

CHAPTER I

MY MOTHER BLANKA AT EIGHTY

My Parents

On Saturday 24 March 1990 we celebrated my mother's 80th birthday in Britain, at Flat 1A, Highbury Grove Court, Highbury Grove, London N5, the lower ground floor of a modest apartment block built in the mid- 1930s. She travelled to London with my sister Ora from Kefar Shemaryahu, her home in Israel.

The celebration took place in Britain, not in Israel on the advice of my lawyer in Jerusalem, Advocate Leah Tzemel. Given the criminal status in Israel of dialogue and contacts between Israeli citizens and the PLO under the 1986 Amendment to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1948), I was advised not to visit Israel for the time being, until the political situation changed.¹

In autumn 1985 I had been mandated by Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad)² Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Forces of the Palestine Revolution to establish an office in London of which I was appointed Director. I moved to London from Exeter to set up the Jerusalem & Peace Service, a new consultancy on the question of Palestine. The first premises of the office were subleased on the 3rd floor at 13 Goodwin Street, Finsbury Park, London, N4. The rooms were the former offices of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), and previously of the Committee of 100, whose noted members at the time included Bertrand Russell. Given my previous long activist work with the War Resisters' International, I noted with satisfaction the distinguished political history of the premises to which, by coincidence, I became heir. In the spring of 1986 we were informed that the landlord of the building had decided to sell the property and would not renew the leases and the subleases. The lessees were given until August 1986 to find alternative premises.

Both by temperament (sentimentality) and by professional training (anthropology) I have developed a keen interest in family history. My father's birth is registered in the sub district of Highbury. Among the family papers I had assembled, I noted the address of the home of my grandparents, Hyman and Fannie (nee Jacobs) Davis at York Villa, No 2 Highbury New Park, Middlesex. This was presumably the house where my father, Joseph Stanley, was born. An examination of the London street atlas A to Z located Highbury New Park in

Highbury, London Borough of Islington, N5. A subsequent enquiry with the Islington Council confirmed that Highbury New Park, London N5 had been indeed Highbury New Park, Middlesex at the turn of the century. One afternoon that unexpectedly turned out to be free of office meetings and pressing paperwork, I took myself to Highbury New Park. From Finsbury Park underground station it was one stop on the Victoria Line southbound to Highbury & Islington. From there I followed the route on the London A to Z to Highbury New Park. Where No 2 should have been, there was no York Villa. The site was occupied by the apartment block of Highbury Grove Court.

I approached the entrance and decided to press the buzzers in sequence and talk to anyone who could spare the time. I pressed the buzzer for Flat 1A. No reply. The next buzzer for Flat 1 delivered Andre King. It was evening and, by that time, quite dark. I introduced myself formally: 'My name is Dr Uri Davis'.

I proceeded to unravel before him the family history that had led me to his doorstep. He took it all in, but regretted he was unable to give me any information about the early history of the building. He simply did not know. He suggested, however, that I approach the Managing Agents of the block, Messrs. May & Philpot. As we chatted, across the half open front entrance doors (I was not asked to come in), it occurred to me that, in any case, I had to look for new premises for Jerusalem & Peace Service. Where better to begin?. I asked Andre King if he knew whether there were any vacancies in the block.

There were. Flat 1A on the lower ground floor, previously the caretaker's residence, was being rebuilt and renovated with a view to putting it on the market. I took May & Philpot's telephone number and came back during the day-time to look at the flat. I liked the premises a lot. As the only flat on the lower ground floor it was also the only one with an outdoor terrace. I phoned May & Philpot to register my interest, and by August, with the competent help of Theo Mantoura's Lawman financial services, the conveyance was completed and the office moved. Theo Mantoura's assistance was vital. His mother, Leila Mantoura, had become a close friend when I arrived to take residence in London in 1973. Theo was basically family.

I was to live and work in London at the address where my father was most probably born almost a century before, on 5 October 1889. It was fitting that my mother should celebrate her 80th birthday there with a reception called in her honour. It was attended by her children, her younger grandchild Michael and

some 150 relatives, family friends, former British placement students for whom her home in Kefar Shemaryahu was base, and professional and political friends of her son. Her elder teenage grandchild Gul was missing from the gathering, confined to St Andrew's Hospital in Northampton with the obsessive disorder of anorexia and suicide.

My mother was born Blanka Bluhme Kacerova on 26 March 1910 in Slovakia in the village of Vrutky (now swallowed up by the city of Martin) to a peasant and professional blue collar Jewish family. Her father, Leopold Kacer (Kohn), was one of the first three Jewish railway engine drivers in the country. She was the youngest of three children: her brother, Alexander Shelomoh, (born 1902) and her sister, Lidia Leah, (born 1906). Their father died in 1915 at the age of 43 when my mother was just five years old. Her mother Paula (nee Kohn) died seven years later. The family house in Vrutky was sold and the two sisters were fostered by their aunts. Alexander, by then a young adult, earned his living as a waiter and a chef. The family had dispersed. Alexander married Esther Weiss and settled in Zilina. Lidia resided with her paternal aunt Pauline Strauss near Budapest and Blanka, with her maternal aunt Ilonka Schwartz, near Ilava.

In 1925, after completing her elementary and middle school education, Blanka was sent to relatives in Vienna who owned the Korf factory where she was to learn the profession of hat-making. A diploma (with distinction) in ladies hat-making from the commercial vocational school in Trencin followed in 1928. She worked in Trencin and subsequently at the famous "Moderna" ladies hat firm in Bratislava until 1933, when she left to join her brother, Alexander, in Palestine. A year earlier Alexander, who had decided to take a bicycle tour from Czechoslovakia via Turkey to Palestine, had landed in Jerusalem where he earned his living as a chef. My mother travelled to Palestine with Alexander's wife, Esther as well as Esther's sister, Elizabeth, and her little daughter (Esther's niece), Rachel.

It was in Jerusalem that Blanka first met my father, Joseph Stanley Davis.

My mother took a job as a ladies hat-maker with Tirtzah Jackson (formerly Schmidt) at the corner of Ben Hillel and King George Street in Jerusalem. In order to secure her stay in the country she managed to arrange a fictitious marriage to a certain Mr David Ben Zvi Menashe Lifschitz. My father was first introduced to my mother by her brother, the chef at the restaurant he used to frequent. When he proposed to her in 1935 she turned him down. He was middle

aged and divorced with a grown-up daughter. In 1938 she returned to Czechoslovakia for the *bar mitzvah* of her nephew, Leopold Yehudah Lewinger, the son of her sister Lidia and husband Jeno Shelomoh Lewinger. She remained in Czechoslovakia for the whole of the year and returned to Palestine in early 1939, before the outbreak of the Second World War. When they met in Palestine again, four years later, this time in Tel Aviv, my father proposed to my mother for the second time. This time she accepted and they married in 1939. My father was 50 and my mother was 29 and, I suspect, still a virgin.

My father, Joseph Stanley, died on 7 June 1957 at the Tel ha-Shomer hospital. My birthday falls on 8 June. He died on the eve of my 14th birthday.

While my father was in hospital my mother travelled by bus to visit him daily, or almost daily. Israel's road transport grid at the time was nothing like it is today. It must have taken her three hours each way. On the day my father passed away she came back weeping: 'Daddy died'. We fell into each other's arms crying. My sister's voice could be heard in the garden. My mother collected herself sufficiently to deliver to her some sop about Daddy going to a distant place. My sister was six years old at the time.

On the way back from the hospital my mother, crushed under the raw burden of her bereavement, asked a young man to vacate his seat for her. He responded rudely, with something like, 'I paid for my ticket and I have the right to sit here'. She burst into tears and verbally attacked him: 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself to answer a grown woman in this way? Can't you see it is difficult for me to stand? I have just lost my husband. He died today in hospital'. The poor man did not know what hit him. He definitely did not deserve such an assault. Certainly, he was rude, as Israelis in public are wont to be. But my mother was not old, and at 47 she was good-looking. She had a hip problem. I was born overdue, in the 10th month, and was pulled out with forceps, which marked my forehead with a V sign for many years to come. My mother's pelvis was dislocated in the process and this left her with a limp. Also arthritis was developing in her left knee. But the limp was not obvious unless she was walking. Nor was the anonymous passenger to know that she had just learned of her bereavement. Under fire, he scuttled to his feet.

My sister Ora tells me that she recalls mother telling a different story. Father died at night. There was no telephone in the house at the time and the hospital sent a telegram to his next of kin, mother at Kefar Shemaryahu, informing the

family of his death. Mother had left for her hospital visit early in the morning, and on arrival learned of her husband's death and of the telegram. She rushed back to intercept the post before I returned from school. The bus was packed and she pushed in. A man on the bus shouted at her rudely and scolded her for forcing herself into the bus instead of waiting for the next service. Mother gave him a piece of her mind and told him why she had to take the bus. The man went white and did not know where to look.

It occurs to me that she was about my age at the time that I am writing this - a woman of 47 with two children. She had married my father fully aware of the age gap (21 years) and of his poor health. My father served as a lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery in the British army during the First World War. I recall his mention of service in Aden and France. During the war (according to family narrative, during his service in France) he was exposed to German mustard gas and was taken back to England for treatment and recuperation. The gas injury was to be permanent. The gas in his eyes and his lungs slowly, progressively, relentlessly, corroded the tissues of his retina and pleura. He died partially sighted, and the immediate cause of his death was the near complete corrosion of his lung tissue.

My father came to Jerusalem as a matrimonial fugitive. Oral family history has it that after recuperating from the acute symptoms of his injury, his mother, a well-endowed widow, purchased for him a gentleman's farm holding in Redbridge, Sussex. It was at this time that he met his first wife, Winifred Eileen (Jill) Gladys Hayes Allen, the daughter of a Church of England Irish military family. My mother Blanka believes she served as a chaperon to his mother (my paternal grandmother) Fannie. They married in 1924, and my half sister, Charmian (Hemdah) Julie, was born in 1925. They divorced in 1932. The reason cited in the divorce documents is adultery by Winifred Eileen Gladys Hayes Davis with a certain Alexis Gellman.

My father arrived with my half sister, Charmian, in Jerusalem in 1935. He had effectively kidnapped her from the United Kingdom. The family story, as relayed by my mother, is that my father and his first wife Jill agreed that their child would not be confessionally committed either to the Church of England or to the Synagogue. They agreed to suspend their right to determine her religious affiliation, if any, until she was 18, at which time, as an adult, she could make her own choice.

After the divorce family pressure on Jill to baptise her daughter progressively mounted, lest the child be condemned to hell. My father feared his former wife would succumb the pressure and violate their agreement. Another version has it that he did not regard his former wife to be a sufficiently reliable mother. He kidnapped his daughter and took her out of Britain.

I had met Jill after taking up residence in the UK in the 1970s. She had remarried into a minor branch of British royalty (Boustead) and this second marriage had produced a daughter, Anne (subsequent married name West), was born in 1934. When we met at her home in Whitegates, Piccad Rough, Sandy Lane, Guildford she dismissed the story of parental dispute over Charmian's confessional affiliation as nonsense, but confirmed that my father did kidnap the child and take her out of the United Kingdom.

My father left Uckfield with Charmian in 1932 with money for their journey and future subsistence secure in his waistcoat lining. They travelled to Spain (Barcelona and Majorca), Rhodes and Greece. But the child had to go to school, and since, according to the divorce agreement, she had been made a ward of court, he had every reason to believe that her mother had filed an injunction against him in the UK (apparently, she had not). The only practical alternative to the UK was Palestine. Two of his cousins, Winifred and Irene, had married the two Roth brothers. Irene married Cecil the distinguished Oxford Jewish historian and Chief Editor of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Winifred (Winnie) married Leon (Haim) Yehudah, leading Jewish thinker and moralist. The two brothers charted very different courses in their Jewish scholarship and their respective contributions to Jewish life. Cecil became a prominent member of the intellectual Zionist establishment. Leon followed the call of conscience and intellectual dissent. Although there was no personal friction between the brothers, there was no love lost between their wives.

Winnie and Leon Roth moved to Jerusalem in 1928 where Leon was appointed first Ahad ha-Am Professor of Philosophy at the newly established Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He was also elected member of the British Academy, a rare honour for someone not resident in the UK. My father joined them there with Charmian in 1935. In the new country Charmian was either given, or she took, the Hebrew equivalent of her English name, Hemdah.

My father's intellectual milieu and affiliation in Jerusalem was the *Berit Shalom/Ilhud* group. Its leading lights at the time were Leon Yehudah Magnes,

the first Chancellor and subsequently President of the Hebrew University, Martin Buber and Ernst Akiva Simon, as well as the husband of my father's cousin, Leon Yehudah Roth. The group opposed political Zionist policies of confrontation with the Arab people of Palestine; rejected the political Zionist objective of establishing the state of Israel as a Jewish state; and advocated a bi-national Arab-Jewish/Jewish-Arab state in Palestine².

My father was not alone in this intellectual and political circle who developed a growing interest in and sympathy for the work Mahatma Gandhi and his Satyagraha philosophy of non-violence.

In 1951 Leon Roth submitted his resignation to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Years later I was told by his widow, Winnie Roth, who was living in an exquisite flat in the Lanes, Brighton³, that in his letter of resignation Leon Roth gave 'disappointment' as his reason for leaving. He was in the country during the atrocities committed throughout the 1948-49 war by the dissident IZL (*Irgun*) and LEHI (Stern Group) militias (e.g., Deir Yasin) and by the Israeli army (e.g. Duwayma). He saw clearly where the newly established state of Israel was heading, and wanted nothing to do with it.

Leon and Winnie Roth and their four children returned to the United Kingdom settled in Cambridge. Their son, Raphael (Rafi), my cousin twice removed, returned to Israel and changed his surname into the Hebrew, Rotem. He joined the border Kibbutz, Magal, in the Triangle where he worked with their sheep. I frequently spent good parts of my secondary school Passover and summer holidays with him, where I learned to milk the sheep, drive a tractor and ride a horse. I loved it. After his departure from Jerusalem Professor Leon Roth took visiting lectureships abroad, but was not offered an academic appointment in the UK. In 1960 his *Judaism: A Portrait* was published by Faber & Faber, London and in 1963 he embarked upon his long postponed ambition to visit Australia and New Zealand. He travelled there with his wife and died shortly after arrival in New Zealand from a stroke in April 1963. She buried him there.

Leon Roth is the only relative in my immediate family, other than my father, of whose politics I am proud.

In 1965 I was jailed for leading the campaign against the confiscation of Palestinian lands in the Galilee and against the establishment of Karmeil as an exclusively Jewish city on the expropriated lands (see Chapter III). Following

my release I was admitted to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem as an undergraduate student to read Philosophy and Arabic. I noted with pride that the University Magnes Press series of Hebrew translation of philosophical classics is named after Leon (his name in Hebrew was Haim Yehudah) Roth. And when, in 1969, I took employment as an Arabic-English transliterator, Cecil Roth was Editor-in-Chief.

Cecil Roth ended his career as Editor-in-Chief of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. He died in Jerusalem in June 1970, and was buried at the Sanhedriyah cemetery where he was given a state funeral.

At the funeral Rafi was asked to join the pallbearers. The President of the state of Israel, Zalman Shazar, was invited to support the widow's right arm. And, to my amazement, as the next-of-kin, I was asked to support her left arm. There I was, one of Israel's infamous political prisoners and foremost civil rights campaigners, walking solemnly in the company of the President of the State of Israel supporting Cecil Roth's widow at a state funeral. Just a year earlier, in 1969, I was almost lynched in 1969 by Jerusalem mob during a protest in Zion Square against the annexation of East Jerusalem (see Chapter IV).

Months later, when I visited Irene Roth at her Jerusalem apartment we talked about the funeral and that incredulous conjunction. 'Cecil would have loved it' - she said. She loved it. I loved it. I don't think Shazar did.

I never stopped to consider or judge my father on the matter of his departure from the UK, the kidnapping of his daughter Charmian and the damage he caused both mother and daughter. He was my father, and by the time I heard the story, the kidnapping had been elevated to the status of a family legend. Nor did I ever discuss the story with my half sister. When I was old enough to do so, we were already set apart by the irreparable rift between her and my mother. This culminated in Charmian's challenge to my father's will. She took her case to court against my mother and lost. My politics were an added barrier: resistance to the draft and civil rights campaigning on behalf of the Palestinians inside Israel did not go down well with Charmian, nor with her husband, Haim Kolton.

My great grandfather Woolf Halevi left Poland for the UK in the mid-19th Century with his 10 sons and settled in Whitechapel, East London, as a cap-maker. By the time my father was born in 1889 his family was established as wealthy assimilated Jews in London. They made their money in real estate. They

took the surname Davis, and moved from immigrant East London Whitechapel to up-market Highbury in Middlesex. They never converted to Christianity, but they did go to church on Sundays for social interaction. When my father's father, Hyman, died of pneumonia in 1902 at the age of 41 a few months before my father's *bar mitzvah*, my father's mother and my paternal grandmother, Fannie, became a wealthy widowed matriarch. Her eldest son, my uncle Merton (died 1947), married Eve Maud Rice and ran a lamp and electricity shop in the seaside resort town of Bognor Regis. This marriage produced one retarded offspring, Leo, my only first cousin.

The next in line, my uncle Cyril (died 1987) joined the family firm of Jacobs Young and Westbury trading in cane imported from China and the Far East. He married, but had no children. Third in line was my father (died 1957). At the age of 15 he was sent to Berlin for his secondary school education. He matriculated in 1908 and wanted to study to be an architect. His family objected. They planned for him to join the family business. He never did, but neither did he study architecture. He was mobilized as an officer with the Royal Field Artillery in the First World War, and he did not resume his interest in architecture after his injury in the war. He was fluent in German, however, and subsequently used his linguistic skills as a translator. The youngest, my uncle Frank (died 1955), was a prodigy child pianist who gave his first public concerts before he was 10 years old. He too never developed a professional career. As a pacifist, he served in the Red Cross during the First World War and was decorated for his bravery in bringing wounded to safety under fire. Eventually, he settled in Bushey Heath with his Scottish homosexual partner, Jock Weir. Only Cyril was employed in a regular job, as an executive with the family business of Jacobs Young and Westbury, first in London and, subsequently, in Haywards Heath. The others, Merton, Stanley and Frank, depended throughout their lives on their inherited family wealth from their father and allowances from their mother.

My mother communicated a double message on the subject of her relationship with my father. There was the official line couched in slogans: 'He was a wonderful man'; 'He was a wonderful husband'. But there was a parallel, complex, subliminal message, which, from time to time, was explicitly articulated. She could not accept that my father did not have a regular job (only 'good-for-nothings' do not have jobs). She regarded herself as the solid rock of the family and my father as a dreamer. She loved him. The physical contrast between them was striking. My mother was good looking, physically big and buxom. She came from a Jewish peasant and blue collar stock in

Czechoslovakia, and she had no intellectual pretensions. My father was physically small and very much a third generation upper middle-class London Jew.

She had a profession: ladies hat-Making. He was a dilettante intellectual and had no profession. She was down to earth. He was bohemian. She must have given my father a sense of stability, acting as an emotional anchor. He loved her. I remember the red roses he always bought her. He must have had wonderful sex with her against her full, big-breasted, soft body. It must have been just before or just after my tenth birthday when I walked into their bedroom one morning, pushing the door open unannounced. I was promptly told not to enter again without knocking. They were both under the covers, my mother on her back, her knees parted and raised under the blankets, my father melting into her, his head next to the nape of her neck. I was taken aback and hurt at being rejected. Understanding, yet not fully understanding, the reason that led my parents to redraw the boundaries of their private domain, I was made aware of my parents' sexuality. Alone in my room, I wondered whether the noises which were barely audible through the wall were the sound of their love-Making. I discovered on a bookshelf one day a volume, *Sex After 40*!

Yet their relationship could also be tempestuous. Not infrequently their arguments escalated, and my father would storm out of the house to walk up and down the road outside, arms clasped behind his back in anger. After his death, in my frequent adolescent outbursts of fury and sulking tantrums directed against my mother, I picked up his reactions. Years later she chuckled: 'Just like your father'.

In my more extreme outbursts of teenage rage I could become quite physical, though never against persons. In the course of a violent row with my mother, escalation could result in my marching around the house repeatedly slamming the shutters one by one. It was a country house designed by architect Heintz Rau * with some 16 shutters all round. My mother lived there until her death in January 1992 and my sister (at 41) still occupies the house. It has remained happily unaltered since its construction in 1942.

My mother's decision to join her travelling brother in Jerusalem and her subsequent marriage to my father saved her from the Nazi transportation of the Jewish community in Czechoslovakia and from Auschwitz. Both my parents arrived in Palestine for personal, not ideological Zionist reasons. Hitler failed in

his efforts to occupy the United Kingdom and so my father's family were not condemned to transportation and annihilation. Not so Czechoslovakia. My mother's immediate family, her sister Lidia Lewinger, her sister's husband and their three children, were victims of the Nazi Holocaust in Auschwitz as were related branches of the family. And I, her son, a disgusting sullen *sabra* when subject to teenage tantrums and made vicious by adolescent rage, would curse her, aiming my blows at her weakest spot. I sought to wound her in the ugliest possible way, where, I well knew, it would hurt most: the loss of her family murdered by the Nazis: 'I wish you were buried in the grave of Hitler', I would scream at her.

The cursing invariably worked. My mother would stop short; freeze in her tracks. Tears would well in her eyes. There was her son, 'a survivor of the Holocaust' (had she not survived, I would not have been born), allowed by providence to live (whereas the children of her sister were fated to untold misery and horrific death), cursing her, wishing her not just dead, but buried in the grave of Hitler, the arch-criminal responsible for the murder of her family, the worst enemy of the Jewish community in modern times.

The most appalling aspect of these curses was that they came naturally to me, a *sabra* boy in Israel. As naturally as singing from the treetops with my classmates during playtime:

Be tu tu tu tu *ha-Aravim yamutu*, be tu tu tu tu, *be tu-bi-Shevat*
 [Tu tu tu tu The Arabs will die, tu tu tu tu, in tu-bi-Shevat (the
 feast the of the planting of the trees on the 15th of the Jewish
 calendar of the month of *Shevat*, the 11th month of the Jewish
 calendar)]

There has always been a double message in references to the Holocaust in Israeli schools. At one level, we were taught that the Nazi Holocaust was the most terrible crime in history committed against the Jewish people (not against humanity including the Jewish people). At the other level, we were taught to despise the Jewish victims of the Holocaust for going to their designated destruction 'like lambs to the slaughter'. Needless to say we were not taught that Nazi racism and the Holocaust were directed not only against Jews, but also, for instance, against the Gypsy (travelling) people of Europe. Nor were we made aware of the role of the collaboration, *inter alia*, by sections of the Jewish and Zionist leadership with the Nazi occupation authorities in manufacturing and

securing through deception and silence, the obedience and the docility of the majority of the Jewish communities in the face of the prospects of their transportation⁷.

My mother's tribe of relatives in Israel was not small. Our house in Kefar Shemaryahu was a centre for her family, now dispersed throughout the country. The double message was also articulated at home through my mother's attitude to her relative, Gertrude (Beibi) Zehavi (nee Kacerova formerly Kugler formerly Zitrin). Beibi was an underground resistance activist with the Partisans against the Nazi occupation and a survivor of Nazi concentration camps (Auschwitz and others). At the one (official) level my mother treated her with genuine respect, affection and compassion. My mother's home, our home at Kefar Shemaryahu, was always open to her. She was undoubtedly a welcome guest. At the same time, there was an unmistakable message of underlying contempt. Beibi, chronically distraught and hysterical after her camp ordeal, was labelled (possibly correctly) by my mother - who has probably never slept with another man after my father's death - as 'needing men', that is to say, after men for sex, namely, 'nymphomaniac'.

Following the signing of Restitution Agreements between the Government of Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1952 it was possible for my mother to apply for personal restitution for her family property, including the property of her sister's family, in Nazi occupied Slovakia. My mother refused outright. As the agreements were updated over the subsequent years, I urged her to apply. After the death of my father in 1957 the family was in dire economic straits, but her refusal remained adamant. This was contaminated money; blood money; she would not touch it; one cannot compensate for the horrors of Nazism with money. She remained deaf to the argument that the restitution moneys were paid out in compensation for lost properties and damages - not for the life of those who had been murdered.

At the time, I thought her position was stupid. Today, I am not so sure. Stupid or otherwise, hers was a position of consistent principle.

In 1950 my parents went for a few weeks to the UK to seek eye treatment for my father. I was left with neighbours up the road, Mr and Mrs Grutzner, who ran a children's pension at their home. In 1951 my sister Ora was born at Donollo Hospital in Jaffa, and in 1954 the family (my parents, myself and my younger sister) went to the UK for my father's second eye treatment with Dr Harold

Ridley, foremost eye specialist in the UK at the time. The aim was to fit him with contact lenses. The family rented an attic apartment at 19 Cranley Gardens in Muswell Hill, where I attended the local Whittingham School.

This time we stayed in the UK for nearly half a year. For months my father deliberated whether to resettle in London or return to Kefar Shemaryahu. He spent hours discussing the question with the UK members of his family. There was a payphone in the house, and I can still visualize him standing there, wearing his mackintosh and his brown trilby felt-hat talking for what seemed hours, most frequently with his younger brother Frank, to whom he was closest. He could not make up his mind. My mother came to detest his 'Frank says ...' accounts of his long phone discussions with his brother on the endless subject of 'to return or not to return'.

Finally my mother took the decisive step. She told my father that she was returning with the children to Kefar Shemaryahu, and he could join her (or otherwise) when he was ready. He returned with her.

My father was well educated and culturally very refined. We had on the bookshelves in our home in Kefar Shemaryahu the complete works of Goethe, Schiller and Shakespeare in expensive leather bound 1880s-1890s editions, although I had rarely seen my father or my mother read them. My mother insisted on dusting the books every year. On spring (Passover) cleaning, each volume was taken off the shelf, opened, and the two covers brutally smashed together with a bang to get the dust out. The dust may well have been blown out in this way, but the delicate leather-bound volumes were also irreparably destroyed under this annual assault, as was a set of gilded leather bound prayer books given to my father by his grandmother on his *bar mitzvah*. The volumes were saved from total destruction when my mother became too arthritic to do the annual spring cleaning 'properly' herself. Family finances were too tight to allow hired help to do the job and we, the children, were obviously, totally disinclined to undertake the chore for her.

My father also brought with him from England an exquisite set of cutlery, including fish knives and forks. The handles were made of ebony. My mother, during one spring cleaning session, threw the entire set into a cauldron of boiling soap water to give it 'good' clean. The set was ruined.

My father was a freelance translator. I have a volume by the Director of the

Economic Research Institute of the Jewish Agency Dr Alfred Bonn, *State and Economics in the Middle East*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, London 1948, acknowledging his translation. My half sister Charmian recalls a tour of new settlements sponsored by the Jewish Agency in 1936 following which he was to write a series of articles for publication by the World Zionist Organization.

My father died when I was 14, and I, at the age of 49, am now groping to unravel the contours of my relationship with him as they existed during his lifetime, buried for over three decades under the thick paste of my mother's simultaneous official stereotyping ('wonderful husband') and dismissal ('good-for-nothing')

Kefar Shemaryahu

In 1937 the Rural and Suburban Settlement Co (RASSCO), established as a subsidiary of the Jewish Agency in 1934, was finalizing the planning and the parcellation of a modest area of land of some 1200 dunams (approximately 300 acres). It was originally purchased from the coastal village of Haram Sayyidna Ali as a smallholding village (*moshavah*) to satisfy the growing demand for rural and suburban settlement of middle class professional German Jewish immigrants to Palestine, following the rise of Hitler to power in 1933. RASSCO Haram lands were settled by a core of German Jewish immigrants and the locality was named Kefar Shemaryahu after a veteran leader of the German Zionist movement Shemaryahu Levine.

In kibbutz or smallholding *moshav* forms of settlement settlers were given long term leaseholds to the land, while the freehold (title) remained with the Jewish National Fund or the Israel Lands Administration. But the *moshavah* form of settlement catered to rural and suburban settlers who had access to capital and would only consider buying the freehold of their smallholding.

The Jerusalem climate proved damaging to my father's lungs, and the family doctor advised that he move his residence to the warm coast. In 1939 my father bought from RASSCO Plot no 19 Bloc 6671 * in its newly established smallholding village of Kefar Shemaryahu. He decided to settle there, and, possibly recalling his experience as a gentleman farmer in Redbridge, Sussex, develop a smallholding on the land.

In 1942 he built the family house there, and in 1943, six month after my birth in

Jerusalem, he moved to farm the family smallholding. In the entire world there is only one place that I can genuinely call home: 34 Ha-Sadot Street, Kefar Shemaryahu.

After the 1948 war, the neighbouring Arab village to Kefar Shemaryahu, Haram Sayyidna Ali, became a ghost town: all of its people became refugees. The Arab women vendors with their donkeys laden with fresh season's fruits and vegetables vanished from the streets of Kefar Shemaryahu. Most of Haram Sayyidna Ali's agricultural lands were appropriated by the Jewish National Fund and the Israel Lands Administration and allocated to the neighbouring Jewish settlements of Rishpon, Kefar Shemaryahu, Nof Yam and Herzliyah. In its empty dwellings new Jewish immigrants from the Arab countries were housed. The large, beautiful imposing mosque became derelict. Its gates were locked and chained by order of the Israel Ministry of Religious Affairs, to be reopened only decades later.

A small cluster of eucalyptus trees grew beside the Mosque, and Sayyidna Ali's beach was the nearest to walk to. Scaling the walls of the Mosque with my classmates is part of my childhood memories, as is picking the fruits of the ripe sabr from the sabr hedgerows of Sayyidna Ali, and giggling in illicit fascination and teenage embarrassment at the rings of used condoms scattered on the shady ground under the eucalyptus trees. It was the haunt of local lovers, or, more probably, local prostitutes and their clients.

I am still amazed, and I do not fully understand, how this Palestinian presence, so much part of my Saturday, holiday and camping life as a growing youth in Kefar Shemaryahu, could have effectively been experienced through our official and unofficial education as both present and absent, real and unreal. We were told by our parents that Arab inhabitants of Sayyidna Ali were good neighbours, and that the leaders of the Kefar Shemaryahu community 'called on' the notables of Sayyidna Ali in 1948 not to leave, but that they left regardless. The juxtaposition of this narrative ('We called on them not to leave') and reality (Jewish new immigrant families from Arab countries occupying the Palestinian homes of Sayyidna Ali) conveyed a complex underlying message. The implication was that, in this relationship, the act of alleged unjustified departure by the Arabs, entitled their settler Jewish neighbours to appropriate their possessions. The distorted logic of the equation was that if the Arabs did not trust the Jewish settlers with their lives, the settlers were justified in taking their homes.

The departure of the Arab inhabitants of Sayyidna Ali, against the advice of the Jewish settlers (so we were always told), was transformed, almost magically, into an act of betrayal in the eyes of their Jewish neighbours. The unfaithful deserved all that was coming to them. The obvious desire of the Arab peasant families to shelter their children from the danger of war was depicted as desertion. Their universal human right to property, including departure from their homes to safety in times of war and return in times of peace, denied and interpreted as lack of attachment to their vacated possessions. This effectively transformed their properties almost into a gift.

An analogy can be drawn with date rape. In date rape the two parties share the same space alone, as well as a level of intimacy that goes with the date. She says 'no'. He reads the 'no' to mean 'yes'. After all, had she not been willing to have sex with him, she would not have agreed to date him alone in the first place. If the Arabs were not willing for the Jewish settlers to appropriate their possessions, they would not have left in the first place.

As in date rape, the highest betrayal of all, from the aggressors' point of view, is when the victims turn around and publicly accuse them of illegal attack. From the aggressors' point of view it was simply not fair. The victims are not victims but tempters, and if, in the act of tempting, they became victims, they have only themselves to blame.

When Iraqi scuds hit Tel Aviv and its environs during the Gulf war in 1991, thousands of Jewish families fled to take their families and children to safety. They went to Jerusalem, assuming that Iraq would refrain from targeting the third holiest city of Islam, and to Eilat, assuming that the city is beyond the range of the Iraqi missiles. They were accused by the Mayor of Tel Aviv, General (Reserve) Shelomo Lahat, of desertion. But nobody suggested that their properties should be confiscated and distributed among those who remained in the city throughout the war, or that they should be prohibited from return to their homes in Tel Aviv and condemned to remain refugees in the localities where they had sought shelter. After all, they were Jews - not Arabs.

Leaving aside noted exceptions, the Arab was not, and is not, regarded as a full legally constituted human being by the Jewish settler community. The Arab was not considered capable of autonomous judgement, or taking a decision to leave against the backdrop of, for instance, the Deir Yasin massacre, to protect his family and children, like the decision many thousands of Jewish families in Tel

Aviv in the face of the Iraqi scuds. Yet this may, under the circumstances, have been wiser and more correct than the wishful thinking represented by advice of the neighbouring Jewish settlers of Kefar Shemaryahu to stay. The departing Palestinian families did not view their evacuation as permanent. The majority of the Palestinian population of Sayyidna Ali acted like most civilian populations exposed to the war and massacre. They took their family and children to safety until hostilities subside. Most departing families left the bulk of their possessions behind because they could not pack them all quickly and because they expected to return sooner rather than later.

The case of Sayyidna Ali is particularly illuminating because the refugees ended up by a twist of fate as citizens of the state of Israel. They sought refuge in the Arab village of Muqaybila in the Triangle, which fell under Israeli sovereignty following the 1949 armistice agreements between Israel and Jordan. Were they allowed by the Israeli authorities to return to their homes? Nothing of the kind. Though present as citizens of the state of Israel, they were classified under the Israel Absentees Property Law (1950) as 'absentees' and lost all rights to their vast properties in Sayyidna Ali. New Jewish immigrants were settled in their homes and their lands were apportioned among the neighbouring Jewish settlements, including Kefar Shemaryahu, whose inhabitants, as we were emphatically and repeatedly told, entreated them not to leave.

Our neighbours, our fellow human beings, citizens of the state of Israel, were transformed by the political and legal logic of Zionist philosophy and practice into the horrific status of 'present absentees'.

It was the same logic that transformed the Palestinian presence so much part of my life as a growing youth in Kefar Shemaryahu, into something both present and absent, real and unreal. The reality of everything past and present associated with The Arabs in Israel was reduced to the same status of 'present absenteeism'. The Arabs continued to be present as enemies, as infiltrators, as murderers, as saboteurs, as refugees, as the sabr hedgerow, as the empty homes, as the vacated mosques. But they were not there.

For most of us, our daily routine was Hebrew and Jewish: kindergarten, school, army, university and/or job. But, our holidays were Arabic: kindergarten walks to the beach in Sayyidna Ali; school excursions driving through Arab villages singing at the top of our voice *hevenu Shalom aleikhem* (we brought peace [imposed] upon you (aleikhem) - not to you (eleikhem)). The family of my first

wife Nira spent their summer holidays in the abandoned seaside Palestinian Arab village of Tantura, whose inhabitants were expelled by the Israeli army in 1948. So did the youths of the neighbouring labour Zionist kibbutzim, including Gan Shmuel, the home of Udi Adiv and Havah Halevi⁶.

In the final analysis, calls by the leaders of the Jewish settlers of Kefar Shemaryahu on their Arab neighbours not to leave, must be judged - and can be fully understood - only in relation to their action: their complicity with the transfer of the ownership of the lands of their Arab neighbours to the Jewish National Fund on behalf of 'the Jewish people' 'in perpetuity'; and their appropriation of these lands for the expansion of the territory of Kefar Shemaryahu. The attempts of the inhabitants of Kefar Shemaryahu to justify this scandalous injustice by the claim of their reported appeals to the Palestinian Arabs to stay, sound to my now sharpened ears like the ultimate exercise in bad faith, the epitome of blaming the victim.

Kefar Shemaryahu was in fact saying to Sayyidna Ali: Don't leave, because if you leave, we will loot your possessions; occupy your homes; confiscate your lands. Don't force us to become robbers, looters, thieves and criminals. If we do - you are to blame. Through your departure, our entreaties notwithstanding, you made us criminals. We, the settlers, were held back by your presence and were able to regard ourselves as decent human beings. You were the safeguard of our humanity. We would not forgive you for tearing the veil of hypocrisy from our faces and revealing the real inhumanity of our settler politics into light. For this, you deserve that we rob you. For exposing our true nature, you deserve to be our victims. You did not trust your lives to us. You suspected us of being capable of massacre. As punishment we will give you your just desert. We will take your properties and expect you to thank us that you were not massacred. Look how generous and morally superior we are. Other people (Nazis, for instance) would both massacre you and confiscate your properties. We only confiscate your properties, deny you citizenship and reduce you to stateless refugees. But we do not annihilate you in gas chambers.

It was the leading Palestinian intellectual, Hisham Sharabi, at Georgetown University, Washington DC, who noted in interviews during the Gulf war the ultimate tragedy of the Palestinians: their occupiers are perceived in the West to be 'Jews'. The Palestinians are subject to the horror and illegality of settler occupation like the Algerians under the French, the Zimbabweans under the Rhodesians, the Africans under the Afrikaners. But the suffering, the injustice,

the horror and the illegality of the Israeli occupation of Palestine is made invisible by the Holocaust perpetrated against the Jews in Nazi occupied Europe. So long as the 'Jews', namely, the Zionist Israelis, do not subject the Palestinians to annihilation in gas chambers but 'only' to mass dispossession, denationalization and occupation, the horror and the cruelty of the Palestinian situation will go unrecognized in the West.

But in the horrific dialectics of the narrative above is also rooted the key to a solution. If the Palestinian is the guarantee for the Israeli settler's humanity; if the plug of settler bestiality is pulled when the Palestinian is expelled - then humanity is restored when the Palestinian returns. For the Palestinian, it means return from statelessness to citizenship. For the Israeli, return from settler racism to equality under the law.

Although the house at Kefar Shemaryahu was completed in 1942, my parents, for whatever reasons, returned to Jerusalem. This was possibly near the time my mother was due to give birth, in order to ensure the delivery at the Sadowski private clinic, the best antenatal medical attention available in Palestine at the time. My mother had a narrow pelvis. She was 33 at the time of my birth (with one previous miscarriage).

I had a village childhood. Milk was delivered in a donkeycart by Herr Katz and later by Herr Haazeh. Until 1948 Arab peasant women from the neighbouring villages of Sayyidna Ali and al-Jalil brought their merchandize of fresh fruit and vegetables in baskets on their heads or on donkeyback. I was raised on goats milk. My father insisted that I should be fed unboiled goat's milk in order not to impair its nutrient value. The vet would arrive periodically to examine the milk for tuberculosis. There was a vegetable garden and a small cowshed.

But our livelihood was secured not by the smallholding. It depended on my father's modest war pension and occasional translation, periodic injections of family funds from England and my mother's ladies hat-making - the smooth wooden busts which she used for her craft are part of my childhood furniture. One room in the house was rented out to Yaffah Galinka, the Kindergarten teacher, until she married Avinoam Slutski and moved to live in Netanyah, and in the summer my parents ran a summer kindergarten for the children of the wealthier neighbouring Tel Aviv families. During the 1948 war many Tel Aviv families sent their children to the relatively more secure countryside, and Kefar Shemaryahu was a favoured destination. Michael Brizon (B Michael), the noted

Haaretz political satirist told me that he remembers my home from these days. I was three years old when the Second World War came to an end in 1945 and five when the 1948 war broke out. My only recollection of that period seems to be a vivid memory of seeing an airship (Zeppelin) in the sky.

I was raised on the land. My feet were familiar with the texture of the moist red hamra soil in winter and scorched by the heat of the sand in summer, with desperate relief provided by the flutter of sprinklers on the lawn. The lawn of my childhood was not the green turf common today, but the old fashioned grass dotted with small purple flowers that attracted hordes of bees in spring, to whose stings we were regularly exposed.

My father's health deteriorated, and the smallholding was an endless drain on the family's always tight financial resources. My father needed eye treatment in the UK and by 1950, towards their trip, my parents decided to liquidated the farm. The cowshed was turned into two residential units, a one room flat and a two room flat (the small house), which were then permanently rented out. That same year my parents left for London to get eye treatment for my father. I was left behind in the care of Pension Grutzner for children, our neighbours further up on the same street in Kefar Shemaryahu. The Grutzner house was the biggest house on the street, with distinctive decorative beige colour plaster outside. Their furniture was heavy and beautifully carved. And I was fascinated by their breakfast china bowls. Breakfast was served in bowls with marvellous coloured pictures of children's toys on the bottom. There was a different picture on the bottom of each bowl, which would be gradually revealed as we, the children at the Pension, scraped out the last of our morning porridge. It was always a surprise to discover whose bowl had which picture.

Their younger daughter Ruth (Ruti) was acknowledged to be the most beautiful girl in our kindergarten class. We boys, walking her back home, not on the 'main' village road, but on the parallel deserted 'Arab' road, would always urge her to lift her skirt and pull down her panties to let us have a peek at her tender parts.

The direct cause of my father's death was his gas injury in the First World War. After his death the mainstay of our livelihood was my mother's war widow's pension paid from London. My mother did not marry again. Nor, as far as I am aware, did she have any other sexual relations. I believe that a few years after my father's death she was introduced to someone, and did consider remarriage.

She was foolish enough to ask me what I thought about the prospects of her remarrying, and I of course responded negatively. The subject was never raised again. I was to remain the unchallenged 'man in the house' and the head of the family at the age of 14. A prince. A king-designate.

My parents brought with them when they returned from my father's first eye treatment in the UK in 1950 a Gestetner stencil printing machine. They did a modest amount of printing at home. One of their more significant clients was RASSCO (Rural and Suburban Settlement Company Ltd) in Tel Aviv. I often helped with the collating, stapling and deliveries.

To supplement her income, my widowed mother continued with the hat Making, the printing and the summer letting of rooms. My mother, my sister and I would all sleep in one room to vacate the other two rooms for summer rentals. The beds were arranged in the room as if it were a barracks. One summer, I must have been 15 or 16 years old, I asked my mother across the distance between her bed and mine whether I could sleep with her. She must have been shocked, but she did not verbally abuse me or send me on a guilt trip (how dare you! how can you!). She simply said no. She also said she did not know whether other mothers did that with their adolescent sons, but it was definitely wrong. I asked once. I never asked again.

Yet, it was not my mother but my father, that small and frail man, who determined the direction of my life in two decisive ways.

First, by commission: he insisted that I be exempted from gun training in the paramilitary *Gadna* " classes at secondary school on principle. In his liberal dictionary, military service was a necessary evil. He did not object to compulsory military service at the age of 18. He did not object to my participation in physical exercise, topography classes or excursions. But he took strong exception to gun training in school, which, I assume, he regarded as fascist or crypto-fascist. He argued, pressed and fought so that I could be excluded from gun training classes at Tikhon Ironi A (First Municipal Secondary School) in Tel Aviv, where I was enrolled. I was the only student at the school to be exempted.

Second, by omission: he died when I was only 14, a year after my *bar mitzvah*. This is what he read out to me at my *bar mitzvah* reception in the spacious front garden of our home in Kefar Shemaryahu:

My dear son, Today, your thirteenth birthday, is a symbolic day in your young life.

The *bar mitzvah* ceremony marks the transition from boyhood to adolescence, it signifies your initiation into the mysteries of life and the responsibilities of society ... And for you this day has an added significance - you will shortly be leaving the elementary school to start a new life as a pupil of a secondary school ... In th[ese] discordant [times] the future calls for wise and enlightened leadership, for men and women imbued with the spirit of justice and human kindness in accordance with the teachings of the Prophets.

It is our fervent wish that you, my dear boy, will succeed in your studies and in your future career, and living up to your name [Uriel]: "God is My Light", grow up to become a well-balanced, just and upright man - a lover of humanity - a protagonist of the coming 'Aquarian' Age.

I did live up to my name and followed the light of God (the truth of conscience), though not quite in the sense my father would have expected.

After his death, I followed his directions and adhered to his demand that I should be exempted from gun training in Secondary School. But then I failed to see why the gun should be rejected at the age of 14, 15, 16 and 17, yet become a necessary evil at the age of 18. If it was wrong to train for war at 17, why was it not wrong to train for war at 18. If drilling for killing was not acceptable for boys of 17, why was it acceptable for 18 year-old men? My father was not there to give me an explanation. Nor was he there to support me or oppose me in taking his liberal values to what I thought at the time was a compelling radical conclusion. Had he been there, he might have been able to present a persuasive argument against my reasoning, and I might have been convinced.

And my mother could not give me an explanation. She did not see why an explanation was necessary in the first place. For her one had to go to the army because one had to go to the army; one delivered one's duty to the state because one delivered one's duty to the state. She went along with my father's crusade to exempt me from gun training at Secondary School because it was a matter of principle for my father, not because she fully understood his position or agreed. Likewise, she went along with my decision to declare myself as a conscientious objector because she could see that it was, for me, a matter of principle; because she accepted the right of an individual in a democratic society to conscientious

objection; and because she could appreciate my quest for moral consistency (honest, she called it). Not because she agreed.

Three decades later, no longer a pacifist, and as a father myself, I can only speculate how I would reason with my adolescent son on the subject. I would, perhaps, use analogies and examples. For instance, in the UK it is illegal for a male of any age to have sex with a woman under 16. And, presumably, it is illegal for a woman under 16 to engage in sexual intercourse. But sex becomes legal for both men and women after 16. There is substance in the stipulation that what is a legitimate pleasure in adult life (sex) is damaging for adolescents (sexual abuse); that what is legal for an adult (learning to drive) is not legal for an adolescent (joy riding); and that a necessary evil in the world of men and women (gun) ought not be introduced into adolescent world (paramilitary training in secondary school).

But my father was not there to introduce me to such reasoning. He was not a pacifist and I do not think that he would have taken the philosophical-political position that the gun is, in every case, an unacceptable means of offense or defense, or that war, every war in any context, is a crime against humanity. I trust he would be opposed to most wars. I also believe he would support some wars as just and judge some armed struggles as necessary.

He was not there to reason with me and teach me. And even if he had been there, being a stiff-necked, morally precocious youth motivated by conscience, hatred of hypocrisy and the rejection of double standards, I might not have been receptive to his reasoning. I would have argued that Making love, sex and learning to drive are not like learning to kill. Sex is in itself something beautiful that can be abused, and learning to drive is in itself something useful that can be misused, whereas the gun is in and of itself negative and destructive, something that cannot, in any context, be applied to positive use. It is negative in every context.

I had discovered an ahistorical absolute: war is a crime against humanity. I was therefore determined not to support any kind of war and to strive for the removal of all causes of war. War cannot be removed by war (ends do not justify the means); the gun is to be rejected at 14, 15, 16, 17 and at legal adulthood of 18.

At 17, in the pursuit of truth, taking my father's liberal values to what I then believed to be their logical and necessary conclusion, I declared myself before

the Manpower Division of the Israel Ministry of Defense to be a conscientious objector and a 'pacifist'.

I crossed the security border.

Notes:

1. The Amendment was nullified in January 1993 following the election of the Labor led coalition government in June 1992.
2. Abu Jihad was assassinated at his residence in Tunis by an Israeli assassination squad on 16 April 1988.
3. Susan Lee-Hattis, *The Binational Idea in Palestine During Mandatory Times*, Shiqmonah, Haifa, 1970.
4. Winifred Roth spent her last years with her son Raphael (Rafi) Roth at Moshav Omer, Beersheba. She passed away in March 1989.
5. S A Lewin MD & J Gilmore PhD, *Sex After 40*, Dell Publishing Co., New York, NY, 1952.
6. Among the outstanding architectural works Rau designed with his partner Reznik in 1955-1958 was the small and now world renowned Synagogue building and the building for the Department of Mathematics at the Giv'at Ram campus of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.
7. For a critique of the Zionist historiography of the Holocaust see the essays by Lenni Brenner and Akiva Orr appended to Jim Allen, *Perdition, A Play in Two Acts*, Ithaca Press in collaboration with Jerusalem & Peace Service, London, 1987.
8. Subsequently reclassified in the master-plan for Kefar Shemaryahu as Plot no 63 Bloc 6671.
9. For the story of Udi Adiv see also Havah Halevi, "The Taste of Mulberries" and "The Female Snake" in Fouzi el-Asmar, Uri Davis & Naim Khader, *Debate on Palestine*, Ithaca Press, London 1981.
10. See Glossary.