DREAM

AND

ACTION

ALEX RAFAELI



The Twentieth Century was a bridge which the Jewish people crossed, from the persecution and the discrimination of Europe via the inhuman suffering of the hostile Nazi periods, to the freedom of the independent Israel.

Alex Rafaeli was one of those who dedicated themselves to building this bridge. "Dream and Action" is the personal story of a man who lived and actively experienced the upheavals of these periods. He was born in Latvia and as a child lived through the violent Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and through the civil war in the Baltics until 1921.

Educated in Riga on Russian and German cultures, he took his Ph.D. in Political Science in Heidelberg. In Germany, he experienced firsthand the rise of Nazism and the initial wave which led to the destruction of European Jewry.

Arriving in Palestine in 1933 he worked as an economist until he

(continued on back flap)

DREAM AND ACTION

The story of my life

ALEX RAFAELI

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2026

"Dream and Action"
Copyright © by Alex Rafaeli.
All rights reserved.

Production by Custom Graphics, Jerusalem
Printed in Israel at Achva Cooperative Press, Jerusalem

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the author.

For information: P.O.Box 222 Jerusalem, Israel

...that dreaming is as good a way of spending our time on this earth as any other, and *dream and action are not so far apart as is often thought.* All the activity of mankind was a dream once — and will again be a dream.

Theodore Herzl, *Altneuland*



Dr. Alex Rafaeli

Contents

Acknowledgements

Preface

1. Childhood in Drissa 1
2. Riga 13
3. A Window to Europe 29
4. My First Years in Palestine 51
5. Underground Missions 69
6. "The Embassy" 89
7. A Soldier in the American Army 117
8. Farewell to my Loved Ones 139
9. The Postwar Years 147
10. Israel and Family 171
11. Looking Back 193

Addendum 197

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Batya Stein
for her editing and her valuable advice,
and my daughter Varda Rafaeli-Ophel
for her critical reading of the text.

Preface

Time has moved on and my years are drawing to a close. I feel the urge to look back at my various struggles and achievements, to gather all the strands together and write the story of my life. I was physically removed from the tragedies of the Holocaust, but it was the Holocaust that influenced my thinking, directed my feelings and shaped my life. It created a moral dimension that has been with me at all times, and which I have been unable and unwilling to escape. The destruction of my family during those tragic years is the main reason for my writing.

Many of my younger years were devoted to political and underground work with the *Irgun.* I felt it was my duty to do this, as the Irgun fought for the independence of my people and struggled to break the spiritual walls of the ghetto. This is not, however, an attempt to write a history of the *Irgun* but only to give an account of the events in which I was personally involved. I was an eyewitness to some of the momentous events of my generation, and wanted to tell our children about them.

I dedicate this book to my wife Esther, who was my guiding light in the writing of this memoir, and to our children and grandchildren. I hope that knowledge of their roots will help them shape their decisions about their own lives.

Alex Rafaeli

Jerusalem, January 1993

1

Childhood in Drissa

My father's family, the Rafaelovitch, came from Drissa, a small town in the Vitebsk district in Western Russia. Napoleon and his army had used Drissa as their central base at the beginning of the nineteenth century and Lev Tolstoi mentions Drissa in *War and Peace*. The town sits on a small peninsula with the broad, deep Dvina river on the West and another small river on the East, green fields and dense forests behind it. Drissa had about 10,000 inhabitants, a relatively large Jewish population and several picturesque wooden synagogues.

I was born in 1910 and my father's family had by then been living in Drissa for two centuries, but besides a few stories that my father used to tell I do not know much about my ancestors. The family had lived in Alsace during the seventeenth century, part of a Jewish community that had fled from Spain to seek refuge in the East. One of my forefathers, Avram Djerabukha, was granted the right to print his own money at the end of the

seventeenth century. My grandfather Yehezkel, who was fifteen at his wedding, married my grandmother, Ita Haya Beilin, aged fourteen. They had eighteen children and my father, who was born in 1874, was the seventeenth child. At our last meeting in Helsinki in the fall of 1938, my father told me the history of his family. I was fascinated by the stories about his brothers and sisters but all the pertinent official information and the family archives were lost in Drissa during the Revolution of 1917. He mentioned that one of his brothers had been a banker and another, Sergei, a well-known poet. The others had worked in the family business and two of his sisters became Russian Orthodox nuns, caring for the sick.

The Kahns, my mother's family, came from Tukum, where my mother was born on January 20, 1876. Tukum was a small town eighty kilometers from Riga, part of the ancient duchy of Kurland and a stronghold of German culture. Hence, though they were not originally from Germany but rather from a land that in the last few centuries had been under Swedish and then Russian dominance, the Kahns were German Jews by background and character.

My maternal grandparents were Dora and Alexander Kahn and my mother was the seventh of eight children, four girls and four boys. My grandfather had been an amber dealer, a semi-precious gem extracted from the Baltic Sea, and had business dealings mainly with Germany. For all practical purposes Koenigsberg became his second home, or rather his business headquarters, and it was there that he died. He was actually more a dreamer than a businessman and those are the genes I have most certainly inherited from him. He was well-read and interested in philosophy and art.

My mother's family eventually reached far-away places. Her brothers Isaac and Louis left for New Zealand as teenagers around 1906, and then moved to Sydney, Australia. They became successful businessmen and later developed a considerable volume of trade between Japan and Australia. The third brother, Harry, also went to Australia and opened a shoe-store

in Melbourne. The fourth brother went to Central America, and as far as I know lived in Costa Rica. Mina, my mother's eldest sister, married twice and lived most of her life in Leningrad where, with thousands of others, she died of hunger and frost during the German siege of the city in World War II. Mina had two children, a daughter, Genya, and a son. There were two other sisters; Ella lived in the "samovar" city, Tula, and Sonya, the youngest, was a journalist and a hardline communist who lived in Moscow. I have memories of Sonya's later visits to our home in Riga. She consistently tried, to no avail, to persuade my brother and me that young, capable people like us should not devote time and energy to small, marginal issues of no "historic significance" like the Jewish people, but rather join the forward lines of Youth-Fighting-for-a-World-Revolution.

I was born in Griva, a summer resort near Dvisnk. We lived in Dvinsk for several years before moving to Drissa, which I remember from about the age of five. Our first home in Dvinsk was cramped, three very small rooms and a leaking roof, hardly an apartment at all. One night, when I was about three or four, we woke up to find that our house was on fire and my father was moving our belongings into the courtyard. As he would whenever faced with a crisis, my father showed no panic and did what had to be done quietly and matter-of-factly.

I do not know why we were living in these conditions and away from the family, but my father was eventually asked to come and take charge of the family business and we moved to Drissa. Drissa was no more than three or four parallel unpaved streets. Most houses were built of wood, in the typical Russian *Izba* style, but the public institutions and the homes of the wealthy, were built of stone. *Dvoranskoye Pomeistwo*, the palace headquarters of the district's nobility, was in the town center together with the courthouse, the prison and the city garden. Nearby was a big marketplace and behind the city garden was the town school, where my mother taught German and French.

At the end of town was the Christian cemetery and right beyond it was a large estate with a farmhouse, a barn and a cowshed built around a big square, enclosed by a wooden fence and appearing to a child like an impregnable fortress. Seldom were people or animals seen there and I often played there with other children. The whole place seemed abandoned and the memories of our games and fantasies about this seemingly mysterious and forsaken place, full of secrets, have remained with me throughout my life.

Across the river was the Jewish cemetery, where the tombstones had Hebrew inscriptions. We had all been warned not to enter the cemetery as our parents were alive and we were even scared to climb the walls to look in. I did climb once, together with my cousin Yehezkel who was five years old like me and my brother Asya then aged three. We thought we saw the tombstone of our grandfather Yehezkel but I was scarcely five, superstitious and too afraid to ask my father anything about death or about my grandfather's burial place. I never knew my grandparents on either side, though I always loved listening to stories about them and looked for pictures and books with their names.

Two large wooden synagogues stood on the Dvina. The one was the hasidic synagogue to which we belonged, warm, friendly and lots of fun during the holidays. The other was the synagogue of the *mitnagdim*, where people were cold, never smiled, and what kind of Jews were they anyhow? But actually, we children knew little about these differences and never asked about them, accepting them as a fact of life. Along the river and behind the synagogues were the bathhouses, wooden buildings with dressing rooms around them and pools in the center, with separate facilities for men and women. My mother would take me with her to the bathhouse when I was small, and I would see women wearing crosses. I knew that these women were Russian and felt very unhappy that we Jews wore nothing that could identify us as such, a suitable conterpart to the

cross. Nobody ever gave me a good answer as to why this was so.

We lived on the main street in a red-bricked, rather elegant house by Drissa's standards, with wide windows and spacious rooms. Right behind our house, facing the street, lived the family of my uncle Hatskel, my father's brother. My uncle Hatskel and my father, Boris, were the last of their clan in Drissa, as their large family had dispersed to all corners of the world. For as long as I can remember they never talked to each other. My cousins and I never knew the reasons for this feud, probably some Freudian love-hate rivalry or some disagreement over property, all of which was soon to go up in flames anyhow. We were not affected by it, accepted it as another fact of life and felt as close as siblings. My mother was very friendly with her sister-in-law and every Friday evening they exchanged food and cakes for Shabbath. However, the tacit agreement was that the fathers would not be involved. I never heard the brothers quarrel or argue and never saw any violent clashes. All the work, and a lot of work there was, was conducted quietly and in a warm atmosphere.

As far as we could see, on both sides of our house along the main street was the family's property, with rented shops making up some kind of a commercial center and big warehouses. The family was involved in the wholesale trade of grain. We bought grain from the peasants and transported it to big cities. Another enterprise was flax. In a huge shed behind our houses, about thirty Russian women cleaned the flax grown in our own fields, which would then be exported to England and Ireland to manufacture linen. There may have been other sheds elsewhere because the handling and export of flax seemed to be big business. As a grown man I came to hear of people in England, and even as far away as Argentina, who had traded with our family, but I know nothing else about the business except for what I saw, since nobody talked shop at home. Later came the war and then the Revolution, when the family lost everything, and no one was keen to mention the past. It was only later,

when searching for my roots, that I tried to find out more details, but by then it was too late.

We children called the square around the warehouses *belyi dvor*, the white courtyard. This courtyard was very mysterious and always locked. The keys were with my father and no one was allowed to enter without his permission. Sometimes, when father was busy elsewhere and had left the keys unguarded on the table, we would take them and go off to explore the huge storage rooms. There, away from the grown-ups, we felt as masters of a private kingdom. My first love experience, as it were, is connected with the white courtyard. When I was about six, a very beautiful woman came to Drissa with her young daughter, Lyuba. She was a true lady and the story was that she had been the mistress of Count Durnovo, a member of the Czar's court. Everyone spoke of how important and distinguished she had been in the highest circles of St. Petersburg. But when a rumour spread at the imperial court that she had borne the Count a child she was forced to leave St. Petersburg at short notice. So here she was in little Drissa and beautiful Lyuba, who was then about five, became the object of my interest and affection.

I was very much attracted to Lyuba, but did not quite know what to do about it. I remember taking her to the white courtyard and putting her high on a barrel where she sat like a little Buddha. I took off her blouse and was by then breaking my head as to what to do next, only to notice that the gate had opened wide and my father had walked in. He gave me a very patient, warm, and understanding explanation, but made it very clear that I was not to take little girls into the white courtyard any more. This was the end of my first romance, and my erotic life entered a long period of latency.

One of the most significant experiences of my childhood was my family's encounter with the Russian laws concerning the Pale of Settlement, the territory wherein the residence of Jews was legally authorized. My father was then considered a distinguished man in our district, of considerable economic

and social standing. The authorities related to him with respect and deference, and we were completely unaware of the situation beyond the confines of our own territory. As I said, one of my father's brothers was a banker. I do not know how he ever came to the Russian capital or how he became a banker. He may have left Judaism and become a Russian Orthodox convert, or he may have been one of the very few gifted and successful Jews permitted to settle outside the Pale.

In 1916, my father went to visit his brother in Petrograd. He had no police permit to go there but took a chance and was caught. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to two months imprisonment for his "crime." Luckily, he was allowed to serve his sentence in Drissa where he was fairly treated, but he still had to stay in prison. They let him come home for Shabbat, accompanied by policemen who waited for him outside. I would visit him from time to time in the prison and often found him reading by the window.

My father's experience, although not much more than a waste of time in unpleasant surroundings, gave me a shock that has continued to haunt me throughout my life. How could this happen to us? My father, the head of a well-known family with business connections in many countries, could be punished with a jail sentence simply for travelling to another city? Maybe my father, despite his prominent position, was merely another prisoner in a little city somewhere in this huge empire? Maybe we should not be as happy as we felt most of the time? Something in the picture must be wrong. As children, we had never suffered any limitations and had never felt discriminated against. Being a Jew was another of life's features, implying neither special privileges nor burdens. We were "naturally" Jewish. We did not feel that this should affect our relationships with our neighbors who, we thought, accepted us on equal terms. We related to the nobility, to the official authorities and to the police as people doing their jobs, part of the surrounding reality. The limitations imposed by the Pale of Settlement seemed meaningless as long as we remained inside,

but beyond the narrow borders of our hometown, life was obviously ruled by other laws. Suddenly, lo and behold!; to be a Jew meant that it was a crime to move and perhaps even to live. My father had a very hard time explaining the meaning of this crime to me, a six year-old, and I vividly remember feeling that something was being kept from me. It was simply impossible that Jews were forbidden to go to Petrograd and I could not avoid feeling that I was not being told the whole story.

World War I began with defeats in western Russia. The country was in turmoil and we were soon in the throes of a civil war. Slogans about freedom, the bloodthirsty Czar and the evils of empire were everywhere. Then in 1917, the flags appeared, red flags for the revolution and black flags in memory of those who had given their lives for it. The revolution brought anarchy, as the Russian soldiers stationed in the city thought that a revolution meant freedom to attack and loot, but in Drissa the people organized in self-defence. Whenever an unruly mob would try to break down the gates of our house, the main, and quite effective, form of defense, was to pour boiling water on them.

Everything was in upheaval. Besides the Red and White Russians there were Green Russians, who were neither communists nor supporters of the Czar but merely peasants trying to take advantage of the chaos by looting and attacking civilians, especially Jews. The police, riding horses and carrying whips, were also involved in battling the revolution's supporters. But we and and our Russian neighbors stuck together and somehow managed to survive.

Once, during the civil war, the anti-communist Whites took over a section of our house for one of their officers, who moved in with his mistress and valet. He was a tall, wild-looking man with a nasty, screeching voice, but his mistress was kind and friendly. One night the officer woke us up. He was rushing around the house breaking the furniture. He needed vodka. He needed more vodka. He called in my father, faced him with a drawn sabre and threatened to cut him to pieces unless he got

more vodka. We all stood by my father's side, frozen and unable to move. We looked at my father. He had a toothache and his face was swollen, though not a muscle in his face moved. There was no vodka. The officer was waving his sabre, shouting hysterically and drawing closer to my father. Then his mistress slowly edged him back to the bedroom.

On another occasion, my father again measured up to the need for action and showed great courage. We had a second house nearby, often used by guests and family visitors. In the summer of 1917 this house was taken over by Russian troops which were on the move to the German front. My aunt Sonya was visiting from Moscow and we were having tea under a tree near the second house. The soldiers sitting above, on the second floor, began shouting abuses at us. We did not react so someone poured boiling water on us and my aunt Sonya was hurt. My father ran upstairs and I ran after him. About thirty soldiers were staying there but my father found the one who had poured the boiling water and hit him, while the others just stood around looking stunned. My father took me by the hand and we slowly went down.

Our house in Drissa was always full of people, mostly my mother's colleagues, high-school teachers at the *gymnasium*, doctors, and many others who shared a passion for politics. My mother had always been fascinated by politics and she had joined the Social Revolutionaries at the ripe age of eighteen. The Social Revolutionaries struggled against the despotic Czarist regime and for freedom and equality for the Russian people. They were tough fighters and often resorted to terrorism. Pinhas Rutenberg, who later built the first electric power station in Palestine, belonged to this group. He took part in many direct actions against Czarist leaders and also in the Russo-Japanese war. After leaving Russia he continued his political work in Europe before coming to Palestine in the twenties.

My mother had been the secretary of their strike committee, and had helped organize the first big strikes of Russian indus-

try in 1905 at the *Provodnik*, the Riga railway builders. This strike was a preliminary action, right before the first purportedly democratic elections to the *Duma* [the parliament] in 1906. Then she was arrested and sent to Siberia but managed to escape and reach Paris, where she studied at the Sorbonne. My mother was a rebellious intellectual, willing to take considerable risks for the sake of her principles. This aspect of her personality has certainly had a deep influence on my own life-choices, despite the differences in our political aims.

By 1909 my mother was back in Russia, married to my father and was a teacher of German and French at the Drissa *gymnasium*, She soon became a mother of two but continued her political activities, participating in anti-government meetings and supporting the coming of the revolution. She and her friends argued about the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and never mentioned the Czar without qualifying him with some adjective, such as blood-sucker. I picked up the style of their political arguments and echoed it when talking to my playmates. I would gather together my friends, my neighbors, and the children of the women working at the store, climb on a ladder and harangue them with screams of "Down with the blood-sucking Czar!" and "Long live the Revolution!".

In the meantime, the war had been going badly for Russia. Just before the revolution there was a German offensive and Drissa became part of the occupied West. The German officers distributed postcards of Kaiser Wilhelm and Hindenburg and demanded they should be displayed. They were polite and would usually accept my father's judgement, with my mother translating, whenever there was any disagreement as to which houses they should occupy. We were made very unhappy because the German officers had "confiscated" our maid Sonya, a big, strong woman who looked upon our house and our family as her private property.

For reasons not quite clear to a little boy, the Germans disappeared as fast as they had arrived and the Russian army moved in. All of Great Russia's different nationalities were

represented in its regiments, and Kirgize, Kalmicks, Georgians and Mongolians became part of the town. They were a rowdy and disorderly lot and tried to take advantage of the civilian population, particularly the Jews. A demonstration once gathered in the main street, in front of our house, and mounted police rushed to disperse it. I watched, face pressed to the glass. I saw a man running towards our window and a mounted policeman pursuing him. Inches away from me I saw the policeman's hand reach for his sabre, move up and cut the man's head. I turned away.

The turmoil and cruelty notwithstanding, to the children it all seemed a very exciting adventure. Flags were everywhere and songs, especially the Russian folksong *Dubinushka* and the International, were heard across town. The teachers gathered at our house to make paper flowers in red and black to honor the memory of the martyrs in symbolic funerals, and to sing revolutionary songs. All of us were convinced that a beautiful new era of happiness and freedom was dawning for the good people of the Great Russian Motherland.

Suddenly, my parents and their friends were huddling together for night-long conversations. They all looked very worried. The Bolsheviks were closing in and it seemed that we, "bourgeois capitalists," had much to fear and could not expect any consideration from them. It was the beginning of winter in 1918 and we were told we would be leaving Drissa. We were shocked. How could we leave all these beautiful sights, our home, the warm synagogue with our place near the *aron hakodesh* and go elsewhere? Where to? Riga was mentioned. I did not understand what that meant.

One night, two big sleds arrived. We were bundled off with very few possessions for a long ride through a birch forest thick with snow. We looked like figures in a painted winter scene. Later we arrived at a small railroad station for our overnight trip to Riga. It had been a tiresome journey and we were happy to climb the freight cars on the way to what we hoped would be more peaceful surroundings. The next day we

arrived at a city of light, with wide streets, shops, and the urban noises of streetcars and carriages. We were in Riga, our new home.

2

Riga

Oh Herr zerreisse mich!
Ich bein ja noch ein Kind
Und wage doch zu singen
Und nenne Dich
Und sage von den Dingen:
Wir sind.

Franz Werfel, *Wir sind*

After spending a few weeks in a pension in the center of the town, my parents found a small, two-room apartment in the southern section of the town, in Matveyevskaya Street. It was a lower class neighborhood with huge buildings by the standards of those years, each six or seven stories high. We were in the last building and had to pass two courtyards to reach our entrance. The courtyards, which doubled as playgrounds for the

children, were obviously a considerable credit point. Our new living quarters were a far cry from our spacious and elegant Drissa home and we were surrounded by families who obviously had problems making ends meet, though they seemed generally courteous and cooperative. There was a bedroom for my parents and my brother and I slept on the sofa in the kitchen, which functioned as dining room and parlour and also as the center of all family consultations. We lived there for the next four or five years.

Staying on in Drissa, where we were clearly identified as "capitalists," would have been rather dangerous. By moving to Riga we had intended to leave the Civil War behind. Unfortunately, the war soon caught up with us, when communist rule was imposed on the Baltic provinces. We were ruled by a Revolutionary Committee whose ideology was never made clear. All we knew was that the Communists were those who carried weapons, pushed people around, beat them up and wore black leather jackets. No one ever explained the connection between social philosophy and leather jackets but in all those years I never met a Communist commissar who did not wear a leather jacket or screamed at the top of his voice.

"Bourgeois" and White Russians were assembled and sent to do forced labor, such as digging trenches to protect Riga against the White Russians and their allies, or to dig graves. Every evening less people returned from forced labor than had gone out in the morning. The missing ones had been shot. In Drissa, the Jewish community had been automatically classified as bourgeois but we had suffered no discrimination. Now all had changed. The revolution eliminated the ghettoes of Czarist Russia but brought loss of freedom, danger and suffering instead.

Most people had no regular work. Businesses were closed and food could only be obtained directly from the peasants, some of whom dared to enter the city and hide in hallways. No one accepted money. There were different kinds of currency, all worthless, such as *Czarinki*, the Czar's money, and

Kerenki, the Kerenski money, named after the new prime minister. The communist regime had not yet printed money and food was bartered for clothes, shoes, watches, and jewelry. Those days were full of fear and sorrow and whenever my father left the house we were afraid we would never see him again. Our neighbor Ada Rappaport was a distant relative of my father, a recently married young man and father of a baby girl. One morning he was taken away and never returned. His body was later found in the forest.

Volunteer units of Latvians, attempting to establish a Latvian republic and supported by the Western allies, were meantime concentrating on the other side of the Dvina river. It was not too clear in those days what was meant by "Western," but they included the White Russian forces of General Yudenitch and the English and French military units supporting Admiral Kolchak's struggle against the Communists. The Latvians, who found themselves in the midst of an ideological conflict between the European powers, used this to their advantage and their attempt to secure an independent Latvian state eventually proved successful. In the meantime, the Whites bombed Riga intending to push out the Reds but, as usual, it was the civilian population that was punished. One of the nastiest bombings occurred during a rare family lunch. The details are blurred in my memory but I do remember we had no furniture and sat around a blanket spread on the floor, on which bread and some fruit were set. I was sent away from the "table" to be alone in the kitchen for misbehaving toward my brother Asya. From the kitchen window there was a beautiful view of the southern suburbs of Riga, which were then undergoing massive shelling, but what I saw seemed unreal rather than cruel. Bombs were hitting the neighboring buildings and blowing houses apart. Rooms were simply collapsing, with furniture and people falling out. I did not hear screams nor did I see any blood, and it seemed as if an angry little boy was merely tearing up doll houses.

The bombings caused the regime to become tougher and nastier. The Communists began breaking into houses and accusing people of economic speculation. Bodies were lying around on staircases and in the streets but no one paid any attention. Peasant wagons took away the dead, their arms and legs dangling from the sides. After several months the Reds began to withdraw, running away in long columns and overtaking one another on bicycles and in trucks. The Latvians moved in, trying to catch and shoot real or imaginary Reds, while innocent bystanders again paid the price.

The Latvian Provisional Government had meantime moved from Libau to Riga and begun to exercise control over the newly established Latvian Independent Republic, but for civilians there was not much change. There was no food, the political commissars continued their work under different names while the Reds and, as always, the Jews, were caught and punished. Although political slogans were still thrown around rather freely, no one cared about their meaning and the civil war deteriorated into a chaotic struggle between criminal gangs. The American Relief Organization began operating field-kitchens for the hungry civilian populations of Eastern Europe. Every day I would go with my younger brother and stand in line for some food, consisting mostly of watery soup and pancakes made from potato skins. I tried many times to find out who actually ate the potatoes but no one gave me an answer. I never managed to get a potato.

My father was again trying to build up a grain business by purchasing grain from the peasants, bringing it to the city and selling it to the millers. There were encouraging beginnings. The peasants had heard about our family before and trusted my father. The problem was not money, as they were paid in cash, but making the initial trade contacts. My father carried bills and gold coins in order to pay off the peasants and on one of his trips was assaulted by a gang of robbers. They took his money and put him up against a tree to shoot him. He said

Shema Israel and was saved by talking to them coolly and patiently.

My mother, a cultured person with socialist leanings, had no prejudices against the Latvians or the Russians. She became friendly with our Latvian neighbors, invited them to our apartment and confided in them. She was very naive in money matters and told our neighbors where she hid the money that my father left behind in the house during his trips. Less than a week after this chat, the bell rang and I opened the door to a tall man. I was ten and no one else was at home.

"Police!"

"Please come in."

"You are being accused of speculating in electric bulbs."

I just smiled. "Bulbs?"

"Bulbs" he said.

"Mommy definitely needs a bulb or two."

"I have to search your apartment," said the policeman politely.

"Please." I knew we had no bulbs.

"You, my boy, just take away the wood from the kitchen window."

"But the bulbs would break on the wood." I tried to argue.

"Keep quiet and do what you're told. We know speculants have their own tricks." He walked around the apartment, into the bedroom and out again.

"Okay, no bulbs."

I did not know that my mother kept the family savings under the mattress. The money was gone and never found but this experience, which I only understood much later, was quite instructive and helped to encourage a healthy skepticism.

After the establishment of the Latvian republic we entered a more stable period. The first indication was the number of Jewish refugees arriving from Russia. My mother was contacted by a cousin once removed on her father's side, who informed us he would be arriving with his family. There were five of them, and they announced they would "stop over" at our

apartment for a few days. I met them downstairs, as they arrived in two big peasant carts filled with furniture and household stuff, with a cousin perched high on top of the first one. I was immediately concerned by an important logistic question: how could such an old man — he must have been about forty at the time — climb up so high, and how would he slide down without breaking his neck? Each of the wagons was bigger than any of our rooms and there was an urgent family conference: how could this family, with all their belongings, move in with us? I do not recall how this problem was solved, but the family stayed on for a few weeks and appeared to be very much at home. They did not talk much to me, as they only spoke Yiddish, which I did not understand. I was allowed to stay in our apartment, but I realized that there was some discomfort attached to the hosting of refugees and it would be best to avoid creating a refugee problem in the first place.

Life somehow returned to normal. We had never gone to kindergarten since there had not been any, nor did we attend school, but we had private lessons to learn reading and writing. I was not too excited by it. It seemed terribly simple and I mastered it quite naturally and without much effort. Later I attended the Bintz School which, in typical turn-of-the century style, was in the main boulevard opposite the police headquarters and easily reached after a ten to fifteen minute ride in streetcar number 6. Most of the pupils were Jews but this was a Russian school and taught no subjects with any religious or national implications. I had started school during the brief period of Communist rule, when each class was asked to elect a pupils' committee to run its affairs, including jurisdiction over the teachers. Although I was elected to the committee, my political success lasted only one day. As soon as it was discovered that my background was not exactly proletarian I was kicked out. I was truly upset, not by the political dishonor but because committee members were allowed to go home one hour earlier every day and I was forced to renounce this privilege. The school director was Mr. Bintz, who looked exactly like

Theodore Herzl. The school appeared to be almost a political club, with free meals provided by the municipality and special privileges granted to pupils whose families had some pull or political standing.

My father had meantime left the grain business and established a wholesale company dealing in imported textiles. This business was successful, and in 1921 we left our modest two-room apartment in Matveyevskaya Street and moved to a pleasant neighborhood in West Riga, a more exclusive section of the city near the Schuetzen Park. Our apartment was in an elegant building in Strelnieku Street, which also housed the residence of the Czech ambassador, and this apartment was home to my family until 1939-1940. One of our new neighbors was Rabbi Mordechai Nurock, a member of the Latvian parliament and a prominent leader of the Jewish community. It was a beautiful house covered in Swedish marble and our apartment had five high, spacious rooms, as in the old days in Drissa. It was very comfortable, furnished with heavy Russian fittings and the atmosphere was very cozy.

By 1921, my mother came to feel that this was not the education she had wished for her son and she established connections with the town of Memel. The Russian education current in Latvia was not up to her standards, which had been moulded in the tradition of her German education in Kurland. My parents decided I should study German and Memel, the easternmost city of East Prussia, was the closest venue. I was placed with the family of a German school principal who was supposed to teach me German language, mathematics, and other subjects. He lived on the outskirts of Memel in a big house with a garden; there was also a small farm nearby, with horse stables, cows and a big orchard. A Jewish girl from Kovno, Lithuania, named Sonya, as well as some German children, were also in residence there. Sonya was a lovely and intelligent girl and I was glad for her pleasant company and that of the teacher's son, a boy my age and a good partner for football games and jogging.

Before I left Riga my mother had made provisions for my Jewish education. Following the recommendation of the local rabbi it was planned that I would receive lessons three times a week in Hebrew and Bible as well as prepare for my *bar-mitzvah*. These arrangements seemed satisfactory to my mother who felt that, at least for a couple of years, a German education in the tradition of her family from Tukum would be in order. But she failed to take politics into consideration. Germany had been defeated in World War I and her neighbors on both East and West were looking to seize chunks of her territory. By the time I had been in Memel for nine months and making good progress in German, unknown troops dressed in civilian clothing overwhelmed the small German garrison and captured the district. There was hardly any shooting and no casualties, as the Germans had been completely taken by surprise. After these unknown forces consolidated their hold they changed into military uniforms and it became clear that Memel had been occupied by the Lithuanian army.

As I had not been very happy studying the difficult Latvian language, neither my parents nor I thought that I should now embark on the study of Lithuanian and we all agreed that I should return to Riga as soon as possible. However, this would still take several months as I had to finish studying my *parasha* and my teacher had to help me with my *bar-mitzvah* speech, which was to be in Hebrew. Hebrew was then still difficult for me and I had to learn the speech by heart. My teacher was a committed Zionist and my speech was about San Remo and the Balfour Declaration, none of which meant very much to me. Nevertheless, I studied it very enthusiastically and delivered it with great pathos at my *bar mitzvah* party on my return to Riga. I doubt whether the audience at my father's synagogue was quite aware of the political implications of my speech, but since it was in Hebrew and stated my allegiance to the Jewish people as well as praying for a brighter future, everybody was very proud. After that my mother registered me at a Russian school. All the teachers and most of the pupils were

Russian nationals. They behaved correctly and I never heard any unpleasant or anti-Jewish remarks but I nevertheless learned about national differences and slowly came to the conclusion that I should study with my own people. The opportunity soon presented itself.

At first I joined *Ha-Shomer ha-Tsair* in 1924 under the inspiring leadership of Syema Shenkman. Syema later joined kibbutz Kinneret and lost his life hauling cement on a boat while building new houses in his kibbutz. I heard a lot about socialism there, which in view of the situation of national minorities in Latvia was not too relevant to our problems. Then Jabotinsky came to Riga and some of us went to hear his lectures in the *Schwartzhaupter*-hall. He spoke in beautiful Russian and electrified all the young people. We all felt that here was a man able to express our innermost thoughts. He was proud and strong and refused to let either the Latvians or the Russians deny our own national authenticity. After a year or so some of the older boys organized *Brit Trumpeldor* while we, the fourteen-fifteen year olds, organized *Kadima*, an allied youth division which became part of *Betar*. This was a turning point in my life. I met intelligent and energetic young Jews studying at different schools all across Riga who felt we should all be united in a Jewish organization oriented towards Palestine. That was where I met my friends Leah and Sonya Pitl, Yitzhak Sherman, Hillel Stein, Benno Lubotski (Eliav), and later Aaron Propes, Aryeh Dissentchik and Moshe Joelson.

I also felt I had to take personal action. A Hebrew high-school had been set up by the Zionist Association for Jewish Culture. The language of study was Russian with a few parallel classes in Hebrew, but the plan called for the opening of an additional Hebrew class every year. The Jewish studies program included a daily one-hour class in Hebrew and several hours a week of Bible and Jewish history. Almost all the teachers were Jewish. I spoke to my parents about changing schools and they were adamantly opposed. At first my mother tried to reason

with me and, after I persisted, she refused outright: "We are not going back to the ghetto!" Education should be conducted either within Russian or German culture, and Jewish subjects could be taught at home with private teachers. My argument that Hebrew was not a religious subject to be taught at home and that the cultural background of the school was decisive for my future proved of no avail.

After several months I simply applied to join the Hebrew high-school, withdrew from the Russian school and falsified my parents' signatures. For three or four months no one noticed but at the end of the semester my parents began wondering about my term report. After much foot-dragging I produced a Hebrew certificate and a colossal family argument ensued. My parents claimed I had betrayed them by lying and falsifying their signatures and I tried to show them that there had been no alternative as they, members of the older generation, did not understand my national obligations. They slowly got used to the idea that, in two years, I would graduate from a Hebrew high-school rather than from a Russian one.

Except for this conflict, family life was quite happy. My father became a successful businessman and his firm of textile imports grew. He opened bigger premises in the Old City of Riga and later in the more modern section by Vermanski Park. My mother was busy with my brother and myself and also had a circle of friends. Her sister Ella had moved from Tula and lived nearby. Ella was an interesting and intelligent woman. In 1911-1912 she went to live with her brothers Isaac and Louis in Australia but then returned to live in Tula, where she worked as a teacher. She had perfect command of English, French, and German and was professionally successful. She never married. Her social contacts were mostly middle class, whereas she herself far surpassed the accepted standards of this group in both intelligence and education. She became interested in my education and in later years, when she came to Palestine, I attended to her problems and nursed her during her final illness.

Ella had preferred Europe to Australia with her brothers but, throughout their lives, my uncles Isaac and Louis remained very loyal to the Riga branch of the family. They tried to help their younger sisters and finance their studies, took an interest in other members of their family and visited us in Riga every few years. My uncles could hardly be described as Zionists but after the Balfour Declaration, which for many Jews was the harbinger of a Jewish state, they decided they wanted to share in this new and exciting venture. They decided to come to Palestine and bought a boat to serve the cargo trade with the neighboring countries. Somehow they even found a Jewish captain, or rather found someone who claimed to have experience with that kind of boat and most probably was never asked to show a licence. The boat sailed from Alexandria to Jaffa and was then supposed to go on to Haifa to pick up cargo. It seems that the captain saw what he thought was a lighthouse and ran aground somewhere south of Haifa. Many months and a great deal of money later my uncles managed to move the boat off the sandbank, but by then it was no longer seaworthy and the first Jewish shipping line went out of business. Isaac returned to Australia but Louis stayed here and became a successful orange grower in Petah Tikva. His eldest daughter, my cousin Phyllis, married Aaron Saharov, the scion of a well-known Jerusalem family and they have three children and several grandchildren. Her sister Sylvia married an American newspaperman, Howard Klausner, who also came from Latvia. They lived in New Jersey and had two children but she unfortunately passed away just a few years ago.

As I said, those were rather happy years. Every summer we would all go on vacation to the Riga seashore, which was about forty kilometers away. There were several holiday resorts in Jurmala, over sixty to seventy kilometers of white sands and beautiful forests extending along the Riga Gulf. We would rent a house in one of the resorts and enjoy almost three months of summer vacation. My father would come on Fridays and spend weekends with us. These were peaceful, pleasant and relaxing

times, mostly devoted to swimming, sports, friends, and the youth movement.

Between 1924 and 1928 my social life circled mainly around the *Betar* movement. Political meetings and discussions were the order of the day. Sport was my main hobby and I became an enthusiastic believer in physical exercise, particularly long distance running. Already by 1924, during our sea-side summer vacation, I would train by running for a whole hour though my friends thought I was raving mad. I developed an outlook demanding maximum physical exertion and resistance to pain and tiredness. I built up a whole philosophy around sport, claiming that the readiness to demand increasingly greater efforts from the body helps to shape will-power and character. My mother supported me in this and was no indulgent *yiddishe mame*. She wanted us to be physically strong and saw to it that we received a spartan education. Both Asya and I were taught to take cold showers in summer and winter, when temperatures in Riga are between ten and twenty degrees below zero.

I was training intensively in athletics and track, and represented my school in several sport competitions. I wanted to participate in the Riga youth championships which took place in the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] stadium and mentioned this to my mother, but she was adamantly opposed to this idea. Perhaps the new American YMCA terminology did not sound right to the Jews of Riga or competitive sports did not seem too essential. Whatever the reasons there was a big argument. I insisted and said I would register for the 1000 meter run anyhow. In the end she agreed and I ran in the preliminary and final races. I came in third and my mother was very upset with my results. When I expressed surprise at her reaction she said: "All or nothing." I was reading many books about sports then, all telling me that track improves mind and character and that the important thing was to fight but not necessarily to finish first, yet here was my mother



Author's Parents
Rose and Boris
Rafaelowitch, 1909



Mother and Asya
Summer 1937



Author with Parents
Riga 1928



Esther and
Alex Rafaeli



Author on the left –
age 7 years
Asya – age 5 years
Drissa 1917



Asya (Yehezkel).
Riga 1928





Visit of Uncle Lolus at Edinburgh, Riga seashore 1926. Standing: Author, Uncle Louis. Seated Left to Right: Aunt Ella, Father, Mother, Asya

Asya chairing the Levanonia Fraternity 1934

insistently claiming that if I took part in a competition she surely expected me to win!

When I turned sixteen I joined the *Maccabi* sports club and began participating in official track competitions. I scored my first success in the national schools' championship, where I reached the semi-finals in the 100 meters race though this was not exactly my distance. By the next season I was ready to participate in the national championship and reached the finals in the 400 meters race, where I came fourth. I still remember how, in the semi-finals of this competition, I faced a Latvian runner over two meters tall. I was running in borrowed shoes two sizes too big since I had forgotten my own shoes at home. This was the fight of my life, not only because of the physical challenge but because of the crowd, which numbered several thousand people howling: "Beat the Jew-boy!" I never forgot this race and still remember it vividly today, more than sixty years later. I did not win because I was a better runner but because for the first time in my life I was faced with anti Semitic pressure. Later, while studying at Heidelberg, I continued running 400 meter races for the university and for *Maccabi* Germany. My mother visited me there in 1929 when I took part in a town competition and though I did not win then either, this time my mother gave me a kiss and a big friendly smile. It is sometimes pleasant to educate one's parents.

Indeed, there were many sides to my mother's personality. She could certainly be a very understanding, sensitive and sympathetic person, not only to her family but to people in general. She was often supportive and helpful to strangers, who always found her a receptive listener and shared their problems with her. I specially remember her eyes, sparkling and inquisitive. She was always anxious to learn and never afraid of asking questions. Moreover, I always felt that she had strong telepathic powers even though she never made use of them. I particularly remember one instance, when I was about fifteen. My mother would usually get out of bed after we had left for school. Breakfast was served by the maid and we

returned later in the afternoon, at about four o'clock. That morning my mother was up early looking nervous and worried. At first she refused to talk about it, but then she told me she had dreamt that her late mother had appeared in her dream dressed in dusty, torn clothes and had scolded her: "What kind of daughter are you? Look at the clothes I am wearing. You neglect me." My grandmother Dora Kahn had died in 1913, more than twelve years before, and was buried in Tukum.

I tried to calm my mother and left for school, but when I returned in the afternoon she was not at home. I called my father at his office and he told me that my mother had been called to Tukum. It transpired that a terrible storm had hit the town the previous night and my grandmother's tombstone had been shattered. The *hevra kadisha* had phoned my mother in the morning and talked to her about the need for repairs, and she had left about noon to tend to this matter. This is how feelings and love communicate.

As I went into adolescence my relationships with my parents often became strained. They thought I was devoting far too much time to *Betar*, that I was much too influenced by *Betar* leaders such as Dr. Yaakov Hoffman, Aaron Propes and others and neglecting to learn things that would be important to me in my later life. My mother thought that national Zionist politics were too restricted and clannish and failed to measure up to spiritual and intellectual standards. Once I ran away from home and worked as a porter at the railroad station for a couple of days. Another time I decided Latvia was too small and a bigger country would hold out greater possibilities. The political target should be cooperation between Russia and Zionism and my return to Russia would be an appropriate step in this direction. I left home around five in the morning for the railway station, only to be caught by my father who returned me home and quite cordially convinced me that I should wait a while before embarking on any further attempts to solve the "Jewish problem." These were not merely typical displays of adolescent rebellion against parental authority but something

rather different. People in my generation lived through war and revolution as children. Civilians were passive victims brandied as capitalist exploiters merely because they wanted to care for their families and being a Jew meant being weak, a shameful thing deserving punishment. As a result, a powerful wish to fight welled up in many of us, to show that we were strong, proud, and better than the nasty world around us. We not only yearned for independence as a political aim but also as a deep emotional need, although we were often weak and our first tough battle was with our own selves.

As a pupil I was definitely average and uninterested in most subjects. I was bored by chemistry, physics and mathematics, in that order, but I was interested in history, both Jewish and general, and I also discovered Kabbala about which I read passionately and even understood some. Whenever the Jewish history teacher called on me to answer questions I would talk about everything in kabbalistic terms and resist all his attempts to steer me in another direction. In the end he gave up and let me talk about Kabbala. These games went on for the last two years before my graduation and at that time I also experienced my first infatuation with girls. My first love was Nussya, a unique beauty. Soon after, I discovered that she was superficial and not too bright, whereupon my interest turned to Leah who was indeed less beautiful and rather heavy but had a sparkling mind and a wonderful sense of humor, though it took me a while before I dared to kiss her. By that time I was ready to leave for my studies in Germany.

3

A Window to Europe

The ceremonies surrounding graduation at the Hebrew *gymnasium* in Riga, scheduled for June 1928, went on for quite some time. One hundred days before graduation we celebrated *sto-dnevka*, "the last hundred days party." This was a fun filled and exciting affair, with humorous speeches and slogans and a great deal of singing. Although the notion of celebrating an event before it actually takes place seems rather strange, *sto-dnevka* was an exciting rite and passed on to future generations.

Over a hundred students in three parallel classes were graduating that year, two studying in Russian and one in Hebrew *[Ivrit be-Ivrit]*. At that time, Hebrew was only beginning to develop the vocabulary it needed to function as a full-fledged modern language but in this class, which numbered about twenty pupils, mostly boys, all courses in both the sciences and the humanities were taught in Hebrew. My Hebrew was not

sufficiently fluent and I graduated from a Russian class, although I also participated in a Jewish studies program including such subjects as Hebrew, Bible, and Jewish history. These studies were part of the effort of the Zionist movement in Latvia to develop Hebrew education despite the scarcity of teachers and the dearth of books.

I did not take my exams too seriously. Except for Kabbala I had no special interests and graduated with average marks. After graduation there was our customary seaside vacation and this time, beside my usual long-distance runs, my mother and I talked a great deal about the next stage of my education. I disliked the French approach and America was much too far, so we decided to concentrate on applications to English and German universities. By July, I had been accepted at Oxford and Heidelberg. Frankly, I had not expected these universities to accept an applicant submitting a diploma in Hebrew and Latvian but the answers were friendly and, to my great surprise, rather encouraging. At Oxford I was required to pass an English exam, while at Heidelberg they wanted me to come personally and prove I was fluent in German. We held a family conference to decide which of these universities would enjoy the privilege of my company, though we hardly knew anything about either. Heidelberg won the day due to very convincing academic reasons, namely, Saul Tchernichowsky, our national poet, had studied medicine there and many of his famous poems had a Heidelberg dateline. To enlist further support for this wise decision we relied on the fact that Mr. Jaffe, Herzl's associate and one of the founders of the Jewish National Fund, had also studied in Heidelberg.

So I went to Germany, and looking back it turns out to have been a good decision. My friends arranged farewell parties and the leadership of *Betar*, with Beno Lubotsky, came to see me off. My father smiled and my mother was very moved, while Asya tried to keep order among all our friends. The train moved south west, through the fields of Lithuania and on to the German border. Names that until then had only featured in

stories or had merely been letters in a map suddenly became realities. Koenigsberg, where my grandfather had died, was a grey and dull city. Danzig, in East Prussia, with its mediaeval castles, was much more interesting.

The next evening we approached Berlin, and to my dismay I discovered there was more than one Berlin station. How was I supposed to know where to get off? I picked one called Alexanderplatz. It was only later I noticed that this was a rather sleazy quarter, full of night-clubs, gambling joints, dubious small hotels and the kind of people that go with it. By then I had already checked into a cheap hotel, where the rooms lacked keys or facilities of any kind. I barricaded the door as best I could but only managed to fall asleep in the early morning, utterly exhausted by my thirty-six hour trip. The next morning I phoned the only people in Berlin with whom I already had at least a slight acquaintance, the Jaffes. Their sister had been to Hebrew high school with me, one of the brothers was a very successful opera singer and an older brother, who had already graduated with a Ph.D. and was editor of the Stockholm Jewish newspaper, was then visiting in Berlin. Dr. Jaffe was an *ilui* [genius], very knowledgeable in Talmud and Jewish philosophy as well as generally a highly cultured man who could speak and write fluently in more than half a dozen languages.

He was very upset when I told him where I was. "Stay put," he said, and insisted I should not move until he came to fetch me with a taxi. During the whole trip from my hotel in the east side of Berlin to the opulent West he gave me an impressive lecture on social and moral differences and on the need to associate with suitable people. He explained that I had the potential to turn into a positive moral character, but by living in the wrong section of town I was bound to associate with the wrong people and might consequently be influenced in negative ways which could eventually change my character and lead to a tragic end. I was not yet eighteen and he was probably all of twenty-five or twenty-six at the time, but I felt as if he were at

least seventy eight and all the world's wisdom was pouring from his lips.

He placed me in a clean and respectable residential hotel. The room was very elegant, even luxurious. But the price! It was at least ten times as much as the little corner in Alexanderplatz. I asked Dr. Jaffe how I could possibly pay for such a room with the budget at my disposal and right then and there got my first lesson in economics: one should never save on a one-shot deal. If I was only staying in Berlin three days I should stay in a respectable place, even if more expensive. However, if the plan was to rent a room on a permanent basis I should look for the cheapest possible set-up because on permanent arrangements one should always try to save. He also refused to guide me to subways or buses and suggested that if I was only staying three days I should use taxis and save time and effort.

There were two other people I had to see in Berlin. One was Myron Sheskin, whom I was to consult regarding the entrance exam to Heidelberg University. He was seven or eight years older than me and studying engineering. He was also active in the Revisionist movement in Poland and working closely with Jabotinsky. Sheskin was tall and good-looking but a rather brisk and rude fellow. When I came to his house he was having breakfast. He told me to sit down and wait until he finished paging through the morning newspaper. I was not invited to join him, nor did he show any particular interest in listening to me. When he finished reading he wished me luck in Heidelberg and that ended our short and rather unsweet meeting. For a young and confused youngster in a huge city this was a very discouraging encounter. In later years I kept meeting him at congresses in the U.S., where he had settled and made money. He moved to Israel in the late seventies and lived near us, and we even became quite friendly. I never referred to our sad encounter in Berlin but it taught me a lesson about politicians.

My other visit was to Richard Lichtheim and this was an altogether different experience. He lived in an elegant mansion

in the garden section of Berlin and I was announced by a butler. Lichtheim was one of Jabotinsky's associates, a vice-president of the World Revisionist Union and a man with a successful Zionist record. During World War I Lichtheim had been the representative of the World Zionist Organization in Istanbul. He had developed close contacts with the Sultan's entourage as well as with influential Turkish circles where, as a German citizen, he was assured a friendly reception. As Palestine was then part of the Turkish Empire his position was extremely important to our cause. He was friendly and very encouraging. He told me about Eugene Taubler, a famous professor of philosophy and ancient history at Heidelberg University and one of his best friends as well as a very devoted Jew and loyal Zionist. Lichtheim put me at ease regarding my limited command of German, told me that people from Riga learned German very quickly, that Russian students at Heidelberg were generally successful and there was no reason to assume I would be an exception. He gave me a warm letter addressed to Prof. Taubler and once again reassured me that I would be accepted at Heidelberg. I called on Taubler and we agreed that I should begin attending his lectures immediately and take a German test within six months. But in fact I never actually studied German, I was never tested for my language proficiency, and Heidelberg University had no proof that I knew German until my graduation. I simply began to read and speak German and made good progress.

People at the university were friendly and cooperative. I had not informed the authorities of my study plans for the simple reason that I did not know them myself, as I was wavering between philosophy, social science, and law. There were many things I wanted to do but whenever I expressed any wishes I was told I could not do everything at once. In my view going to university did not mean studying for a profession but rather embarking on a spiritual search that would help me open new vistas, see Europe and meet different people. I was not thinking of financial independence or of acquiring means for a livelihood.

Although I did not think my parents could support me forever, I pushed practical questions out of my way.

It was September 1928, autumn in Heidelberg, and I was busy meeting a fascinating new world. I kept thinking of Pushkin's words about Peter the Great opening a window to the Western world for Mother Russia. So it was for me, a meeting with scientists, philosophers, and students from all over Europe. Heidelberg appeared to be a strange place, with many rival student corporations wearing caps and sashes of different colours, "colour wearing fraternities." There were often duels between their members over questions of "honor." There were occasional instances of anti-Semitism, but until 1933 I had not noticed any public expressions of the totalitarian Nazi ideology and terror which were to spread everywhere with such tragic consequences. Besides its academic merits Heidelberg was a lovely, interesting, cosmopolitan city. I was introduced to German literature, philosophy, and culture and became naively intoxicated with everything I saw.

I did not have a specific professional target in mind and tried to absorb everything, which led me to some very exciting intellectual exercises. I read Otto Weininger's *Die Philosophie des als Ob*, and listened to Gustav Radbruch's lectures on the philosophy of law. After contacting Radbruch, an eminent jurist and former Minister of Justice, I decided to study law. I attended Prof. Ernst Levy's lectures on civil law and Prof. Gerhard Anschutz's on constitutional law, and moved through mounds of books and papers. All this was far too much for a beginner. I was running from one lecture to another and had very little time for social life, or even for sports. The first term ended in the spring of 1929, and as I did not have enough money to go to Riga I stayed in Heidelberg and travelled around south-west Germany. Heidelberg, which was especially popular with Jewish students, was also a "summer university." Students from other universities, such as Berlin or Leipzig, would come to Heidelberg for the summer to study, enjoy the landscape and the company. A stimulating and heterogeneous

Jewish youth society developed in Heidelberg every summer, representing the whole spectrum of spiritual and political Jewish life. Delegates from *KJV [Kartel Judischer Verbindungen]* invited me to join their corporation, *Ivryia*, as part of a student tradition called *Keilen*. *KJV* was the Zionist student movement, while the *KC* assimilationists were a movement of Germans of Mosaic persuasion. For most of my years in Germany I remained within the *KJV* circle of young Jews devoted to the cause of Zionism. The Jewish women students organized their own Zionist groups, called *ZIST [Zionistische Studentinen Groupen]* and there was quite a bit of socializing amongst us. The summer semester seemed to move very rapidly.

Some of the people I met in Heidelberg remained my friends for many years to come: Rudi Hecht, Heini Wydra, Eva Bernhardt, Gustave (Gershom) Schocken, Hans Nathan, and many others. These were all children of well-known Jewish families, representing prominent achievements in business, public affairs and other spheres. They were not only wealthy but also highly cultured and, although not at all religious, contributed generously to Jewish and Zionist causes.

Rudi Hecht came from an old and aristocratic German family which controlled a considerable part of the Rhine shipping, from Switzerland up to the North Sea. Hecht's company often invited us to take boat trips up the Rhine and during the summer I stayed at their family house in Basle. Rudi had a suite of his own in their huge, beautiful villa, where he housed a large collection of ancient Hebrew coins and archeological artifacts. He was not merely a collector but also very knowledgeable about Holy Land archeology. Rudi did not stay in the family business but moved to Palestine at a young age and after the war established the *Dagon* grain silos in Haifa, which developed into a successful and efficient enterprise of national importance.

I met Rudi in Heidelberg in 1929. We became friendly and saw a great deal of each other. In the last year of our studies we rented rooms in the same apartment in the Bergstrasse and

prepared there for our final exams. Most members of the *KJV Ivryia*, the Jewish students' fraternity to which we belonged, supported the General Zionists led by Dr. Kurt Blumenfeld, the president of the German Zionist Federation. Rudi and I were the only two who fought for the ideas of Jabotinsky. These discussions brought us closer together and we became involved in planning our future life in Palestine. The tropical heat there was one of our foremost concerns. How would we get used to it? We decided to train for it. In the midst of Heidelberg's hot summer months we would put on warm underwear, winter clothes and fur coats. Then we would mount a motorcycle and rush through the field roads behind the town till we became exhausted and sweaty and then we would force ourselves to do it over and over. This was supposed to prepare us for the hot Palestinian climate. We also thought of future employment prospects and drafted an index describing all the factories and commercial establishments we would eventually build in Palestine, including an electric railroad to Um Rash Rash, presently Eilat.

In 1931 Rudi went on his first trip to Palestine. He came back with many exciting stories about the beauty of the land. Weeks later we went paddling in the Neckar river on his kayak, which was called *Dybbuk* and flew the blue and white national flag. I suddenly thought about the Jordan River. "Rudi," I said "how wide is the Jordan? Is it twice as wide as the Neckar or more?" (The Neckar is about half a mile wide). I was thinking more in terms of the Volga. Rudi kept quiet. I asked again. There was silence. I was getting excited, but something was wrong. I was deeply disappointed. "You mean to say" I asked "that the Jordan is not wider than the Neckar?" The truth about the Jordan, a strong and mighty river in my mind, came out. Getting used to the modest reality of our ancestral homeland was rather painful, and for years we never talked about the size of Palestine.

From time to time I also stayed at the Schocken family estate in Berlin, where Gustav introduced me to his parents, his

brothers and sister. I had never felt quite at ease with "German" boys, despite their Zionism and their loyalty to the Jewish people, and felt a distance between us. The Schockens were an exception. They had devoted a great deal of time, interest and money to Hebrew literature, especially to mediaeval poetry, and had established a large and successful publishing house devoted to Jewish subjects. Gustav's father was Zalman Schocken, a well-known businessman and owner of a chain of department stores, who was also the patron of Nobel prizewinner S. Y. Agnon and years later became the publisher of the daily newspaper *Ha-Aretz* in Palestine.

I felt I did not really belong in this German world. Somehow I was Russian, a bit wild, and my clothes were not quite up to their standards of Western elegance and style. It did not bother me much then but it took several years until I really felt myself belonging to the same "Western civilization."

I missed my sports training, which was almost unavailable at the university, and decided to join *FC-04*, a Heidelberg football and sports club. Their track section was rather modest, so I quickly became one of their best runners and represented the club in the 200 and 400 meter competitions as well as in relay races. This took me to some bizarre villages in the south of Germany where people got together after the competitions to sing funny songs and drink beer, which I loathed. They were not my kind of company but there was not much else to do during the vacation I spent in Heidelberg. Naively, I thought that some day I could compete succesfully elsewhere in Europe and I did not want to neglect my training.

One day as I returned to my room my landlady met me with a smile and told me my mother had arrived. The night before she had sent a cable from Trieste to tell me she was coming but it was Sunday and I had been away all day on a sports excursion. She was on her way back from spending several months with my uncle Louis in Palestine and the cable was on the table when she arrived. It was a wonderful surprise to see her and have a chance to boast about my "achievements." She went

with me to lectures and even to a sports competition. We spent a great time together and I was delighted to show her "my" Heidelberg and introduce her to some of my new friends.

Then came another surprise. At the beginning of 1930 Uncle Isaac and his family came to visit me in Heidelberg. We agreed to meet at the entrance to the town. So here they were, arriving in a big black limousine with cousin Alex driving Aunt Fanny, Doreen and Uncle Isaac. We did some sightseeing and had lunch together. In the afternoon Uncle Isaac took me to a men's shop, where I was fitted out with an elegant dark suit, something I had not been quite used to. I was very happy to see them all. It gave me a feeling that, besides my immediate family, there was a wider one as well.

I had really come to love Heidelberg and its atmosphere though I could still be quite critical of the reality around me. In hindsight, it is clear that Heidelberg was the springboard to my future, marking the beginning of a long, winding road that was to end in Jerusalem. Many things I learned there were later important for my work with the *Irgun*, for my service in the American army and for all my Zionist activities.

At the end of my first year in Heidelberg *KJV* asked me to go study in Leipzig. They needed active members in the Leipzig fraternity and prevailed upon me to change universities. This change did not seem to be in my best interests at the time but I was naive and enthusiastic and did not think of my own personal future, so I went. My time there was a positive experience as it eventually channeled my studies in a more practical direction.

Heini Wydra, who had studied with me in Heidelberg in the summer of 1929, came from Leipzig. His family was originally from Poland and was engaged in the fur trade, of which Leipzig was the world center. I spent three semesters in Leipzig, from the winter of 1930 to the winter of 1932, and Heini and I became good friends. Two women students from Palestine were our close companions. Yocheved Kaplan, who later married Heini, was the sister of Eliezer Kaplan, the first Israeli Minis-

ter of Finance. The second, Hadassah Sherman, was the daughter of Tel-Aviv's first physician and was in Leipzig studying music. The four of us spent most of our free time together and my athletic training was neglected. I registered for the 5,000 meter university championship but withdrew in the middle of a run, a very shameful decision for a devoted sportsman.

At that time I was very interested in two rather unconnected fields, town-planning and parapsychology, and attended with great interest the lectures of Prof. Driesch, a world-known figure in the area of parapsychology. But it slowly began to dawn on me that my father had by then been financing my studies for two years and I still had no practical accomplishments to show for it nor, in fact, any assurance of ever being able to earn my own living. I had to do something quickly to prove I was not wasting his money and my time on politics and empty talk and could actually "produce results." It turned out to be rather simple. I registered for a course at the university's insurance institute and was given credit for some of my law studies, which enabled me to obtain my diploma in insurance — something called *Versicherungs-Sachverstandiger* [Insurance Expert] — in two semesters rather than four. During these two semesters I worked very hard studying insurance, mathematics, administration and law, knowledge which I was able to use when I came to Palestine. During the summer I worked for three months as a trainee in the Leipzig *Lebenversicherung*, one of the largest German insurance companies.

I was also involved in activities of the Leipzig Jewish community. I participated in their meetings and discussions, wrote in the local press and met fellow students at various university clubs. Most of my social life revolved around *KJV* and our foursome.

Late in the summer of 1931 I received a letter from Riga informing me I had been elected as one of the Riga delegates to the Revisionist world convention in Prague, to meet under Jabotinsky's leadership. Although I have been identified for many years with the Revisionist movement, I have always felt

uncomfortable with the name. Rather than perceiving it as an attempt to "revise" a given position I always thought of it as an independent, positive ideology aiming to establish a Jewish state with a free, competitive economy. Revisionsts were unwilling to be committed to a socialist stance and believed these problems should be taken care of after the establishment of the state. Unfortunately, we were cornered into the "right-wing" of the political spectrum, a description failing to portray our political targets accurately.

At the convention, I spent an interesting week, in the company of Jabotinsky, Meir Grossman, Richard Lichtheim, Oscar Rabinowitz, and many of my former Riga friends, including Leah, my high-school sweetheart, who sang Hebrew songs and was very much admired. After I returned to Leipzig *KJV* again asked me to help them reorganize their fraternity at Frankfurt University. Although I was not too keen I agreed once more to their request and ended up losing a semester; I attended lectures in sociology but had too little time to read or study. Frankfurt was a big financial and business center and there was also an active Jewish community. I joined the local *Betar* branch and began lecturing on political issues. Once I even became involved in a heated controversy with Nahum Goldmann where I contested his lukewarm views on Zionism. I was trying to do too much at once and it just did not work.

My companion in Frankfurt was Dada Langer, a very cultured young lady, half-French and half-German, who was studying literature and philosophy. Her father was a well-known artist and one of the founders of Dadaism, who had named his daughter after the movement. I quite disliked the name and suggested she change it but her father had since died and Dada felt she should remain loyal to his wishes. Dada was a very liberal girl, intelligent and knowledgeable, and she hated the Nazis. As soon as the Nazis came to power she ran away from Germany without documents or money, managed to reach Oxford and became a lecturer in French literature. When I graduated from Heidelberg in 1933 she wrote me a warm letter

from Oxford trying to persuade me not to accept a doctorate from a German university, but I could not allow myself to accept her suggestion. In 1935, when I was working in the orange groves of Netanya she wrote to tell me she was tired of the British and would like to come and live in Palestine, and would it not be a good idea for me to marry her? As I did not want to insult her I wrote back to say that I was already engaged and soon to be married, a rather elegant solution that spared her feelings as well as the the need to deal with her *giyur ka-halacha* [Orthodox conversion].

At some point in the course of discovering Europe and moving around between German universities I realized the time had come to make final decisions regarding my studies, so I decided to move back to Heidelberg and concentrate on my future. Alfred Weber, a professor of *Kultur Soziologie*, had a very strong influence on me. He was a brother of Max Weber, who was already a central figure in twentieth century sociology. Alfred Weber directed an institute in the beautiful Palais Weimar, a handsome villa outside Heidelberg on the banks of the Neckar, and represented the best tradition of European liberalism. He stood up strongly and courageously against totalitarianism and insisted on his principles until the last minute, when he was expelled by the Nazis. At his seminars I not only learned to think analytically but also met some fine, interesting young people, as curious about the world as I was. I remember Weber in the spring of 1933. Hitler had been in power for three months and Nazi-clad *S.A.* came to the faculty building at Palais Weimar, where the German republican flag flew at the entrance. The Nazis ordered the *Pedell* [house director] to lower the "chicken rag" and hoist the Nazi flag. He did. Prof. Weber appeared on the scene and quietly said: "Lower the party flag and raise the national one." He did. Then the Nazis again gave their orders and Professor Weber again objected. This exchange was repeated about five or six times. The Nazis "won."

Walter Jellineck was a special case. He was a professor of constitutional law and came from a rabbinic family in

Vienna. His father had converted to Christianity and he lectured us on Aryan purity. One of his conclusions was that at least five generations of pure Aryan blood were required to ensure Aryan purity. This instance of Jewish pathology is a good example of what happened to some Jews in the course of three generations. I was studying for my doctoral exams when Hugenberg, the head of the right-wing *Deutch Nazionale Partei* left the Hitler government and the Nazi-ruled coalition lost its majority. Prof. Jellineck, a rabbi's grandson, asked me, a young Jew from Riga, whether I thought that the Hitler government was legal. This was obviously a provocation and I suggested that the matter be referred to the Supreme Court.

Germany had basically been a friendly place during my first few years at university, but then the anti-Semitic right developed into a powerful movement calling for the murder of my people. German Jews continued to see themselves as loyal and devoted German citizens who had fought bravely and had been decorated in WWI. They insistently explained to all "misguided" foreigners that all these were passing events and continued to make jokes about Zionism and Palestine. One night we were having dinner at the home of Prof. Sultan, a German professor who happened to be Jewish. The windows of his apartment faced University Square where hundreds of students, dressed in the mustard Nazi uniform and singing Nazi songs, were throwing books into four big bonfires burning on the square. I was not afraid, and only became strengthened in my view that even Jews who had till then been far removed from Zionism would soon understand the ominous threat Jews were facing everywhere in Europe. The next morning, S.A. units stood by the broken windows of Jewish stores on which big signs had been hung: *Die Juden sind unser Umgluck* [The Jews are our misfortune]. Don't buy in Jewish stores! Kick out the Jews! The streets were full of people shouting *Heil Hitler!* Send them away! Kill them!

Heidelberg was in the German state of Baden, the first state which had granted the Jews political and social equality at the

beginning of the 19th century. But it had not lasted, and the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a return to the darkest Middle Ages. I walked quietly along the main street. Germans who knew me turned away. Jews tried to comfort each other with the same phrases: "It will soon be over." "It will be forgotten." "Don't worry. It's only an ugly minority." "Germans are highly cultured people. This sickness will soon disappear." I only felt disgust. I thought of the pogroms of Chmelnitzki and Petlyura from my studies, and of the mock trials in which I had taken part at school. An old, poisonous stream seemed to be flowing under the rivers and hills of Germany, hiding behind the cultural achievements of Goethe, Schiller and many others.

During my last months in Heidelberg I was shocked by the number of Jewish suicides. Our people had placed their faith in Germany and had lost their will to survive, and I was more appalled by their spiritual weakness than by the cruelty of Nazi policies.

Schell had been an acquaintance of mine from my pre-Hitler days. When I came to Heidelberg in 1928, he had been the president of the Democratic Group and had invited me to talk to them about Zionism and Palestine. Six months after Hitler assumed power he became a Nazi, and was later appointed "leader" of all German students *[Reichs Studenten Fuhrer].* Heidelberg had become part of a different planet, in which people stopped thinking and reacting as before. After the Hugenberg group left, Hitler had formed a new, all-Nazi government and draconic measures were enacted at Heidelberg University from the beginning of 1933. Jewish and anti-Nazi members of the academic staff were fired and guidelines were published to determine appropriate behavior toward non-Aryans. The anti-Nazis who remained were a negligible minority lacking all influence, without any hope of ever again enjoying academic freedom or of being considered on their academic merits.

Prof. Radbruch was not Jewish, but as a former minister of Justice he had been one of the architects of the Weimar Consti-

tution. He was a great statesman, a warm, noble man, an exciting teacher and one of Nazism's first victims. Out of 189 professors in Heidelberg over a quarter were fired, mostly from the faculties of philosophy and medicine. Alfred Weber had to leave in the spring of 1933 and so had Hans von Eckardt, a professor of political science who had originally come from Riga. He was a radical German nationalist but it did not help him much. Of my Jewish teachers, Eugen Taubler went to teach in Cincinnati and Arthur Salz also emigrated. Karl Jaspers, a professor of philosophy and a spiritual beacon in those dark days, was married to a Jewish woman and had to escape to Switzerland. Emil Lederer, who was of Jewish descent but totally detached from anything Jewish, emigrated to the USA and helped to found the New School for Social Research in New York. I also remember Professor Levy, who taught civil law, a very dry and formal man, Jewish by descent but very German, who quickly disappeared. The most shameful aspect, from a German point of view, was that almost no one objected. Ruperto Carola, the oldest university in Europe and a landmark of liberal thought, was silent.

Jewish students, who were all considered "Marxists," were forced to leave. For an interim period *numerus clausus* quotas were limited to one and a half percent, although Jewish students had previously made up about five percent of the student body. No new Jewish students were accepted, except for a few foreign nationals.

July 1933 was my last month in Heidelberg. Given the prevailing circumstances, the university authorities decided to conclude all the necessary formalities very quickly, to prevent Nazi commissars from meddling with Jews or liberals whose graduation was still pending. My thesis was accepted by Professor Brinkman and after passing my "orals" I was at last a doctor of political science. I was twenty-three years old and the whole world was before me. And what a world it was! My work in sociology with Prof. Alfred Weber, to whom I was very devoted and whose civic courage I shall not forget, had made

me think again about my future aims. I was seeking for an opportunity to work in Palestine. Ruth Ruppin, the daughter of Prof. Arthur Ruppin from the Hebrew University, was a medical student in Heidelberg and belonged to our Zionist circle. She offered to write to her father and ask him about research possibilities for me at the Hebrew University. All this would take some time so I decided to go visit my family in Riga, but thought it best to secure a visa to Palestine before leaving Germany. There was no other way of entering Palestine, as illegal immigration was then merely a figment in some of our friends' imagination. I decided not to be bashful and approached the British Consul directly.

My problem was that I needed proof for the Consul that I was a bona fide student at Heidelberg and would return to continue my studies there as soon as my work in Jerusalem was finished. I needed the student visa and had to get it myself, as I had no family in Palestine nor any funds whatsoever for an investment visa. I therefore registered as a student at Heidelberg University for the following year. Jewish foreign students could still be accepted at Heidelberg in 1933, that is, if any Jews without backbone or moral fibre could be found to do so. I decided to take this step in order to obtain a visa to Palestine.

A young Jew from Eastern Europe asking for permission to continue studying in Heidelberg was a rather strange occurrencene in those dark days. People at the registrar's office seemed surprised and embarrassed but asked no questions. Against payment of a nominal fee they stolidly handed me a document attesting that I was registered to continue my research in Heidelberg. I then went to Frankfurt to meet the British Consul General, an elderly, typical British gentleman.

After exchanging the usual platitudes he wanted to know how he could help me. "I need a student visa to Palestine," I replied. "I'm sorry, but that will be impossible," said he. "But why? I am doing a study on the social and psychological problems of the Jewish people. It is absolutely essential for me to work with Prof. Ruppin. He is a prominent scientist who, by

the way, also went to Palestine from Germany about twenty years ago." I kept insisting and he kept objecting.

I asked him for the reasons for his decision, as if completely oblivious of the fact that there were Nazis in the world. He had by then become slightly more friendly and had even managed to smile a few times. He hesitantly suggested we leave his office and move into his private rooms. "You know," he started anew, "these people (obviously alluding to Jews) are often dishonest and do not tell us the truth. They really don't want to go study in Palestine but just want to get in and stay there." We both looked quite appalled at the idea. "Oh," I said. "That is truly awful and quite unfair to the British government. I understand your misgivings. But you see, it does not apply in my case," and I took out the document proving that I was already registered to return to Heidelberg and would obviously never consider doing anything else. He looked at my papers, checked the dates and the stamps, made a telephone call and seemed convinced. "Oh well," he said, "this is a rather different story. You are obviously entitled to receive a student visa and I will be happy to issue one."

I could now leave for home and on the way I stopped over in Berlin to visit Maria Therese. Maria had studied sociology and art history in Heidelberg. She was the daughter of the German chief-of-staff, General Baron von Hammerstein-Equord. The Hammerstein-Equords, as their name indicates, were of French Hugenot descent and had been expelled from Catholic France in the eighteenth century. In the course of time they had adopted German culture, but the family had not forgotten the religious persecutions of the Catholic Church and were considered liberals by German standards. General von Hammerstein-Equord belonged to General Schleichers's group, who opposed Hitler's appointment to be chancellor and later paid dearly for his views. Maria, who was a member of our Heidelberg circle, proclaimed herself a Zionist and announced she was going to Palestine. There may have been some other instances of German youths sympathetic to our cause but I do

not believe that anyone could match the case of the Zionist daughter of Hitler's chief-of-staff.

For Maria and me to meet in Berlin after the Nuremberg Laws entailed a great risk, particularly as Maria could be compromising her father. She reserved a room for me at a small hotel near Zoo station and arrived punctually, dressed in sport pants and racing through Berlin on her motorcycle. I suggested that we keep our meeting brief and that she should forget about going to Palestine, as there was no way of keeping such a trip a secret and public knowledge of it could cause her and her father grievous harm. It seemed to me that as long as a few liberals still held any position of power in our dark world, we should try to keep them there. The liberal public in Europe, or whatever was left of it by then, would want a man like her father to stay on and wield whatever influence was still available to him. She refused to commit herself regarding the journey to Palestine but still insisted that she wanted to see Palestine with her own eyes. We met again in the park in the evening. We had not finished talking but to be seen at the hotel would have meant prison. We spoke for several hours and still failed to reach any conclusions. Little did I know then that, only nine months later, she would surprise me by arriving in Jerusalem.

I continued on my way to Riga. It was a slow train ride through Germany and the country had changed considerably over the last year. Nazi flags and uniformed personnel with swastikas were everywhere and train stations were decorated with slogans, the dominant one being "Jews are our misfortune." It was not a pleasant sight. Lithuania was just as somber and I was happy to reach Latvia, where the atmosphere seemed slightly easier and more relaxed, though this was obviously an illusion. The Latvians were a small, intelligent nation of only one million people, who spoke a language very close to Sanskrit and had developed industry and agriculture. Most of them were Lutheran Protestants, a faith that German missionaries had brought into the Baltic nations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They were an attractive, Nordic-

looking people, blond and blue-eyed. However, they were strongly anti-Semitic and hated Jews with a blind and sadistic passion. Being a small nation they had been forced to show restraint and keep their feelings under control. Before the Nazis came there had been only few instances of anti-Jewish legislation, but after the occupation the Latvians became murderers and executioners for the Nazi regime.

When I arrived in Riga I found my parents enjoying a holiday at the seashore. My father was satisfied that his business was doing well. I tried to convince them to move to Palestine or to Australia, where they could join my mother's family. My suggestions were politely but firmly rejected. "We cannot fight the whole world. Our family lost property and factories in Drissa in 1917-1920. We had to start anew and we have rebuilt our lives but to leave now would mean that we would become paupers and dependent on others. Now we are independent, but if we sell our Latvian money would be worthless outside. We are too old to start again."

When I met them in Helsinki six years later I tried again to persuade them to leave Latvia. The same words were said once more in 1938, but it was then that my family pronounced its own death sentence with open eyes, not quite knowing what was in store for them. They did expect a war and feared its consequences, but the possibility of Nazi crimes never entered their minds. Asya agreed with me, but he understood my parents' feelings and did not want to leave them alone. He felt one of us should stay with our parents, and they all insisted I should go on to Palestine and Asya should stay. This was a difficult decision, but after considering all the implications it was felt that it would perhaps be better to brave the storm by splitting forces.

While I was still vacationing with my parents I received a letter from Ruth Ruppin infoming me that her father would be glad to accept me as a research student at the Hebrew University. I wanted to work on the ways in which social upheaval and revolution affect the mental and social structure of the

Jewish people. Historically, it made sense to start with the French Revolution but my main concern was the Russian Revolution of 1917, a field in which I felt I could make a contribution and put my knowledge of Russian to good use.

Ready to go to Palestine, I booked passage from Trieste on a small Lloyd Triestino vessel, the S. S. Adria. I left Riga after spending a month with my family and on the way stopped in Berne to visit Eva Bernhard, who had just married Pini Robinson. Eva's story was not atypical of a whole generation of German Jews. Her father, Dr. Georg Bernhard, had been the chief editor of *Die Vossische Zeitung* and one of the Weimar Republic's leading intellectuals. He had been an important political and spiritual figure and was a high priority target for the Nazis. He had married a Russian woman, an Orthodox Christian, and had two daughters. The older one was a famous actress at the Rhinehart Theatre and had been baptized as a Catholic, whereas Eva had been baptized as a Protestant. This prominent German Jew thus had a caricature of four religions in his family. Eva did not take her baptism too seriously. By the time she had reached our circle she had become a Zionist and was active in our student group. She converted to Judaism in Basel with an Orthodox rabbi, and eventually settled in Palestine with her husband, a professor of medicine.

In October, sad and depressed about the future of Europe, I said good-bye to my friends and set out on my journey to Palestine.

4

My First Years in Palestine

We are the music-makers
And we are the dreamers of dreams
Wandering by lone sea-breakers
And sitting by desolate streams.

Arthur O'Shaugnessy, *Ode*

The S. S. Adria docked in Jaffa in October, 1933. Jaffa was then a rather primitive port and ships had to anchor about a mile and a half offshore. Big, hefty Arab port workers drew up their small boats to the sides of the steamers and passengers were half-thrown, half-carried to them to be brought ashore.

My uncle Louis was waiting for me. He was a tall, thin gentleman, kind and warm-hearted, even if rather formal in his manner. He was wearing the brown fedora he never parted with, and in good English fashion always sported a tie, regard-

less of the heat. Through the good offices of a British official he took me out of the queue waiting to go through customs and a few minutes later we were off in his big black Buick. He had built his house in Rambam Street, at the southwestern edge of Tel Aviv and near the Arab Manshia quarter. His home, designed in Spanish style and with a small garden, was popular with British personnel and specially with British Jewish officials. In the big sitting room were large portraits of King George V and Queen Mary, a proper indication of where their loyalties and affections lay. By "their" I mean not only Uncle Louis, but also Aunt Hannah. Aunt Hannah was English, and everything about her — her speech, her manner, her dress and her furniture, her whole lifestyle — was English. During her long years in Palestine and in Israel she never learned Hebrew, or for that matter, any foreign language.

My uncle Louis had originally come to England from his native Tukum together with his brothers Isaac and Harry, and then continued to the new world, New Zealand and Australia, where they established themselves. It was during this period that he absorbed British culture, a British way of life and a British conservative political philosophy. Together with Aunt Hannah and his two teen-age charming daughters they established a warm and pleasant home.

Of all my mother's brothers, Louis had always been the closest to us. Beginning with his visits to Riga we had maintained an ongoing discussion about Zionist politics. I had always found him cool and reserved towards the Zionist cause while showing a warm understanding for the British point of view. He claimed our political demands were too exaggerated and tried to explain to me the difficulties and dangers of British colonial policy. At the same time, Uncle Louis was very tolerant and understanding of the reasons that had brought me to Palestine. He knew exactly what I was doing and never tried to disassociate himself by telling me to stop my activities, at least for as long as I was staying in his house.

TUTTLEMAN LIBRARY OF GRATZ COLLEGE
Melrose Park, PA

A rather curious situation developed. My aunt Hannah always had guests for tea on Saturday afternoons including, among other British officials, the British district commissioner for Jaffa and the British district commissioner for Tel Aviv, Alex Epstein, who later became a friend. It was precisely at tea-time however, that I was usually participating in demonstrations against British arrests of people involved in what they called "illegal immigration," or for the opening of Jewish immigration to Palestine, or against the passive attitude of the British administration towards Arab terrorism. These rallies would usually end with the protesters marching through the streets of Tel-Aviv and clashing with the police, resulting in arrests and wounded on both sides. I took part in these hours-long demonstrations, and by the time I returned to 6 Rambam St. my shabby condition was a source of great embarrassment both to me and to my hosts. Those close to the family knew the reasons for my disheveled unseemly appearance. My aunt and uncle would usually smile it all away with some British understatement, and their guests did not quite know what to make of me.

I went up to Jerusalem to meet Prof. Arthur Ruppin at the Hebrew University and begin my research work. I put on a dark suit and a tie, a rather unusual appearance for a Palestinian student in 1933. I proudly spoke Hebrew, unaware that this was not the Profesor's strongest point, and he promptly replied: *Junger Mann, Deutsch konnen Sie nicht sprechen?* [Young man, can't you speak German?] Ruppin's sociological theories were not quite like the Webers', but we got along. After leaving the meeting I took a walk in the garden and the hills around Mt. Scopus. I found myself where I always wanted to be. But my interests soon changed considerably. Travelling around the country and meeting old friends from Riga and from Germany, I began to reach the conclusion that scientific work and abstract research was not quite the task for a young man in those days.

I had been contacted by friends and acquaintances belonging to underground military organizations, such as the *Haganah* or *Irgun Bet*, asking me to join their ranks. It was clear to me that I would sooner or later enlist in the *Irgun* (at that time called *Haganah Leumit* [National Defense], where I could probably contribute not only as a soldier but also through my European connections and my knowledge of languages. But for the time being I had to register at the University and begin my research work. I was in Palestine on a student visa, which was only valid as long as I was studying, and I would later have to find another way to legalize my residence. There were three to four months left before the beginning of the university year and I decided to take any work I could find.

Many Zionists then returning to Palestine and wishing to share in the new culture Hebraized their original European surnames or adopted new ones. In line with the *Zeitgeist* I changed my family's name from Rafaelovitch, as it had been for many generations, to Rafaeli, which retained the original Russian meaning of "belonging to Rafael."

I actually began my career as an agricultural worker in the orange groves of Petah Tikva, arriving every morning by bus from Tel Aviv. My job was to dig irrigation channels around the orange trees with a wide shovel they called a *turiah*. I was paid 22 piasters per day, four of which went to cover the round trip ticket to Petah Tikva. For the first few days I was in a romantic mood, happily "working the land," but in the long run I had to admit that agriculture was not quite my calling and I was neither efficient nor successful at it. After a few months I moved to Jerusalem to start my research, or rather to indicate that I had started my research, while trying to support myself by working as a waiter in a little cafe in Jaffa Street. I could not allow my parents or my uncle to support me and my two pounds salary kept me quite independent. I shared a bedroom with another waiter, a fellow my age from Germany, who was my first social contact in Jerusalem. I did not last at it and it became clear to me that I had to find a job where I could put my

academic credentials and my training to use. The opportunity soon presented itself.

Haim Gamzu, a newspaperman I had known in Riga, contacted me with an offer to join the editorial staff of the first economics paper to be published in Palestine, *Ha-Doar Ha-Kalkali* [The Economic Post]. I found the proposition fascinating. I was thrilled by the idea of contributing to the economic development of the country by writing about it, as well as by the thought that my income would jump from two to thirteen pounds a month. I met with the publisher, Rafael Abulafia, a tall, handsome man with Spanish features, who reminded me of an El Greco painting. I was very happy to have an opportunity like this after only nine months in the country, even though journalism was not my vocation.

Rafael Abulafia was the scion of an old, aristocratic Sephardi family that had lived in Palestine for many generations, and one of the few surviving members of the *Nili* group, of World War I fame. Together with Aaron and Sara Aaronson he had helped to establish an underground intelligence network to assist the British, then stationed in Egypt, to conquer Palestine. This was quite a dramatic chapter in the history of Jewish resistance, a gallant attempt to establish new political facts by participating in the Allied war effort in exchange for a British promise to help in the establishment of Jewish independence.

For all practical purposes I wrote this periodical by myself. Each issue numbered between eight and fourteen pages and I had to get the news, interview sources, analyze the statistics and write all articles and editorials. I worked in German and Gamzu translated into Hebrew, edited and proofread the galleys Historically, Abulafia must be credited with the first attempt to establish an economic magazine in Palestine dealing with current and international problems and analyzing Zionist economic development within the framework of the Middle East. The periodical was planned as a bi-monthly and Abulafia was responsible for the commercial and administrative

aspects of the publication. It turned out to be rather succesful. Special editions were at times devoted to certain fields such as industry or insurance, and I would then conduct an in-depth study of a specific aspect of the Palestinian economy. These special issues also brought in added income, which I always welcomed, as it helped me gain economic independence. Abulafia and his wife later became my personal friends.

During this time I met up in Jerusalem with my Heidelberg mentor, Richard Lichtheim. The banker George Halpern headed the Jewish Colonial Trust, which was the banking institute of Theodore Herzl and the parent company of the Anglo-Palestine Bank. He and Lichtheim had together founded an insurance company named *Migdal*, to be associated with the large, Italian-based international consortium *Assecurazioni Generali*. It was felt that the increasing German immigration and the economic development of Palestine justified the establishment of an independent insurance company, which could develop considerable business. Lichtheim was to be in charge of life insurance and Etienne Bash would be responsible for other departments. My studies at the insurance institute in Leipzig University qualified me for the position of secretary of life insurance. Lichtheim promised to think of me in due course, and when *Migdal* was established he invited me for discussions and introduced me to Halpern, the tough boss of Jewish economics in Palestine. I got the job, which entailed coordinating the work of the insurance agents with our office, processing the medical check-ups and the financial payments. I shared an office with Prof. Breuer, a member of a leading Orthodox family in Frankfurt that had been among the founders of *Agudat Israel*. He was the company's actuary and we were tolerantly friendly toward each other. Nevertheless, it was clear to me that he disliked being a witness to my appointments with underground contacts, to the meetings arranged in the little cafe downstairs and to the carrying and moving of weapons, often through the office. He understood what was going on, opposed my activities and was perhaps

even afraid of them, but never hinted anything, either to me or to anyone else. Working in the office of a prominent company like *Migdal* was a very convenient cover for me, and I had also kept my job as co-editor in *Ha-Doar Ha-Kalkali.* I worked late into the night and over weekends and managed the two jobs for as long as the newspaper existed. My Jerusalem roots were deepening.

My cousin Alex Kahn stopped by for a few days on his way from Australia to Europe. He had graduated as a lawyer in Sydney, his home town, but was not active in his profession. He devoted himself to investing his share in the family property and to watching the stock exchange. Alex spent a few days with me, walking the narrow streets of the Old City and visiting historical sites. Actually, he knew Jerusalem better than I did in those days, as Uncle Isaac had brought his family from Australia to Palestine for about six months in the beginning of the twenties, for the duration of their shipping company venture.

Alex was not at all interested in Jews or Judaism and I suspect that this view was considerably affected by the separation of his parents, Uncle Isaac and Aunt Fanny. Both Alex and his sister Doreen felt that Isaac had been unfair to their mother. Since they identified their father with the Jewish establishment, they extended their resentment towards their father to everything Jewish and placed themselves at the opposite end. But whenever we met, which was not often, Doreen and Alex were always friendly. I was very unhappy to hear that Uncle Isaac and Aunt Fanny had separated. Doreen stayed with her mother and Alex went back to Australia with his father. I was especially saddened that Aunt Fanny decided to go and live in Berlin at the beginning of the Nazi era. But she was alone, her mother and sisters lived in Berlin and she went there to join them. In 1938 I met Doreen and Aunt Fanny again in Paris, when I was on a mission on behalf of the *Irgun.* Although still distant, they sounded much friendlier to the Zionist cause. A few years later Doreen married Pat Skillington, a senior civil

servant who worked at the British Foreign Office. He was a pleasant and intelligent fellow with balanced views about Palestine and Zionism or rather, for a member of the Foreign Office, unusually friendly views.

Some of the friendships I made during those years in Jerusalem have remained with me to this day. One was Haim Lubinsky, an eloquent, imaginative, and very patriotic fellow who was then studying law. He was the man who told me the story of the *Irgun* and convinced me of its importance, and actually brought me into the underground movement. A wave of tension was rolling over Europe. The Nazi regime was expanding its influence to other parts of the Western world. The future of my people was in jeopardy. Bitter thoughts went through my mind. In 1934, I joined the *Haganah Leumit*, which disagreed with the *Haganah* regarding the best tactic of Jewish defense under the circumstances then prevailing in Palestine. The conception of the *Haganah Leumit* was that a well-organized military body should be established, staffed with full-time personnel and adopting an aggressive defense policy, which would be a deterrent to anyone intent on attacking Jewish areas.

I went through a series of checkups and investigations that culminated in a passionate oath, committing me to fight for the freedom of the Hebrew people. Now I was a member of the underground, and through Lubinsky I met a number of young men who were later actively involved in the struggle against the British. We used to meet in the home of Benyamin Cohen-Aharonov, who as a boy had walked with his family all the way from Bukhara to Palestine and had settled in the Bukharan quarter of Jerusalem. He had received a French education, and served as secretary of the French Consulate General in Jerusalem for forty years. During World War II he became world-famous when the Vichy forces captured Syria and Lebanon. The Vichy command in the Middle East ordered the Jerusalem consulate to close and all the French officials moved to Syria or simply disappeared. Benyamin was the only

"Frenchman" left. He refused to obey Vichy orders, hoisted the French flag in front of the consulate building and declared that the French consulate in Jerusalem had joined the forces of General De Gaulle, who was then only beginning his campaign. This was the first French consulate to pledge support for De Gaulle and Benyamin was later decorated with the French *Legion d'Honneur* for his actions. It was in his Oriental-styled home that I first met David Raziel, later the *Irgun* commander, as well as Avraham Stern (Yair), Hillel Kook and other leaders of the Jerusalem Jewish underground in those days.

Much time was devoted to discussions, which often lasted through the night. I remember some critical remarks against Stern, whose "crime" was wanting to go to Florence to study philosophy. The thrust of the attack was: "How can a young Jew go and study philosophy abroad when the nation is in crisis?" Avraham tried to explain how important philosophy and logic were for clear thinking on political matters. He also felt he would be contributing to the national endeavor by distancing himself from events and embarking in a process of search and analysis that would enable him to evaluate them more clearly. But the comrades were tough and would not see Avraham's point of view. They tried to pressure him to abandon his academic pursuits and to begin writing military training manuals in Hebrew, an unusual activity at that time.

I was a newcomer to the group and not yet fluent in Hebrew, so I simply listened. I sat there absolutely fascinated. It was a new world to me and these were new Jews. I knew my place was with them and I waited to be assigned a responsibility of my own. My integration in the movement continued in this conspiratorial fashion and after several months I became part of a small unit that began undergoing military training. My first instructor was Raziel himself and during the summer we trained in the Judean desert, a few miles east of the university campus on Mount Scopus. By autumn, I had became a junior instructor and assigned to handle a German-speaking unit. This was a new venture. There had been no German-speaking

instructors before and there was now considerable *aliyah* from Germany, with many young people unable yet to speak Hebrew. It was quite amusing for me to meet Jewish students from Heidelberg who had fiercely opposed Zionism. A stroke of history had now brought these boys to join in the struggle for a Jewish homeland.

I also met other friends from my Heidelberg years who had settled in Palestine. Rudi Hecht was here, always busy planning political activities. Both of us were upset when several German Jews organized celebrations for the New Year on December 31, 1934, and we decided on tough action. Exactly at midnight, at the peak of the celebrations, we threw stones at the cafe where the party was held, broke the windows and caused considerable panic. We had taken a chance and managed to flee the scene without being caught. We later laughed at our impetuousness and intolerant rejection of *galut* practices, but in later years we realized that throwing stones was not an acceptable method of educating towards Zionism.

Suddenly, out of the blue, Maria Therese appeared. Nazism was consolidating its hold and this lovely girl, whose father was still the German chief-of-staff, came to Jerusalem to persuade me to accept her and help her become one of us. She did not speak about religion or conversion and I did not raise the issue, lest I be placed under an emotional obligation, but I felt she wanted to become part of Jewish Palestine. I tried to convince her that, by joining the struggle for a better Germany, she would be making a much more important contribution than anything she could do in Palestine. I suggested she also talk to Rudi, and although we did not compare notes I imagine that he made the same suggestion, since a month later she went back to Germany. After several years I heard she had married a half-Jewish German diplomat, who during the war had served as an "honorary German" at the Tokyo embassy.

I was still holding my job at the *Migdal* Insurance Co., and I had an opportunity to meet prominent people. I disliked the politicians, who impressed me as petty and provincial, but I

was very impressed with some of the intellectuals, such as the poet Saul Tchernichowsky. He was a physician by profession and the doctor of our insurance company. He was a short man, with a beautiful Roman head and fiery, hypnotizing eyes. When he found out I spoke Russian we became friends. He was married to a Russian woman who had never converted and did not speak Hebrew, and these circumstances gave rise to many problems in his provincial enviroment. His poetry initiated a revolution in Hebrew literature. He wrote about the inspiring power of the human spirit and the human body, and described enthusiastically and with deep love the beauty of the Holy land. No one before him had ever spoken about the rebirth of the Jew in connection with the beauty of the land.

In 1935 I became secretary of the Jerusalem branch of the Revisionist party, chaired by Dr. Washitz. My first job was to conduct elections to choose delegates to the World Conference of the NZO, the New Zionist Organisation, scheduled for later that year in Vienna. This was my first serious political experience. We prepared propaganda material urging every supporter of the NZO to vote in the elections and we established nearly twenty polling stations all over the city. The socialist parties conducted an aggressive campaign against us, and approached social and professional organizations in the city with a demand to boycott us. The *Histadrut* threatened any taxi in Jerusalem doing business with us, and I mobilized cabs driven by Armenians, Copts, Maronites, and other Christian denominations, to carry our voters to the polling stations. Fanatics from the so-called Labor front threw stones at us. People were hurt and taxis were damaged but the next morning we counted more than 10,000 voters in Jerusalem. This was a wonderful demonstration in favor of Jabotinsky, whose name had been connected with Jerusalem since the 1920-21 riots. I asked *Migdal* for a six-week leave-of-absence to attend the NZO conference in Vienna, which after Riga and Heidelberg was a great experience for a young man.

I was introduced to Jabotinsky and he asked me to come to

his Paris headquarters after the conference. I established friendly relations with Shmuel Merlin, his political secretary, with whom I later worked on many political projects both in Poland and in the U.S.. There were many other important public figures there that I greatly admired, such as Michael Berchin, leader of the Russian liberals and the editor of the Russian daily *Posledniye Novosti* in Paris, Wolfgang von Weisel and Yosef Klarman. Rudi Hecht was also very active at the conference.

In Vienna I also met with my mother, who had come for a medical consultation. The previous year she had been diagnosed as suffering from cancer. She had undergone an operation but surgeons discovered that the cancer had spread and nothing could be done. They estimated she had no more than a few weeks to live. My mother was never told any of this and I agreed with my father that I would speak to the doctor in Vienna before her visit. After examining her the doctor told me in a private meeting that the chance of a spontaneous remission of this sort was one in thousands. I spent as much time as possible with my mother during the week of the conference and we also did some sightseeing together.

Before leaving Palestine I had met with Avraham Tehomi. In Jewish history Tehomi is a chapter on his own. He had been the leader of a Jewish self-defence campaign in Odessa during the twenties, then one of the founders and leaders of the *Haganah.* Tehomi was a very handsome and attractive man who approached events rather simplistically and lacked intellectual depth. His left hand was always bandaged because of wounds he had received when a bomb exploded in his hand. We discussed the possibility that I should consider leaving my professional concerns after joining the *Haganah Leumit* and work for the underground full-time. He asked me to visit Belgium after the conference to address meetings and mobilize support. Tehomi was on the British administration's highly-wanted list in those years, but met me nonchalantly at a cafe on Allenby St. in Tel Aviv. I told him I had never thought of be-

coming a "professional" revolutionary, that I basically enjoyed my work and preferred to stay there. I did keep my promise to him to visit Liege in Belgium, where the only coal mine in the world employing large numbers of Jewish miners was situated. They came mostly from Poland and spoke Yiddish. They listened intently, with quiet, unsmiling faces, to my attempts to communicate the importance of our military struggle against the British in my broken Yiddish. My next stop was Antwerp, where the Jewish diamond dealers in Pelikaan Straat also granted me a friendly reception and contributed some money.

After visiting Jabotinsky in Paris I returned to Jerusalem and went back to work at *Migdal.* Although obviously unhappy with my "sideline," the management was never openly critical of me. Everyone was quite friendly and the only one who probably felt uncomfortable was Lichtheim, who had hired me and jokingly kept referring to my frequent meetings at the cafe downstairs, where I spent more time than in my office. However, as the months went by, it became clear that I was not being fair. I could not continue to work at a job with fixed hours and a set routine. I therefore began looking for a position as a free-lance consultant to insurance companies, that could grant me the necessary freedom to continue my work in the undergound. By the end of 1935 I began working as a consultant for the Phoenix Insurance Co. in Tel Aviv, for Anchor Insurance, an Austrian company, and for an insurance agency established by a new oleh, Dr. Yaacov Hoffman, who had been an economist in Riga but was better known as the president of the Revisionist Organization. My consulting work granted me a comfortable income, far above what I had earned in my first two years in Palestine, guaranteed me freedom of movement and a sense of independence.

I also became the economic editor of the daily newspaper *Ha-Boker,* published and financed by the General Zionists. Every Wednesday I wrote about three-quarters of a page in their business supplement on various economic issues. I established

friendly relations with their editor-in-chief, Peretz Bernstein, the party leader of the General Zionists who later became Israel's first Minister of Industry, I also re-established contact with my *Leibfuchs* [fraternity junior] from *Ivryia*, Gustav Schocken, who now called himself Gershom. His father wanted to set up industries in Palestine.and Gustav suggested to him that I do some market research on the prospects of projects in which he was interested at the time, pharmaceutical enterprises as far as I remember. The family's main investment in Palestine was the Schocken publishing house and the *Ha-Aretz* newspaper.

I had by then received basic training in the use of light weapons, and at the beginning of the 1936 riots I was sent to a defence post in the Beit Israel quarter in Jerusalem, opposite Musrarah. Our circumstances were pitiful. We were a very small group, half of us *yeshiva* boys, and all we had were a few old-fashioned pistols and practically no ammunition. I was later sent to *Shekhunat* Shapira in Tel-Aviv, a small suburb surrounded by Arab groves now known as the Ha-Tikvah quarter. We were twenty men with two rifles and five or six pistols, and every evening the Arabs would shoot at us from the surrounding groves. We lacked the firepower to expel them and could only shoot back to prevent them from entering the houses. The commander of this post was Yitshak Zarzevsky, an admirable, dauntless patriot. In later years I worked as his second-in-command on "illegal" immigration from Poland and Rumania.

One morning, my uncles Isaac and Harry Kahn arrived from Australia. I went to my Uncle Louis for a family reunion. It is an understatement to say that these uncles were not Zionists. When Uncle Louis informed them of my underground activities they were perturbed and suggested it might be better for me to come to Australia. I told them I would gladly come, but only after the British left Palestine and let us build our country. On this trip, my uncles had travelled by train from Kantara (Suez) to Lod, and the train had been attacked by Arab guerillas in the

vicinity of Gaza. They had a real scare and by the time they reached Tel Aviv their views on defence organizations in Palestine had changed quite drastically, helping to make this meeting between us less tense than the previous ones.

At the end of 1936 or the beginning of 1937 Tehomi began negotiating with the *Haganah*, with the aim of uniting it with the *Irgun*. Under pressure from leaders belonging to all segments of the *Yishuv*, an *ad hoc* agreement was signed and a quasi-united framework was established. But it did not work out in practice and leftist elements from the *Haganah* took over control of the stock of weapons and ammunition, leaving the Tehomi people high and dry and involved in loud and bitter arguments with *Haganah* old-timers. Those who had been in the Haganah *Leumit*, especially from *Betar* and the Revisionist movement, returned to their original positions.

As a result, the *Irgun Zeva'i Leumi* was established to replace the *Haganah Leumit*, and the officers in the new body were appointed in close cooperation with Jabotinsky. The *Haganah Leumit* had been under the overall political influence of what was considered the Zionist "right," meaning the Revisionists, the *Mizrahi*, the General Zionists, and some independent personalities, but most of the military personnel were affiliated with either *Betar* or the Revisionists. Accordingly, its overall strategy had been unstable, and many military decisions had either been postponed or carried out inefficiently. This meddling by party men was totally unacceptable, and following the failure of the agreement between Tehomi and the *Haganah* we decided to establish a military organization that would be exclusively guided by military considerations. We concluded that, whatever our political ideologies, military measures had to be dictated by national targets: defense against Arab terror, expelling the British, and establishing a Jewish state. It was in this spirit that the *Irgun* was established, and although we considered Jabotinsky our leader and mentor and consulted him as well as other party leaders, we drew a distinction between the party's views and our own

military activities. The public image of the *IZL* was that it was the military arm of the Revisionist movement, but the truth is that we followed our own independent ways and even came into sharp conflict with Jabotinsky when we failed to accept his suggestions, as I will later relate.

At the beginning of the split I had impulsively joined the *Haganah* following Tehomi's example, naively believing that our people should consolidate their military strength, whatever its size, and keep partisan considerations out. This was a very idealistic viewpoint. The reality was different, as Abraham Stern (Yair) persuaded me. He came to my room one evening with Haim Lubinsky. We walked around the city and talked through the night. I decided to return to the *IZL* and was immediately sent to a course for *seganim* [lieutenants], a kind of basic officers' training. We trained every Shabbat morning in the Judean desert and in different schools throughout the city. After three to four months we had a festive get-together chaired by the officers.

Sport had always been important to me but I had to give it up when I came to Palestine. There was no time for training and there were no facilities. The stadium, if one could call it so, was small, neglected, and full of stones. Much later, after I had a family and had established myself economically, I began once more to devote time to exercise, this time to long-distance walking. I took part in many marches, fifteen and thirty kilometers, enjoyed it and felt very well.

The *Irgun* developed very quickly in Palestine and even faster in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland, where the Polish government assisted in the military training of our units. We were often at odds with the *Betar* leadership in Europe, until the 1940 Paris Conference, where under the chairmanship of Jabotinsky we agreed on a *modus vivendi* that allowed us to lead the Irgun in line with the military considerations we considered essential to the eventual establishment of a Jewish state.

Irgun members, especially those doing "full-time work,"

were living in very difficult personal circumstances in Palestine. The movement was persecuted by the British and many of us were on the British "Wanted List." Many of the members were married, but they had been forced to leave their jobs. The *Irgun's* budget was very modest indeed, and the salaries of full-time members were low and usually in arrears. It was only through enthusiasm and boundless devotion that the *Irgun* survived this initial stage. Our financial prospects looked hopeless, and we did not know where to start.

At this time, I developed a close relationship with David Raziel, or Razi as we called him, who had meantime become the commander of the *Irgun*. He devoted a great deal of his time to military training, researching military literature and compiling manuals on weapons and tactics. He impressed me as a strong, silent man. Although deeply religious and observant and a graduate of *Merkaz Ha-Rav*, the yeshiva headed by Chief Rabbi Abraham Itshak Ha-Cohen Kook, Razi was tolerant of other views and a uniquely talented leader. He was one of Rav Kook's beloved students and often consulted the Rav regarding possible clashes between military actions and religious commandments. I attended one of his meetings with Rav Kook, where he obtained special permission to transport weapons on Shabbat for self-defense purposes. The *Irgun* had a large number of yeshiva students amongst its members.

I often walked with Razi through the streets of Jerusalem and we talked at length of our commitment to military action. Our conversations would begin in the early evening and continue through the night. One day he revealed to me the approximate size of the organization and said: "You have to enlist in the Jewish army full-time. This is the task of our generation. We can establish this army and win, and this is the bidding of history. Please, leave your business work and join the *Irgun* full-time. You know languages, you know the big world, and you are also a newspaperman accredited with the British government. You must go to Europe and explain what we are fighting for, not only to the Jews but also to the general public. We

have worked together like brothers for two years now. We need your help. We need money and weapons. You must do this job."

It took me some time to come to a decision. I was twenty-seven years old, earning well by local standards and economically independent. I was being asked to renounce this and embark on an adventure. On the one hand, I had not joined the *Irgun* to go about making speeches and collecting money. I wanted to be active in the field. I also felt that I had an obligation toward people who had placed their trust in me and given me important professional opportunities. I could not really be at ease feeling I was neglecting my family in Riga and aware that I would have to delay establishing a family of my own. On the other hand, I asked myself what would have happened had the anti-Semitic Latvian Republic ordered me to join their army, as they had ordered my brother. I would have been forced to serve. Now, when my own people needed my help and there was no state power and no legal way of drafting me, how could I refuse to serve and fulfill my reponsibility? Finally, one early morning, standing on Jerusalem's Jaffa Street after a night-long walk with Raziel, I agreed to become a full-time revolutionary. Now, years hence, I have pondered on the consequences of this decision.

The circumstances of my life forced me to delay the start of my own family for a long time. For the next twelve years, between 1937 and 1949, I served either in the *Irgun* or in the U.S. Army. I am grateful for having had a chance to participate in such a crucial phase in the history of my people and see the birth of a Jewish state. However, this meant that I was no longer young when my children were born and it is possible that they did not enjoy the companionship which they were entitled to.

Raziel was killed in May 1941 in a battle near Baghdad, after he, Yaakov Meridor and other *Irgun* officers volunteered to fight for the British against the Germans and the pro-Nazi Arab forces. It was his inspiration that influenced the decision which was to shape my life.

5

Underground Missions

Mis arreas son las armas
Mi descanso el pelear
Mi cama las duras penas
Mi dormir siempre velar.

Pedro Calderon de la Barca

The first few months after my decision to join the *Irgun* on a full-time basis were spent working with the intelligence officer, Yosef Dukler, a true Russian-type aristocrat. I moved to Haifa and began training for my new task. I was briefed, policies were formulated and confidential contacts for *aliyah* matters and money transfers were established. A new phase had begun in my life during which I worked in Yugoslavia, Poland, the Scandinavian countries, France, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Switzerland. After a short return to Palestine

and despite the war situation I again travelled to Rumania, Yugoslavia, Italy and the United States. These tasks were totally new to me. I had never imagined I would be devoting years of my life to attempts to save refugees, to buying weapons, developing contacts with members of various ethnic minorities and lobbying for political support. I had always been an individualist and had never seen myself as someone who could deliver messages to large audiences. But there I was, training to embark on a new career.

In Haifa I stayed with a local family and had to be careful. Since I was blacklisted by the British, I was smuggled on board a ship in a sack when it was time for me to leave for Athens in January 1938.

I travelled from Athens to Novisad, in northern Yugoslavia, where the Jewish community was mainly of Hungarian descent. Dr. Dohany, the president of the Revisionist organization, received me and arranged all my meetings. Soon after, his fate would embody the special anguish and suffering which the war had inflicted on assimilated European Jews. His wife was not Jewish and he later spent several years in a labor camp. Fortunately, Dr. Dohany survived the war.

The Jews of Yugoslavia were very proud of their heritage, especially the Sephardi community. Rabbi Alkalai was the chief rabbi of Belgrade and gave his blessing to my mission. He introduced me to several prominent Jews as well as to some Serbs and I made many friends. The Serbs were generally sympathetic to Jews, unlike the anti-Semitic Croats who later collaborated with the Nazis.

My most interesting experience was in Sarajevo, a Moslem area with a well-organized Jewish community. Only months before my visit, in November 1937, the local Nazis organized an anti-Semitic rally together with some Moslem leaders The Jews broke up the meeting and threw the Nazis out.

This was a difficult transition period for Yugoslavia. Its cultural orientation had been essentially toward France; French had been the most popular foreign language and French culture

was highly developed. Yugoslavia was unable to withstand German pressure after the *Anschluss* and Stojadinovic formed a new government, of reactionary pro-German leanings. There was an immediate change in atmosphere and German became the dominant foreign language.

Despite the political unrest our drive was successful and we raised £2,000 for Palestine, a very significant sum in those days. Raziel wrote to me saying "it saved the situation." It evened out the budget, at least for a while, and everyone was very encouraged. The unexpected and unfortunate side-effect of my success was that I was labeled a fundraiser, and remained stuck with this image for a long time.

Raziel asked me to go on to Scandinavia and Poland, but for obvious reasons I could not personally go to the consulates and ask for visas. I was told to mail my passport back to Jerusalem and wait for the visas in Milan. After a few weeks I continued on to Stockholm and Helsinki, via Warsaw and Danzig. I spent my two-days stop in Warsaw with Yair Stern. He told me about the work in Poland, where a succesful training program of *Betar* units had begun with the cooperation of the Polish government. Yair was a sensitive man, yet of steel-tempered character. I could only smile whenever I heard the British or the Jews speak of the *Stern Gang* of terrorists. Yair was a poet, a man of great understanding and sensitivity for beautiful things and for human life who, like all of us, saw himself as a soldier enlisted in a larger cause. He was born in Lithuania, but spoke fluent Russian and Polish. Russian was his mother tongue and it was in Russian that he corresponded with his mother and wrote his first poems, which he read to me.

Yair took me to the train and encouraged me to continue what we had begun in Yugoslavia. The small pro-*Irgun* committees in Finland and Sweden were helpful but less so than in Yugoslavia, since the community had been warned by the Zionist organization to refrain from supporting us. There were some contributions nevertheless, and I asked the committee to send the money directly to London in the care of Chief Rabbi

Hertz, who then transferred the money to Palestine. Haim Halevi, later Prof. Halevi and one of Israel's top health administrators, was my contact. My task in Sweden was to run a public relations campaign and present the story of the *Irgun* to the Jewish community. In Finland we were buying weapons, revolvers and submachine guns. The quantities were small, but we managed to smuggle them into Palestine as musical instruments.

Upon arriving in Helsinki I wrote to my parents. It was five years since I had last seen them. I had not registered for the draft in Latvia and could be arrested if I ever tried to go back, so my parents agreed to come to Helsinki and we met at a pleasant, unpretentious hotel, the Torni. We had a warm meeting and a week of long, soul-searching talks.

My parents' economic situation had improved considerably by the mid-thirties. Their textile business was prosperous and my mother repeatedly mentioned that there was no longer any of the nerve-racking tension that had attended their fight for survival. My father, then sixty-four, could now relax and delegate authority. My mother, who was two years younger, was happy and in excellent spirits. Her appearance was a real miracle to me. It was only four years since we all had feared for her life and now she felt well, and looked lively and radiant with happiness.

We talked a great deal about whether it was justified for me to give up my profession and relinquish my Heidelberg education to turn into a full-time "revolutionary." They were ready to accept that I should enroll as a soldier whenever needed, but not as a full-time activist. My mother had not been a Zionist at first, believing that liberalism and social progress would eventually ensure Jews the same rights enjoyed by all citizens. But she changed her mind following her 1929 visit to Palestine, after which she came to visit me in Heidelberg. Her internationalist views notwithstanding, she now supported the struggle for a Jewish state and began to encourage my Zionist activities. In 1936 I had written to them of my despair about the

leadership of the *Yishuv*, which I felt lacked the wisdom and courage required to bring Jews able to fight for the country. I felt our leaders were defeatists, and questioned whether this situation would ever change and whether I was not wasting my time fighting for a Jewish homeland. My mother's reply was fiery and passionate: "Don't throw away the gun. Don't give in. Fight, fight! It will be a long and difficult struggle. Keep up your spirits. Believe in the future and fight."

By the fall of 1938 she was being asked to take a stand regarding my own life and she was saying: soldier yes, professional revolutionary no. She thought it senseless that I should devote my time to propaganda, an intellectually sterile pursuit which required too little of a young man's talents and too much of his time, especially if he was qualified to make a better contribution to society. Father did not get too involved in the discussion. He was proud that a self-defense movement had been formed and that it was active even beyond the borders of Palestine. He was even more proud that one of his sons had a share in this work, but he could not understand how I could live on an *Irgun* salary of six pounds a month, which was rarely paid on time and sometimes not at all. How could one set up a family in these circumstances, and how could Sasha live like a pauper after investing so much time in his studies? Obviously, the discussion was endless.

We talked about the family business and about my father's move to another office, in Raines Boulevard, where he worked until his death. My parents felt that Asya should not be asked to join the family business but should rather work in the profession for which he was training in Paris, electrical engineering.

Parting was hard. We all feared a world war was close and we did not know when we would see each other again, but my mother was strong, optimistic and full of smiles. In Helsinki harbour, as she was boarding the boat to Riga, her advice to me was: "Be strong and continue the good work. You are part of something bigger and more important than yourself and what

truly counts in the end is the knowledge and experience you accumulate. They go to make up your happiness. Don't worry about us. We are old (64!) and we shall find our own way. You have your whole life ahead of you. Make good use of your strength and don't ever throw away your rifle." A warm smile illuminated her face. My father did not worry about politics and struggles and simply wanted to see me married, happy and independent. He was deeply upset. His face was tense and he cried when we said good-bye, as did I. I was very sad but could not believe that this parting was forever. I was sure we would overcome the storms, as we had done before, and we would embrace and love each other again. How naive we were! This turned out to be my final farewell to my parents, these wonderful and warm people who had lived their lives committed to hard work and to ideas of justice and love for one's fellow men. I never saw them again. The war, the Holocaust, and human bestiality separated us forever.

In the fall of 1938 I returned to Poland. I was very warmly received ty the Strassman family, who were deeply committed to our cause and were actually the basis of the *Irgun* leadership in Poland. Henryck Strassman was a professor of criminology at Warsaw University, a fully assimilated intellectual and a loyal Polish patriot. He spoke neither Hebrew nor Yiddish, and had no religious attachments of any kind. His wife Lilly came from a similar background, had studied at the Sorbonne and was a well-known Polish writer and journalist. My meetings were sponsored by the magazine *Jerozolima Wyzwolona* [Liberated Jerusalem], the Polish organ of the *Irgun* . This publication, aimed at assimilated circles, put forth coherent arguments for establishing the *Irgun* and for our struggle against the British.

Meeting with these groups was an entirely new experience to me. I had tended to see Polish Jews as a very traditional community, deeply entrenched in our religious and national past, speaking Yiddish and wearing Orthodox garb. Suddenly I was faced with Westernized Jews, professors, lawyers and physi-

cians as far removed from Judaism as the German assimilationist *Central Verein*, who saw themselves as German citizens of Mosaic persuasion. Their roots were either Polish or European and, like German Jews, they lived in a dimension which was all their own. They were two years away from World War II but very far from the reality of a Jewish national renaissance and of the struggle for Jewish independence. I failed to comprehend how such intelligent people could be so misled in their understanding of our bitter circumstances. Nevertheless, we still needed their help and support, and had to enlist them in the struggle for a stronger Jewish people and seek their assistance in our efforts to create a Jewish state, not only for ourselves but also for them. Henryck Strassman was a major in the Polish army and was later murdered in the Katyn Forest massacre. Lilly (later Ayala) Strassman came to Israel with her two sons, and eventually married Haim Lubinsky. Her son Gavriel became a well-known reporter and one of the editors of the *Ma'ariv* newspaper.

After Warsaw, I spent a week in Lemberg and then went on to Cracow, where I met Dr. Yohanan Bader who later became a prominent parliamentarian in Israel. I then continued to Drohobycz and Borislav, well-known Polish oil-towns with wealthy Jewish communities.

In Vilna I had an emotional reunion with Riva, a young lady from Riga with whom I had studied together in Heidelberg. She had belonged to our Zionist circle there and all I knew was that she had returned to Riga. Now in Vilna, a meeting had been set up for me with the owner of the largest Polish concern manufacturing radios, a young and gifted industrialist. There was good chemistry between us and he invited me to his home for dinner where I met his beautiful wife Riva, who turned out to be Riva from Heidelberg, and their two-month old blond daughter. "I was told an officer was coming from Palestine, but how could anyone know it was you?" she said. They supported the *Irgun* drive generously. All these wonderful people would be murdered within a year.

Our work continued. Raziel arrived in Warsaw to join Hillel Kook, Haim Lubinsky and Yair. They were on their way to a meeting in Paris, which Jabotinsky had called in order to agree on the terms of cooperation to be established between the *Irgun* and the *Betar* movement. The relations with the Polish government and the Polish army were also to be discussed. At this meeting it was decided that the *Irgun* would set up a Western European base in Paris, and I was called to head it. It was the beginning of February 1939 and I was instructed to establish a series of political and financial contacts. On my way to Paris I made a stop-over in Switzerland, staying mainly in Zurich. The leading newspaper *Neue Zuricher Zeitung* published a long interview with me in its political section and so did *Die Weltwoche.* I also met with several leaders of the Jewish community, including Prof. Guggenheim, Dr. Lachman and Dr. Kunsteiner, but without much results. They were stiff and old-fashioned, and feared even their own shadows.

Paris was an important political center in 1939, and the main location for journalists assigned to Western Europe. I settled in at the Magellan, a small hotel in Avenue Marceau. There were two serious constraints on my activities: I knew no French and had no approved budget. The *Irgun* had no money, which meant that I had to raise it myself. On all these, I found Zvi Waxman tremendously helpful. Waxman was an old assistant of Jabotinsky, an experienced newpaperman and a former sergeant in the Jewish Legion during WWI. He spoke any language one could think of and knew everyone in Paris. He was a real friend, a goldmine of contacts, and became our public relations man.

My first serious contact with the press was with Mme. Genevieve Tabouis of *Figaro,* which soon developed into a friendship. She was extremely interested in the *Irgun* from a French national perspective. I spoke German. She spoke French. We liked each other. The result was three long articles in *Figaro,* which broke the ice. Politicians and journalists began talking about us and contacting me daily for information

and interviews. We decided to waste no time and Waxman organized a large press conference at the *Cafe de la Paix.* It was a success and there were more than thirty journalists from all over the world, including some from leading American and European papers. Also present was the famous American newspaperman Cholly Knickerbocker, who had just returned from Germany with a realistic appreciation of the troubles in store for the Jews and for the Western world.

We managed to get our message across and convince the world press that we were more than a bunch of bloodthirsty gangsters busy killing British soldiers. It began to be understood that our aim was to fight the power preventing Jews from fleeing to Palestine to save themselves and establish their own state. Soon the French military establishment, as well as the Jewish community, knew that *Irgun* representatives were in Paris. Several East European Jews approached us with offers of financial help and I was invited to the French Defense Ministry to meet the Chief of Staff, General Weygand. General Weygand had fought the Arab rebellion in Syria and Lebanon in the twenties, and was the French army expert on Middle Eastern affairs. Whatever cooperation developed after World War II and whatever assistance was given by France to the *Irgun* and the *Haganah* as well as to Israel in later years, originated in these first talks in 1939.

A month later, in March 1939, I was asked to return to Eastern Europe. A war was going on at the border between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. There was a very large local *Betar* unit there, and we had to plan how they would handle themselves in this war and help them leave for Palestine. On the way there and back I was subjected to military checkups in the border towns, as well as in Budapest and Vienna. The determination of these Jewish youths to fight for their survival was at once a reason for pride and sorrow.

On April 14th I reported to Jabotinsky in Paris. I had seen him many times before, at conferences and meetings; as a teenager in Riga I had heard his speeches and discussed them

in study groups, but I had never met him personally. The articles by Tabouis in *Figaro* had apparently established my reputation not only in the general press but in Jewish circles too, and this opportunity to meet with Jabotinsky was a very moving experience for me.

Jabotinsky invited me to lunch at a small French restaurant, in a quiet side street off Champs Elysees. A small table for two created an intimate atmosphere and Jabotinsky was warm and friendly. He asked me about myself and about my parents and then switched to the true reason for our meeting, the coordination of our political work in Paris.

Jabotinsky invited me to join the *Betar* leadership and I told him I could not, because even though I did not wear a uniform I was a soldier and subject to discipline. He insisted, saying that we could not have several bodies working for the same objective and had to have a united leadership. Our dialogue went something like this:

Z.J.: "Your work attracts lots of attention. It must be made clear who the leadership is that stands behind all your activities."

A.R.: "You are the commander-in-chief and everyone knows that. You formulate our platform. Your provide the political and spiritual justifications for our struggle. There is no need for anything else."

Z.J.: "No *oodelniyi knyajestwa* [independent fiefdoms]. You, the young people of the *Irgun*, are setting up an independent fiefdom and this weakens the movement. Once you join the *Betar* leadership you will help bring all of Western Europe under a single authority."

A.R.: "I cannot do that. A fieldmarshal does not give orders to a junior officer. If Raziel or any one of the *Irgun* commanders were to order me to do this I would, but an officer responsible for military and educational matters cannot join a political committee. You could even be embarrassed by *Irgun* officers joining this committee. You are a statesman and should not be liable for all the actions, often unpleasant ones, which

we might be involved in. In fact I do not think you should have met with me. There are British agents as well as Arabs on my tail. I could be attacked or shot, as so many of our boys have been. A statesman of your stature has special duties to the Jewish people in these hard days and should not be connected with the work I am doing in Paris. You are primarily a political and spiritual leader. I have been around you for over ten years without ever having had a chance to talk to you. You have only invited me now because of the public echoes of my work in the *Irgun* . From a national point of view, contacts between us do not serve a good purpose and we should meet as little as possible. I am responsible for a military job in the underground and you, as our leader, work at an entirely different level. I could only jeopardize you."

Jabotinsky became unhappy, angry and irritated. He had sired a military resistance movement but the movement had gone its own way and its day-to-day functioning was no longer under his control.

Besides public relations and political work I also participated in *aliyah* activities. This operation had to be continued even though the *Irgun* lacked sufficient manpower. This was difficult and dangerous work, which entailed negotiating with Greeks and Turks, making and paying for deals, buying ships, equipping them as best as we could, moving groups of Jews to the pick-up points, getting them passports, authentic or forged, bribing local police to turn a blind eye, and last, getting everyone off to sea and praying they would not be intercepted by the British.

My assignments took me time and again to Hungary and Czechoslovakia. *Betar* and *Irgun* groups were ready to travel to Palestine without visas, in boats which were hardly more than leaky shells. I met with them, explained the conditions and warned of the difficulties in store. Yosef Katzenelson and Itshak Zarzevsky were in charge of this work, experienced men who could claim to their credit thousands of Jewish lives saved. A special account had been opened at the Paris Lloyd's

Bank and Katzenelson, Zarzevsky and myself were authorized to instruct the bank to make payments. I was trying to make ends meet with the limited funds at our disposal, to pay for the boats and all other expenses.

We also created a network of contacts with various committees representing national groups fighting for their independence. We met with Maronites from Lebanon and agreed on our common interests, as they feared Moslem radicals. We established first contacts with Kurds, which continued in different ways over the years. We continued our contacts with Irish and Serb liberals who had always been sympathetic to our independence struggle.

We then received instructions from Palestine. We were told that the Zionist Congress would convene in Geneva in August-September 1939, and were asked to send a delegation to the Congress to explain *Irgun* policies to the delegates. Rather than acting alone as I had been doing for most of the time, I would be joined by Hillel Kook, coming over from London, and by Haim Lubinski, who was on his way from the United States to Palestine. Later, Ayala Strassman came from Warsaw and was very helpful, not only because she was a beautiful young woman associated with the *Irgun*, but because she spoke excellent French and Polish and impressed everyone with her sparkling intellect.

Kook, Lubinski and I were asked to stop over for a short conference with Jabotinsky at the holiday resort Vals-le-Bain, in the Haute Savoie mountains, where he was resting with his wife Anna Markovna. He did not look well but was full of life and enthusiasm, and none of us had any inkling that he only had nine months to live. He received us very warmly and we were happy to see him less tense and pressured.

The focus of the discussion was the rebellion against the British, an issue which the *Irgun* leadership had been seriously considering for quite some time, although everybody had been extremely careful not to push for a final decision. The plan called for *Irgun* soldiers trained in Poland to land in Palestine,

and together with local *Irgun* units fight the British for the control of certain areas of the country. Although it was clear that the strength of the British army would not allow us to hold on to our positions for any length of time and that we would suffer military defeat, we could thereby establish a clear target for the future and create a basis for Jewish independence, not only in the minds of our people but in the world at large. We wanted to raise our flag in a part of Eretz Israel, no matter how small, as a symbol for future action. Jabotinsky had expressed reservations during the previous year because of his concern with the human costs of this venture, but in Vals-le-Bain he gave his hesitant approval. Lubinski carried the message to the *Irgun* command in Palestine but we were too late. The *Irgun* command had by then been arrested by the British, a month later the Germans invaded Poland and World War II began its tragic course.

Our funds were very limited, and we made the trip across France to Switerland in Jack's small car. Jack Levy was an unusual character, a young man from Palestine who had settled in Paris and became a distributor of women's lingerie. He was very good looking, an apparently useful feature in his sales efforts. He had an old, small car, which was our chief means of transport. On the road from Paris to Geneva one of us had to lie on the side-wing of the car at all times and hold on to a pump, or whatever it was, to prevent it from falling off.

At the Zionist congress, my job was to attract attention to the *Irgun* 's platform and find opportunities for explaining our work. Jack succeeded in securing the names of Congress delegates at most of the hotels, and our daily bulletin was in all their mail-boxes the next morning before breakfast. The delegates met at the City Theatre, in the center of the residential area. There were billboards around the theatre and I decided to rent all of them for a week. I did not know yet what I would do with them, but felt I should make some kind of declaration.

We worded a public statement explaining the *Irgun* 's struggle for national independence, with headlines in Hebrew and

French. The next morning I was informed that the police would not permit these slogans to be posted outside the theatres as they constituted "propaganda for a foreign army" and could not be placed on Swiss billboards.

While we were deliberating what to do next, I recalled a story my mother had told me about their propaganda campaigns during the upheavals in Russia in 1905-1906. The Czarist government had banned all public political pronouncements, so they resorted to seemingly innocuous quotes from poems and novels, which they used as slogans. Although ostensibly literary and innocent, the public quickly understood the *double entendre* and the call for action that could be read into them.

I then thought of Wilhelm Tell, a historic symbol of the struggle in twelfth century Switzerland, whose rebellion had led to the establishment of the independent Swiss Republic. We combed Geneva's bookshops looking for the original story, and eventually found a French translation of Schiller's book with Tell's call to arms, which we paraphrased as follows:

> When a nation is fighting for its independence and its future is endangered, every man must take up arms and fight for his people and his country.

Now I had my poster. The Swiss could not possibly oppose this reference to their national epic. Across the top was the name *Irgun Zevai Leumi* in Hebrew and French, and the message to the delegates of the Zionist Congress citing the Swiss historic example. This poster, in blue and white, was the first thing the delegates saw when leaving the theatre at the end of the Congress' opening session. We had their eyes, their ears, and their deep interest.

Our daily bulletin was issued in four languages, and called *Irgun News*. It included reactions to the speeches delivered during the sessions and comments on the decisions adopted at the Congress. Early in the morning, all delegates found our bulletin under their doors. We also met with several Zionist lead-

ers sympathetic to our cause, at their request, but they were afraid to make their position public and shied away from any practical steps.

On the last day of the Congress we called a press conference at the Hoteal Beau Rivage. Hillel Kook spoke in English, Ayala Strassman in French and I in German. It went on for over one and a half hours, and we answered many serious questions. The absence of representatives from the Jewish press, probably designed to avoid competition with reports from the Congress, was not surprising, but the international press was very well represented. There was also a quiet gentleman sitting in a corner who turned out to be a Swiss security agent. It seems that the authorities did not like our activities, and I imagined the British embassy also requested we should be silenced. All three of us were interrogated, but Hillel and Ayala were leaving town that evening and no steps were taken against them. I had to stay on for another few days to wind up our activities and meet our obligations. My insistence on finishing the job put me on the Swiss blacklist, and for the next six years the Swiss thought of me, in a rather gross overstatement, as a "dangerous terrorist." Nine months later I returned to Switzerland on *Irgun* business and was promptly arrested and deported, accompanied by "a guard of honour."

The war had broken out in the meantime and on my return to Paris I found a note from the French police, informing me that my resident's permit was no longer valid and I was to leave France immediately. My contacts did not help, and after consulting with friends it was decided I should move to London. When the boat reached Dover the British police arrested me and I faced a barrage of questions: "We know who you are. What do you want to do in England? What are your plans?" There was no sense in pretending, as they seemed to have followed me all the time. I told them that the war against the Nazis put us on the same side and I felt it was my duty to take part in the war effort. Their answer was short and blunt: "You cannot enter England."

I returned to Calais, where the French took me under their wing and put me on a train destined for the Spanish border with crowds of refugees leaving Paris. As we crossed the border at Oran I presented my Palestinian passport, since I had no intention of staying in Spain. This did not convince the border police; I was taken from the train and placed in a refugee camp on the Portugese border, together with many hundreds of Jewish refugees who were trying to reach safe shores. After several days, in my capacity as a journalist representing several agencies, I began sending cables of protest to international bodies demanding their intervention on my behalf. But no one reacted so I found a simpler way of getting away. The camp was poorly guarded and I was free to go into town and visit the post office. I simply rented a taxi early the next morning and after a few hours I arrived in Lisbon, went to the British Consulate, and asked to be "repatriated to Palestine." This was a standard procedure and after a few days the British consul arranged a berth for me on a Dutch freighter, the S.S. Stella, which was on its way to Jaffa.

By the end of November I was back in Tel-Aviv. Raziel was in prison and Binyamin Zer'oni was acting head of the *Irgun* . There were long meetings with Binyamin, which took place in a variety of dwellings in attempts to elude the British police. In the end it was decided that I should go back, this time to Eastern Europe, Rumania and Italy, to coordinate the movement of boats and *olim* on their way to Palestine, mostly to direct them to the proper landing sites. We also had to take care of *Irgun* funds deposited in Lloyd's Bank in Geneva. With the war on, the Germans attacking France and Italy part of the Axis, our funds could have been frozen for the duration. Although I was on their blacklist and might face difficulties, we could not leave the money lying in Switzerland. The plan called for me to eventually reach the United States, where Aryeh Ben-Eliezer and Mike Ben-Ami had begun our political activities.

For the next few months I worked again as an assistant to Dukler, our intelligence chief, with whom I had trained. We

moved to Haifa in order to help a group of our members who had been arrested while undergoing military training at kibbutz Ayelet Ha-Shahar. I began to prepare for my new task and we agreed on a plan of action. A visa for the United States was arranged for me but I could not secure an exit permit from Palestine, so I was once again smuggled out in a sack. Carried on the back of a strong friend, I boarded the S.S. Marco Polo leaving for Trieste, Italy.

It was March 1940. I was commuting back and forth between Trieste, Milano, Belgrade and Novisad, trying to put some order and efficiency into the movement of the *olim* en route. Bucharest was much better organized. The committee for *aliyah* there was headed by A. Meissner, with the cooperation of Dr. Colin, the famous Rumanian writer, Dr. Schieber from Vienna, and an *Irgun* officer from Israel, Avraham Blass, later a prominent executive in Amcor and Ampa factories. We set up arrangements for contacts and landings, and all adhered to them in the short term.

From Bucharest I went to Czernowitz and to the Dniester River, which marked the border between the German and Russian zones. The Jews were being pushed from side to side. Our aim was to get a few boats and help at least some of them across the Dniester, to the Romanian side, and move them on. The matter of the money from Geneva had meanwhile become urgent, and the problem was how to accomplish this mission, how to appear at the bank in person and transfer the money to Tel-Aviv. The war had been going on for several months, with most of the fighting taking place in the East, especially in Poland, and the question was whether it was possible to get a visa to enter Switzerland from the East. A trade fair was taking place in Basel at the time and my journalistic credentials appaarently convinced the Swiss Consul in Bucharest that my attendance at the Basel fair was "essential." He issued a visa. I purposely went via Germany; this was dangerous, but faster and easier despite the risks.

I arranged to arrive in Geneva at about 5 a.m., registered at a

hotel and was out by 6 a.m.. I had to finish all my assignments in the city over the next few hours, as it was clear that given my status on their blacklist the police would be waiting for me upon my return. I went to the post office and phoned Riga; my father was seriously ill and partially paralyzed. I found myself facing a terribly painful dilemma — should I go to Riga to see my father or continue with my work? My mother and Asya told me that my father's situation was quite hopeless. They also warned me against coming to Riga, as I could not do any good there and I would surely be arrested after a day or two. By the time our conversation had ended, the bank was open and I had arranged to cable the money to Palestine. The man in charge of supervising the accounts in Palestine was Mark Spaer, who managed financial matters for Raziel.

By 10 a.m. the money was out. I had seen the people I had wanted to see, I had talked to my family, and by noon was ready to face the music. When I entered my hotel room there were two police agents quietly sitting on my bed waiting for me. My bags had obviously been opened and searched. Once more there were questions: "Why did you come back to Geneva? What do you plan to do? We know you want to bomb the British Embassy in Bern. What other terrorist designs do you have in mind?"

My explanations did not satisfy them. I told them I had left all political work and had nothing further to do with the *Irgun*. I showed them my American visa and told them of my intentions to begin a quiet business life. Nothing helped. They took me to prison and locked me up in a tiny, dirty cell. I objected loudly and demanded to see a lawyer. The police laughed and explained to me that I might become famous, as this was the cell which Lenin had occupied before World War I and I might perhaps go as far as he had. The interrogation continued, and their obvious concern was to find out whether there were any other *Irgun* agents in Switzerland and who were their connections. I tried to convince the man in charge that my presence in Switzerland would only be a headache for them. If I

were indeed an *Irgun* agent, as they believed, my comrades would try to get me out. They would have to divert manpower and funds to watch me. The fact was that I was actually very pressed for time, since I had reservations on the S.S. Rex leaving Genoa for New York on April 30th, and on April 27th I was still being interrogated.

On the 28th they took me to my hotel to pay the bill and put me on a train to Genoa. I had the privilege of a compartment all to myself, though I shared it with two poker-faced policemen who were there to make sure that I did not change my plans. Soon I was on an Italian boat to America, and it was Goodbye Europe! The S.S. Rex was the last Italian boat to reach the U.S. from Italy on May 9, 1940, just before Italy entered the war and joined the Axis.

6

"The Embassy"

Be proud as a flying banner
Be sharp as a sparkling sword,
The flame from the depth, like Dante,
Will burn your shining cheek.
Be always a calm witness,
Cast around your glance,
Let forever be your virtue
The readiness to suffer at the stake

Valeri Bryusov, *"To a Young Poet"*

After the S.S. Rex arrived in New York I was taken directly from the boat to a press conference Jabotinsky was holding at the Astor Hotel on Times Square. There must have been about one hundred journalists in the audience.

The war was then in its eighth month, and as I was coming from Eastern Europe they asked me to tell them about my first-hand experiences. Whispering in Russian, Jabotinsky asked

me how he should introduce me. I could not use my real name and on the spur of the moment I thought of "Hadani," a name which stuck with me for many years. I could not yet speak English so I spoke German and Jabotinsky translated. I reported on the state of refugees in Rumania and Turkey, who were anxious to reach Palestine and were being kept away both by the local governments and by the British. I told them of our underground activities, of *Aliyah Bet*, of the boats we had managed to lease in Greece and Rumania, of the political and technical obstacles blocking entrance into Palestine and of the few boats that had reached Palestinian shores succesfully.

My first week in the U.S. was devoted to meetings with Jabotinsky. At the Kimberley, a modest hotel on Broadway and 71st Street where he lived, I reported on what I knew about the situation in Palestine, and about the work of the *Irgun* in the German-occupied areas. I had to be careful, as Jabotinsky had in the past viewed our activities as tending towards a separatist course he had found unacceptable. For our part, we continued to see ourselves as a non-partisan military organization divorced from party politics and from old-style Zionist and Revisionist squabbles, although we viewed Jabotinsky as a national statesman and considered him our spiritual leader.

Two days later Jabotinsky asked me to discuss practical matters with Eliahu Ben-Horin. Ben-Horin was then an active party man, although I had previously known him as an *Irgun* officer. He wanted facts and figures, numbers of people and details of the *Irgun* budget. This information was not available to me, as I had only been partially connected with "illegal" immigration and my main concern had been to establish political and military contacts in Europe. Had I known all these facts, however, I would have reported them only to my direct commander. I had given Jabotinsky a general description but I refused to reveal any further details to Ben-Horin, who became extremely angry and forced Jabotinsky to write an official letter to me in my capacity as an *Irgun* representative in the U.S.. In the letter he demanded that I submit to his office full reports

about all our work, in writing, and that I undertake not to initiate any political activities without his permission. I did not react. We did not enter into any further discussions, and the *Irgun* continued its political activities in the U.S. without any partisan or organisational affiliations.

The *Irgun* delegation in New York at that time consisted of Mike Ben-Ami, Aryeh Ben-Eliezer, and myself. We were later joined by Hillel Kook and Shmuel Merlin. Our first task was to deal with what we considered an unbearable situation: there was no military formation in which refugees from Nazi terror, Jews who had become stateless, and Jews from Palestine, could take part in the war against the Nazis under their own flag. We therefore began a coast to coast campaign under the motto: "Jews Fight for The Right to Fight." We took out full-page ads in all the leading newspapers, spoke in radio talks and held mass meetings and press conferences in Washington and New York, which were attended by prominent American political and labor leaders. We found considerable understanding and sympathy among several groups, especially on Capitol Hill, in Washington D.C., among intellectuals, academics and labor leaders. During 1942, the Jewish leadership in Palestine and Great Britain agreed that Palestinian Jews would be drafted into military service. Although we failed to attain our declared aim of creating our own army, the Jewish Brigade that was established would enable Jews to participate in the war under their own flag, as part of the Allied forces. *Yishuv* leaders instructed all Jewish younths who were then living as refugees in various Allied countries and could not reach Palestine to join the military units sponsored by their native countries, such as the Free French, the Czechoslovak units, and the Free Polish Army. These efforts were also encouraged by the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, a movement set up by our group that included Americans of varied backgrounds willing to help in the battle for Jewish independence.

My first few months in New York were a sort of "basic training." I met with Americans, tried to understand their mental-

ity, learnt about their media and studied English. I was then asked to go to Chicago and set up a committee. There were a few committed Revisionists there, but without any organization. The opposition of the Jewish establishment was very strong and I had to fight for every chance to speak at Jewish clubs and synagogues, but we did succeed in organizing a group of friends who were committed to our views and were willing to help.

Our success in establishing the first branch outside New York increased our ongoing friction with the Zionist establishment, headed by Rabbi Solomon Goldman, who was not only the head of a leading Chicago Conservative congregation, *Anshei Emet*, but also the national president of the Zionist movement in the U.S.. We had no intention of interfering with the work of established institutions. Our declared aim was to organize emergency activities to meet the distressing reality of the war. Rabbi Goldman refused to talk to me or to any of the people in our group. Our chairman, Irving Teitel, remained loyal despite the insults and the attempts to brand us as "fascists" and "radicals" in several nasty articles in the community press.

Just before leaving Chicago I received a cable from home. My mother and Asya wrote to tell me that my father had passed away. This was not unexpected, as I had already felt my father's death was imminent during my work in Europe at the beginning of 1940. I had called home from Geneva, Trieste, and Bucharest, and knew that his condition was critical. He had been paralyzed by a stroke in January and had difficulty speaking. There was not much they could do to help him. My mother and Asya reminded me that, were I to come to Riga, I would be arrested immediately.

My father's fight had ended. The hero of my childhood, the friend and guide of my early years, had left us. He had cared for us and led us through the difficult and painful struggle for survival. Without him, we would probably not have survived the years of anarchy, civil war, terror, and hunger. In his quiet and understated fashion, without raising his voice, my father

had suffered valiantly and succeeded in rescuing his family from poverty and need. He had braved winter storms and murderous robbers in his attempts to re-establish contacts with the peasants who had once worked with his family. He had taught his children to stand fast and seek the silver lining in every cloud. He had also been a warm and understanding teacher, explaining "the facts of life" to us and showing us how one could remain true and loyal to oneself and to one's traditions. Our farewell meeting in Helsinki in 1938 had given us all an opportunity to meet as mature adults.

After my father's death Communist terror was imposed on Latvia and then came the German murderers, who destroyed his family and his people. His early death spared him the bestial suffering shared by all the others. My father was buried in Riga, in the Shmerli cemetery. It was only fifty years later, when Esther and I visited Riga in 1991, that I could pray at his grave.

I returned to New York to sit *shiv'a* for my father, where I had friends with whom I could share my grief. Jabotinsky came to see me, most sympathetic and encouraging. Soon after, in August, I received a call informing me that Jabotinsky had died of a heart attack while spending the weekend at a *Betar* camp. His wife Ana Markovna, his son Eri and the rest of his family were in London and Palestine, and for some time he had been lonely and ill in New York. His death was a great shock to me. Jabo, a symbol of the struggle and resistance of the Jewish people, had always been part of my life, my mind and my heart. I had known him since the age of thirteen, and had always felt his spiritual presence, the power of his ideas and the magnetism of his personality. I had been a critical youngster but had never wavered in my loyalty to this man, who had opened new horizons and led us on the road to national independence. I had always thought of him as a poet and a dreamer rather than as a political leader, and was deeply pained by his loss. In line with his wishes, Jabotinsky was re

buried in Israel only after an independent Jewish government expressly decided to do so, in the summer of 1965.

In October 1940 I was sent to Los Angeles, following a decision to promote our activities in the West Coast. I knew very little about California and Hollywood conjured up the image of a huge entertainment center. We had been told that there was increasing public interest in Zionism and the Palestine problem. There was also growing demand for information about underground activities and especially about the *Irgun*. We therefore decided to give priority to the West Coast over such areas as Chicago, where we were forced to engage in arguments with the Jewish establishment instead of concentrating on explaining our position to the public at large.

I took a slow trip to the West Coast travelling mainly by bus and going through Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and even through smaller places like Ardmore and on to Galveston, Texas, where meetings had been arranged for me. This was my first encounter with Jewish communities in the periphery and I found it very stimulating. The people were interested, sincere and astonished to hear the story of our activities. They could not understand how Jewish youths without political backing, money or weapons could engage in action against a major power like Britain.

After Oklahoma and Texas I took a train to Los Angeles, where I was met by Bernie Feinman, an intelligent and exciting fellow, a highly-trained and well-organized executive. I was introduced to Bernie by his sister, Frances Gunther, about whom I will say more later. Bernie was with MGM and could claim several successful films to his credit, including *Ninotchka*, with Greta Garbo, *Sea Wolf*, with Ida Lupino and John Garfield, as well as others with Clark Gable, Carole Lombard and Edward G. Robinson, who often came to our meetings.

I had come from the somber world of European war and was now in the midst of Hollywood's bubbling creativity. Many of the writers were knowledgeable and well-informed about the situation in the Middle East. Politically, this group leaned to

the left and quite a few of them were Communists, either card-carrying or armchair ones, but I refrained from ideological discussions. We worked tirelessly and held long parlour meetings, mainly with writers, who were Hollywood's intellectual elite. Bernie Feinman knew them all well and I had a chance to cross swords with several gifted screenwriters such as Sol Mankiewicz, director Fred Zinnemann, and also Billy Wilder, an accomplished writer who later produced several succesful movies, among them *Never on Sunday*. There were also several interesting British writers who had come to Hollywood "for the duration." The usual questions emerged: "Why do Zionists disapprove of the *Irgun?* Why don't you wait with your problems until after the war? Why do you bother the British when they are fighting a war which is also yours?" But even they changed their minds when we succeeded in showing that, unless we acted, the German murderers may not leave any Jews alive in Europe.

The support we received from important Hollywood figures was crucial to our efforts. Items related to the movie world figured prominently in the American media, and our later success on Capitol Hill was probably due, at least to some extent, to these early contacts with the film community. Within several months we had formed a committee representing a broad spectrum of people active in Hollywood. I was puzzled by the lukewarm support given by several Jewish actors, more particularly some who had grown up in New York's East Side yet remained aloof and uninterested in their people's fate. British actors, by contrast, were concerned and intellectually inquisitive. I was especially impressed with Sir Cedric Hardwicke, who had not even been invited to our functions but warmly endorsed our efforts. One of our staunchest supporters was a most gifted Italian Jew by the name of Mike Sabatello, a top executive at Warner Brothers but not well-known to the general public.

Our "shock treatment" techniques, such as full-page ads, mass meetings in synagogues and churches, pageants in Madi-

son Square Gardens and mail campaigns, all pressing for urgent action and appealing to Americans of all denominations, left the Jewish official establishment unimpressed, to put it mildly. Leaders of Zionist organizations viewed our activities as an intrusion into "their territory." Rather than informing and educating people on the work they themselves were doing or thought should be done, they simply adopted the motto "Stop the *Irgunists*, don't listen to them, don't invite them to synagogues and clubs and don't support them!" The Los Angeles community newspaper entitled one of its week-end editorials "Baron Munchausen." It was dedicated to me, claiming Hadani was a cheat and an impostor, there was no *Irgun* in Palestine, "all was one big lie," no one was organizing "illegal" immigration, and so forth. I cannot say they hampered our work. Instead, their tactics increased interest in our activity and assured us free media coverage. Now everyone, even the community's old-timers, wanted to know what we were about. In the long run, their intolerance and their tendency to underestimate the public's intelligence boomeranged against them and widened interest in our work across the U.S..

We were probably the first Zionist group seeking to address a broader public. We presented the Jewish plight as primarily an international problem and, therefore, one affecting America, which should be lending us a helping hand, in line with its traditions and interests. Although the Jews were already part and parcel of American culture and had shown deep loyalty to American interests, they were in a political ghetto as far as Palestine and Zionist aims were concerned. On these issues, Jews talked mostly to themselves. Without exaggeration, I can safely claim that our work opened up a new phase in the attitude of the American public to the Jewish problem. Within less than two years we grew into a broad influential force sponsored by prominent figures that included senators, Christian dignitaries, labor leaders and academics. We enlisted the sympathy of close to one million people, raised a great deal of money, and broke the conspiracy of silence that had sur-

rounded the plight of European Jews. Our approach was also appealing to Jews who had withdrawn from what had seemed to them parochial Jewish concerns. We mobilized world public opinion against the scandalous repressive policies of the British in Palestine and made the work of the mandatory regime much more difficult.

We conducted our work in several frameworks, and adapted our strategy to different phases of the war. We established the Committee for the Jewish Army, American Friends for a Jewish Palestine, and in 1942, the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe. Every one of these frameworks dealt with another aspect of our struggle, but we were also known as The Bergson Group, The Ben Hecht Group, or simply "The Committee." "The Committee" conjured up different images among different people, ranging from heroic and awe-inspiring to fraudulent and negative, depending on the hatreds and sympathies of the beholder. At the very least, it would be fair to say that we helped to place the Jewish problem on the American agenda, thereby making it a matter of international concern. Our political work during those years has been well described in David Wyman's book *The Abandonment of the Jews.*

I was asked to come back to the East coast, and before leaving Hollywood I toured California in the company of a dear member of ouf group, Boosia Lvova, whose family had come to the U.S. from Kharbin, China. After spending six months in Hollywood all I had seen were lecture halls, private homes and film studios. Here was an opportunity to see this beautiful country, from San Diego in the south, via the scenic drive to San Francisco in the north. This was an unusual experience for me and the only sad note was that I missed seing Colonel Patterson in La Jolla. Colonel Patterson had been the commander of the Jewish Legion in World War I, and had come to La Jolla for medical treatment. By the time I was able to reach him he had left for Chicago to join his son, who was a curator at the National History Museum there. He died soon after,

greatly mourned by all of us. This great Irish officer, who had actually co-founded and commanded the Jewish Legion in World War I, was a great friend of Jabotinsky and the commanding officer of Ben-Gurion, Ben-Zvi, Bernard Joseph and many other Palestinian leaders who had served with the British in World War I. He remained a trusted and loyal friend throughout his life, not an easy task for an Irish officer serving in the British army. He was severely punished for this involvement and was never elevated to the rank of either brigadier or major-general, although he had certainly deserved it. Although this deprived him not only of honours but also of financial benefits, he never faltered in his support for the Zionist cause and never hesitated to attack the British for their betrayal of the Jewish people and their collusion with the Arabs.

I first met Colonel Patterson upon coming to New York and I visited him at the Commodore Hotel before going to Hollywood. He suffered from a heart condition and was confined to his bed. I told him I felt free to complain to him because he was one of the few people with whom I could talk freely without fearing for our image. I said I really disliked political work, including the endless discussions with the Jews and the British and all our attempts to sell our views to the media. I would much rather be in the field, preferably fighting Germans. "My young friend," he said to me, "the political fight is dirtier than the military one. Whoever is capable of it must do it. I did it, and I did it as an Irishman, because the cause was just and there are enough good people in the world to understand it."

In Hollywood I had been forced to contend with sophisticated political arguments and with people holding firm political convictions. Now I went on to Atlantic City and Philadelphia, to meet with middle and upper-middle class Jewish communities whose ties to Judaism were mainly emotional. Their concern for the Jews in Europe went as far as voicing sincere sympathy, but did not extend to practical action. We organized a number of conventions and conferences, mainly

in Atlantic City and in Philadelphia. I was often invited to address meetings of other movements, especially those of Jewish war veterans. They were genuinely interested and gave me a fair hearing, but never really contemplated taking any practical steps. In Philadelphia I took part in a bi-weekly radio program on one of the popular radio stations, exclusively devoted to the struggle for Jewish survival and the Palestine problem. It was then that I made the acquaintance of two prominent American figures with whom I developed an immediate rapport. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of Cleveland headed a powerful and influential Jewish community and was a prominent Zionist figure. He had strong reservations about the policies of Rabbi Stephen Wise, a leading spokesman for the Jewish community. Silver claimed that Wise acted *mi-ta'am*, as one appointed by the official authorities.

The second man who stands out in my memory is Professor Al Sacher, a Jewish historian and the founder of Brandeis University. We met in Atlantic City where he was on vacation and we talked at length about ways of defining Jewish nationalism. He disagreed with the notion of Jewish involvement in political and military struggles. In his view, Judaism should be preserved through spiritual values and by protecting civil rights everywhere in the world through organizations like *B'nei Berith*, the Anti-Defamation League, etc. But after the first news of the Holocaust reached the U.S. Professor Sacher changed his views, and admitted that it would be justified for a part of the Jewish nation, especially in Palestine, to actively resist policies threatening to destroy the Jewish people. Professor Sacher never became an *Irgun* supporter, but his attitude was fair and understanding, unlike that of other American Zionist leaders who viewed us as their adversaries.

At the beginning of 1941 I received the last letters from home, and ever since there has only been silence and a dark and painful emptiness. The first authorized information on the murder of the Jews was released by the State Department in November 1942. The information originated in the U.S. Con-

sulate in Geneva and in some Jewish groups where my old friend Richard Lichtheim was active, but the American media were not interested. Hardly any attention was paid to the fate of the Jews and news items on these questions were relegated to the back pages. Throughout the war, neither *The New York Times* nor *The Washington Post* ever allowed anything concerning the Jewish tragedy to make front page. Roosevelt, either openly or in subtle ways, kept urging all public bodies to refrain from reacting to Nazi propaganda slogans that presented the conflict as a "Jewish War" and claimed that even denying this would turn it into one. The official policy line was: "Keep silent about the murder of the Jews in Europe. Let's win the war first, and then we'll help the Jews." No one asked whether there would be any Jews left to help after victory.

Even the knowledge that two million Jews had already been murdered failed to move the Roosevelt administration to change its policy or to take any steps to help European Jewry. Jewish organizations remained passive. They continued making feeble noises but made no attempt to pressure the government to change its cynical attitude. Non-Jewish America, except for some labor groups and some marginal Christian churches, was no help either. Neither the U.S. nor Great Britain were willing to help Jews escape from Axis controlled Europe. Jews were not wanted in the U.S. and certainly not in British-ruled Palestine, which should have been their natural refuge. Classic British colonial policy, together with traditional anti-Semitism, combined to make this latest tragedy possible. The American Congress, which in those years was even more anti-Semitic than the State Department, was also strongly opposed to Jewish immigration. Roosevelt never mentioned the Jews in any of his bi-weekly press conferences throughout the war, although a small statement by the president would surely have placed the story of their murder on the public agenda. During 1942-1943, the State Department answered all questions on the fate of European Jews with a standard "reports are unconfirmed."

Helping the Jews would not have required sending additional forces or endangering any more American lives than those demanded by the regular war effort. As a first step, it called for the American president to speak to Nazi victims in the name of the American government to tell them they were not alone, and to warn war criminals that they would be legally tried and punished by the Allies when the war ended. It also called for the Allies to extend help to refugees from Nazi atrocities. By breaking their deadly silence, the Allies could have helped not only the Jews but all victims of German brutality, in a tangible embodiment of the American spirit that "resistance to tyrants is obedience to God." But the Allies were guided by prudence and refrained from taking even moral action.

We continued our efforts. In November 1942, we rented a house in the "good diplomatic district" of Washington, on 16th Street. At least three *Irgun* officers were always in the house and the secretaries worked downstairs. Peter Bergson, Hillel Kook's alias, was in hospital for an operation, and only Merlin and I remained at the "embassy," as Merlin called it. Our intention was to obtain the support of people in Congress and in the administration. It was not enough to show that our fight was a just one, but we had to prove that supporting our cause was in the best American interests. We began meeting with senators and congressmen who were particularly interested in foreign and military affairs. I was asked to seek access to Senator Truman, to Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State for foreign affairs, and to the Pentagon leaders. The Germans were at this time near the Egyptian border, and Montgomery seemed unable to stop them. Were Egypt to fall, it was expected that Palestine would be next. The *Irgun* command decided that, if the Germans succeded in occupying Palestine, we would withdraw into the mountains and engage in guerilla warfare. For this purpose, we were in urgent need of weapons and other supplies and my assignment was to get them. Under the circumstances prevalent at the time it seemed that our only hope for help was

from the Americans, despite the official position of their government.

Harry Truman was then in charge of the Senate's War Supply Committee, which also had jurisdiction over the War Production Board. It was not easy for someone of my non-standing in Washington politics and with nothing substantial to offer the War Production Board, to meet with Truman. He was known as a practical man, dedicated to his job and uninterested in chit-chat, but I received crucial assistance from Senator Thomas from Utah, a Mormon, who helped to arrange the meeting. Truman also had a Jewish business partner with whom he was very friendly but he had obviously never thought of the Jews as a military factor, especially in a large-scale war.

I was told that Senator Truman would be ready to see me for a few minutes at four o'clock in the afternoon. As I walked in he was standing at his writing table, putting files into a bag and obviously preparing to leave. I introduced myself and began by telling him that, were Egypt to fall, the Jews of Palestine would be the Allies' only hope of preventing the Germans from gaining control over the whole of the Middle East and cutting all communications between Europe, Asia and Africa. He threw back a couple of questions at me, checking how viable an option of resistance would be. After I answered, he sat down and we talked for over an hour. He promised to take an active interest in our work, although he warned me that the decision to drop arms to the *Irgun* in Palestine could only be taken by the Pentagon. He himself thought that this was a matter worth considering and promised to discuss it with the military authorities. He also recommended that I see Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State, and added some hard advice: "Neutralize him, so at least he shouldn't object. Maybe you can meet his wife, who is Jewish, and maybe she can help you influence him."

I told him I was afraid of "Jewish wives" and that I was not seeking affection or understanding for the Jews. I sincerely believed we were discussing how Jewish military units in Pales-

tine could be of military help to the Allied cause. This project became less urgent after Rommel's defeat but our efforts to obtain help for the Jewish underground and to secure a certain measure of free immigration created an atmosphere of goodwill and understanding for our cause, despite the opposition of the Zionist establishment. The Zionist bodies were supported in their efforts by the British embassy in Washington, one of whose officers was a prominent Jewish philosopher, Professor Isaiah Berlin. Berlin tried to influence the American government to expel *Irgun* members from the United States or prevent them from further activities. This has recently been confirmed by papers released from the British Foreign Office archives.

Despite the many reservations and the latent anti-Semitism we sometimes encountered in Washington, there were many prominent statesmen who showed warm understanding for our cause. One of these was Senator Guy M. Gillette from Iowa, whose support for us was unwavering and later visited Israel several times. Senator Gillette incurred considerable expenses in connection with our work and never accepted any money in return. Congressman Summers of Brooklyn was also a fervent supporter who worked day and night without any compensation. The case of Senator Langer of Oklahoma was unique. He was a conservative Senator and had formerly been a confirmed isolationist. For twenty years he had served as chairman of the Senate's Military Affairs Committee. He was a tough man and the military establishment had not found it easy to deal with him, especially as it concerned budgets after the U.S. had entered the war. He supported our group and was a loyal fighter against Nazism as well as a good friend of the Jewish people.

Parallel to our political work in Washington we sought to appeal to a wider public by staging a dramatic pageant written by Ben Hecht and directed by Moss Hart. Ben Hecht, director Billy Rose, and actors Sylvia Sydney, Paul Muni and John Garfield, had joined our Hollywood group back in 1941-42. Now they helped us stage an impressive production, telling the

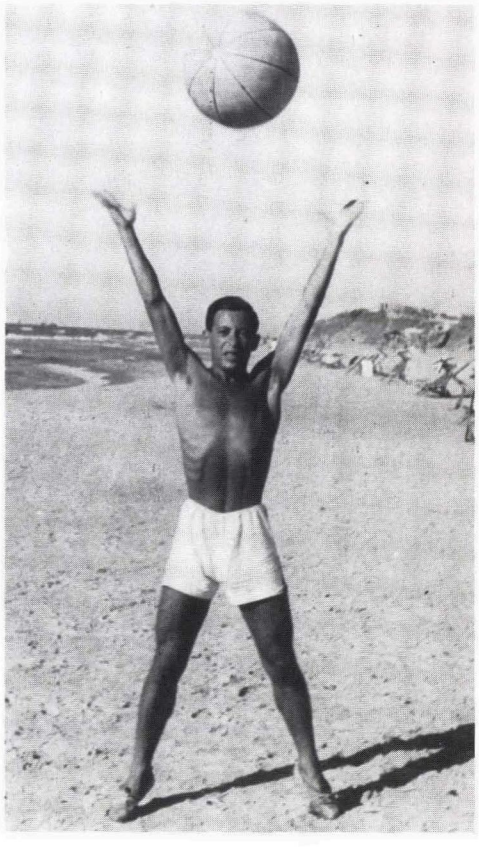
story of European Jews, *We Will Never Die.* Over 1943, it was seen by tens of thousands in Madison Square Gardens, in the Chicago Stadium, in Washington, in Hollywood, in Miami, and elsewhere. The cast included leading American artists and a choir of two hundred cantors. It dramatized the story of the Allies' unwillingess to cooperate in the rescue of a defenseless civilian Jewish population that was no match for Nazi savagery and told of attempts at Jewish resistance. It appealed to Allied governments to change their non-interventionist policies and to help in the rescue of the Jews. After the war we produced a second pageant, *A Flag is Born,* which told the struggle for Jewish independence in Palestine. Marlon Brando was in the lead role.

Unfortunately, despite its dramatic success, this show did not move the American government and no action followed. The truth is that there was never any attempt to engage in any serious rescue work of any kind. The Anglo-American Conference on Refugees that convened in Bermuda on April 1943 could not even agree on an appropriate definition of the problem and failed to counsel any action that might "interfere with or delay the war effort." Warning the Nazis or bombing the railways leading to the camps would mean "delay" and such measures were out of the question. Even the U.S. Senate was left out. Senator Langer attacked the government representative at the conference demanding to hear why the conference proceedings had never been delivered to the Senate and told Senator Lucas, a conference participant: "I'm looking forward to the report of the Conference with great impatience." It never came.

We wanted to challenge the "Let's win the war first" notion as well as the impotence of the Jewish establishment, busily involved in a "love affair" with the American president. We again managed to attract public attention by placing full-page ads in the *New York Times* and other leading newspapers, bluntly stating that "to the Jews in the Nazi death-trap, Bermuda is nothing but a cruel mockery."



Asya dancing with Cousin Mura Udem at her wedding, Riga 1938



Author training on the Tel Aviv Beach, 1936



Author after Basic Training at Camp Blanding, Florida 1943

At the Rhein River September 1944



Ruhr-Gebiet, Germany March 1945



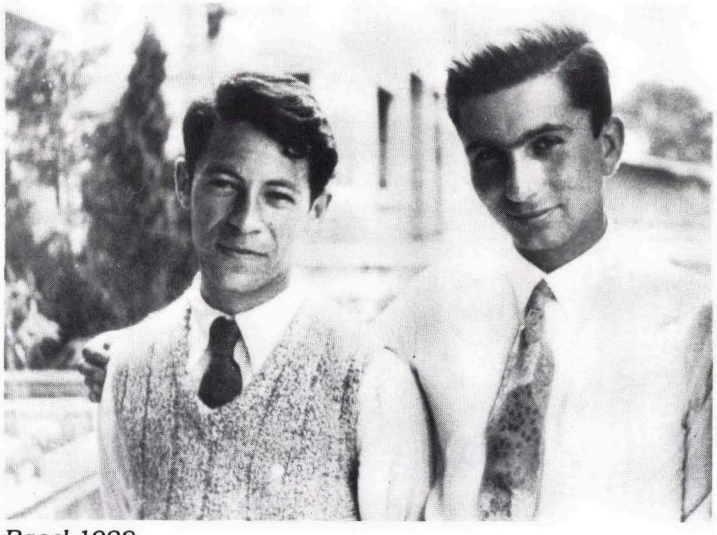


Visiting Zeev and Anna Jabotinsky at Vals-le-Bain, Savoie, August 1939



Frances Gunther
New York 1942

Author with Rudi Hecht



Basel 1928



Haifa 1991

From 1942 onwards we had worked within another framework, representing a cross-section of the American nation. On July 20, 1943 the Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe opened in Washington, and then moved to the Commodore Hotel in New York for further sessions. I was elected executive vice-president, and assigned to coordinate the activities of the conference across the country. Prominent speakers at the conference showed that Jews could be saved without hindering the war effort. Senator Gillette from Iowa and Senator Johnson from Colorado headed the conference, assisted by Will Rogers Jr. and Joseph Baldwin. Herbert Hoover, William Randolf Hearst, Wendell Willkie, the Republican candidate for President, senators and congressmen, religious leaders, academics, and journalists supported our effort. Henry Morgenthau, the Secretary of the Treasury and a friend of Roosevelt, was enormously helpful. Except for Morgenthau, no other Jewish political figure with any clout in Washington, was of help. Justice Felix Frankfurter, one of Roosevelt's most trusted friends, ignored the fate of European Jews. He did not want to be known as a soft-hearted Jew, who placed "Jewish lives ahead of the American war effort."

Frankfurter, a powerful influence in many sectors of the national administration, did not view the rescue of Jews as one of his concerns. He was interested in Australia, India, and Vichy France, but not in the Jewish people during the most desperate years of their history. The same applied to many other Jewish statesmen and friends of the President, such as Bernard Baruch, Herbert Lehman and David Niles.

Morgenthau took an unequivocal stand against the State Department's policy to conceal from the public all information regarding the murder of the Jews, which had been available by September 1942. Together with some of his colleagues at the Treasury, he tried to convince Roosevelt to publish this information and assist Jews who had managed to escape the Nazis. He supported our demand that the American government publicly state that the Nazis and their cohorts would be

tried as war criminals at the end of the war. As he states in his book, *Germany Is Our Problem*, published in 1945, Morgenthau demanded that his government make a public declaration against the murder of Jews. He never joined our board officially, but was always willing to help. He came from an assimilated German-Jewish background. He had never been a Zionist or even a sympathizer of the Zionist cause, but he courageously dared to oppose the policies inspired by the President and the State Department.

Although Senator Gillette and others helped us to place the Jewish plight on the agenda of the Senate, this was unfortunately not sufficient to change the main goverment strategy in the conduct of the war. The thrust of this strategy was to dispel the image determinedly projected by the Germans, that America was fighting a Jewish war. Despite the goodwill and understanding generated by our activities, in practical terms we accomplished nothing. All the Committee's attempts to convince the authorities that the railroads to the camps should be bombed, that a warning should be published to the effect that all those cooperating with war criminals would be tried after the war, that immediate passage to the States should be granted, even on a temporary basis, to those Jews who had escaped and were now stranded in Rumania and Turkey, were of no avail. The isolationist clique in the State Department, pressured by the British who feared these Jews would reach Palestine, refused to budge. Supporters of our cause introduced motions in the Senate and delegations were organized, but nothing helped. A delegation of rabbis from all over the U.S. came to Washington to call on Roosevelt, but he refused to meet with them and sent the Vice-President, Henry Wallace, instead.

We had practically no contact with European Jews at the end of 1943. They knew nothing of our efforts and we felt it was crucial that they should know we were aware of their plight and committed to help them in any way we could. We decided to set up a radio station outside American territorial waters but, because of the war, we needed permission from the OSS [Office

of Strategic Services]. The director of OSS was the prominent newscaster Elmer Davis, and my friends Frances and John Gunther helped us to get his approval. The plan was to establish contact with European Jews by broadcasting via London in Yiddish, German, Polish and other languages. Even though we knew the Germans had forbidden the use of radios we were convinced that, once we started broadcasting, some people would tune in and pass on the word and we could at least boost their morale and help them hold out.

After long discussions Elmer Davis approved our project provided we submitted detailed plans, agreed to military censorship and proved we had the money to finance the project. If satisfied on these counts he was willing to submit our plans to the President. We drew up detailed plans and began looking for funds. Frances Gunther introduced us to Samuel Zammuray, the "Banana King," who had come to America from the Ukraine as an eight year-old boy. After he developed banana plantations in Central America and set up the famous "White Fleet" for carrying the fruit, he became the "King of the Banana Republics." We spoke to him about our plans for a radio station and he committed his support, but when the plans were brought to the President they were vetoed outright. The same grounds were adduced: we should refrain from turning this into a "Jewish war" and encouraging "our" anti-Semites. Jabotinsky had once remarked that, in so-called good society, anti-Semitism was like pornography: one knew all about it, one might even be interested, but in proper society one does not speak about it. After the President's refusal I went with several influential friends to see Eleanor Roosevelt, the President's wife. When the S.S. Zacharia and other boats had been stranded on the Danube in 1941-42, she had been very cooperative and had helped move the boats along. But the radio station was a political issue and she claimed she could not interfere. Our attempts to set up a Jewish radio station thus came to a sad end.

Even after the Allied landings in Normandy, decisions supported by congressmen and by broad segments of the public on steps that could have saved the remaining Jews were delayed time and again. The War Refugee Board, granting temporary asylum to small numbers of Jewish refugees who had succeeded in escaping Axis countries, was only established in January 1944. The President's dramatic statement announcing the creation of the board was greeted with appreciation. Secretary Ickes, Secretary Morgenthau, and Wendell Willkie sent messages crediting the Emergency Committee with this decision and congratulating them on the success of their work, small as it was. The U.S. government sent Ira Hirshman, a member of our board and a Bloomingdale executive, to be the American representative in Turkey charged with supervising rescue work in Eastern Europe. Eri Jabotinsky was attached to him as a special envoy.

Despite my deep involvement in this work, I felt very sad and depressed. Nothing had been heard from my family for a long time and there were no signs of life from Riga. I began to feel that it had been wrong of me to have devoted so much of my life to political work instead of trying to save my family. I did not know then that they had already been murdered at the beginning of December 1941 and I assumed they were still alive in the camps. Several close friends were then very supportive. One was Rose Keane, an actress and producer. Another was Frances Gunther, who was as close as a sister to me and also active in our work. Aryeh Ben-Eliezer, a member of "The Embassy," was a wonderfully honest and warm man. I was close to them but I had great difficulty discussing my fears about my loved ones in Riga. The only one with whom I could talk about this was Anna Markovna, Jabotinsky's widow, who behaved like a mother to me. When I was due to leave for Europe to serve in the American army, she was distressed and heartbroken. I could feel her warmth and devotion and promised her I would try to come back alive.

My decision to join the American army ended a period of

work for the *Irgun* in the U.S. which had lasted three-and-a-half years. It began in May 1940 at the press conference in New York led by Jabotinsky, and I can easily say that my struggle during those years was often harder, more tense and more depressing than the battles I was to know on the beaches of Normandy, in the flatlands of Southern Holland and in Bastogne in Belgium. In the U.S. we fought against narrow minds, who saw the Jews as pariahs and small traders incapable of any kind of heroic effort, but the problem was that the Jews themselves felt inferior. They were scared to demand help for European Jews and were frightened to fight against anti-Semitic politicians, primarily in the State Department. All this was happening in the middle of the twentieth century, after the Jewish community had attained significant achievements and made an important contribution to the strenght and welfare of the American republic.

This was the prevailing view across the public spectrum, beginning with the Jewish establishment, whose activities were based on philanthropy and confidential talks behind closed doors, and all the way to great American statesmen such as President Roosevelt, for whom the Jews were a nuisance at a time when America had more important problems to deal with. Our group stood between an anxious Jewish establishment and an American government that wanted to take Jewish problems off the agenda, at least until after the war. It was no wonder that we were branded as "fascist" terrorists who should be silenced or turned over to the British.

We were willing to fight for the right cause. We were part of a military organization in Palestine that had no weapons and no money, but with a considerable following within the *Yishuv*. We drew our strength from the moral force of a young Jewish generation committed to resist the Nazis, to fight those who were keeping Jews out of Palestine and condemning them to impotence by preventing them from taking part in the struggle against Hitler. We were merely six young men, but we saw ourselves charged with the task of changing these assumptions

and encouraging a new understanding. Let me introduce the group briefly.

Shmuel Merlin was born in Bukovina, Rumania. He was a journalist, a gifted writer with a keen analytical mind, who could always be counted on to iron out difficulties and reach crisp formulations. He was Jabotinsky's secretary for some time, and reached America in 1941.

Hillel Kook, descendant of a long rabbinical line, was a yeshiva graduate and a nephew of Chief Rabbi Kook. He was no longer religious then and worked in a rather modest job at Hadassah Hospital while mainly busy with his tasks as a commander in the Palestinian underground. A gifted speaker and a statesman of great qualities, Hillel became ambassador extraordinary of the Jewish people to the U.S..

Eri, Jabotinsky's son, was a talented mathematician and later became a professor at the Haifa Technion. He was one of the pioneers of aviation in our country and held rather independent views regarding the separation of Jewish religion and the Hebrew nation. Eri saved many Jewish lives by risking his own in German-occupied Europe and by helping people to escape through various harbour towns on their way to Palestine. He was with us until 1943 and then left for Turkey to help in the rescue efforts.

Mike Ben-Ami, whose original name was Yitzhak Rosen, was one of the first babies born in the newly-founded city of Tel Aviv. He was orphaned at an early age and inherited the family fortune, but his wealth never spoiled him. He joined the underground, was active as a leader of *Alyiah Beth*, and in 1940 became part of the U.S. *Irgun* delegation.

Aryeh Ben-Eliezer was the youngest of us. He was a handsome dark type and could have passed for Charles Boyer's twin brother, including the voice. During the Arab revolt of 1936 and 1937, when Arab gangs attacked Jewish villages with impunity, he was the first man of action to initiate a counter-attack. More than once he assaulted trains and bases of Arab terrorists single-handedly, surviving as if by special divine pro-

tection. Born in Vilna to an Orthodox, working-class family, he had no formal education and worked as a truck-driver in Palestine. However, he was a dedicated autodidact and a man of daring military exploits. I first met him early in 1937 following a suggestion of my assistant, and we fixed an evening date at a crowded cafe in Tel-Aviv's Mograbi Square. I had a warm, pleasant feeling talking to him. A truck driver? A terrorist? No education? Here sat a highly cultured young man, who spoke with impressive, convincing logic and felt we should send him to America to carry out educational work. "Do you speak English?" I asked him. "No," he said, "no English, or French, or German." "What *do* you speak?" "Yiddish. I will get along."

We sent him. By the time I arrived in the States Aryeh was one of the most successful and sought-after speakers in the Yiddish-speaking districts of Brooklyn and the Bronx, and six months later was just as successful in English. At the end of 1943 he returned to Palestine to take charge of the *Irgun.* It was Aryeh who got Begin out of the Polish army and appointed him commander of the *Irgun.* He was arrested by the British and sent to a prison camp in Africa, but managed to escape and return to Europe to direct *Irgun* work there. He later became a Keneset member, where he was popular and appreciated by all and was elected vice-chairman. He seemed destined for a successful career, but fell ill and died in 1970, after prolongued suffering.

Finally, myself. I appear under different names in *Irgun* documents, depending on the country or the job I had been assigned to. I worked as Ben-Yanai, as Nahshon, and finally as Hadani in the U.S.. In the last stage of our work, when there was less need for cover, I became known as Hadani-Rafaeli.

The six of us set out on a mission in 1940, to persuade America to grant the Jewish people a chance to fight by organizing a Jewish army made up of Palestinian and stateless Jews. As we began receiving information about the persecutions and the death-camps, we set up the Emergency Committee to Save the

Jewish People of Europe. True, we failed to change the tragic course of events, and the democratic powers refused, almost until the end of the war, to engage in any effort designed to save Jews. But our public relations campaign was very succesful, and our movement included churchmen and rabbis, statesmen and judges, senators and congressmen, leaders of minority groups, teachers, writers and actors, a cross-section of America. It was not a Jewish movement. In fact, the Jews were a minority and people from all sections and all walks of life were represented.

It is hard to believe that all of us knew only basic English, and that we learned as we went along. Faith and enthusiasm were somehow enough. We were invited to participate in debates with important speakers, on the radio, in newspapers, at town-hall meetings and in the universities. The achievements of our group were mainly educational and political. We succeeded in our attempts to broaden understanding of the plight of European Jewry, and shared with the American public the tragic results of the silence and isolation which had surrounded it. The bitter truth was that the Allies, after great sacrifices, won the war against Nazi Germany, whereas for the Jewish people the doors to Palestine remained closed, the Jews were isolated, and millions perished.

In New York we made life-long, close friends. We were "adopted" by the family of Dr. Kagan, who had come to the U.S. from Harbin, China. This warm group of Russian Jews, loyal to our cause, befriended us all personally. Dr. Kagan was our personal physician, our father-confessor, and in fact acted as a full-fledged father. He worried about our health, our food, and our personal problems, and helped us through the difficulties of living in an alien country.

I would like to mention two remarkable people who were very active in our movement, Frances Gunther and Harry Selden. Frances was one of the most unusual and brilliant women I have ever met. Her parents had come to America from the Ukraine at the end of the last century and settled in Galve-

ston, Texas, where Frances and her brother Bernie were born. She met John Gunther at Chicago University, they married and he began a journalistic career in Chicago. Frances was also a journalist, with a keen interest in politics. They later served as correspondents in Austria and in London, where their circle of friends included many prominent and famous people. John began his series of political analysis about interesting countries, the *Inside...* books which brought him world fame, while a great deal of Frances' writing was devoted to the Indian struggle for independence. She wrote for leading English papers and voiced very critical views of British policy towards India. Frances and Nehru were close personal friends until his death. The Gunthers were divorced in the mid-forties, and in 1947 their only son Johnny died of a brain tumour.

Following her work with us, she decided to live out her life in Palestine. She settled in Jerusalem and continued her writing career, taking up an interest in biblical studies and pursuing the cause of Jewish-Arab understanding in Israel. She had come to our committe from an asimilationist standpoint and rediscovered her Jewishness. She and John activated many of their influential friends on our behalf. She remained a close friend of my family until her death twelve years later.

Harry Selden came from a family which had few contacts with the Jewish community. They were in the jute business, involved in transactions with Cuba and India. As a young man Harry had wide intellectual interests and devoted his time to reading, research, and journalism. Although the family prevailed on him to join the business, it did not last long. He returned to his work as an editor and a writer. His close friendship with William Ziff, the succesful publisher and friend of Jabotinsky, influenced him to intensify his work as an editor. It was through Ziff that he met the young men at the *Irgun* and enthusiastically joined in their work. Political cooperation developed into a deep friendship, and he became chairman of the executive of the ALFP (American League for a Free Palestine). He was a dollar-a-year man, active in the sphere of

relations with Capitol Hill and editor of our publications. His business contacts helped us to acquire rescue boats, the S.S. Ben Hecht and the S.S. Altalena, to overhaul them and bring them to their starting points in Europe, a considerable financial and technical undertaking. Harry worked with us for five years full time, and remained a close friend of his *Irgun* associates, a feeling to which *Irgun* veterans gave appropriate public expression.

Our work would not have been possible without the help of a large group of young people who participated in our efforts and displayed a lot of civil courage in a difficult and sharp public discussion — among them Zipporah Kessel, a devoted *Irgun* member, later the chief radio operator of S.S. Altalena and Miriam Chaikin, a gifted young writer who did important political work on Capitol Hill, Washington.

About to enter a new stage in my life, I looked back on my years of work on behalf of the Emergency Committee. We established the Committee after information on the murder of the Jewish people in Europe had begun to reach us through diplomatic channels and informal communications in the fall of 1942. The American Jewish community was helpless and, despite their sorrow and indignation, proved incapable of mobilizing itself into action: "What can we do? Jews are a powerless, marginal group. How can anyone be forced to do anything to help the victims? We must wait until Germany is crushed!"

This was the reaction across the whole spectrum of political and religious loyalties in the Jewish community — Zionists and non-Zionists, religious and secular, members of various political groups, all refused to admit reality. The Bermuda conference on refugees never mentioned the word Jew, and the passivity of the Allies was, in fact, helping the Nazi machinery of extermination. Our effort was launched in an attempt to break this conspiracy of silence by publishing full-page ads in leading newspapers, engaging religious and lay organisations, labour leaders, artists, and academics, mounting theatrical pageants and mobilizing political influence in Capitol Hill —

anything that might help to place the Jewish question on the national agenda.

It began to pay off in 1944, when the American government finally decided to establish the War Refugee Board. It was very late, but 200,000 Jews were still able to reach the camp in Ft. Ontario, New York, and President Roosevelt promised to place the facilities of the State, Treasury and War Departments at the Board's disposal, and ask other Allied governments to participate in this endeavour. But although it was gratifying to be congratulated by Secretary Ickes on the success of our efforts, and Wendell Wilkie and Senator Gillette also gave us credit for the creation of the Board, we felt that only tens of thousands had been rescued, while millions had perished. Our only satisfaction was that we tried to do our duty by making the world aware of our people's fate. In fact, however, we had done more than that. Our methods had destroyed psychological barriers and crashed the mental walls surrounding an inner ghetto, helping to create the conditions that would eventually help to galvanize support for the establishment of a Jewish state. I was proud to have been part of that struggle, and could now begin my life as a soldier.

7

A Soldier in the American Army

A new chapter was about to begin in my life, my service in the American army. Early in 1942 the Chicago Draft Board had requested that we register for service in the American Army, and I asked the *Irgun* command permission to enlist. The political activity was becoming repetitive and I felt personally drained but the *Irgun* refused to release me because there was no one to replace me, so I had to tell the Draft Board I could not yet serve. Legally, I did not have to serve, as I had a Latvian passport and Latvia was a neutral country with an embassy in Washington. The Chicago Draft Board included many German-Americans who pounded me with questions like "How can you, as a Jew, refuse to serve?" They were not too impressed with my explanations and were obviously surprised when I returned to volunteer for service nine months later.

Mike Ben-Ami and I passed the army tests but the others in

the group were rejected for medical reasons. I was anxious to take part in the fighting, which I saw as a personal opportunity to help my family and to take a stand against the hypocrisy of the allies toward the Jews. In fact, I wanted to be sent to the front as soon as possible. In November 1943 I began my basic training as an infantryman at Camp Blanding, Florida. For the infantry I was an old man of thirty three — all my colleagues were nineteen or twenty — but I felt young, happy in the knowledge that I would soon be facing Germans on the battlefield and doing what I wanted. Except for the anxiety about my family, the army was a welcome experience for me.

Training at Fort Blanding was very tough indeed. We went on twenty-five mile marches, the place was full of mud and snakes, and several soldiers were bitten. I had to compete with strong American boys much younger than myself. My commanding officer was a nice Russian fellow whose family belonged to a Russian Orthodox sect that observed their day of rest on the Sabbath rather than on Sunday. He was 6'4" , very friendly and helpful to me. One day, a discussion about the war flared up in my tent and one of the soldiers began attacking me and claiming that the Jews had started the war to make money. Obviously, I myself was also responsible for that. I blew up and hit him over the head with the butt of my rifle. He collapsed and was taken to hospital. I told my commanding officer that, as far as I was concerned, this fellow was a Nazi and I was going to fight the Nazis not only in Europe but also in America. Although there was a request for a court martial, my commanding officer was wise enough to ignore it and closed the case.

Soon after I had joined the army, the chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, Senator Langer, wrote a detailed letter to Secretary of War Patterson telling him about my background and recommending me highly. He mentioned my education, my interests, and my knowledge of several European languages. He also mentioned that, while in Heidelberg, I had attended the lectures of Field Marshal

Keselring. He felt I should be sent to the Office of Strategic Services, or some similar intelligence assignment. But I did not know much about the politics of Uncle Sam. We had overlooked the fact that, for twenty years, Senator Langer had not agreed to approve military budgets as submitted, and now, for the first time, he was asking the army for something. Patterson replied two months later, informing him that Alex Rafaeli had been sent for basic training to the infantry center at Fort Blanding, Florida, that his commanding officers were satisfied with him, and that he was a good soldier. I only found out about this incident when on furlough in New York and Washington, after completing my basic training and just before we were sent to Europe. The truth is I was not at all sorry. I was happy with my unit and pleased that at long last I could do something besides public relations. After all the difficulties and the dangers of my previous work in Europe, moving under cover and escaping German and British intelligence agents, training seemed almost like a vacation, despite all the hardships. It might sound bombastic but I was happy and relaxed.

We sailed for Europe in April 1944 on the S.S. Le Jeune. We were packed like sardines and had to wait hours for a washroom. We landed in Glasgow and proceeded to Dover and then to Portland, a naval base in the south of England. We were temporarily assigned to the 29th Virginia Blue White Infantry division. It was there that we had our first contact with Nazi prisoners, as well as with Russian traitors who had served under General Vlasov in the Russian Liberation Army, under German command. I had an unusual experience with two of Vlasov's soldiers. I usually talked to them in Russian but once they came to my tent and, suddenly, one asked me in Yiddish, *Ir seit a Yid?* [Are you a Jew?] Well! Jews in Vlasov's army! That was a surprise.

They explained that, after being attacked by German units and while attempting to retreat, Cossack cavalry units had shot at them from the rear and forced them to return to the lines and hold the Germans. The Russian units followed

Vlasov's orders and surrendered, and the two Jews had no alternative but to go with them. They could obviously not identify themselves as Jews and had to go on fighting on the German side. The U.S. Army was transferring the Vlasov forces to the Russians who, as far as we knew, were shooting all of them. I listened carefully to these two fellows, made them write out their biographies, their family background and any indications of a Jewish education. After they persuaded me of the truth of their story, I managed to save them from being turned over to the Russians.

One day, when on leave, I visited Yrma (Yrmiyahu) Halperin in London. He was a top *Betar* activist and had helped to establish the first Jewish Naval School in Civitavecchia, Rome. Some parts of the city of London were in ruins and bombs were still exploding quite often, but the British remained cool, composed and determined. In the evening, back in Portland, I was told we would be sailing for Normandy. Three weeks had gone by since our original landing, and an American LST boat brought us to Utah beach, at St. Mere de L'Eglise.

We were assigned to fill the ranks of the 30th Kentucky Old Hickory Division, who had been badly hurt in the initial landing. The German troops were retreating and bombed us daily but, although we suffered casualties, they could not hold up our replacements. Normandy, an area of small villages and narrow roads, had suffered huge damage but there was still plenty of Calvados, the local apple brandy. Militarily, those were rather confused times. It was the first American experience in the European theatre and many *bona fide* mistakes resulted in a great deal of self-inflicted damage, by our own planes and naval units.

The Free French forces were right behind us on the way to Paris, but we were ordered to step aside and let them enter Paris first for political reasons. They had not seen much fighting in Normandy but the Americans were anxious to raise French morale. By that time we were coming close to the Dutch-German border and to the famous German defenses, the

Siegfried line, where we would have our baptism of fire. It did not seem as imposing as the stories about it and late that evening, under cover of darkness, we moved into Holland and liberated the city of Maastricht.

It was midnight by the time we reached the city and the residents, who heard the tanks rolling, came out to greet us. Their reception, unlike that of the Belgians, was very warm. The Dutch had resisted the Nazis and had paid a high price. Our cars stopped and a Dutch woman, who knew no English and could only speak German, was directed to me. This was the first question I was asked, and I heard it often in the course of the war: "Is it true that your president's name is not actually Roosevelt but Rosenfeld?" Such was the information spread by Goebbels. "Nothing wrong with being Rosenfeld, but Roosevelt's name is really Roosevelt," I replied. I don't think she believed me. We advanced further north and liberated Sittard and Venlo. A strange event took place next, which could only happen in the American army. My company commander was apparently trying to get me promoted. He called me in and told me, an ordinary infantry soldier, to go to the European Theatre of Operations [ETO] headquarters in Paris and report to General Record. No one told me what it was about or what I was supposed to do, only that I was to report.

It took us a day to get to Paris. I went to headquarters at the Claridge Hotel on Champs Elysees, where I had often stayed before the war. A captain told me that the general would see me soon. The general had apparently received information about my background and my army service. After a friendly talk that lasted about half an hour, he told me, "You'll join my staff. You will get a field commission and you will be part of my liason staff with the civilian population when we enter Berlin. You'll be informed." I drove back and told this amazing story to McNamara, my commanding officer, who said he was very proud of me. McNamara was an unusual character. He was a dentist from Boston and, at forty-five, a bit too old to be the commander of an infantry company, but he would not quit. Some of his

"friends" told me that his wife was a major in the WACs [Women's Army Corps] and as he was only a captain, he wanted to become at least a major before leaving the army.

Time passed and as we never heard from the general again, I became the butt of my company's jokes. "Hey Alex, you really went to see the general? Really? At ETO headquarters? In Paris? You probably made a mistake. You didn't see the general. You saw Eisenhower himself. And he really told you you'd be an officer in Berlin?" Even Captain McNamara, who obviously trusted me, began to feel somewhat unsure about the story and I myself began thinking that it may all have been just an hallucination. But then, I had been to Paris, so my adventure must have happened.

One day two officers came to our unit and, after an interview, informed me I would soon be transferred to CIC [Counter-Intelligence Corps] as an agent. Usually, only American-born servicemen were admitted to this unit and all had been FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] agents, lawyers or journalists in civilian life. I did not come under any of these categories but my previous experience was found to be relevant. As the army entered Germany it became clear that we were short of qualified personnel to work in counter-intelligence operations. This was the first war in American history in which the Army was supposed to deal with war criminals and political leaders. It was an exciting assignment.

The unit was relatively small, about ten people under the direct command of a colonel, but our powers were quite broad and we were authorized to make arrests. Intellectual standards were obviously much higher than those in my previous infantry unit; we wore slightly different uniforms or civilian clothes. I never knew how my colleagues felt about my being a Jew and we never spoke about it. Fellows in my previous infantry unit had been more outspoken on this score, as the following incident will show. One evening we were temporarily put in charge of a prisoners-of-war camp near Bastogne. Some of my fellow soldiers resented the assignment and began curs-

ing, not the German prisoners but the Jews. One of these soldiers came from a Polish family in Cleveland, Ohio, and had obviously been reared in a tradition of Polish anti-Semitism. When Captain McNamara heard them talk he became incensed and screamed at his own soldiers, "Bastards, you're as good as the Nazis. Get into that enclosure and stay with the Germans." McNamara's reaction was astonishing. In the middle of the war, he ordered two American soldiers to spend a windy night together with enemy forces. This was our McNamara. He really had no right to do this, and he could have been court-martialled and removed from his command, but he was an honest man. This was my farewell from my infantry service.

The army had sufficient manpower for regular intelligence work. There were many people with linguistic ability and a high school education, especially refugees from German-speaking countries. But my assignment as a CIC agent was more difficult and required an academic background, personal maturity, and psychological experience. My superior thought I had these qualities. As our unit moved closer to the German border I was interviewed and checked several times, and was ultimately transferred to 216 CIC Det., the key counter-intelligence unit of the 16th Corps. This unit was responsible for a large area, from Dinslaken in the west to the Ruhr Gebiet in the East across the Rhine, which was the center of German industry.

Our first task was to uncover a German spy network. I managed to trace their contact arrangements by matching rare old coins and received my first commendation. Our standard instructions were to arrest every Nazi above the rank of major who had served in the *S.S.*, *S.D.*, *S.A.* and other formations. This was referred to as the "automatic arrest category" and detainees were sent to a special camp for further investigation. The important targets were Nazis who had committed, or were suspected of having committed, crimes against humanity. This was a complicated task and often quite unpleasant, particu

larly when it concerned certain key leaders who resorted to sophisticated cover-ups.

In our preliminary briefings at ETO headquarters, before entering Germany, we were told: "Here in Western Europe you have a resistance movement. They are helping us, guiding us, giving us information. It will be different once we enter Germany. There you'll be on your own." This was our understanding when we crossed the Siegfried line in September 1944, while the first American units moved into Aachen and across the Rhineland through the Ruhr Gebiet, into Recklinghausen and Essen. But as soon as we entered the big German cities, many Germans began contacting us and providing information, obviously in an attempt to save themselves. The Germans called our headquarters *das Amerikanische Gestapo* and, in many cases, Germans actually helped us catch the Nazis we were looking for.

I had not met Germans since my graduation at Heidelberg in July 1933 and until my arrival in Europe as an American serviceman. Now I encountered them again, first at the base in England escorting prisoners of war, and again during the Normandy landings. But now I was in CIC and the contact was much closer. These people were cowards. German prisoners of war, mostly officers, repeatedly tried to approach me and claim that they were not really Germans: "My mother was Polish," or "My father was a Frenchman, from Alsace," or "My grandfather was really a Jew." They kept insisting that they wished to join some Allied unit, either French or Polish, but all they really wanted was to disassociate from their own people. This was the recurring pattern all along the Normandy campaign, through France, Belgium and Holland, up to our crossing the Rhine. I kept thinking back to my days in the Zionist youth movement and of our scathing criticism of Jews ashamed of their Jewishness, who had tried to assimilate and pass for Russians or Germans despite the refusal of the enviroment to accept them. The Jews could at least claim they had been part of a minority that had suffered discrimination and

persecution and there were objective reasons for their attempt to escape their uniqueness. But the Germans? How could they excuse this stampede? They were a nation of sixty-five million people, strong, rich, and intelligent. True, they had lost a war and their defeat had wrought destruction and misery, but all these were temporary. They never admitted their mistakes of judgment and their cruelty and had not suffered even a fraction of the tortures that had been inflicted on the Jews. Moreover, they were living on their own land, however hard their circumstances, and they were behaving much more cowardly than any assimilated Jew ever had, willingly relinquishing their national loyalties.

By the time the war had ended and patterns of personal and political fraternization began to develop, these trends were attenuated. But it is in times of stress and tragedy that we judge the fibre of a nation. A strong and powerful people fell apart under the first powerful blow to its national integrity, whereas the Jews had showed deep faith in their own destiny despite the long, tragic centuries of persecution.

By March 1945 we had crossed the Rhine and faced the Battle of the Ruhr. While the bulk of the U.S. Army was on its way to Berlin we were still fighting a rear-guard battle in the Ruhr, where strong German formations defended the German industrial-military complex. The British began the big offensive with an attack on Essen in March, with 200 bombers in each wave, but they were not too experienced and caused little damage. While assuming they were bombing Essen they had actually bombed Homburg, about twenty kilometers NE from Essen. Only toward the end of March or the beginning of April, when the attacking fleets included 400-450 bombers at a time, did their attacks become more acurate and effective. The British destroyed over 160 acres of industrial property, and paralyzed German industry.

We participated in the battle for Essen and were assigned to the control of civilians. Essen was a highly industrialized city, with a sophisticated population. The relations between the

U.S. army and the local population were built on the principle of "non-fraternization" and all contacts were banned. However, this principle did not apply to CIC which, for security reasons, had to keep close contact with the local population. Many Germans were still convinced that "the Fuhrer would win" and that a V-2 and other surprises were still in store.

After the difficult Battle of the Bulge, where the German attack was repulsed at considerable losses, we had to take these local reactions seriously. Although Essen was our immediate target, the American troops achieved an effective and fast breakthrough and were advancing toward the Elbe and Berlin, and their meeting with the Russian army was celebrated throughout the world. We were still fighting around Essen, where pockets of German resistance were trying to stop us, and additional time and effort were required to overcome them.

In the public eye, Essen was intimately connected with the name of Krupp and his worldwide industrial-military complex. As soon as we entered Essen I was directed to Villa Hugel, the Krupp's palatial residence and the headquarters of his enterprises. It was Alfried, the son, who at that time managed the company. His father Gustav, the head of the family, lay paralyzed in the family estate at Salzburg, Austria. Alfried Krupp, a hard-faced man in his late thirties, stood surrounded by our military policemen at the entrance to a huge grey building that looked more like a factory than a private residence. The military policemen turned him over to us and on the spot I decided that he would be treated like any other Nazi prisoner. He would not enjoy any special privileges and would be moved to a prison. After answering several questions he claimed his wife was American and this should count in his favor. I told him we were not dealing with his wife but with him and took him to our headquarters in Recklinghausen, about 45-50 kms away, where we had set up a special prison for "political cases" — Nazis and war criminals who were our special responsibility. My commander, Major General Anderson, heard we had taken in Krupp and came over to see me.

"Alex, why exaggerate? Why put Krupp in prison? He made guns for Hitler and the peasants made bread for him. Aren't you prejudiced?"

"I'm very prejudiced but I'm acting by the rules. Krupp was not only a munitions manufacturer but also a high S.S. official. He financed the Nazi party for years and employed slave laborers from all over Europe. We must keep him in prison."

Krupp remained in prison. I was told to find and arrest the governor of the Ruhr district, Leo Schlessman. He was the top Nazi official of this district and a recipient of the Nazi *Goldabzeichen* [Golden Emblem], the highest Nazi award which had only been bestowed on a limited number of Nazi leaders. But Schlessman had disappeared and we could not find him. Every time I tried to interrogate Germans about Schlessmann their face changed and I felt they were scared.

After a few days, while considering the options available to a man in his situation, I fell upon the idea of hospitals. Americans had refrained from searching hospitals out of respect for the sick. I warned all hospital directors, who impressed me as devious and evasive, that their managerial staffs would all be arrested if found to be hiding wanted Nazis under false names. I went through several hospital rooms looking for someone who would resemble Schlessman and would appear anxious. I found someone who had just undergone surgery and looked "promising." The nurse handling the case appeared very nervous and the staff seemed agitated when we began checking his identity. His card indicated he had been a mechanic at the *Kruppwerke* [the Krupp enterprises], but I was still suspicious. The records indicated he had undergone stomach surgery, but our army doctor indicated that the stomach cut was too superficial and he did not think there had been a proper operation. We concluded this was the man we were looking for, but he denied everything.

The next day I called Krupp to my office for one of our interrogation sessions. The "patient" Schlessman was brought into the neighboring room and I suddenly opened the door. Krupp

was taken by surprise, stood up and greeted Schlessman. Schlessman could deny no longer, stood at attention and said to me, *Ich diene den Fuhrer* [I serve the Fuhrer].

I had been busy looking for people on the wanted list and now I decided to concentrate on Krupp. The next morning I called him in for an interrogation. The curiosity and the public interest evoked by his case had made him arrogant and self-assured. I was quite curt with him and let him stand while I conducted the enquiry in military fashion. He soon became sheepish, as did many other Germans. He claimed he had not been interested in politics, had been busy studying and having fun until 1937, when he began working at the Kruppwerke and had joined the Party. I warned him he should stop playing around and thinking we were naive. I told him we knew that his father and his family had built up the Nazi party, and gave him half a day to prepare a full report. He then told me the hideouts of Erich Mueller, who had designed the German guns that had cost so much blood, the infamous *Kanonnen Mueller*, and of Houdremont, another builder of German cannons which, at that time, were the best in the world. The Americans were very anxious to get Houdremont, and he was actually delivered to us with Krupp's help, after found hiding in a forest around Essen.

Essen looked like an archeological excavation of a prehistorical village. It was no longer a town but rather a vast field covered by heaps of stone. The only thing still untouched was the statue of Friedrich Krupp on the city square, warlord of armaments production and grandfather of Alfried, my prisoner.

I drove again to Villa Hugel, which was about three miles out of town on a hill just above the Ruhr River. The battle for the Ruhr was still in full swing. Through the length of our investigation the area behind the Villa, where the Germans were trying to make a stand, was shelled by our mortars. From Alfried's desk I could see the German positions across the river, and all around us the air vibrated with the staccato of M-1 and

Tommy-guns. Our paratroopers were trying to clear the Nazi snipers emplaced on a hill just above the Ruhr River.

I continued my work in the Krupp castle. Headquaters assigned me to prepare materials for the legal unit of the British army that would be replacing American troops. I selected letters and financial receipts, keeping in mind the idea of a trial of war criminals in the future, and I interviewed several executives and secretaries. It was obvious that secret files showing the extent to which the Krupps had directed the financing of the Nazi party had been burnt. But I still found a great deal of material that was interesting, such as proof that Ukrainian steel mills had been transferred to the Krupps following the German occupation of Russia.

I continued my interrogation. Krupp knew that I had been assigned to his case and was irritated because I had not talked to him for days. He was jittery and searching for answers. My first question to him was why his family had supported Hitler. "Economic prosperity requires stability. The political squabbles in Germany created unrest and uncertainty. We Krupps are realists, not idealists; we believed that Hitler could bring stability, and as a matter of fact he did. The country had sunk into anarchy and Hitler came with concerted plans for action. Originally, we had helped the *Deutsche Volkspartei*, where my uncle had been one of the leaders. But they were too weak and could not control the Nazis."

"But what about the rest of his platform, his views on culture, on human values, his discriminatory tactics and his persecution of the Jews and of others? Did you approve of this?"

"There are no ideals. I am blunt, for there is a need for frankness in our bitter defeat. Life is a fight for survival, for bread and power, and it requires strong and tough leadership. That is what Hitler gave us. We all felt better after the years of his government."

"Do you mean to say that all the Germans backed Hitler?"

"Yes. There was very little criticism, and whatever there was, did not stand a chance. The majority of the people were

behind the government, and this may have been our weak point. I have recently read Churchill's speeches and noticed that the criticism of his adversaries prompted changes in his decisions. We did not have this but, in principle, it would not have made much difference, since Hitler had the backing of the whole nation."

"Do you still support him? Are you still a Nazi?"

"No, I have changed. Our government cheated the people and we didn't really know what was going on. We were told that an invasion was impossible, that the Allies could never break through the Atlantic Wall. There were hints of new, secret weapons. As late as four weeks ago I heard of new, bigger arms, in the style of the *V-2* and supposedly much stronger, as well as of new contingencies working in our favor."

"Such as?"

"Diplomatic conflict between the Allies. We all expected a crisis in the relationship between the U.S. and England on the one hand, and Russia on the other."

"What do you think would have changed had you known the truth?"

"We could have saved Germany. We could have stopped the war and saved the country from destruction, as we did in 1918. We lost the war then, but stopped the devastation. Resistance at all cost has brought additional tragedy upon our people. The might we were facing was much too great for us."

"Yes, but what about the basic political philosophy? How is the war propaganda related to the actions of the leadership, to the *Blut and Boden* [blood and soil] idea and all the rest?"

"We Krupps never cared much for ideologies. All we cared about was an efficient system that would allow us to work without disturbances. Politics is not our line."

"You mean to say you are no longer a Nazi because they lost the war? That any system would have been acceptable as long as it gave you a chance to do your work, even if it was a dictatorship raised on hatred and regardless of the misery it might

cause the world? Is this what you mean by `Politics is not our line'?"

Krupp began quoting cliches and avoided answering. I read him an excerpt from a speech by his father, where he had boasted that the Krupps had begun to rearm Germany despite the Versailles Treaty. Krupp tried to explain that his father had meant "defensive preparations."

"Will you be planning defensive preparations now as well?"

"No, we don't want that. If the Allies bring peace to Europe and give Germany a chance to live we shall cooperate. If the Allies demand it, we'll produce weapons. Otherwise, we'll manufacture goods for peace. Our coal mines will produce coal for Europe. We're realists and we shall face the facts."

"What do you think of Speer?"

"We were all flabbergasted when Todt died and Hitler appointed Speer as his Minister for War Production, but later we were simply surprised. Speer was a good architect. He was also quite bright and knew how to deal with the essentials without getting bogged down by trivialities, but there was some bad stuff in him and he kept messing things up. We could have done much better."

"Would this have made a substantial difference?"

"No, but it would have strengthened our resistance."

"It would have prolongued the war then?"

"Yes."

"So you would favor further resistance?"

"No."

"When did you last meet Speer?"

"In October. He was in Essen and spoke of rebuilding the Ruhr and of protection against air attacks. It was mainly the transportation arrangements that were affected by the bombings. We did not consider evacuation or a major industrial reshuffle."

70% of Essen's industrial plants had by then been destroyed, but they continued to produce anti-aircraft guns until

the last day. Their main problem had been the lack of fuel and water.

"When did you lose hope of victory?"

"When you reached Paris We did not think it was possible. The capture of Paris depressed us terribly."

"Did the people still care to resist?"

"Yes, the bombings made everyone mad. Names like Murder Inc. made the man in the street hate the Allies."

"Does this mean that the Germans will try to organize a resistance movement to oppose and sabotage Allied occupation forces?"

"I don't believe they feel like that now. They are weary and glad the fight is over. They will forget the past very quickly. They want peace and work, nothing else."

We then discussed financial matters, such as the *A.H. Spende der Deutschen Wirtschaft* [The Adolf Hitler Fund for the German Economy], the destruction of his plant, and his use of slave laborers. Krupp claimed that the women had been very good, but that the production capacity of the men had only been 70% of that of German workers.

The next session was devoted to the Jewish people.

"Where are the Jews of Essen?" I asked.

Krupp turned pale. "I had nothing to do with that. I don't know!" he exploded. "I didn't hear anything about it."

"Didn't your family have any Jewish acquaintances? Are they still around?"

"I knew that the Jews were being sent away but I didn't know what was happening to them. I didn't know they were being killed. I swear...."

"You kept company with Hitler and Goering and you didn't know of their anti-Jewish policy? Of the murder of the Jewish people?"

"We never discussed Jewish matters," he said, and went on to confess his deep affection for Jews.

It was disgusting. Although generally quiet and well man-

nered, he lost his composure when I asked him about the Jews. He spoke like a desperate man.

"Bormann was a personal friend of yours. He represented Hitler when you took over Russian factories but he was also one of the men in charge of murdering the Jews. Didn't he discuss it with you?"

"When we changed our status from a joint-stock company to a family firm, Bormann was a member of the Board who represented the Party and Lammers represented the government. He never talked to me about the Jews."

"Did Bormann's membership on the Board mean that Hitler had a share in your property, or was it the *Stiftung* [the foundation]?"

"I don't remember. All the papers have been burned. Maybe Dr. Jansen knows, he was in charge of these matters."

"I saw photographs of you with Bormann in Russia. Were you there?"

"Yes, in 1942, to inspect a steel mill."

"Did you also visit Treblinka, Auschwitz and Majdanek?"

"Never, never." He was trembling.

As I was leaving Villa Hugel I passed the huge gate at the entrance to the Krupp's headquarters and offices. A man wearing some kind of blue and red uniform stood at the gate. He was about sixty but stood erect, clean-shaven and alert. He was guarding the gate. There was nothing behind the gate, only ruins. He did not seem to notice that Allied bombs had destroyed the buildings, that Krupp was a prisoner, that only a few feet away GI's were dashing around in their jeeps. He stood by the gate, tense, arrogant, and blind, a symbol of defeated Germany.

I also questioned Dillgart, the *Oberburgermeister* from Essen and one of the first Nazi leaders. He was very relaxed and although he had been a U-boat commander at the beginning of the war, he obviously knew very little about industry or defense matters. He spoke warmly and enthusiastically about Hess, describing him as a capable statesman who had foreseen the end before the Allied landing in Europe and had sought

ways of persuading the British to join a German-British front against Russia. Hess flew to England four or five times before he actually landed, and no one in Germany believed the silly story about his insanity. He quoted me a jingle which had gone around Germany:

Wir fahren gegen England
Wenn einer aber wirklich fahrt
Dann wird er fur verruckt erklart.
[We are on our way to attack England
But when someone really gets there
He is declared insane.]

With Dillgart, Houdremont and Erich Muller in our hands, we had gathered a team that would enable our engineers to get what they had been looking for, at least in the technical and administrative fields.

During this period, teen-age German boys tried to organize a resistance movement and called themselves *Werewolf*, a mythical animal half-man half-wolf. They made attempts at guerrilla warfare and tried to sabotage American cars and telephone lines, spoil food and pass out leaflets claiming that "the *Fuhrer* will be back and we shall win." It took several months to mop them up, and when caught, they claimed they were serving the *Fuhrer* and the country. As nasty as they were, at least they told the truth. Yet here was Krupp, the head of an international concern that had financed Hitler and the Nazi party from the start, that had helped to prepare attacks on peaceful countries to destroy them and take over their industries without any compensation, in line with a policy the Krupps had been involved in for generations, and I could not get a straight answer from him. He kept trying to explain that it was all business: Murdering civilians, and especially Jews, establishing slave camps and deporting innocent people was not an ideology, but just business.

In the war crimes trial, Krupp's defense lawyers claimed that he had been naive and inexperienced and had kept the

wrong company. The "wrong company" included Martin Bormann, Adolf Eichmann, Rheinhard Heydrich and Baldur von Schirach. Krupp had been the proud carrier of an *S.S.* membership card as well as one of the Nazis' main financial supporters. It was ludicrous for Krupp's lawyers to label him, as they had done at an international press conference, "a misguided young man." All the murderers who had surrounded Krupp had been the same age, and they had no doubt also been "misguided" !

My CIC commander decided that for the duration of the investigation I should stay in Villa Hugel. As I mentioned, the house was ugly and rather dark — people staying there did not smile. I went up the front staircase that led from the big reception hall to the private quarters, looking for a quiet, modest room. The chief butler accompanied me and I chose a room where I felt I could breathe.

"I will take this one," I said. The butler turned pale, his fingers were trembling: *"Es spuckt here."* [There are ghosts here.] It took some time until I could get the story. In 1918 Kaiser Wilhelm II had gone into exile to Holland. Hindenburg and other key officers had tried to convince him not to abdicate and to remain in Germany, but the rule of the Hohenzollerns had ended. Wilhelm had spent several days in this room on his way to Holland and some people believed that, since the Kaiser had become homeless after leaving Villa Hugel, his ghost kept returning to this room after his death.

Now I had to check the Krupps's private files. The files of Gustav Krupp, Alfried's father, included a lengthy correspondence with Hitler, Goebbels and other Nazi leaders. There were receipts for millions of DM that Krupp had transferred to the party, to the *S.S.*, to the Labor Front, and to other organizations. The biggest contribution had been to the Hitler *Stiftung* of the German Industry. The Krupps had paid Hitler for properties found all across Europe. There were big bank accounts in Sweden, Turkey, and Egypt, but the family's main fortune was supposed to be hidden in the salt mines of central Germany.

There was also a secret file, including confidential memos signed by leading German figures. We also found jewelry and papers belonging to other members of the family. In some of the safe boxes we found shaving cream, toothpaste and soap. The butler explained that toilet articles had been very scarce and valuable during the war and even Krupp had been forced to lock them up.

We continued working in Essen and in the Ruhr district during the whole of May and hardly noticed that the war was officially over. During April and May the army was busy catching and arresting war criminals, liberating the camps and destroying all vestiges of Nazi power. Victory was officially proclaimed on May 8, and our corps celebrated with a big parade in Beckum. Jasha Heifetz, the violinist who had been expelled from Germany, gave a concert for the armed forces. For the first time I attended a religious service with official prayers for the various religions represented in the army. I found this rather strange, but there we all stood in military formations while a rabbi, a Protestant minister and a Catholic priest went up to the podium to give thanks. The Jewish chaplain wore a skullcup and a *talit*, unlike the usual army practice.

The war in Europe was over but personally I felt bad. I was exhausted. Work pressure, lack of sleep and high emotional strain brought on a bout of depression. I was also very anxious about my family in Riga and kept trying to make contact with various organizations that I hoped would help me find them, but without any results. I received a two-week furlough and at the end of May went to Paris and then to London, where I had a chance to meet friends active in public affairs, especially in connection with Palestine: Dr. Arieh Altman, Gershon Rosoff, Mike Ben-Ami, Shura Katzenellenbogen, an old comrade from Riga, and again Yrma Halperin. All these meetings were very warm and everybody tried to cheer me up. I also met my Aunt Fanny, whom I had not seen since our meeting in Paris in 1939. Aunt Fanny lived in London with Doreen, who was very cool towards me. Doreen had married a non-Jew, and this had

upset my Uncle Isaac. I met her husband, Pat Skillington, and their beautiful two-year old daughter.

By the middle of June I returned to my base in Germany, only to be told that the 16th Corps would be moving in a few days to new headquarters at Chateau de Chantilly, the Rothschild family house near Paris. I had visited the chateau before the war and had greatly enjoyed its beautiful art collection. Our stay there was wonderful. We were very comfortable, each one of us had a private room and a private jeep. We spent a very relaxing time in this small town, where horse-racing had been the main activity. Previously there had been horses from all over France in the stables but when we arrived in Chantilly they had all been taken to Germany. We swam a lot in the lakes of Manoir de la Bonde, a residential hotel frequented by Parisian bohemians.

I did not have much work. I had to finish gathering the material about Krupp, preparing facts and figures on the conditions of slave labor and attending interviews with military lawyers assigned to the Nuremberg Trials. In 1947, Alfried Krupp was sentenced by the War Crimes Tribunal to twelve years imprisonment. He was charged with helping the Nazis to commit war crimes and with the extensive exploitation of slave laborers in his factories. In 1954, U.S. High Commissioner John McCloy granted an amnesty to Krupp and to several other industrialists, and Krupp returned to Villa Hugel. All their property, including holdings the Nazis had confiscated from Jews during the war as well as the products of slave labor, was returned to Krupp and other Nazi criminals. McCloy had been close to the American president during the war. He had advised against allowing entry to European Jews seeking refuge and against bombing the railways leading to the death camps. For German industrialists who had done booming business during the Hitler era, McCloy was a kind of hero. Prof. Guido Goldman, the son of Zionist leader Nahum Goldman, was active at Harvard in promoting a series of homages to McCloy, a friend of his family. Goldman became a "house

Jew," protecting McCloy's interests. Baron Ernst von Weizecker, Hitler's State Secretary, active in the S.S. and the *Gestapo* and the father of the present German president, was sentenced at Nuremberg to seven years imprisonment for his wartime crimes. He was later pardoned by McCloy and his sentence was reduced to one year.

During the time I spent in Chantilly, headquarters discovered from my personal file that I had once been a journalist and drafted me as a sports writer for the *Stars and Stripes*, the Army newspaper. I told the editors that I was ready to assume responsibility provided I did not have to cover baseball or basketball, of which I knew very little. I reported on the army swimming championships and on athletics. These assignments kept me mostly in Paris, where I was able to attend the *Rosh Ha-Shana and Yom Kippur* services held at the magnificent Trocadero Halls for hundreds of Jewish soldiers serving with the Allied forces.

But I was not feeling better. I was going through a very bad period, suffered from hallucinations and bouts of anxiety about the fate of my loved ones. A combination of physical symptoms and emotional strain finally brought me to the Paris army hospital, where I received excellent treatment, a comfortable private room and a great deal of kind attention.

8

Farewell to My Loved Ones

Nay, for Thy sake we are slain all day long
and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.
Rouse Thyself, why sleepest Thou, O Lord?
Awake! Do not cast us off forever!
Why dost Thou forget our affliction and oppression?
Psalms 44:23-25

In 1946, trying to return to civilian life, I was overcome by a black mood. I was sick and depressed, feeling guilty for having been unable to save my parents or at least my brother Asya, two years younger than me. His name was Yehezkel, after my paternal grandfather, but I could not pronounce his name when small and called him Asya, the name by which he became known to all. I thought of him as "Daddy's boy" feeling that my father favored him, while I was "Mommy's boy." Asya

was brown-haired and handsome, with a smiling face, and our son Lonny looks very much like him. Unlike me he was friendly and sociable, a dashing fellow and very popular with the girls. I was often jealous but also proud of him. Several of his friends from his teenage and student years still bear deep love and affection for Asya, as the enclosed letters show.

He had attended a Jewish school where German was the language of instruction. Minorities in Latvia were entitled to establish their own school systems and decide on the language of instruction. Thus, there were Jewish schools teaching in Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian or German, and several languages were sometimes taught in the same school. At home we spoke Russian, though our parents spoke Yiddish whenever they wanted to keep secrets from us.

Asya had been a proud Jew and a devoted Zionist. We had not suffered from anti-Semitism and had no complexes about our Jewishness. There were no feelings of inferiority or signs of a ghetto mentality in our circle, and it was only during the war that we first encountered this pathology. Asya was intelligent but not very interested in his studies. While still in high-school he founded and became the chairman of the Zionist Fraternity *Lebanonia*, and later studied electrical engineering in Paris.

When returning to Riga from his studies in Paris in the fall of 1939 Asya stoppped over to see me in Warsaw, where I was on an *Irgun* assignment. It was a moving reunion and we spent the night talking earnestly about the situation of the family in Riga.

"You must all leave Latvia," I demanded. "Father will never leave," he said. "So I will come and drag all of you out." "You will be arrested upon arrival at the station. You evaded service in the Latvian Army and you are blacklisted." "The family in Australia can send you visas whenever you wish." "Father says that in Riga he is established and independent. After selling all his property he will be left holding Latvian money that will be worth nothing abroad. He will never agree to be dependent on

his in-laws." And so we went on and on until we came to the most difficult question, himself. Asya could have had any visa he wanted, a "capitalist" one to Palestine, or a French one through his closest friends in Paris, the Sandors, or an Australian one. "How can I leave our parents now, with the war and economic troubles?" "So I will join you," was my answer. "If you do that you will not only not help me, but we shall both be in trouble."

At that time Asya had far-reaching plans for future work in underdeveloped countries. He often talked to me about starting a new venture in the Philippines and was quite optimistic about its prospects. But despite his full awareness of the looming dangers and knowing the family's bitter experience during the last war, he felt it was his duty to return in order to be with our parents. He would not even discuss his future plans with them so as not to make them unhappy.

I tried to persuade him, as I had tried to do with my father during our Helsinki meeting in 1938, to immigrate with the family to Palestine or to Australia. Asya's view was that this decision should be taken by my parents and they were against it. So they stayed and he stayed with them. His last words to me were: "Our people need you, so you stay with the *Irgun*. Our parents need me, so I am going back to Riga." He paid with his young life for his loyalty to our parents.

We were together for only a few days and he charmed all my friends in Warsaw, including Raziel and the Strassmans. This was our last meeting.

After returning from Warsaw Asya joined my father in the family business, and then took over after my father's stroke. By the time my father died in May 1940 Asya had already been drafted into the Latvian Army and he was only given a few days leave to attend the funeral and be with Mother.

Soon after my father's death Latvia was occupied by Soviet troops and my family was forced to relive the painful experiences of World War I. The one year of Soviet control seemed to last a lifetime. Communist Russia and the Bolsheviks were

back in Riga. Persecutions and tortures began anew and "capitalists" and "Zionists" were again the first targets. All property was nationalized and our business now belonged to the state. My mother was temporarily employed as a bookkeeper in our business, and Asya was fired because of his "capitalist" background. A full circle had now been drawn and our family was once more under the tyrannic control of a Communist dictatorship. Asya and mother were forced to give up our home and were assigned two small rooms in a dirty, neglected slum. Three months later they were moved to one room without running water. Asya was conscripted and my mother, left to suffer alone, kept writing to me about her efforts to be a good "bookkeeper" and maintain morale.

When the Germans occupied Riga in June 1941 they established a ghetto, introduced forced labor and began their murderous attacks. Together with a few friends from his fraternity Asya established an underground resistance cell and attempted to break out of the ghetto by stopping a car with German soldiers. The Germans and two of Asya's friends were killed in the exchange of fire. The others escaped and joined the partisans in a forest close to the Estonian border, near Valka, where they engaged in guerilla activities, attacking cargo convoys and German cars. Latvian peasants collaborating with the Nazis soon betrayed them and S.S. units attacked them by surprise. Only a few of them survived, though seriously wounded. Russian partisans rescued them several weeks later and eventually told the story of their struggle and death. I heard the details through a school friend who managed to escape to Leningrad and later returned to Riga, and I assume this report to be correct.

My mother remained alone in the ghetto, old and ill. I do not know how she survived these dreadful months, but in December 1941 she was forced to march with everyone to the execution place in Rumbuli. I doubt that she could have walked the fourteen kilometers to Rumbuli in the midst of the Russian

winter. She probably collapsed and was murdered by the Germans on the way.

It took me many years to establish all this. In the meantime, while stationed in Chantilly, France in the summer of 1945 I read that the president of the Russian Red Cross was coming to London. The chairperson of the British Red Cross was Mrs. Winston Churchill, and my friend Yrma Halperin arranged to introduce me to her. Mrs. Churchill arranged an appointment for me with her counterpart, a Russian general. I gave him a detailed memo about my mother and Asya, only to be faced with a superior, condescending smile: "Millions have perished. How can we look for your family?" He clearly did not want to waste any time on me, but in view of the introduction talked to me for fifteen minutes and took my memo.

After the war I desperately sought information about the fate of my family. I contacted people, checked with refugee organizations and placed ads in European and American newspapers that reached the survivors. I wanted to speak to anyone who may have had any contact with them but there was only silence, the silence of death.

At this time, tense with anxiety, I had a dream which neither logic nor psychology could help me explain. I dreamt that I returned to our apartment in Riga, in Strelnieku Iela. The big entrance hall was as it had always been, furnished with a table and chairs. In one corner we used to hang our coats and in another was a set of boxes, on top of which my mother used to place her hats. In my dream I looked in this corner and saw a letter addressed to me. I recognized my mother's handwriting. I opened the envelope and found only a photograph of a skull. I do not know how, but I recognized it without doubt as my mother's skull. I was shocked. Then I saw a little note attached which only said : "Kislev 7-9." That is all I remembered. I did not know then when my family had been murdered, and I knew the names of some months, but I was certainly not familiar with the Jewish calendar.

About six months later, in the fall of 1946, I read that Rabbi Mordechai Nurock had arrived in New York. He had been a member of the Latvian parliament and for a short time even a Prime Minister. He had also been a prominent leader of Latvian Jewry and our first floor neighbor. I traced him down to the McAlpin Hotel and went to see him. It was a very moving encounter. He told me that when the Russians entered Riga in 1940 they arrested him as a Zionist leader and exiled him to an eastern province in the Soviet Union, thereby unwittingly saving his life. His wife and his two small sons stayed behind and were murdered by the Germans. As far as he knew, my mother and brother had been sent to the Riga ghetto. A group of young people, led by Asya, shot their way out of the ghetto, commandeered a car and escaped to the north. My mother stayed behind in the ghetto. The first massive executions or, as the Nazis called it, the "liquidation" of the Riga ghetto, took place during the seventh, eighth and ninth of Kislev.

Who shall know the ways of Heaven?

Thoughts and images of my mother and my loved ones in Riga tortured me endlessly.

Butts of rifles.
Sticks with nails.
Hit the *Zyids.*
Push them, drag them.
Dig them out of the ghetto holes.
On to the snow-covered highway.
On to the murder fields of Rumbuli.

December 1941. My terrified mother steps into line in this biting winter day, trembling with cold. The road to Rumbuli — the road of Jewish death, covered with broken bodies, red rivers of blood on the white sparkling snow, broken heads, open eyes frozen, and the crippled hands and legs of all those too weak to obey orders. Jews fallen on a white highway. Her eyes swollen, looking ahead but not seeing the white clouds and the blood on the December snow. Her little soul jumps to

the top of the tree and looks down upon this great stream of humanity. It asks whether these bodies were people before, real people with smiles and warm words, with names, and homes, and children. There is no answer. Only silence between the sporadic shots and the pounding of the rifle butts. This work of destruction is the song of the sons of Goethe and Schiller, a creation of Teutonic philosophers, the great symphony of German culture.

The souls of the victims climb to the tops of the hills and the trees. They look down at this human chain, half dead, half dragging on, and remember these people once singing and dancing, smiling and praying. They cannot grasp how satanic Satan can be, delaying the kill in order to prolong the torture.

German and Latvian cohorts line the road and the eyes of the Jews look to the sky and search for God. Where is He? Is He hiding? Did His angels disappear? Perhaps He was never there? They do not see Him and do not hear Him. Is He punishing His children? Satan's poisonous smile hangs from the bushes and covers the sky. In Rumbuli, Jewish prayers are soundless and homeless; they darken the sky. All are orphans. Only orphans, His orphans, are left. My mother drags herself along facing this satanic hunger for more torture and more pain.

She bites her lips and calls for her sons, embracing them and their unborn children. She only asks for death and prays for an end to her life, her life of torture, pain and loneliness.

A soundless scream, the mute anthem of Rumbuli Jews. But the butts do not hit strong enough and the bullet misses her. The Germans gloat in their victory. The Jews of Riga who survived this terror reach the fields of Rumbuli. The graves are ready, surrounded by machine guns. There are no farewell sounds and no cries. The great free world looks away from the Jews of Rumbuli. My mother stands quietly and looks at the guns. Did you have the strength, mother? From where did you draw strength to reach Rumbuli? You face the Germans together with the children of Riga — singers of songs and makers

of music, builders of towns and factories, merchants and poets. They have been robbed of their speech, their smiles, their strength, and they all disappear in the stream of death and the ocean of dirt. The leaders of the free human world are far, far away.

My mother speaks to her children, to all the children. She asks: "Will you live? Can you live? Will you avenge these horrors? Will you have your own children and smile again?" At the edge of the pit my mother's heart speaks to me, to the world and to Heaven. She then falls into the darkness. She dies without crying. Lips frozen and soundless. There are no prayers, no *Kaddish.* Time stopped at Rumbuli. Time is frozen and stands still.

"Die Strasse frei den braunen Battalionen..." Swastikas push the sun out of the sky into an endless grey emptiness. Mother goes to another sun and a different planet, millions of years away, to have a rest and to smile again.

The children of God, of prophets and kings, became His orphans and dropped into a deep, black oblivion. All their supplications became dark clouds, turning the sky into the shelter of their homeless prayers and their lost hopes. Beauty and music were buried in the pits under the rattle of machine-gun fire. And only my mother's voice came to me through the clouds — "Good-bye, Sasha."

9

The Post-War Years

After spending some time at the General Army Hospital in Cherbourg I returned to the U.S. on board the hospital boat Francis Langer. I landed at Staten Island on October 31, 1945, was treated to a gourmet dinner at Camp Kilmer, New York, and sent on to Camp Upton, Long Island, where I received medical treatment for a few months. On the day of my discharge I was called in to see an officer. He offered me the compensation benefits granted to soldiers wounded in service, amounting to twenty-five percent of my earning capacity. I was surprised. Compensation had never entered my mind and I felt that the offer put a slight on my military record. All I cared about were the grounds for my discharge. "It will be a medical discharge, naturally," was the answer. "No, never" I said. "If you won't accept a medical discharge, we can't give you any compensation." Again I refused. Many years later I did need the money, but by then there was no way to establish my claims as the archives had burned down and my papers with them.

I returned to New York sick and depressed. The world seemed a large desert and I shared nothing with those around me. I began drinking and leading a wild life, obssesed with thoughts about my family. Could I have saved Mother and Asya? I had in the past dealt quite succesfully with security men more sophisticated than the Latvian police, so why hadn't I tried? It took me some time to regain my balance but eventually I came to feel I should not let the Germans destroy me too. Helped by good friends and by a well-known psychoanalyst, Prof. Eliasberg, I was able to resume the normal course of my life and somehow made peace with the world around me.

After my years of military service, first in the *Irgun* and then in the U.S. army, I was a civilian again. Adventure and danger were now behind. I realized I was responsible only to myself, able to set my own aims and pursue them, and I decided to become independent and start a business. The business world had not been attractive to me until then. My father and my grandparents had been merchants and manufacturers and I respected them, but I had not seen this as my calling. My aspirations had been different. I had wanted to be an intellectual, formulate ideas and influence people but after the war, my army service and, above all, the murder of my family, I changed my mind.

For those of my comrades in the *Irgun* whose families lived in Palestine the Holocaust had been a moral and political issue rather than a personal one. They tried to re-enlist me into the service of the *Irgun* so that I would continue with my political work. This was a difficult decision and I hesitated. I did not want to return to politics and felt I had done my duty by serving in the underground as well as in the war. For twelve years I had neglected my family and my profession and delayed attaining financial independence. The memories of my meetings with Asya and with my parents before the war were still vivid in my mind and I was tortured by the idea that, had my circumstances been different, I might have been able to help them. Now I had to find a way to establish myself.

My friend Erica Meier was a young lady from Vienna and a very shrewd businesswoman. She guided my initial business ventures and in 1946 helped me establish my first company under the name of Commonwealth International Corporation. It was located at 2 Beekman St., just off Wall Street. The title was slightly bombastic for the size of the initiative I had launched. My capital was $3000, made up of my army severance pay and the capitalization of my army life insurance. After the war there were acute shortages of machinery and electrical appliances, especially in the Third World. I bought up used industrial machines or refrigerators from buildings undergoing renovations, overhauled them and shipped them to India, Pakistan, and other countries. As a discharged combat veteran I had special privileges in obtaining export licenses and my company began doing very well, but I never became a real businessman. I lacked the necessary "touch" in financial matters and was not a true "wheeler-dealer," but I was interested in the dynamics of production. My later businesses never became big concerns or stunning financial successes, but they kept me and my family independent.

Several people were helpful to me at different stages of my business life. I had a rather ambivalent relationship with Sam Dubiner, who became my business partner in Israel. I should also mention Julian Licht, a very successful engineer and a friend from my Riga school-days, whom I had not seen for over twenty years and who looked me up after seing my photo in a list of war veterans. Julian owned several houses in New York and acted as chief consultant to the Burmese leader, General Ne-Win. Julian and Erica gave me some introductory lectures on American business.

I was under constant pressure to return to political work. The *Irgun* was involved in a two-pronged effort to help Jewish displaced persons reach Palestine. This entailed mobilizing public opinion in support of free immigration as well as finding and financing boats and getting them past the British blockade. By January 1947 I had succumbed and was back in

Washington up to my ears in *Irgun* work and neglecting my business, which was left in the hands of Erica and Julian. I was once more addressing public meetings and raising funds, mainly in Miami Beach, Florida.

At this time the authorities in Italy, France, and Greece gave in to British pressure and barred Jewish DPs [displaced persons] from entering their countries, which had served as exit ports to Palestine. They now required DPs to have visas for a final destination as a condition for receiving transit visas. But no humanitarian democracy had as yet agreed to take in homeless Jews, so how could we obtain final destination visas? We began establishing contacts with governments and politicians in several Central American countries. We also needed passports to enable our comrades who had escaped from British prison camps in Africa to return home via Europe. We devised a plan that called for contacting these countries and asking them to grant us immigration visas, which we guaranteed would only be used by our people to reach European ports that would serve as departure points to Palestine.

Our first contact was with general Tiburcio Carias, the President of Honduras. I was assigned to this job and flew to Tegucigalpa, the Hondurian capital. Tegucigalpa was quite a primitive town, without proper roads or trains. People were kind, and almost everyone depended on the banana plantations for their livelihood. I had been given a letter of introduction by a prominent Jewish businessman with offices in downtown Manhattan, who was a leading importer of goods from Honduras. Officials in Honduras had been willing to sell individual visas but were a bit wary of involvement in a plan dealing with thousands of cases, which is what we needed. The President, a descendant of Maya Indians, had only very vague notions about Palestine and about *aliyah*. He did express a great deal of sympathy and understanding for our struggle, but business was business.

After my introductory meeting with Dr. Carias, who spoke only Spanish, I had a few operational meetings with Dr.

Duron, their foreign minister. They agreed to "sell" us two consulates, that is, to supply us with authentic papers and forms. The name of the "consul," who would be our man, was to be filled in later. The "consul" would issue fictitious entry visas to Honduras, which Jewish DPs could then use to obtain transit visas to enter the Mediterranean countries from which they could board ships to Palestine. We paid several thousand dollars for each consulate and gave financial guarantees that no one would actually use these visas to enter Honduras.

We had a problem deciding where to set up these consulates. All the Hondurian consulates in the Mediterranean cities where we were active, such as Marseille or Toulon, had already been "sold" for commercial transactions and we kept looking for suitable venues. I then remembered my school history lessons and suggested Avignon. True, Avignon was not a seaport, but who cared? So Avignon it was.

I went on to make similar arrangements in Nicaragua and flew to Managua, Nicaragua's capital. The plane was an old Dakota, sold by the American Air Force and piloted by wild ex-servicemen. On my first night in Managua I heard noises and tanks rolling in the streets but in the morning everything was quiet again. I later heard in New York that there had been an attempt at a revolution. Mauricio Pataki, a Hungarian Jew from Managua and a business associate of Nicaragua's President Anastasio Somoza, was very helpful. During the War of Independence I met Pataki's son in Israel serving as a major in *Mahal*, the overseas voluteer corps, and commanding a unit that fought the Kaukji forces in the north of Israel. In San Salvador I met Dr. Ernst Liebes, who was a prominent businessman and had been a member of the *KJV* in Germany. He led me through the Central American political jungle. I tried to make similar arrangements in Guatemala too, but the country was under American control and they feared to take any steps the Americans might object to. I did manage to see their magnificent scenery, Lake Atitlan and the old Indian city of Chichicastenango.

After returning to Washington and reporting on the results of my mission I was assigned to the United Nations meetings scheduled to take place at Lake Success to deal with the "Palestine problem." Like the Free French and the Free Poles, we had established a similar organization on our way to independence. It was called the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation (HCNL) and we were granted observer status in the United Nations. My official accreditation card was in the name of Dr. Alex Hadani. I was in close contact with delegates from several South American countries who supported our position, especially Sr. Santa Cruz, the representative from Chile, Sr. Zulvaga from Venezuela, and Dr. Granados from Guatemala, who were particularly helpful. I was in touch with the temporary Polish delegation and also had several friendly meetings with Jan Masaryk, the son of the founder of the Czechoslovak republic, Tomas Masaryk. Although not a Communist himself, Jan Masaryk was the foreign minister of post-war Communist Czechoslovakia, and the Communists used him because of the international respect commanded by his name. Masaryk had to be very careful about anything he said or did. He understood our needs, expressed warm support for the idea of establishing a Jewish State and was anxious to help us as far as he could. Needless to say, the news of his suicide, or perhaps murder, was a terrible shock to us all.

We continued expanding our international connections with other groups involved in their own struggle for national independence. Frances Gunther introduced us to Jawaharlal Nehru, the leader of the Indian Congress. Although we shared a common enemy, Nehru could not be helpful to us and his main concern was to gain access to the American political circles we were connected with. Nehru's sister, Madame Pandit, later the Indian ambassador to the U.S. and Sayyid Hussein, a Moslem Congress leader who later became the first Indian ambassador to Cairo attended our meetings and established contacts with many of our supporters. Sayyid Hussein and Madame Pandit had been in love at a younger age and had wanted to get mar-

The Hollywood Committee of the American League for a Free Palestine
Front Row Left: Mrs. Spitz of Universal International Pictures, George A. Jessel
At Rear Center: Quentin Reynolds, Will Rogers Jr., Author 1946





Executive Board of the Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe. Washington, D.C., 1943
Form Left: Prof. Max Lerner, U.S. Senator E. Langer, Eri Jabotinsky, Will Rogers Jr., A. Ben-Eliezer, Author



President of Israel Mr. Yitshak Ben-Zvi with Mrs. Rahel Yanait Ben-Zvi visiting the factory. Sam Dubiner right.



Marion and Henry Hassenfeld visit Jerusalem Pencils Ltd. 1952



20th Anniversary of the establishment of Jerusalem Pencils Ltd. June 1971
From Left to Right: Merrill and Sylvia Hassenfeld, Harold Hassenfeld, Esther, Karni, Author



Heidelberg Friends meet at Beth HaNasi — 60 years later
Left to Right: Gustav Schocken, Rudi Hecht, Author





The New Management of the Jerusalem Pencils group. Asi and Lonny

Dedication of dormitory at Hebrew University in Jerusalem in memory of Asya.
Left to Right: Phyllis and Aaron Saharov, Esther, Aunty Hanna Kahn, Author

ried but her Orthodox Brahmin family, and especially Nehru, refused to allow this. We also met Sygman Rhee, the founder of the modern Korean Republic, who had led his country's war against the Japanese. He had lived in exile for many years and had married an Austrian Jewish woman. She was an unpleasant person and a self-hating Jew. Rhee's offices in Washington were next to ours, on Massachusetts Avenue, and he was also supportive of our endeavor, as were the Indonesians.

It seems we were a bit too creduluous when we believed that these contacts would eventually be helpful to the foreign relations of the future Jewish state. In addition to these Asian nations the *Irgun* had already established close contact with the Lebanese Maronites through Eri Jabotinsky, and with the Kurds, the Basques, the Irish, and the Serbs through the Paris office in 1938- 1939. But all our help was soon forgotten and none of them were available when Israel needed their support.

At this time we received the shocking news that our friend Boosya Lvova had been murdered in Japan while serving with the U.S. forces, probably by servicemen in the American occupation army. All the signs indicated that she had been sexually attacked and was killed while trying to fight back. Her body was brought back to Toronto, where her father lived, although she had not had any contact with him and had been living with her mother in Harbin. Her father was an unpleasant, ignorant man, who refused to talk to me or even shake my hand. He kept telling everyone that the *Irgun* had made a secret terrorist deal and she had been killed in action, which was absolute nonsense, as she had only wanted to finish her service in Japan and return to Harbin. Her father even refused to let me say a few words of farewell at the funeral and all I could do was put some flowers on her grave. I was devastated.

At the end of the war the *Irgun* had established a *mateh lagola* [Diaspora headquarters] in Paris headed by Eliyahu Lankin, who was later the commander of the *Altalena.* Yaakov Meridor, who had been the *Irgun's* commander since Razi's death and had escaped from Gilgil, a British prison camp in

Africa, reached Paris after Lankin. Since our American committee was an integral part of the *Irgun* we obviously worked closely with the *mateh.* I was asked to join the work in Europe and moved to the Paris office. The *Irgun* delegation had reached the U.S. in 1939, and we had been cut off from Palestine during the war, a kind of "isolated battalion" deciding on priorities in line with our own understanding. Now the war was over and we all worked together within the *mateh la-gola* for free immigration and for the establishment of a Jewish state. But the conflict between the *Irgun* commanders and Hillel Kook, who wanted to retain his independent policy, continued.

Eli Tavin was commander of military operations in Europe, which were mainly directed against British military installations, while we continued our attempts to bring olim and arms into Palestine. The *Irgun* had also established a string of command posts throughout Europe charged with the training of young Holocaust survivors. We had come out in the open and were now doing by ourselves what we had done before the war with the help of the Polish government — training young Jews, assembling weapons and mobilizing political help from countries that supported the idea of a Jewish State. Our object was to organize an army in Europe, transport it to Palestine, and capture whatever territory we could hold. We would then proclaim ourselves as the temporary Jewish government of these areas and gain a right to be represented in the international political forums on an equal basis. Jabotinsky had already approved this idea in 1939 but the outbreak of the war prevented its implementation.

My tasks were not too clearly defined, but I was generally required to establish political contacts and find and purchase weapons. The work was interesting but very demanding. I met many interesting people, among them Maurice Thorez, the leader of the French Communist party. Although it was hard to imagine why the Communists would wish to become friendly with us, they had nevertheless been looking for a contact. Its

share in Hitler's defeat notwithstanding, Britain was still a colonial power in their eyes and thus a legitimate target. They were obviously less interested in our struggle than in causing harm to British interests and in their own image as supporters of an Arab Middle East. Our concern was not with French internal politics but with seizing an opportunity to purchase weapons. There were plenty in the former French Communist underground, but we only enjoyed the support of the former *Maquis* within the party and it was not easy to buy from them. I met Thorez several times. He was friendly, polite and very interested in the structure and the methods of the *Irgun*. Our local supporters decided to act independently and defy Moscow's orders. Jean Paul Sartre was of great help on this count. He was not a member of the Communist party but was ideologically close to them, and his considerable influence proved decisive.

Besides the tasks that had been assigned to me I was put in charge of a so-far non-existent "Air Force." We recruited Jewish pilots and non-Jewish airmen sympathetic to our cause who had served in the Allied forces and had soon enlisted over fifty experienced ex-servicemen. Yaakov Meridor believed that this group could help the S.S. Altalena in its mission. The leading figures were Yehiel Ratushniak from the R.A.F. and later an *El-Al* pilot; Meir Silberstein, from the Free French Forces, and Paul Kadar from the R.A.F. and later a colonel in the Israeli air force. There were also many pilots from South Africa and the U.S.. We managed to purchase several planes and the South African pilots helped our people escape from British prison camps, while others helped with *aliyah* and established important contacts. There were many bureaucratic complications and we were often at odds with airport authorities.

We bought two Loadstar planes and one Hudson in Canada, and we also had a Chorli plane and a Piper. The personnel of this unit was concentrated in Paris and the commanding headquarters were at Ave. de Messine. I was responsible for the supervision of this group and the technical commander was

Yehiel Ratushniak. The aeroplanes were second-hand and some were not in good condition. All the planes were later transferred to Zevi Dinstein, our vice-minister of finance and representative of the newly established Israeli government in Geneva.

All this activity isolated me from my business ventures in New York. I allowed the name of the company I had established in New York, the Commonwealth International Corporation which Mike Ben-Ami and Julian Licht were managing in my absence, to be used as a cover for certain *Irgun* missions, such as buying planes. For the first eighteen months the reports indicated that the company was making money and I asked my friends to transfer the profits to our immigration work.

While I was combing Brussels and Antwerp, Zurich and Basle in search for political contacts and weapons to purchase, I received the news that our political department had succeeded in bringing Aryeh Ben-Eliezer and Yitzhak Shamir over to France. They had been imprisoned in a British camp in Ethiopia and England was pressing for their extradition, as they were Palestinian citizens. The French refused to comply, however, and they were brought back to Toulon on a French destroyer. Hillel Kook, Abrasha Stavsky and I went to pick them up. The French authorities were very warm and hospitable. We took the night-train back to Paris and spent the time catching up with the news. I brought Aryeh up to date but Shamir did not take part in our happy exchange and remained cool and reserved, answering our questions with a simple yes or no. He obviously considered himself an independent *Lehi [Lohamei Herut Israel]* man, and kept aloof from us. He was unaware that the two groups had by then been reunited. We could not know then that Aryeh, a valiant fighter and a dear friend, would rise to become the assistant Knesset Speaker, loved and respected by all, or that Shamir, a dedicated *Lehi* fighter of few words and tough action, would become Prime Minister of Israel.

We received news that the Zionist executive had decided to proclaim a Jewish state on May 15, 1948. Obviously, we all wanted to be in Palestine for the occasion,but how to get there? The country was isolated. In our group were several *Irgun* members who had escaped from British camps in African countries and others who had come to Europe after the war to conduct military operations against the British. Some had Palestinian passports and some had no passports at all. No one would rent us a plane to fly to Palestine, which was considered a danger zone. Thus began my attempts to charter a plane to Palestine as "an American businessman," but no one wanted to fly there.

I managed to convince the French office of British Airways to fly to Lod. I promised them that three of the pilots in our group would accompany the flight and that they would land safely. Our group included Yaakov Meridor, Eytan Livni, Aryeh Ben Eliezer, Hillel Kook, Eri Jabotinsky, Dr. Yunichman and others. I felt better knowing that we could rely on someone else besides the British pilots in case of complications. We flew an American Dakota and left from Le Bourget, near Paris.

Everybody was in very high spirits, though no one actually knew where we were going to land and who controlled Lod airport. After flying over Athens we heard on the radio that Lod had been captured by the Arabs and that a battle was going on in Ramleh. What were the other options? Haifa was still in British hands and that left only Sde Dov, near Tel Aviv, a small airport used mainly for light planes and Pipers. The British pilots refused to land, claiming that the airport was too small for a Dakota and the risks could be fatal. They decided to land in Cyprus. I informed them we could not accept their decision and that our own pilots, who were with me in the cockpit and were armed, would land the plane if they did not want to. The British gave in. We began circling Sde Dov and managed to land by the skin of our teeth. We opened the door and found ourselves surrounded by *Haganah* men. Only an hour and a half earlier

the Egyptian Air Force had bombed Sde Dov and the northern suburbs of Tel Aviv, and the *Haganah* men had been worried by the appearance of our Dakota, which carried no identification marks. They did not know who we were and were ready to shoot at us. The date was May 15, 1948, and the time three o'clock in the afternoon, right before the birth of the State of Israel. We were home.

We arranged with the British pilots that they would fly to Cyprus for a few days and then pick us up in Haifa, which was still a British enclave. I paid them one third of the rental fee and promised to pay the rest in Haifa.

There were a few good laughs when the *Haganah* people asked to see our visas. "What visas, *haverim?*" I asked them. "British or Israeli? There was no Israeli consulate in France." They then accompanied us to Tel-Aviv harbour, which was registered as our port of entrance. We had a date to meet Begin, the leader of the *Irgun*, at five p.m., and in the hour I had left I went to visit my Aunt Ella, and my cousins Phyllis and Aaron Saharov. Everyone was flabbergasted to see me and wanted to know where I had come from.

We met with Begin in the house of Giddy (Gideon) Paglin, the commander of *Irgun* operations. Begin announced that the *Irgun* would place its military units under the command of the provisional government and would only remain autonomous in Jerusalem, which had not yet been recognized as part of the State of Israel. *Irgun* units were at that time engaged in a bitter fight with Arab forces around Ramleh. Couriers were coming in to report developments, and Begin went on air on the *Irgun* radio to declare his loyalty to the State and encourage the *Irgun* units fighting in Ramleh. The announcer was Shalom Rosenfeld, a well-known writer and journalist and later the chief editor of *Ma'ariv*, the daily afternoon paper.

The next day we began talking about the future. Begin told us of plans to dissolve the *Irgun* as a military organization and create a political party named *Herut*, which would participate in the coming national elections. He invited us to join but I

could not agree. I said that I could not join a party about which I knew so little. The *Irgun* was a Jewish military organization, and I had felt it was my duty to support its struggle. Had I remained in Riga I would have had to join the Latvian Army, as my brother did, so I decided to volunteer for the *Irgun*, but when it came to political parties I wanted to know the program, the plans and the method before I could decide. Begin saw my point and did not insist. Hillel Kook, Eri Jabotinsky and Shmuel Merlin joined the party and were on *Herut's* list to the first Knesset. I did not feel I needed to join the party to serve my people in the future.

On May 18th I passed the British checkpost in Hadera, which the British controlled until their total withdrawal, and I boarded the plane in Haifa. That evening I was back with Hillel in Paris. Most of our boys were busy in Port de Buc fitting out the S.S. Altalena, which would take a cargo of weapons and over 1,000 passengers, including 250 women. It was an LST boat of over 4500 tons, and well-suited to transport the passengers and the military cargo. The task was not easy since people were arriving from all over Europe, but by June 17, just over a month after the establishment of the State, the Altalena left Port de Buc on its way to Israel.

The tragic ending of this voyage was totally unexpected. Much has been written about this sad chapter and I shall not repeat the story. What is clear to me is that we had an agreement with Israel Galili and other *Haganah* leaders responsible for the creation of the IDF [Israel Defence Forces], stating that our units would join the IDF, 80% of the weapons would go to the IDF and 20% to *Irgun* units in Jerusalem. What happened in the end shows that either the *Haganah* command cheated us and Ben Gurion was not informed of the terms of our agreement or that Ben Gurion acted in bad faith. The Altalena brought more weapons to Israel than the *Haganah* had managed to bring in more than thirty years, and nearly one thousand soldiers would have considerably strengthened IDF forces in 1948. Seventeen people were killed in the attack on

the boat, including Abraham Stavsky. Shmuel Merlin was seriously wounded, and the consequences would have been even more tragic had Begin not given clear orders not to shoot back. This incident will be discussed for many years to come. It was a very sad beginning for the new state and clouded the joy of attaining national independence.

After the birth of the State there were much better conditions for bringing in *olim*. However, we lacked suitable boats for transporting the weapons still being bought in France, some through the French government and some through the former French underground. The available boats were either too small or too expensive and we were told we would find some the right size in Sicily.

In June 1948 Mike Ben Ami phoned me from New York and asked me to go to Palermo. I was to meet an Italian general in Rome to secure landing space for our planes and then fly Alitalia to Palermo, where I was to remain seated in the plane until picked up. I had no idea of what any of this was about. In Palermo I was indeed picked up in the plane by a short fellow speaking American slang with an Italian accent. He took me to the Las Palmas Hotel and told me to wait there until someone contacted me. After two days, the same fellow came back and informed me:

"The boss will see you."

"How do I find him?"

"Just go to the dining room and the *maitre d'* will direct you."

"Fine."

Soon after, I found myself facing a pale and haggard man with jumpy eyes. He must have been about sixty. "Do you know Morgenthau?"

I did not quite follow him.

"They tell me you are a friend of Morgenthau."

Henry Morgenthau had supported the efforts of the Emergency Committee during the war and I obviously knew Morgenthau, though I was not sure he knew me. But what did this man

want? And why Morgenthau? I had better be careful. "Well," I said, "he's not exactly my friend, but I know him. I have met him."

"Don't pretend. They tell me from New York that he's your friend and that you can help me." I simply could not trace the connection between Morgenthau and the boats. Suddenly it dawned on me that I must be talking to Lucky Luciano, the head of the Italian *Mafia* in the United States, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment. When the Americans decided to open a second front in Sicily in 1944 they asked Luciano to mobilize the help of the local *Mafia*, in exchange for which they would pardon Luciano provided he left the country and never came back. Luciano agreed to the bargain and the landing proceeded smoothly and with a minimum of casualties. Now, three years after the end of the war, Luciano was talking to me about finding a way for him to return to the U.S. "If you help me get back to America I'll get you all the boats you need." I had to think fast and watch my step. "Well," I said, "we can promise you that we'll try our best to help you. But surely you understand the decision is not in our hands. The government will have to decide."

We talked for a couple of hours and I must admit that his style was familiar to me from Hollywood movies, which had captured the type quite succesfully. We agreed on further action and the next morning I was driven around by one of Luciano's people, who took me to see some of the harbours around the island. A jeep of armed men drove behind us. We had to find out who was ready to sell and check the boats. All the fishermen consented to sell as soon as they saw my companion, at a price to be agreed upon at a later time. By the end of the day we had "registered" between twenty to twenty-five boats of the right size and we agreed I would later send our maritime expert to finalize the arrangements.

We all felt it would be better for me not to phone or cable from Sicily. British intelligence was rather efficient in Italy and France and we did not want to take any chances. I wanted

to leave Palermo to report on the results of my mission as soon as possible but Luciano insisted I should attend a party and meet some of his friends. I found about twelve men and three women gathered in a sparsely furnished cellar. I looked around and felt I was watching a Hollywood gangster movie. My neighbor at the table introduced himself, "I'm Johnny the Crooked. What's your name? What's your territory?" I really don't remember how I got out of that one.

As soon as I got to Rome I managed to phone Paris and New York to report on my assignment, but the Israeli government was by then several months old and the urgent need for boats had lessened. There was no longer any need for an underground movement, and I could again retire, so to say, to private life.

Back at our Paris headquarters in Avenue de Messine I found several guests. First of all Frieda Eskin, who belonged to a group of Russian Jewish families that had escaped to Harbin when the Bolsheviks assumed power. They had established a well-organized Jewish community there, active in the Zionist movement and affiliated mainly with the Revisionists. She was a close friend of Boosya, whose life had ended so tragically. There was also a delegation of American supporters from Washington D.C., including Congressman Sommers from Brooklyn, Prof. Fowler Harper of Harvard University, and Harry Selden, chairman of the executive of the ALFP, all loyal friends of our cause. Sommers and Harper were Gentiles, who were strongly identified with the struggle for Israel.

Samuel Dubiner from Toronto, together with his wife Betty and his business associate Albert Crangle came to visit us in Paris. Sam was a succesful businessman who owned plastics factories in Canada, the U.S. and England. He was a gifted marketing man, and among other items, developed the popular yo-yo. He was known as the yo-yo king of the world. He organized teams that travelled around the world demonstrating the beauty and the tricks of yo-yo.

In the course of time Sam became interested in politics and was elected chariman of the Canadian League for a Free Palestine. He often visited us in New York and frequently invited me to stay with his family in Toronto. Political work had drawn us closer and Sam began urging me to quit public affairs and join his business. My Commonwealth Company was not serious in his eyes. He suggested I join his enterprise, study the plastics business and become vice-president in charge of foreign development. It was a tempting offer but I had reservations because of my desire to return to Israel. Sam had been attempting to persuade me to join him for quite some time. After my return from Paris I became a "student" of industrial affairs, involved in subjects of which I had known very little until then, such as planning and production processes and particularly the marketing system, a crucial aspect of the plastics industry. Although I imagined that work in Israel would be more modest and less glamorous, I was sure it would be more meaningful to me personally, as Canada did not feel like home. Sam nevertheless tried to convince me to stay in Canada, where most of his business enterprises were concentrated, claiming that I could probably be more helpful to our cause by becoming rich and contributing money to Israel. Perhaps I should have stayed, but the memories of my family, of the war and the Holocaust allayed any possible doubts. My decision was final and Sam's spontaneous and enthusiastic reaction was, "If you go, I'll go with you and we'll work together." That marked the birth of our partnership. I would have the advantage of his counsel but I had to establish the company and run it all by myself. The future factory would be called Dura — Dubiner-Rafaeli.

We decided that I would go to Israel to do some market research. There were no regular commercial flights yet and a group of us chartered a plane. We had engine trouble in Rome and it took us three days to reach Tel Aviv. Rudi Hecht and his wife Edith, Leonard Bernstein and his former teacher-secretary Helen Coates were also on the plane. It was great to meet

Rudi, who had decided to settle in Israel and establish a silo project in Haifa. This had been his family's traditional occupation for three generations. The Nazis had expropriated the silos owned by the Hecht family along the Rhine, from Basle up to the North Sea, but the Allies returned them after the war. Rudi was the eldest son and he was expected to succeed his father Jacob Hecht as president of the company. However, Rudi refused to return to Europe, sold his holdings and established Dagon, an efficient enterprise with branches in Haifa and Ashdod.

I have had a friendly relationship with Rudi for close to sixty years, dating back to our university days in Heidelberg. During the war, while I was busy with my work in the *Irgun* and with my army service we had little contact, and it was only later that we met again and renewed our friendship. In 1983 I was elected to the board of directors of Dagon enterprises, where I have been active ever since.

I had met Lenny Bernstein in New York right after the end of the war. He was very interested in Israel's youth and had been on the board of our Emergency Committee. Helen Coates, who had begun as Lenny's piano teacher stayed on for many years as his secretary and manager. Lenny's public image in the U.S. and in Israel places him on the left of the political spectrum. Strangely, his years-long connection with our Emergency Committee is never mentioned in any of his biographies.

I returned to Tel Aviv in October 1948 and was happy to see my Aunt Ella and my cousins the Saharovs, as well as my "political" comrades Hillel Kook, Shumel Merlin and Aryeh Ben-Eliezer. However, I had come to set up a factory and worked together with our attorney Akiva Persitz, the son of Shoshana Persitz, one of the founders of Tel Aviv who later became one of the first women politicians in Israel. He and his associate Amihai Paglin helped us set up the legal framework of our company. I also held meetings with Yosef Echtman, the executive director of the Israeli Manufacturers Association,

who was on his way to become the head of the Investment Department in the fledgling Israeli government. We established the formal plans for our work and I went back to Canada to acquire machinery and raw materials and engage the technical personnel. In November 1948 I was back in Paris where I met Hillel and we enjoyed a good rest while returning to New York on the S.S. America.

In New York I was kept very busy with my work in Dulev and Cheerio Toys, another one of Sam's factories. It was there that I laid the groundwork for my industrial future in Israel. Most of my time was devoted to business but I was happy to meet Frances Gunther and my girlfriend Julia Horowath, who was a young, intelligent and attractive dance teacher. We were planning to get married and Julia had agreed to convert and settle in Israel. While I was away she and Frances had spent much time together studying Hebrew. Half a year later, after my return from Israel, she told me her mother in New York was old and sick and she could not leave her behind and move with me to Israel.

Begin visited the U.S. in mid-December 1948 and was very enthusiastically received by members of the government, the New York municipality and the Jewish community. Before I left for Toronto, Begin invited me to his suite together with other *Irgun* officers. He officially thanked us for our services during the twelve years we had worked for the *Irgun* and for the Jewish people in Europe and America.

During the year, my relations with Sam developed into a real friendship. There was no talk of "how" or "why." It just happened and I felt it deeply. I had gained a brother and was close to his family. Our backgrounds and lifestyle were different but I felt as if I had been adopted and was happy in Sam's company. The loss of my family may have had something to do with this friendship, which gave me a sense of security.

In the meantime I continued my work with Dulev in Toronto. At the end of January 1949 Sam invited me to accompany him on a business trip to Mexico City. On the way we

stopped in Hollywood where I met Miriam Heyman, a friend from my Palestine days. Miriam had been working in the *Irgun's* public relations department and had come to visit me during my stay in Hollywood, where she met Bernie Fineman and eventually married him. Sam and I had dinner with them and met their beautiful little daughter, Davida. However, fate was not kind to this family and tragedy eventually overtook them all.

In Hollywood we also visited the famous Mattel toy factory. Sam exchanged production moulds with them and this marked the beginning of an ongoing business relationship between us. In Mexico City we were the guests of Max Schein, an American Jew who had opened a big plastics factory in which we were very interested. Max was married to the sister of a former Mexican president. She had converted to Judaism and, as often happens, became observant and committed, serving for many years as president of WIZO [Women's International Zionist Organization] in Mexico. In later years Max was a frequent visitor to Israel. He joined the board of Dagon and has been a very generous contributor to the UJA [United Jewish Appeal].

We established useful business contacts in Mexico, which were helpful in later years. I found Mexico's culture and unique style very exciting and interesting. We also visited factories in Lisbon, Madrid and Rome. The trip also included cultural highlights such as Sintra, which Byron had celebrated in his writings, and the Museo del Prado in Madrid. The Museo del Prado opened a window to a world I had hardly known and I have since visited it on several occasions. The last one was with our son Lonny, to whom I had the pleasure of conveying the joys of this museum and of Jewish Spain. My first visit to the Prado was crucial in developing my interest and enthusiasm for art, which were later reflected in our home in Jerusalem.

The next two months were devoted to setting up the Dura factory in Israel, a project which sustained my partnership with Sam Dubiner for the next ten years. From the Tet-Beth

factory we purchased a building which had formerly belonged to a British canning corporation. It was situated on the outskirts of Bnei Brak, close to the Tel Aviv highway, a structure of about 2500-3000 square meters to which we later added offices.

The Manufacturers Association guided me through the jungle of Israeli bureaucracy, which was then much worse than now. As part of an arrangement called "capital transfer" we were allowed to import toys from Sam's factory in Canada without having to pay for them in foreign currency, as long as the value of the goods sold was used as working capital for the new enterprise. There was very little foreign currency in Israel then and it was not being used to import toys. We were sure that Canadian toys, more sophisticated than locally-made goods, would sell well and create funds for investment. My personal investment in this project was relatively small and amounted to $10,000. Sam put up the money needed to import the machinery on a loan basis. It was agreed that equity rights would be split evenly, and Sam would be paid back from the company's future profits, as indeed he was.

I also met up with some of my old comrades from university days. Dr. Ernst Lewin had also come from New York. He had concluded his term as commercial attache at the Israeli embassy in Washington and was now working at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, which had its headquarters in Rome. Ernst became one of their top executives. He had come to Tel-Aviv to visit his sister Vera, who had graduated from Heidelberg University together with me. She was in charge of publications at WIZO, and was also the literary editor of *Ha-Aretz*. Billy Rose, who together with Ben Hecht had been so helpful to us a few years back, was also visiting Israel with his wife Eleanor, a former Olympic swimming champion. They kept looking for a deli and were very disappointed to find that, at that time, the closest one to our hotel in Tel Aviv was in the Lower East Side of New York.

In March 1949 Betty Dubiner came to join us in Tel Aviv for a trip to Prague, where we found the remnants of a vanished Jewish presence. The Czech government was then beginning to catalogue the thousands of Judaica objects that had been collected by the Nazis to establish a museum. This great collection was obviously the property of the Jewish people but was never returned. It could not be managaed by the small remaining Jewish community and all this wealth fell into the hands of the Czech government. On the way back we decided to celebrate the beginning of our partnership with a week-end at St. Moritz and encountered a dangerous storm on the Alps while flying back to Zurich in a small Piper plane. Until we landed we were not sure we would make it back alive.

In April 1949 in Toronto I had my first big argument with Sam over business policies. Sam was a kind and generous friend but he was also an overbearing man and wanted full control, even though I was supposed to manage the enterprise. His style was hard for me to accept and it was on these grounds that we eventually separated after several years of joint work. But this was our first row and it ended in a quick reconciliation. Nevertheless, I still felt I needed a breather and flew to Chicago for a few days, to talk to Ted and Kitty Levine with whom I had become very close while working in the Midwest. Ted was a lawyer and a warm human being. He felt that business is not necessarily built on principles and that I should give Sam credit for his good intentions, despite the problems arising from his character.

A small deformity had developed in my throat at the time and at the end of May I underwent an operation in Toronto. After a week in hospital I went to have a rest in Frances Gunther's summer place in Madison, Connecticut, a lovely home surrounded by pleasant gardens overlooking the sand dunes. It was very peaceful, and Ernst Lewin also joined us.

I was anxious to stop travelling and start working permanently in Israel. After a short vacation in Wengen, high in the Swiss Alps, I returned to Tel Aviv, completed negotiations re-

garding the Bnei Brak building and concluded arrangements for marketing the toys with a chain of stores headed by the Feuerberg group. I also finalized agreements with Martin Farkash from New York, who decided to come on *aliyah* and join us as production manager.

While I was busy with all these preparations and just before the opening of the business something happened that was to change my life. Vera Lewin told me that they had hired a young journalist who was intelligent, cultured and very attractive. I decided to go and see for myself and loved what I saw but Vera refused to introduce me to the young lady, Esther Shapiro, and said I was not good enough for her. I had to resort to a trick. Esther was working in the public relations department and after hearing she had come from Australia I mentioned that my uncle Isaac Kahn had made a big contribution to WIZO, which had helped to build the WIZO House in Haifa. All this was indeed true. However, I also told her that Uncle Isaac was coming to Israel and that the Organization should take him on a tour of their institutions, to which WIZO enthusiastically agreed. This, alas, was not the case, as my uncle only came the following year.

A week later the Australian ambassador hosted a reception at the new Sharon Hotel in Herzliya Pituah. My cousin Alex Kahn, Isaac's son, was then visiting Israel, and invited Esther and me to attend. We then began going to concerts and had a few dinners *tete-a-tete*, which helped us to get to know each other better. We set the wedding for January 20, my mother's birthday, which I felt was a good omen and the nicest gift I could give my late parents.

The political and military chapters of my life had drawn to a close. I now had the time and the peace of mind to establish my own business, and to marry and start a family.

10

Israel and Family

I felt secure about my future with Esther. She was the girl I wanted as my wife and as the mother of my children.

The Shapiro family, originally from Byelorussia, came from Leczyca (Lentshitz), Poland. Most of the family perished there in the Holocaust. Esther's father, Zeev-Wolf, came from a long line of rabbis and was a direct descendant of Reb Aisel Harif (R. Yehoshua Aisek Shapira) of Slonim, a renowned talmudist, author and leading *mitnaged.* Esther's mother, Frymet Schultz, came from a hasidic family in Lodz and most of her brothers emigrated during the twenties and thirties to Palestine, South America and Australia. My father-in-law was a loyal and devoted Zionist. He left his family in Poland, came to Palestine in 1922 and helped build the Bikur Holim Hospital in Jerusalem, where our two daughters were born more than thirty years later. Due to the economic hardships of early life in Palestine he left in 1927 for Australia in search of a livelihood, but the family's heart and thoughts were always in

Palestine and they came back in the mid-thirties. Again they could not make a living in that difficult period and were forced to return to Melbourne. Esther and her brother came back to Israel in 1949 and the parents followed in 1954. During the 1970s my father-in-law fulfilled his ambition and reprinted his great-grandfather's eleven books, which were much in demand in *yeshivot* and religious circles. In 1991 Esther followed in his footsteps and wrote a book about Reb Aisel Harif and the history of her family, which was received with great interest.

Our wedding was a small luncheon party for the immediate family and a few friends. Austerity conditions limited the possibilities. We wanted to get married in Jerusalem and Major Al and Judy Friedgut, new Canadian friends, offered us their beautiful garden and home in Old Katamon for the occasion. My aunt Ella and cousins Phyllis and Aaron Saharov were at the wedding, and of course Vera Lewin. Esther's brother Alec, who had served in the Australian Air Force during the war, was best man, and other members and friends of the Shapiro family were also present, except for her parents, who could not then make the trip from Australia. Esther's uncle Fishel Nomberg came from Rishpon, and his wife Zippora together with Frances Gunther escorted Esther to the *huppa*. Mike Ben-Ami and his wife Marcia, from New York, happened to be in Israel and were also with us.

We were married by Chief Rabbi Herzog and the *huppah* was held in the garden. Heaven was kind to us. There had been storms and rain the day before and it poured the day after, but our wedding-day was sunny and pleasant. After lunch we planted two rosebushes in the garden, one red and one yellow, and watered them with champagne, and in the afternoon we went driving. We went to Ramat Rachel and looked toward Bethlehem, Herodion and the Judean desert. It was a truly happy occasion. For our honeymoon we went to Arosa, Switzerland, and to Paris. We very much enjoyed getting to know each other, even though we did not always agree on ev-

erything and often had passionate arguments. The rosebushes flourished for many years and were much enjoyed by the Friedguts.

Esther was a modern young woman, concerned about keeping a Jewish lifestye and intent on observing the *mitzvot* to the best of her ability. There was rationing and food was very scarce in Israel then. We called this "the Joseph period" after Dov Joseph, the Minister of Supplies. I had ordered a considerable supply of food from the U.S. and managed to fill our larder, but found that some of it had disappeared soon after the wedding. The food was not kosher and Esther refused to keep it but I never knew what happened to it. This was her secret and she just smiled.

Our first son was born in November 1950 and we named him Asya-Dov after my martyred brother and my father. Years later he preferred the shorter version Asi. We were thrilled with him. My friend Hillel Kook and my mother-in-law, who had just arrived from Australia, were with me in the waiting-room of the Tel-Aviv Assuta Hospital, as it was not yet customary for fathers to be present at births. The *sandak* at the brith was Michael Berchin, Jabotinsky's close collaborator and a member of the Russian Jewish aristocracy in the best sense of the term. Uncle Isaac Kahn, Mother's brother, or Bert, as they called him in Australia, came for the *pidyon ha-ben*, the ceremony redeeming the firstborn on the thirtieth day after his birth. Lonny, our second son, was born in 1953, and we named him Aylon Yehoshua, after the biblical judge mentioned in Samuel I, and after Reb Aisel Harif. Varda was born in 1956 and named after my martyred mother Rosa, and our baby Karni-Ayla, named after my aunt Ella, was born in 1964. Esther was a wonderful mother. She devoted all her time and love to the children, but also knew how to be strong and set limits when necessary. My new family was a great source of joy and happiness and gave me the strength to overcome the pain and the depression of the Holocaust and the post-war years. I

felt they were a compensation for the cruelty and the suffering that had been inflicted on all of us.

We rented an apartment on Keren Kayemet Bld. in Tel Aviv and began to build a house in Kfar Shmariyahu. It was a big villa set on the slope of a hill and the plans were beautiful, but in the course of the building we concluded that it was much too large for us and would require a great deal of domestic help. In 1954 we moved to Jerusalem, where we rented an apartment from President Ben Zvi's family on Ibn Gabirol Street. I had lived in Jerusalem when I first came to Palestine in 1933 and now Esther was also fascinated by the city. In 1955 we found an apartment we liked in the Talbieh quarter, and have lived there ever since.

All my energy and efforts after my return to Israel have been devoted to the development of industry. I was mainly concerned with production processes, for which I had an enthusiasm, but I was less interested in money matters which meant that, although my manufacturing endeavors were relatively successful, my business achievements were less so.

Dura was one of the first modern plastics factories in Israel and became very successful in the marketing of toys and household items. We had ten injection moulding machines of different sizes and a tool shop which built moulds for our own use. This was the first enterprise initiated together with Sam Dubiner, and I developed an interest not only in promoting our own establishment but in the plastics industry in general.

There were a number of plastics factories in Israel at the time, some under private ownership and some owned by kibbutzim. I thought that in order to ensure the technological development of the field we should join efforts and form an association. The kibbutzim were enthusiastic about the idea and private industry followed their lead, but we did not know what we were getting ourselves into. The Manufacturers Association, which represented the "private" sector, censored us for aligning ourselves with the trade union industry and never really granted their official approval. However, they did

accept us *de facto* and let us work from their headquarters. The same applied to the kibbutzim, whose role in the plastics industry was even larger than that of the private sector. Aharon Becker was then the secretary general of the *Histadrut* and was sharply critical of these kibbutzim, which were mainly affiliated with the *Kibbutz Artzi* radical left wing movement, for aligning themselves with the "capitalists."

The Plastics Association developed international contacts, organized exhibitions in Israel and participated in many exhibitions overseas. It was also successful in establishing training opportunities for Israelis in the U.S. and Japan and for establishing a technical school in Israel. In the coming years, production in the plastics industry expanded at the rate of about 20% per year. I was elected chairman of the association and served in this capacity for seven years, by which time a younger generation was ready to take over.

My belief was that the social and political background of the factory owners was of no importance to the managing of a plant. Regardless of the system, management must still work efficiently and responsibly and create reasonable and correct relations with the labor force. In fact, within the framework of our association, kibbutz enterprises consistently adopted a much tougher stand vis-a-vis the government and fought much harder than the "capitalists" for every penny.

In the summer of 1950 I was introduced to Henry and Marian Hassenfeld in Tel Aviv. The Hassenfelds were the owners of Hasbro, a toy factory that eventually became one of the biggest toy enterprises in the world and traded on the American Stock Exchange. They also owned Empire, a large pencil factory in Nashville, Tennessee, which controlled forty percent of the American market and was a leading international concern in its field.

Henry came from a Polish-Jewish family and had very deep feelings for Judaism and for Israel. His market research had shown that pencils in Israel were being imported from all over the globe and he suggested that we open a pencil factory, based

on an equal partnership between the Hassenfeld family on the one hand and Sam and me on the other. After preliminary talks with the technical staff in the US, we decided to begin negotiations to open a pencil factory in Israel. It might have been more efficient to open a factory next to Dura, but we thought it wiser to run these establishments on totally seperate and independent lines.

David Horowitz, the director general of the Ministry of Finance came to see us to persuade us to come to Jerusalem, although we had already decided to do so. The following day we were visited by Mordechai Ish-Shalom, the secretary of the Jerusalem workers' council and later mayor of Jerusalem. He made a dramatic and rather desperate offer suggesting that we pay wages ten percent lower than those agreed in the labor contracts. I told Ish-Shalom that I had served in the defense of Jerusalem during the 1936 riots and were I to decide to set up a business in Jerusalem I would not wish to do it at anyone's expense, and surely not at that of our workers.

In all the forty years during which I was responsible for the five factories we established in Jerusalem and near Tel-Aviv there was not a day's strike. Not that we were such wonderful people but we were honest in our dealings, our door was always open to the employees and we kept our word. I felt that all of us were expected to do our best but I also insisted on the right "climate", on a clean enviroment, a pleasant dining room and harmonious relations. These factors were not obvious to everyone but we learned fast. The same applied to the managerial staff, most of whom have worked with us for twenty five or thirty years, some of them even forty. Close relations developed with some of them like Etty Rishin, Yosef Salomon, Yehezkel Khazam, Abraham Silberstein and the late Moshe Shapiro, and we became part of one extended family.

I was keen on living in Jerusalem because of my feelings for the city but the image of Jerusalem was not that of an industrial city. There was no trained manpower and the population of the city had a rather defined character, devoted to religion,

academic studies, government administration and tourism. I was nevertheless determined to try, and began negotiating with a company responsible for the development of the city, the Jerusalem Economic Corporation. The managing director was Mordechai Schatner, a serious and constructive kibbutznik, and the board included several good people, mostly from public administration but without much business experience.

Considerable difficulties arose concerning an appropriate building. The Jerusalem Economic Corporation pledged to put up a plant in Romema according to our specifications by the end of 1950, but when we arrived with the machinery and the technical personnel there was no building and no place for us to start. The government suggested that, "temporarily," we should move to a building that had been set up for light industry in the Mekor Barukh quarter. We could not refuse the offer. There was no other alternative and this plant was at least giving us a space of 2,500 sq. meters, even though the inappropriate layout created added expense, as we were forced to keep moving goods between floors. This "temporary" arrangement lasted twenty-five years. Jerusalem Pencils marked the beginning of our activities in Jerusalem. By the summer of 1951 work had begun and our products were well received in the Israeli market.

In 1953 Sam and I began a new venture and established the first Israeli plant for the manufacture of corrugated cartons, Cargal. Israel's packaging industry was quite primitive then and citrus fruit, one of the country's main exports, were packed in wooden crates imported from Italy mainly by the Citrus Marketing Board, an umbrella organization for citrus exports. Sam Dubiner was Cargal's majority owner and Dura held 13% of the equity. Dura was transferred to Jerusalem and the Dura premises, expanded and enlarged, were used for the corrugated carton plant without any compensation. Cargal developed rather quickly. We became the main Israeli supplier of corrugated carton and began negotiations to establish plants in

Turkey, Greece, and Spain. A heated public debate, which was given broad media coverage in Israel, developed around a plan to replace the wooden crates used for packing oranges with our corrugated cartons. The Israel Citrus Marketing Board had an obviously vested interest in wood crating and was opposed to the domination of the market by our boxes.

I strongly disagreed with the way in which Sam Dubiner and his assistant, Zevik Grodzensky, conducted this affair. Their decision to invest the profits from Cargal in extensive international ventures and to publish aggressive full-page ads against the Citrus Marketing Board did not meet with my approval. In my view, we could have protected our interests with less noise, less animosity and less public arguing regarding vital business matters. This atmosphere only made my work much harder. Zevik roamed the world in a private plane and believed Cargal would become a big international group in no time, whereas I felt we were overexpanding dangerously. Unfortunately, I was proved right after a few years but by then it was too late to change anything.

Sam Dubiner and I parted company in 1960. The mismanagement of Cargal was not the only reason for our separation, but rather the changes in Sam's attitude. I run our joint investements for ten years, they had expanded succesfully and I felt I had gained the experience required to look for new fields. I wanted to expand our contacts, to diversify, and to learn more, but Sam objected. He did not want me to meet business people abroad, to consider diversification or attend conferences and exhibitions. "No need," he would say, "ask me. I'll give you all the answers." I deeply appreciated Sam's friendship and help after the war but I felt a need to advance on my own. Another matter we disagreed on was connected with government licenses, which were often handled in ways I found erroneous.

I purchased Sam's fifty percent holding in Dura, and his twenty five percent holding in Jerusalem Pencils. In return I had to pay Sam nearly $275,000, give up my equity in Cargal as

well as several valuable real-estate holdings in Bnei Brak, Ramat Gan, Holon, and Haifa. From my point of view, this ended up as an unfair deal. Sam changed the agreement between us several times, linked it first to the cost-of-living index and then to the dollar rate, without even having the courtesy of telling me. I felt mistreated and unhappy after ten years of work but I did not argue and agreed to all his demands. I was grateful for "the devotion of his youth," his *hesed neurim*, for his help to me after the war while I went through a personal crisis, for his encouragement and his guidance into the labyrinth of the industrial world. I therefore accepted all his demands regardless of my true feelings. It was only four years later, after I had repaid my debt to him, that I felt truly independent.

Dura was renamed Vered and expanded. We established two divisions, one producing plastic items and the other moulds and tools for export, primarily to the U.S. The banks caused me a great deal of trouble. They demanded repayment of the regular loans granted to JPL and to Vered on the grounds that, after Dubiner had left our group, they lacked security and there was not enough collateral. A year later the banks' carping turned into compliments, when the results of Cargal's policies became public and their business methods were revealed as unacceptable. During that whole year I had not spoken to anyone about Cargal's inside story because I felt I owed that to Sam, but Zevik's methods had caused serious damage and Cargal was ultimately bought out.

The few toolmaking enterprises that were then active in Israel worked for the Ministry of Defense. We decided to expand our tool factory in Israel and hired a good tool engineer who came to Israel via the U.S., after studying in Germany. The Jerusalem branch of the *Histadrut* agreed to refer about thirty tool-makers to us, to join the twelve we already employed. We began building and exporting injection moulding tools and moulds to the U.S., but the government and the *Histadrut* failed to keep their commitments. Binyamin Zer'oni, who had

distinguished himself in the fight against the British and was a very gifted engineer, joined the tool project as a director. We then moved it to Holon and operated under the name of Dukal. I later turned over my holdings to Zer'oni, who became the sole owner.

Jerusalem Pencils expanded its production and export activities. We established a new division for the manufacture of extruded leads, named Graphite Industries, which specialized in the manufacture of colored leads for sale to other pencil factories. A department manufacturing oil pastels and wax crayons was created later, and has since secured a considerable section of the Israeli market.

At Vered we began producing new articles such as plastic pails, plastic jerrycans, bottles and other containers. These new lines quickly gained acceptance and popularity although, at first, many had thought us crazy. Who had ever heard of pails made of plastic rather than tin? We also developed a new approach to the manufacture of multi-colored household goods, which looked beautiful, and managed to sell the know-how for royalties, mainly to Great Britain. These activities helped us survive the crises that affected Israel's economy in 1966.

Our Jerusalem enterprises enjoyed a great deal of public attention, beyond what our size seemed to justify, probably as a result of the serious unemployment situation then prevalent in Jerusalem. Although we were basically a modest family enterprise, a new "American" factory employing 120-130 people could, in those circumstances, become an economic factor in the city. We worked very hard, were cautious in our financial deals and wary of speculative investments. Several local and foreign contacts ensured our measured progress and we refrained from overexpanding our business through loans. I also refused to move into realms of which I knew little. Once, at the end of the fifties, a customer paid his debts by transferring to us a six-dunam plot in Holon's industrial zone, which only a

few years later would fetch a very high price. But I did not know much about real-estate and sold it as soon as I could.

We had begun exporting our pencils to Turkey back in the fifties. The state supplies office of the Turkish government worked under the name of *Devlat Malzemi Offisi* and was reponsible for all purchases, from aeroplanes to pencils. We also established a long-term relationship with *ARPALSA* (Argentine-Palestine Group), headed by Jose Mirelman and Benno Gitter. Gitter later became a leading Israeli banker. This group worked in close contact with a commercial company in Argentina controlled by President Peron and managed by his wife, Evita Peron. As a first step, the Argentinians devalued the dollar as far as the import of pencils was concerned, a move which automatically reduced their price and ensured them high profits. They explained this decision on the grounds that pencils are items of educational value, which justifies cutting the import exchange rate in half. This policy obviously applied only to Peron's company as the exclusive importer and considerably increased our exports to Argentina. In Buenos Aires I met with Tuvia Arazi at the Israeli embassy and with his assistant Benno Lubotzky (Eliav), whom I had known in Riga as one of the founders and leaders of *Betar* before he joined the Labor party.

We also found new markets in Britain, France and African countries, but Germany was our biggest success. Our company had the largest share of the imported pencils market in West Germany, which was almost like bringing coals to Newcastle. The Germans liked our finish and our fair prices but they preferred us mostly because we only used California cedarwood in our production process. In time, the Israeli government began passing on to us requests for industrial advice put forward by developing countries. I was asked to volunteer for jobs abroad and visited Nigeria several times to advise on the establishment of plastic extrusion plants in Ibadan, in the West of the country, and I also went to Biafra, where they had plans for a pencil factory. In Burma we signed a rather artistic looking

document painted in antique Burmese style, declaring our agreement to establish a joint pencil factory in Rangoon in the State of Burma. But when everything was ready, all the machines packed and the technicians ready to take off, the Burmese backed out: "Sorry, no money." South Africa, Thailand and Turkey were also potential targets. As Turkey appeared to be a serious proposition, Henry and Marion Hassenfeld joined me in a visit to Istanbul. Our counterpart in the negotiations was a leading businessman, Mr. Kotch, who was also Ford's exclusive agent in Turkey. The Turks also delayed their decision claiming a shortage of foreign currency but we did not consider this wasted time, as these visits enabled us to learn the customs and business traditions of other countries.

As my business advanced, I began to take an interest in public economic affairs. I had expected the Israeli Manufacturers Association to represent business interests, not in the sense of representing specific enterprises but as a public body concerned with the planning of economic policy, participating in the public economic debate and offering its own views regarding the aims of national economic development. The Manufacturers Association was then led and dominated by Aryeh Shenkar, a smart, hard-boiled manufacturer who had established big textile factories in Poland and belonged to what I called "the old school." He believed that industry in a small country could not be developed by deciding industrial policy in line with national interests and investing in human resources but rather by fostering personal contacts, ensuring loans and, most particularly, import licenses. Due to the low reserves of foreign currency imports were tightly controlled during those years and such assistance seemed essential. Shenkar basically favored a policy of *protektzia* or, as we had called it in the *galut*, *shtadlanuth*. Many of us, opposed to this method, established a group called *Le-Atid Ha-Ta'asiya* [For the Future of Industry], and presented our views at meetings and public discussions. Members of our group sought office at

the elections to the board of the Manufacturers Association, sponsoring a platform calling for an economic policy similar to that implemented in the development of countries such as Ireland and Puerto Rico. We claimed that objective criteria should be established for granting legal and financial assistance on an equal basis to all manufacturing initiatives, with priority given to enterprises involved in export and in the development of technical know-how.

I was very involved and enthusiastic about this public activity. I was elected to the executive board and later to the presidium of the Manufacturers Association, where I served for over twenty years. One of our first decisions was to establish an Association of Foreign Investors to encourage and help newcomers and push the government to enact a law concerning foreign investments. Aryeh Shenkar did not welcome our proposals and considered them too theoretical, but we persisted and members of our group eventually became active in many departments. I headed the one dealing with foreign relations and created contacts with many potential investors all over the world.

This activity allowed me a small share of influence in discussions about national economic policy, a task which I viewed as a serious challenge. For a country practically without any raw materials and with a labor force gathered from all over the globe with limited technical experience, shaping an economic policy was a national challenge almost as serious as formulating a defense policy. Israel has defended its independence without regard for economic constraints and has attempted to build and develop its economy as if there were no defense problems. Although this was a big illusion, the country has managed to survive several wars.

During the Six-Day War, most of the workers in our factory belonged to a reserve unit stationed near the United Nations headquarters in Armon Hanatziv, today East Talpiot. Most of them were inexperienced soldiers, many of them new immigrants for whom this was their first war experience. I visited

them daily and even I could see that the southeastern section of the city had no defenses and was completely unprotected. The assumption behind this deployment was that Jordan would not attack and this front would remain quiet. On the first day of the war the Jordanians occupied the U.N. headquarters in Jerusalem's eastern outskirts and expelled the U.N. personnel — many of whom were Americans — without meeting any resistance. Had they moved on they could easily have captured several Jerusalem districts within hours, as all our troops were concentrated on the Egyptian and Syrian fronts. They would probably have been unable to hold on to their conquest for more than a few days, but they could have caused many casualties and a great deal of damage. Our house was between the Jewish and Arab artillery, and the thick walls erected seventy years earlier prevented serious damage, although we did receive our share of shrapnel.

At the beginning of the war, the Arab media had bombarded everyone with news of the burning of Tel-Aviv and the destruction of Israel, which were picked up and repeated by the world press. Our pencil factory had many commitments to European markets, mostly to Germany, and our policy was always to be on time with our export orders. We were determined to overcome European prejudices about the "Levantine mentality" concerning pledges and promises, that was supposedly prevalent in this part of the world. Before the war our German distributor had placed a large order for pencils timed for the next school year, and was very worried and anxious about our situation. We were quite relaxed as we knew that our shipment had beaten the war by a week, but had no way of informing him.

Now imagine the following scene. The setting is Vienna, the president's office of a large and well-established pencil factory. The president is negotiating a new order of pencil slats with Mr. Vernon Bach of London, marketing director of a leading supplier. The telephone rings and a discussion ensues, of which Mr. Bach obviously hears only one side, more or less as follows:



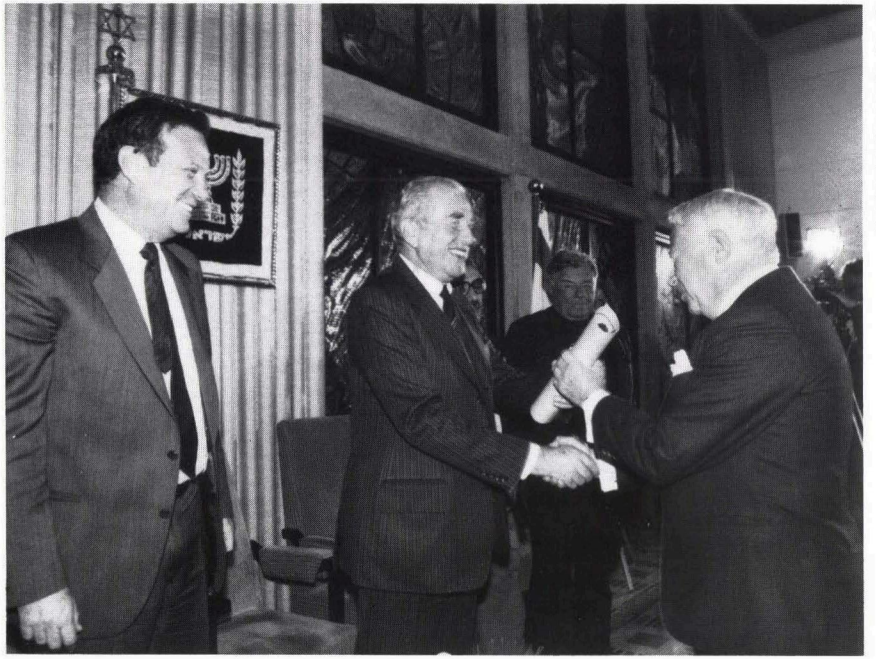
Lonny with Ambassador of Nigeria 1964



The family at Author's 80th Birthday
Standing Left to Right: Lonny, Amihai, Esther, Alex, Asi, Nurit. Seated Left to Right: Yuli, Varda, Karni
Jerusalem, July 1, 1990



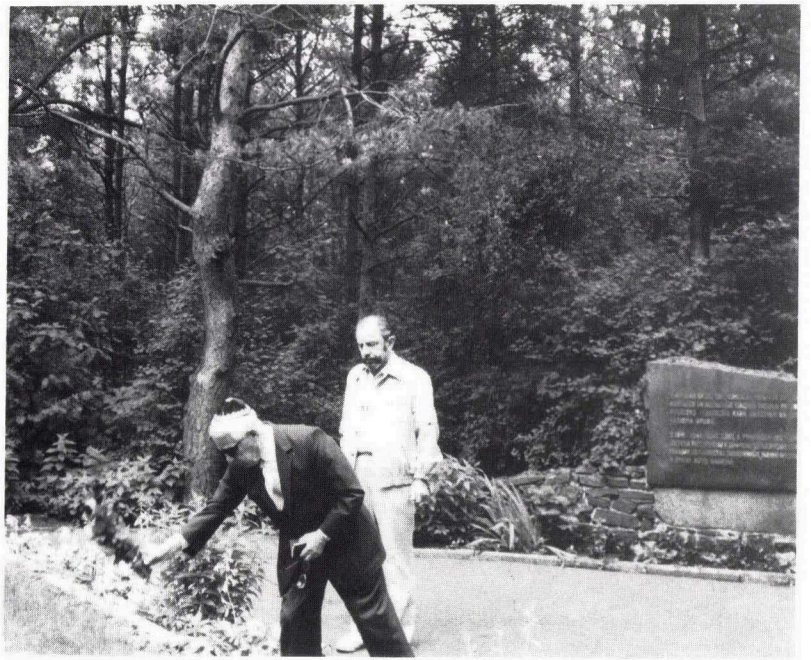
With the Grandchildren. Back row, from left: Itamar and Tal. Seated from left: Amitai, Avishai, Inbar, Amnon, Carmel



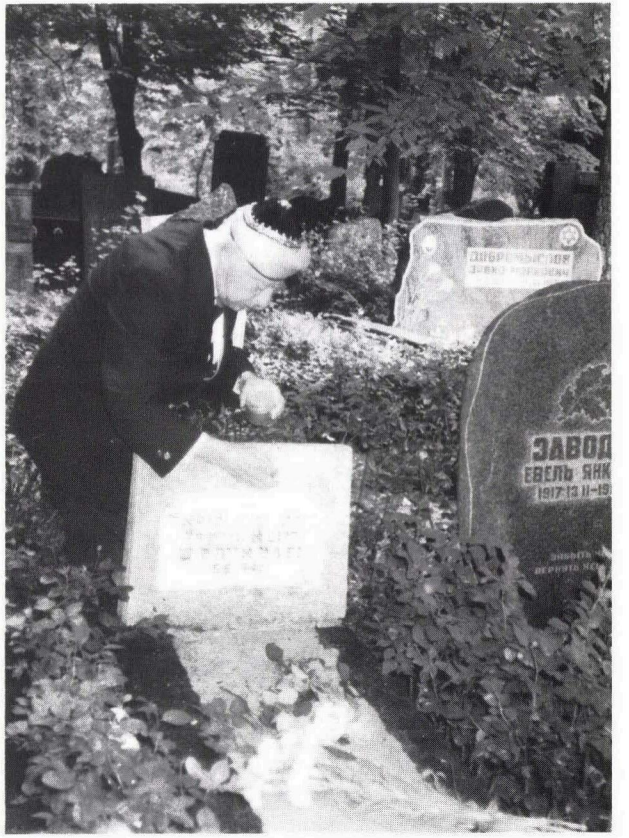
The President, of Israel, Mr. Haim Herzog, bestows on the Author on the 100th Anniversary of Israel Industry, the title: "Yakir Ta'assia" (Distinguished Industrialist) in the presence of: Mayor of Jerusalem, Mr. Teddy Kollek. President of the Manufacturers Association, Mr. D. Lautman. Head of the Trade Union, Mr. Keysar



Receiving the Honor of "Yakir Yerushalayim" (Worthy of Jerusalem) from Mayor Teddy Kollek, 1980.



Bringing earth from Har-Ha-Bayit (The Holy Mount) to the execution place of the Riga Jews in Rumbuli, Riga, with Professor Dumesh 1990



Visiting Father's grave. Shmerli Cemetery, Riga, and bringing earth from Har-Ha-Bayit

"Oh, now you're coming to us. You left us and started buying from the Israelis. Now Israel is lost and you want us to help you out." "No, we shall not cooperate." After a long discussion, the manager says: "O.K., we'll send you 25,000 gross, etc."

In due course, Mr. Bach phoned and informed us of this conversation. We could by then smile happily in the knowledge that we had met our commitments, but I nevertheless took a plane at the first opportunity and went to speak to our client: "We have sent you everything as promised and kept our word. Why did you panic and begin buying new supplies from our competitors?" Our distributor was stunned: "How did you hear that? How do you know?" It seems that Israeli intelligence services, for once, received credit where none was due.

Unlike the pride and the enthusiasm which our brilliant military victory had generated both in Israel and the Diaspora, our economic situation after the war did not seem too encouraging. 1966 and 1967 had been years of rampant unemployment, and very bad for the economy. Immediately after the Six-Day War, Prime Minister Levy Eshkol, a very warm and down-to-earth personality, invited foreign businessmen of proven industrial and financial acumen to an international economic conference. The response was very encouraging and some of the top figures in the world economy convened in Jerusalem. The conference elected a presidium representing different geographic areas, which I attended as a member of the Israeli delegation. The meetings were enthusiastic and several imaginative plans emerged, but the practical results were far from our expectations. A dialogue between the heads of huge, multi-national enterprises and Israeli manufacturers who worked in a small and developing country could only yield modest results. Israel was then at the very beginning of its technological development and foreign businessmen had neither the time nor the patience to wait for their ideas to go through all the necessary stages. However, the conference was successful in opening a new phase in Israeli economics. Industrialists became much more technology and efficiency

minded and the government became aware of the need to streamline its bureaucracy.

My counterpart at the conference was Lou Barnett, from Fort Worth, Texas. Barnett was the chairman of the plastics group at the conference and we became very friendly. He was a chemical engineer and owned one of the largest plastics plants in the U.S. We decided to work together and established Rotoplas, a rotational moulding plant and the first of its kind in the Middle East. Rotoplas was located in Jerusalem's new industrial zone in Talpiot, and manufactured large containers for storing liquids and for the export of fruit juices. After several years I felt that administering Rotoplas placed too heavy a burden on me, especially as this was a new enterprise and required full-time supervision. Barnett was obviously unable to do this while living abroad and I felt that I could no longer undertake this reponsibility, so we decided to sell the plant to Koor.

I was also involved in another interesting aspect of international activity. Since the creation of the State of Israel the economic boycott of the Arab states had been a major source of concern. After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when the oil crisis became a dominant factor in world economy, the Arabs tightened their boycott and began inflicting serious damage to our national interests. The opinion of official circles was that the usual methods were no longer effective to counteract the boycott and the goverment established a Board of Economic Warfare. Members of the board included top experts in economic, military, and political fields, such as General Haim Herzog, subsequently president of Israel, General Meir Amit, General Mordechai Gazit, Ambassador Meir Rosen, the legal advisor of the foreign office, and representatives of the secret service. I was elected chairman. This board was active for over two years, formulating and implementing defense and retaliation policies and establishing contacts and branches in many countries. The activities of the board met with considerable response from many communities, with cables, letters and tele-

phone calls coming in from everywhere, which were duly followed up with appropriate action. The pressure and intensity of the boycott subsided after two years and we then turned over our tasks to the regular diplomatic and financial channels.

The *Likud* party formed the government in 1977 and was the dominant factor in all government coalitions till 1992. This marked the beginning of my activities as a director in several government enterprises. Directors in government-controlled companies are appointed from government circles as well as from the private sector. They are supposed to be knowledgeable and experienced and I had been suggested to the board of some of these companies before. But although several Labor ministers had privately told me that they considered me a suitable candidate my appointment had always been refused as long as Labor headed the government, obviously because of my political affiliation with the opposition.

In 1978, after the *Likud* had formed its first coalition, appointments were being made on the merits of each candidate. When I drew Begin's attention to this discrimination against his own party and to the fact that there were many experienced people within the *Likud* camp too, he said: "Alex, I've been elected to be the prime minister of all our people and not of this or that party, not even my own."

Between 1978 and 1985 I served as a director on the boards of the Zim Shipping Company, the Israel Aircraft Industries, where I also chaired the comptroller's committee, and the Jerusalem Economic Corporation. I was also chairman of the board at Beth Shemesh Aviation Motors. In 1983 I joined the board, and later assumed an executive position at the Dagon silos in Haifa.

All these activities provided me with opportunities to broaden my knowledge of industrial matters and of plans for industrial expansion in Jerusalem. The most serious problems emerged at Beth Shemesh Aviation Motors, which had been established by Josef Zhidlowsky together with Prime Minister Eshkol. Government-owned companies, in some cases owned

jointly with private investors, were active in many fields. However, Beth Shemesh Aviation Motors went through many crises due to to the fact that ownership was shared equally between the government and Zhidlovski, which resulted in many disagreements.

Zhidlowsky had left his native Poland for Berlin, where he began working at the local Mercedes plant and soon rose to senior executive rank. When the Nazis occupied France he escaped to the Free Zone and established his own plant at Pau, near the Spanish border, which developed quite fast. But towards the end of the war the Germans had extended their area of control and he was forced to escape again, this time to Geneva. Zhidlowsky was basically a loyal Jew, and after the Six-Day War approached the Israeli government with an offer to establish a plant modelled on his French one, Turbo-Mecca, in the development town of Beth-Shemesh, where the population consisted mainly of new immigrants with few chances of finding work.

The project was established as a joint venture, but during the first few years Zhidlowsky was in complete control and the company was dominated by the French-Israeli board. He then presented the Israeli government with a series of new demands. Rather than abiding by the agreement that the cost of buying new machinery for the plant should be borne equally by both partners, Zhidlowsky demanded that the government be responsible for all new investment. The government refused, Zhidlowsky stopped calling board meetings and limited his activity in the company. The government instructed the Israeli section of the board to continue running the company and try to maintain contact with the French board.

I was then appointed chairman and tried to do my best. I was anxious to reestablish good relations with Zhidlovsky's staff and decided to fly to his plant in Pau, meet with the executives and study their methods. His workers were mainly Basques from the French side of the Pyrenees. The atmosphere

was very pleasant and we became quite friendly but relations did not improve.

We managed to keep the company working but the French failed to transfer funds when these were due. Later, Zhidlowsky demanded that I convince prime minister Begin to order the aviation branch of the Israeli Navy to buy Alouette helicopters, which were manufactured by the French and carried his engines, rather than the American Sikorskys the Navy had decided upon. I told him in no uncertain terms that I would not interfere in military decisions, even if I could, and that I would not talk to the prime minister. Nevertheless, I had an informal chat with Begin and told him of Zhidlosvky's rude and unjustified demands. With his usual modesty, Begin said: "How can I tell boys who are endangering their lives what helicopters are better for them? I shall never intervene."

The next step was that Zhidlowsky, together with his daughter, demanded that the government purchase Zhidlowsky's interests in Beth Shemesh Aviation Motors. He met with prime minister Begin and I also attended the meeting. Zhidlowsky was extremely rude and demanded that the Israeli government transfer to him, immediately, the sum he himself had decided upon. He moved around in his chair and then began running around the room. Begin quietly asked: "Would you dare talk like this to the French prime minister?" Finally, lawyers took charge of concluding this business relationship.

I had started to devote more time to my artistic interests and decided to bring to Jerusalem the rest of my African art collection, which I had left in the U.S.. There was considerable interest in it, and public exhibitions were arranged in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Kibbutz Hazorea. I joined the board of the Bezalel Museum and worked closely with the director Mordechai Narkiss, as well as with Eliyahu Dobkin, a Jewish Agency executive who had a beautiful collection of Israeli glass. I also added to my collection a painting attributed to Courbet, paintings by Max Lieberman, Lesser Ury, Yosl Bergner, and leading artists from Israel. Dr Joseph Laron, an

Israeli diplomat who had served in Paris, had a big collection of paintings by Jewish artists and through him I widened my appreciation of the "Paris School of art."

This active return to my previous interests added color and counterbalance to my professional work. Esther and the children also took an active interest in this hobby, and developed tastes and opinions of their own. Through Jerusalem Pencils, I initiated several competitions offering prizes to encourage young Israeli artists, an activity which brought us in contact with gifted talents.

I always travelled a great deal with Esther, both for business and for my education, and besides Europe and America I also reached South America, African countries, as well as Burma, Thailand, Japan, China and many other exciting places, where I met people who have enormously enriched my life.

I am proud of our sons, who served their country in elite army units responsible for daring and challenging deeds, unlike any I had known. They never spoke about their exploits and we know about them from others, from books, newspapers, and poems. They were in the army for about six years, were wounded and returned to fight. These were tense and fretful years for Esther and me and, like all parents, we worried and prayed. Our daughters also volunteered beyond the call of duty. Varda worked as a volunteer for a year in Kiryat Malakhi, a development town where she worked with the children of a community of Jews from the Atlas Mountains. After joining the army she served in an education unit specializing in the geography and history of Israel. She later studied archeology and participated in excavations, where she met and later married an archeologist and Egyptologist, Amihai Ophel. They have three children, Itamar, Inbar and Avishai. Varda later completed her M.A. degree in Contemporary Jewish History at the Hebrew University with distinction. She is now working in her field.

As a teenager, Karni was already interested in helping others and volunteered in a children's cancer ward. After her

army service she took a degree in social work and a Yoga course in California, which qualified her as a teacher. Today she works in both these fields and has time for religious studies as well. Our children are sometimes difficult and argumentative, but we nevertheless maintain a close relationship and are able to share joys and sorrows.

I am afraid I did not always have enough time for our children and I was not very efficient in the day-to-day handling of them. But I did my best to pass on to them my basic belief in honesty, loyalty, human compassion and national pride. All I can hope is that they understood the depth of my commitment to these principles and have likewise adopted them. I encouraged them to make their own decisions about their futures, which they do, to make their own contribution to the country and to be self-reliant and independent in their economic and professional pursuits.

After finishing their military service Asi and Lonny became active in running our business enterprises and gave me a chance to withdraw from day-to-day management. They worked under much more difficult conditions than the ones prevailing in my time, when industry was fully protected against competition from imports. But they are much more successful than I was. Asi is married to Nurit Marton, a fine arts graduate, and they have two little boys, Amitai and Amnon. Lonny is married to Yuli Tamir, a Ph.D. and university lecturer and they have two daughters, Carmel and Tal.

Merril Hassenfeld, my late friend and partner in Rhode Island and the son of my partner and co-founder Henry Hassenfeld, used to tell me how he guided his sons to manage Hasbro Corporation: "Let them go ahead, let them make mistakes, they will learn, it will pay off. You just join meetings where strategic decisions are made." Merril's ways made sense to me and I tried to do the same. I do hope they were good for my sons too. Both Asi and Lonny have at different times worked in the Empire Pencil Factory, in Shelbyville, Tennessee under the devoted guidance of Harold Hassenfeld, and in the Hasbro

European executive offices in London. In Jerusalem they have divided the work according to their interests and abilities. Asi specializes in financial and legal matters whereas Lonny is more interested in production and marketing.

My family and my work in Jerusalem are my Nobel Prize, one that has made me very happy.

11

Looking Back

I. Return to Riga

After an absence of sixty-two years I decided to go back to Riga, not to revisit the places I had known in my youth but to take leave of my dear ones, buried somewhere in Latvian soil. I felt a need to mourn and pray for their souls in Rumbuli, even though Latvian collaboration with the Germans made them worse than the Nazis in my eyes and it would be painful and distressing to see the places of torture.

Esther and I arrived in Riga on a hot day in July 1991, exhausted after a long journey. I was tense and could not rest. Images from my childhood and youth overwhelmed me and by midnight I could not contain myself any longer. I got dressed and went out to look for the familiar sights of my past. Very little had changed. I knew where to go instinctively and simply walked in the right direction, as if in a dream. In no time at all I reached my old home, in Strelnieku Iele 9. The house was covered in the same grey marble, but dilapidated and neglected.

According to the plaque on the door the building now served as the premises of the police archive. The street was deserted and I could not go in, neither that night nor on a subsequent visit. I said *kaddish.*

The next day I went again with Esther and from the courtyard we could see what had been our apartment on the third floor. I could visualize the heavy furniture and the greenery in the corners, below the big windows. I suddenly remembered a big etching that had hung in our dining room. There had been few pictures in our home and I now remembered all the details of this one — Arnold Boeklin's "The Isle of the Dead." It showed an island with cypresses and a man rowing towards the island. The painting was dark, with only the silvery lines of the waves lightening the scene, and I suddenly became aware of its mystic power. We shall all row to the Isle of the Dead one day, and we shall indeed be alone then. I had of course seen the painting many times but I had been too young to be moved by it. Now, more than sixty years later and while standing with Esther in the courtyard, it all fell into place.

Actually, all through my teens I had lived in fear of losing my family. We had been four in the family and when walking up the stairs I had always felt an urge to jump four steps at a time. Whenever I failed I went back and climbed up the stairs again, and only then was I able to relax. No one had ever told me to do this but I somehow felt compelled to follow this rule.

Esther and I left the house and turned the corner past the small synagogue where my father used to pray, sometimes with my brother and me. The following Shabbat we went to the only synagogue left in Riga, in Piltivas St. in the Old City. I was called up to the Torah and felt my parents would have been happy to see me back in Riga praying for their souls.

The following day we went with Professor Dumesh, the son-in-law of my friend Prof. Czerfass from Riga, to Rumbuli Forest, where 96,000 of Riga's Jews were killed in December 1941. After praying I spread soil from *Har Ha-Bayit* [The Temple Mount] in Jerusalem over their anonymous graves,

bringing a silent kiss from Israel to our martyrs. We then went to the apartment which had originally been my father's office and where my parents later made their home. My father died in this house a few days before the Russian occupation and we later visited his grave in the Shmerli cemetery. The Latvian who opened the door refused to talk to me — in Russian, German or English. He would not show the apartment to strangers although I explained that this had been our home many years ago, that the Germans had thrown us out and that I had no interest in coming back to live in Riga and only wanted to see the place. Apparently, it was now a communal apartment.

The man engaged in a long conversation with his wife. In the end he agreed to let us in but he switched off the lights as he opened the door. It was dark inside and I asked him to turn on the lights for a few minutes. "The electricity has been cut off," he said. We walked slowly downstairs, thinking our own thoughts about the hospitable face of the new Latvia. There was no one left from my personal Riga of prewar days. The next day we were on our way back to Jerusalem.

II. Peace

Now I have told my story. During my life I went through many of the upheavals of the twentieth century, participated in some of its battles and also tried to do my own work. I ask myself why I wanted to write about my life, to look again at things long gone, to think of people who are no more and deal with questions that often have no sensible answers. The truth is that the events of the past are so much alive that I feel as if they happened only yesterday, as if they are part of my life today and deeply affect the future of my family.

A great deal of research is available on the history of our generation and many people have now written their memoirs, each from his own perspective, but I wanted to tell my children the story of our family, of those with whom I lived and whom I

loved, of storms, wars and revolutions, of our personal tragedy and the blessing of ultimately raising a family with Esther and making a home in Jerusalem.

The events I speak of are also part of our children's lives, even if they happened before they were born. The pain of our people should never be forgotten. I, and all of us who lived through those times, will carry the memory of the vicious murder of the Jews to our dying day. Many children in my generation grew up without toys, or books, or sweets and often knew hunger. Many of us were fortunate to overcome it all and see joy, but the past has never left us.

The Jewish people prayed and hoped for generations to return to the Promised Land, holding on to the dream of returning to Jerusalem. It was the privilege of our generation to translate this political vision into practical action and establish the state of Israel, and I am proud and thrilled to have had a small share in the fullfilment of this epic dream. The various strands of my life have now merged into one, and I am thankful for my family, for our beautiful country and for all the blessings we count as ours.

Addendum

FROM MOTHER'S AND ASYA'S LETTERS

(Translated from the Russian and German originals)

Riga, May 9, 1940

Dear Sashok,

Today we received your letter from the boat, from Naples. I was very glad to hear that you are now at sea and in comfortable circumstances. We have been receiving your mail regularly and are happy to hear from you. We were also very happy with your phone call from Geneva, as well as with your cable and letter. It was a very difficult evening for us and it was good to talk to you on the phone. Daddy is very feeble, his heart is very weak and the doctors don't give us any hope. He feels better at times, but there is always the danger of another shock. His state of mind is not too good either. He knows he is dangerously ill and finds it very hard to talk to us. It is not only a physical pain but a spiritual torture as well. There is a nurse with him at all times, but either Asya or I have also been with him constantly during the last three months. He has had the best treatment but this doesn't change the picture. We wish that Daddy's pains and suffering were over, as we are in a desperate state.

Asya also has to supervise the business and he is doing the best he can. Many thanks for your offer of financial help. We are grateful, but don't really need it. Maybe your younger brother will have use for it in the future. Who knows what is in store?

Daddy did well in the last few years and we are not in need of material help. We wanted Daddy to be in a sanatorium, but his condition got so bad that the doctors did not allow us to move him.

Sashinka, we both ask you not to feel guilty for being so far away. You couldn't help at all by being here. You would probably be arrested on arrival for failing to report for service in the

Latvian Army. In fact, we are very happy and satisfied that you were able to get away and engage in the work you like. All we want to know is how you're getting along in Chicago and how you're establishing yourself in such a big, and probably difficult city. Your letters give us a great deal of pleasure. Asya and I are very lonely these days. When Daddy became ill we had many visitors but now everyone has disappeared, and now it is just us, facing Daddy's tragic fate.

We embrace you

Your mother and Asya

♦♦♦

Riga, May 24, 1940

Dear Sasha,

We received your telegram and letters from New York. In our present misfortune the contact with you is the only bright light. I wrote you a long letter to New York and hope you will receive it. Daddy feels a bit better today but this doesn't change the general outlook. He doesn't sleep and we're always with him. I'm all alone now. Asya was drafted into the army for six weeks but the staff in Daddy's office are very kind and help me.

I'm trying to keep everything in order around Daddy. You'd be glad to see how matters have settled down, in spite of everything. The house and the office are clean. Somehow, after four months of such a serious illness, I'm trying to live with it. In the beginning I argued with G-d Almighty about the injustice of our fate. After such a hard life of revolutions, wars, and great hardship, we must now face this unbelievably painful illness. But now I'm at peace with myself and trying to relax. It's strange how small matters can bother and excite me and how we can draw on a tremendous reservoir of human and spiritual power. ...

Keep a clear head and be strong. You have a big job on your hands and you must succeed.

Your mother

♦♦♦

Riga, June 5, 1940
[a day before Daddy's death]

Dear Sashok,

We received your letter from the States and it was a big thrill for us. It only took a few days and we did not expect it would reach us so fast. We were happy to hear you're successful in your work. I hope you keep this up and do not let yourself be weakened by the sad plight at home.

Daddy's situation has worsened and the left side of his brain is now paralyzed. After his selfless life in Drissa, Dvinsk and Riga, after fighting for the survival of his family and that of others, the least he deserved was a peaceful old age. He should have been spared this tragic illness but who knows the ways of Heaven?

Dear Sasha, do not break down. The iron law is we all had our parents and we all lost them. This is the reality of life.

Your mother

♦♦♦

June 12, 1940

Dear Sashinka,

It's very difficult for me to take a pen and write to you for the first time after Daddy's death. The words "Daddy's death" sound unbelievably painful and very difficult to accept. Daddy died after unbelievable suffering on June 6th, at six o'clock in the evening, at the Jewish Hospital where we had brought him a few days before at the doctors' suggestion.

He first suffered a brain haemorrhage on the right side of

his brain and then, a week before his death, on the left side. It then reached his heart. During the last week he was unconscious and hardly reacted. He was totally overwhelmed by the pain of his illness. He suffered greatly, and obviously could not move. It all began about four months ago and he spent the last three months in bed. It was torture for Asya and myself to see him suffer so.

Besides, Asya has been in the army for six weeks and for the last three weeks I was all alone. Asya arrived two hours before Daddy's death and then stayed on for four days.

We had a *minyan* in the house, and Asya said *kaddish.* Many people attended the funeral and greatly honored his memory. Friends put ads in the paper and showered us with warmth. Asya is back in the army and I'm writing in order to be with you, as I know you're with us. We received all your cables and they brought us much comfort. We all understand that you are very close and cry with us.

We received your letter from Chicago. Many thanks to you for writing so often. We also do, and by now you must have received two of our letters. A third is on the way. These times are so hard and the only thing for us to do is keep in touch.

You ask about me and Asya. All I can say is that, despite everything I've been through, I've remained as healthy as could be.

Asya is very depressed. Daddy was his best friend and had given him all his love. We have now lost him and this is very sad. After the hardships of the war we had some easier times and were able to relax and live with less worries. Daddy in fact developed a taste for good food and good clothes, things he had never had before. Now he could allow himself to raise his standards.

Then came his terrible illness and now we're facing legal problems. There is the question of the inheritance. The state has very strict control over these matters and a comptroller is being appointed. The business has to be legally transferred and

there is an inheritance tax to be paid. But we don't think or worry about it.

Asya is still in the army and I'm trying my best at the office. The business suffered a lot during the months of Daddy's illness, but I cannot speak of these matters in the same breath as I mention his agonizing pain.

I only wish to tell you, son, that we all had parents and we all lost them. It is the iron law of nature, but you are young and your life is ahead of you. I'm only sad that I cannot be closer to you, and I am fated to die by myself. My main task is to encourage Asya and bring him back to an active life. During the months of Daddy's illness I knew that the doctors were right and his condition was hopeless. It was still a surprising shock when it happened, and one has difficulty accepting it.

Dear Sashock, you must control yourself. You are engaged in important work, you bear a great responsibility and you have proven yourself. You need a clear and healthy head so please don't worry about us. We'll keep healthy and fight for our lives.

We don't know yet about our future plans. I doubt whether Asya would agree to leave me here and go away to Palestine or Australia, and maybe we'll go away together. If it is at all possible, dear boy, I shall write to you about this in more detail at a later time.

Be healthy and cheerful. Don't forget us.

Your old mother

♦♦♦

Riga, August 28, 1940

[This letter was written after the Russian occupation and the establishment of a communist regime in Latvia. At the beginning of the letter Mother explains what has happened since Daddy's death, and how it has affected the family. Obviously, she does not refer directly to the political changes impinging on their lives. She barely hints at Asya.]

As far as Asya is concerned he is employed in the same business where he had worked before [Daddy's]. He's trying to find work in his profession as an electrical engineer but there are no openings. He's also looking for opportunities to give lessons in his field.

[The next paragraph is aimed at the communist censor]

Life has become very dynamic and Riga has became a city full of life and activities. Everyone is looking ahead. There is no discrimination and Jews have equal job opportunities.

Our dear friend has died [Jabotinsky]. His heart could not hold out. Did you attend the funeral?

♦♦♦

Riga, August 29 1940

[Under communist censorship]

Dear Sasha,

You probably read the newspapers and know everyone is very happy, especially our brothers the Jews. They used to be persecuted and beaten for their loyalty to Judaism, but now they have the same right to work as everyone else.

Don't worry about us. The whole week we're busy and on Sundays we visit Daddy's grave. We have placed a bench near it so that we can sit down there. We think a lot about you and how you'd probably like to be with us too.

We'll hold out. Asya has a profession and should find employment. Things are different now, and he has a right to work.

♦♦♦

Riga, September 25, 1940

[Communist terror had become progressively worse].

Dear Sashok,

Thank you for your letter of August 30. I'm happy that you feel well and are healthy. We are healthy too and very happy that we are part of the Soviet homeland and away from the European tragedy.

As I wrote to you, Asya is still working at the same place, following the death of the previous owner [!!]. He now works for a new boss and gets a very low salary. We do not know yet whether he'll be permitted to change professions.

I'm not much help. I work at home and I don't know what I'm going to do later. The changes are difficult to absorb but things should come right in the future.

I don't have to tell you that a meeting between us seems unlikely and we shall probably have to find some other time. Asya could not meet you by himself and I don't think he would leave me here alone. He is working and we live very modestly.

Thank you for your offer of help. We really don't need anything.

I embrace you and kiss you.

Your Mother

♦♦♦

September 28, 1940

Dear Sasha,

We received your letter from August 13. It went all over the world and took six weeks to reach us. Please don't worry about us. We have everything we need.

I was working in my profession but I lost my job today and I don't know whether I can find another, although I am a member of a trade union. We are all very happy that we have not

been touched by this nasty war, live at peace and need not fear bombings.

We Jews were a lower class of people until now, mistreated for as long as I can remember. Now we enjoy full rights and we are equal to everyone else. This is a big achievement.

For the last five months, since Daddy's death, Mommy has been in a state of nervous shock. She spent three weeks in a sanatorium and is now a little better.

I have had no news from our uncles lately and I don't know what the situation is like there [in Palestine]. I hope they are well.

Fondest love

Asya

♦♦♦

October 15, 1940

My dear Sashok,

We miss your letters very much. Now that we received one I'm hurrying to reply. We're all alone here and your letters are always a great joy to us.

We are healthy and have been very busy recently. We had to move from our apartment and turn it over to other people. We were given two rooms. It's very comfortable for me, as Asya goes out to meet his friends and I don't have to stay all by myself in a big apartment. Anyhow, it was very cold and I was very uncomfortable.

Besides, we are very busy. Asya is working in the *former* business of your father. You do know that the owner died last summer, and now we are all working with the new owners [!]. As for me, I work in your father's business. I have a small job in the accounting department.

Both of us are earning enough for our expenses and are quite satisfied and happy to live in a free country as equals. No one persecutes us and I'm very pleased that I can work. Work is the best medicine for me. It keeps me busy and I don't have to think about anything, so you don't have to worry.

Greetings from Asya

Your mother

♦♦♦

Riga, November 29, 1940

[The communist regime became progressively more difficult and Zionists were denied work]

All indications are that Asya — and myself as well — will be fired from our jobs in your father's business. Asya still hopes to find work in his profession.

You invite us for a visit, but I guess you know this dream doesn't depend on us. All I can say is that I shall always be ready to join Daddy. But perhaps I should stop before I write any more nonsense.

Your Mother

♦♦♦

Riga, January 22 1941

Dear Sasha,

It's now two months since I've heard from you, I don't know what to think. Is it so difficult for you to write? What are you actually doing? What kind of work is it? Do you often move to other cities. Actually, why?

As far as we are concerned, the most important thing is that I still have my work in Boris' [Daddy] former business.

Asya was fired a month ago and he has not yet found anything else. They said he was redundant. He's very anxious to work in his profession, but the chances are very limited and we cannot hope for much. It's good that at least I can work. My salary is quite miserable but I have work and this means a lot.

I am weak and my memory is not too great but I keep going as best as I can. Once again, the housing problem has not worked out too well. After we'd left our apartment and moved into two small rooms, the new place turned out to be terribly cold. The winter was very severe and we had to move again, but only now have we been given permission, this time into one room. It is a long and difficult story. *[This was part of a campaign to "reeducate" the bourgeoisie]*

...Don't worry about us. We survive. There is sometimes laughter, sometimes sadness, but that's life. We don't need any help. Just be well.

Mother

♦♦♦

Riga, March 15, 1941

Dear Sasha,

...After two months of unemployment I found work at a veneer factory, and I'm very happy to be settled. Mommy is still working in the old business of Asya's father. After the experiences of the last nine months, the work is not easy for her. She has aged and seems to have lost much of her energy. I doubt she'll last there very long. We are pleased to be earning enough to cover our minimal needs. You'll have to figure out how to help Mommy if I don't manage to make enough to ensure her a quiet old age.

I get up very early and work hard, and later do some additional work in the field of electricity.

It's now a month since we've moved into the new apartment (!!) or, to be precise, the new room. We were only allowed one room between us, split it in half with furniture, and now have an "apartment" with one "room" for Mommy and one for me.

...Are you keeping up *kaddish* for Daddy? I'm trying my best, but you know the circumstances.

Your brother

Asya

FRIENDS WRITE ABOUT ASYA

Efri Sandor writes:

Dear Sasha,

It is not easy to take yourself back fifty years and relive events and emotions from so long ago. But I shall try.

Asya and I were as close as two normal young men could possibly be. You could call it brotherly love. In fact, this was a friendship among three young men and it also included Liova Herzkovitz, whose younger brother apparently owns a thriving appliances store in Tel Aviv. I have forgotten his name, but his family called him Kotik.

Our friendship began in the fall of 1927 and it was "love at first sight." It was the year in which we both started *Mittelschule Erich German.* We began to compare notes during a break and then found that we walked the same route to school.

From the next day onwards we had a standing appointment at the corner of Dzirnavas Iela and Antonias Iela, and walked together every day. We immediately became very close and talked about everything: our families, school, things that bothered us, anti-Semitism in Latvia, Zionism, and our dreams for the future.

Asya was a very mature and serious boy from his early years. I tried to imitate him and through him I became interested in many things. He had a wonderful influence on me, as well as on many others. My parents soon realized this and they came to love Asya as a son. I believe I had a similar effect on your parents, and in years to come it sometimes happened that I was having dinner with your family while Asya was dining with mine.

During this first year in high school we both joined the *S.K.* fraternity and became ardent Zionists. Beside our involvement in reading and discussions we also wanted to toughen ourselves and participated in sports, fortunately with good results, as the school bullies never bothered us again.

We soon found we were unhappy with the organization we had joined. First, their Zionism seemed too vague and aimless and second, it was run by a young man we did not approve of, who was practically a dictator. The following summer we resigned and formed a new fraternity, with a Revisionist orientation. I suspect that this reflected your influence. The management was to be elected democratically and the founding president was, of course, Asya.

The *Lebanonia* was born that fall. We contacted the university fraternity *Galilea.* They took us under their wing, gave us lodgings and instructed us in Zionism, Hebrew, Jewish history, and in the usual student sport, fencing with rapiers.

As soon as the news of Asya's new fraternity began to spread we were joined by many of the finest Jewish boys. It was at this time that Liova Herzkowitz came to us and the three of us became very close friends. The fellows started calling us "the three musketeers," and when only two of us showed up for a function it was taken for granted that the third one was ill.

The *Ezra* school opened that year. My father was one of its founders and, therefore, I had to study there. Fortunately, our schools were still in the same street and I could keep up my morning appointment with Asya. We also continued our regular sport activities, ice skating in the winter, athletics in the

spring and fall, and swimming, rowing and sailing in the summer. These three years were very busy; between our fraternity, which Asya continued to lead by popular request, sport, and our growing interest in the female segment of the population, there was hardly enough time for homework, but Asya steadily retained his standing as one of the top students. He had a marvelous memory and a remarkable ability to concentrate, and learning came to him easily.

We finished high school in the summer of 1931. In the fall of that year I was called up for service in the Latvian army and Asya, if my memory serves me right, began studying at the engineering department of Riga University. We did not see much of each other during the next year, as I served in a small town and did not get home often. I was released in the fall of 1932 and went to work in a textile factory.

Asya was by then one of the young leaders of *Galilea*, which later merged into a larger Revisionist organization, *Hasmonea*. At his insistence, and even though I was not a student at Riga University, I was also invited to join. During that year, until the fall of 1933, we did lots of things together. We went to lectures, organized very cozy parties, had lovely friends, distributed and emptied *Keren Kayemet pushkes*. Life was exciting and wonderful.

In the fall of 1933 I went to study in England. Asya again proved to be a loyal friend and wrote to me often and in great detail. I finished my studies in 1937 and moved to Paris, where my parents and my sister had been living since 1936. Asya was then in Paris and we saw each other often. I do not remember what exactly he was doing, but it had something to do with radio. After a while Asya returned to Riga and so did I. It was impossible to obtain a work permit in France then, and I remained in Riga until April 1939. The war was obviously imminent and I did not want to be separated from my parents. Asya and Liova brought me to the railway station. We all had tears in our eyes when we embraced to say farewell, and somehow knew it was forever.

Asya was a wonderful person and a wonderful friend. He was very bright but he was modest, kind and loyal. He was considerate of others, well-adjusted and always in a good mood. Indeed, Sasha, your family can certainly be proud of your origins. Had Asya survived the war, I have no doubt he would have left a mark in this world.

Very affectionally,

Efri Sandor

Nicolai Joffe writes:

Nicolai Joffe 210 Ladera Drive
Beverly Hills, California 90210

11/9/88

Dear Sasha,

I received your letter three days ago. I don't know whether you remember me from Riga, but I think we saw each other in New York in 1940 or 1941, if my memory serves me correctly.

Speaking about memory, you are asking me to remember about Asya, whom I last saw almost fifty years ago. I'll do my best. I can still hear clearly his last words to me. He was one of the few close friends who came to see me off at the railroad station, when I left for the U.S. in August 1939. Believe it or not, most of us in Riga then did not even want to believe that the world was facing a catastrophe. Asya said to me: "Don't ever forget us!" Was it his instinct, his emotions or his brain that prompted him to say that? I don't know, probably a summary of all three.

Asya and I had been very close friends from the time I met him at the high school fraternity, all through our university years and afterwards. How do I remember him? As a Jew. I

don't believe he was very religious, but he was an ardent Zionist. After all he had you as a role model. He was a good Jew, an ardent, devoted, and active Jew.

As a human being he was a *persona sui generis*, one of a kind. He was quite handsome, as you know, very classic features and a light complexion. As a matter of fact, he looked rather *goyish*, with almost a "baby face." He was considered soft spoken and "low key," but he had an iron will and was a deep thinker, who worked out all his intuitions and plans in great detail ahead of time. He was a leader and a diplomat. He made the group around him feel they were implementing their own ideas, but in reality they were Asya's ideas and he was directing all the actions.

And there were plenty of "actions," "politicking" and "maneuvering" in the life of the fraternity. Most of the time he came out "on top." In the course of time, he held many offices in the fraternities.

He appeared to be rather shy and unsophisticated in his "private" life but the girls loved him, maybe because of that.

Our group also spent a lot of time together socially, outside the fraternity. These were very happy and carefree times in our lives. I also remember how caring and concerned Asya was when your mother became sick and had a cancer operation.

Sasha, I have very warm feelings when I think of my friend Asya. He was a valuable human being, who would have left an important mark in Jewish society and in the world at large, if he had lived beyond his young life. He was a *mentsch*, and I will never forget him.

Kindest regards,

Kolja

From a letter by Abrasha Shmitzkowitz

Haifa, February 22, 1987

Asya had a very special charm. His smile radiated nobility of spirit. He had a warm heart and he was always a true friend, ready to help. He loved people and was very popular socially. In his dealings he was very correct and tactful. I can't ever recall him being rude or losing his temper, or letting himself be provoked. He respected the opponent and his views even when he disagreed.

He was a sincere and loyal Zionist, but disliked high-flown phrases. He was close to my heart and thoughts and since the tragedies in Riga he remains in my memory as a true friend.

Shalom

Abrasha

Secretary Harold L. Ickes, in his message of January 26th to the Emergency Committee, stated: "...Now that the War Refugee Board is in existence the Committee will doubtless direct its efforts to assist the Government in every way possible in the accomplishment of the task and to keep alive the hope of rescue in the hearts of Jewish people of Europe."

EMERGENCY COMMITTEE TO SAVE THE JEWISH PEOPLE OF EUROPE, INC.
25 W. 45th St., New York 19, N. Y. • Bryant 9-4600

EXECUTIVE-BOARD

Co-Chairmen

DEAN ALFANGE
PETER H. BERGSON
LOUIS BROMFIELD
BEN HECHT
HON. WILL ROGERS, JR.
HON. ANDREW L. SOMERS
MADAME SIGRID UNDSET
DR. MAURICE WILLIAM
DR. LI YU-YING

Vice-Chairmen

WILLIAM S. BENNET
KONRAD BERCOVICI
JO DAVIDSON
OSCAR W. EHRHORN
WILLIAM HELIS
DEAN GEORGE W. MATHESON
HERBERT S. MOORE
FLETCHER PRATT
A. HADANI RAFAELI
LISA SERGIO
JOHAN J. SMERTENKO

Executive Director

SAMUEL MERLIN

Secretary

GABRIEL A. WECHSLER

Treasurer

MRS. FRANCES GUNTHER

Members

STELLA ADLER
J. J. AMIEL
AL BAUER
Y. BEN-AMI
A. BEN-ELIEZER
T. BENNAHU
M. BERCH
RABBI P
PROF
P

Press Release by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, Inc.

Two Aspects of a Gesture

Mr. Itshak Ben-Ami and Dr. Alex Hadani-Rafaeli volunteer for service in the US army

Two members of the Palestinian Delegation, Mr. Yitshak Ben-Ami and Dr. Alexander Hadani, have volunteered for the United States Army. Though from the point of view of contributing to the manpower of the American armed forces it is of no particular significance, it is of decisive importance from the point of view of the Delegation — its present struggle and the tasks ahead.

This Delegation consists of six members — Yitshak Ben-Ami, Arieh Ben-Eliezer, Alexander B. Hadani, Eri Jabotinsky, S. Merlin, and at its head, Peter H. Bergson. They came to this country with a mission, to mobilize public opinion and move the governments to grant the Palestinian and stateless Jews of the world a chance to fight Hitler in their own army. The Delegation succeeded in arousing a nation-wide movement for this purpose, in mobilizing thousands of the most prominent leaders from all walks of American life, and hundreds of thousands of sympathizers for that

purpose. But the opposition of the British Government remains stubborn and unmoved.

After four years of war, accompanied by wholesale extermination of the Jews in Europe, the Jewish people still is not recognized as a belligerant, as a part of and as comrades-in-arms in the ranks of the peoples who fight the common enemy. The Jews were not only Hitler's first victims; they were also the first armed enemy to take up his challenge, long before September 1, 1939. They fought Hitler not only with propaganda, and the economic warfare of the boycott (the Anti-German Boycott Movement initiated by the Jews started in 1933 immediately after Hitler's arrival to power), but also on the field of battle — on the roads to Palestine, in the hills of Galilee, in the marketplaces and crossroads of Jerusalem, Haifa, Jaffa and all the places where the spearheads of Nazism and Fascism rehearsed on a small scale the bloody drama prepared for later on. Arab terrorists in Palestine, armed and trained with German and Italian money, by instructors in the German language! — were beaten back, and their terrorism quenched by the Hebrew Freedom Movement and its military organization in Palestine.

Well, these Jews are refused, in the most humiliating manner, the right to fight as an entity, as Jews, in this war; to play their part in this drama.

The Palestinian Delegation considered this tragic failure to bring about the formation of a Jewish Army; decided that at least two of its members should volunteer into the American armed forces.

This act has to be considered from two angles which do not contradict, but rather complement each other.

First, the Palestinian Delegation feels that it is deeply indebted to the great American nation which, with its keen sense of fair play, its glorious traditions of fostering freedom movements of different peoples, profess the most advanced, democratic way of life. In no other country would such a phenomenon as the activities of this delegation, its sustained

fight, its relentless creation of commotion, be possible. The fact that a small group of foreigners, representing the aspirations of the most ignored, the most forgotten and the most betrayed people, succeeded in winning popular support through the press, the radio, in Congressional quarters, in being heard time and time again by the different departments of the Administration and by almost all of the members of the Cabinet, in bringing up the issue in open sessions of both houses of Congress, in sending delegations to other countries — all this is stimulating proof that not everything is lost, but that American democracy, American Freedom, is a guarantee of a successful denouement of the Jewish tragedy. The act of volunteering for the American army of two of the key men in this movement, must be considered an expression of this gratitude and indebtedness.

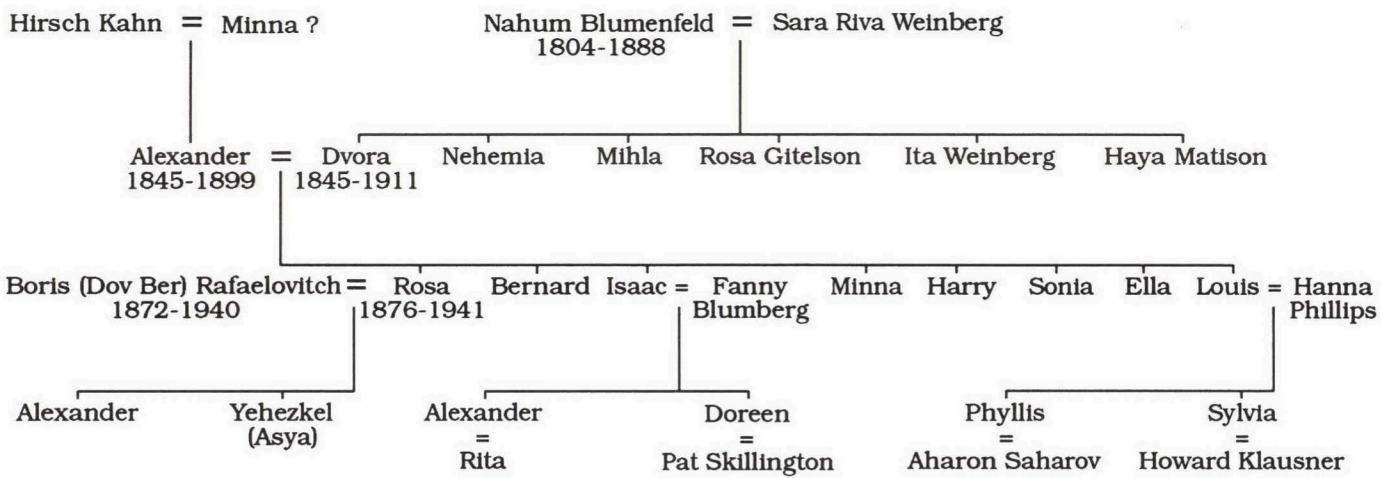
But it must also be considered as a protest against those forces of reaction and imperialism which prevent the normal and dignified participation of the Jewish people in this war. The absurdity of a situation in which Palestine is still neutral, and the Jews are denied the most elementary right to fight as Jews against Hitler, will be brought again to public attention by this act of volunteering by two leaders of the Hebrew Freedom Movement. Maybe some people of high standing upon whom a decision depends will ponder about it.

S. Merlin
Washington D.C.
July 1943

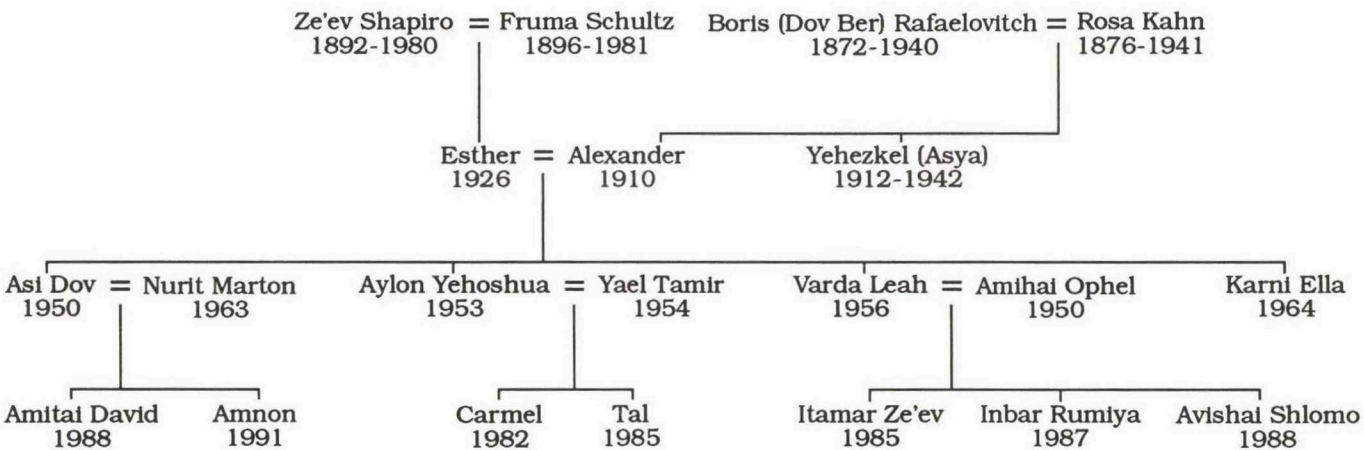
Father's family, Rafaelovitch



Mother's family, Kahn



Rafaeli – Shapiro family




BALTIC SEA
VENTSPILS
PILTENE
TALSI
KULDIGA
VENTA RIVER
LIEPAJA
SKRUNDA
TUKUMS
GULF
OF RIGA
ESTONIA
VALKA
GAUJA RIVER
ALUKSNE
RIGA
SIGULDA
GULBENE
LATVIA
JELGAVA
OGRE
MADONA
BELORUS
DAUGAVA RIVER
LIELUPE RIVER
KARSAVA
JAUNJELGAVA
BAUSKA
KRUSTPILS
JEKABPILS
LUDZA
REZEKNE
LITHUANIA
MALTA
ZILUPE
DAGDA
DVINSK
KRASLAVA
DRISSA
GRIVA
POLAND

joined the Irgun and dedicated his time to setting up military resistance groups, and to the organization of "illegal" immigration to Palestine.

Most of his assignments took him to Europe where he was active until the outbreak of the second World War. He was then sent to America as a member of the Irgun Delegation, which sought the support of the allied forces for the establishment of a Jewish Army, which would participate in the war against the Nazis and mobilize assistance for the rescue of Jewish communities.

After the British established the Jewish Brigade, Rafaeli volunteered for service in the American Army and participated in the campaign from Normandy to the Ruhr. He was assigned as a special agent of the CIC, seeking out and interrogating Nazi leaders.

After the allied victory he continued his Irgun work for Jewish immigration to Palestine.

In 1950 he settled in Israel, became an industrialist, married and established his family in Jerusalem.

