

Kotev, Yaakov  
Born 1922 in Rishon Letzion, Palestine  
Joined the British Army in 1943  
Joined Ha'Chavura ("The Gang") in 1945

### **This is the Way it Was**

I graduated from Mikve Yisrael Agricultural School in 1939 and then went to Givat Zaid. I joined the Jewish Settlement Police in 1942 and in 1943 joined the British Army and served with the 468<sup>th</sup> Transport Company.

In 1945 – 1946 when the war was over and my unit was at Willech in Austria, I was sent to Milan and there joined Ha'Chavura ("The Gang"), together with four other fellows from Givat Zaid; Yosef Vaknin (of blessed memory), Yosef Koren and Yochanan Zaid (of blessed memory). They had been in the 462<sup>nd</sup> Transport Company. "The Gang" was led by Yehuda Arazi, Ada Sereni, Yisrael Libertovsky, Meirke Davidson and Shalhevet Freier.

The bulk of our work was in gathering reserves of food and fuel which we took from British Army bases with the aid of false documents, and using them for the ships of the Olim that left from Italy, and transporting the Olim to those ships from their camps. I participated in the sailing of the ships: "Chana Senesh", "Enzo Sereni", "Wingate" and finally "Dov Hoz" and "Eliyahu Golomb" which were detained by the British at La Spezia.

During the War of Independence I participated in the capture of Bethlehem in the Galilee, which had been a German colony and became a Moshav. Since then I have been a farmer and raise beef cattle and poultry, and grow flowers and deciduous fruits. When I did reserve duty I served in the Engineering and Transport Corps.