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

My family moved to Kfar Yeladim and from there to Tel Aviv. From Tel Aviv we went to Moshav Herut. I completed ten years of education at the Moshav, and two years of study at the girl's school at Nahalal. When we finished our studies, ten of us banded together and decided that we should join Kibbutz Geshet. At the same time, I was approached by Tzvia Katznelson, a recruitment officer of the Palmach, who suggested that I join up. I told her that I thought that going to a new and young kibbutz was just as important, but I joined the Palmach. That was in 1944, and I was sent to "E" Company based at Ramat HaKovesh. The squad of girls was then transferred to "B" Company at Givat Brenner. This was where we really started training, and I was sent to a non-com's course and then to a first-aid course. After a short period as an instructor I asked to be transferred to the naval company, where there was more action.

As part of the naval company I took part in "the night of the trains," in the unit that blew up the police station at Givat Olga. I also helped in moving immigrants to shore from the "Berl Katznelson" and the "Chana Senesh". I was also an emissary who helped train immigrants in the "Ranks of the Defenders" or "Defence Forces", in Cyprus. A little later, I will go into more detail about Cyprus:

By the end of 1946 I had finished a course in first-aid. I had gone to this course with the intention of working on the Aliya Bet ships as a nurse. I was told to wait because there was no ship available at the time. I went home, and stayed only a few days when a note arrived telling me to report to room 111 in the Histadrut Building in Tel Aviv. I was to meet the commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Yosefele Tabenkin, there.

When I arrived, I was informed that a mission of Palmachniks was being organized which would train immigrants in Cyprus, and prepare them for becoming soldiers when they arrive in Palestine. These "troops in preparation" were called the "Defence Forces". I was the only girl in this group which consisted of Uzi Namirovski, Motke Dagi, Aryeh Hirsh, Chuck (Yaakov Noi) and myself. Yehuda Drexler was in charge. I tried to object and said I wanted to serve on a ship.

I was told to go to Cyprus where I would become acquainted with the immigrants and learn their language. Why not do something until a ship is available? So I asked, "When do we leave?", and Yosefele said that I should be at Caesarea at two that afternoon. How was I to get there by two? It was already ten a.m. I hurried home to Moshav Herut and told my mother that I was going to Cyprus. I hitched up the horse and wagon and went to the orchard to look for my father. I told him that I had to be in Caesarea by two. He said that it

was no problem and came home with me. I packed a small valise with a blouse and skirt and a few other things, and my father drove me in our pick-up truck to Caesarea. There, in the large shed, the whole gang had gathered.

The only one whom I knew there was Idel, and I was a very shy girl and not very sure of myself. I thought, "How did I get into this situation?" Benny Marshak was there and he made a sort of going away party. We had something to drink, and Benny gave me a little present, a book by Chana Senesh. I asked him what my job would be in Cyprus, and he said that I would train immigrants in the "Defence Forces" and to do anything else that was required of me.

We left on the "Ophir", a small fishing boat with sails. My father stood on the shore and waved goodbye. It was almost dark when we pulled away was a scene that I will remember for the rest of my life. We sailed all night and I felt seasick the whole trip. By morning I felt a bit better and we started to get acquainted with each other. Our trip had two purposes: one was to get us to Cyprus and the other was to get Yosale Dror out of Cyprus. He had escaped from jail and was hiding near the shore. That was why we were to reach Cyprus in the evening, get off and Yosale would get on. We reached the shore of the Famagusta area and when it became dark, saw lights which directed us where to pull in to the coast. We filled a rowboat with explosives and our baggage, and the fellows tugged the boat to shore as they swam. I did not know how to swim so I held onto the boat and was dragged along. We unloaded the boat as fast as possible and Yosale got in and went out to the "Ophir," which departed immediately for Palestine.

We buried the explosives on the beach and started toward the camp. We heard singing just before we came in sight of the camp fence and inmates were singing, "Don't come! Don't come!" It seemed that the English had discovered that there was a gap in the fence which had been made for us, and they were patrolling it continuously, in hope of catching us. We were behind a mound of earth and could not see or be seen by them. We had several of the camp inmates with us, who had led Yosale out of the camp. At about three that morning they told us that it would be safe to try and enter. We did so, one by one, and quickly ran to a nearby tent. A beautiful girl was inside the tent and she welcomed us. She looked like a gypsy with dark hair and a red blouse. She was from Poland and during the ensuing days we became good friends. She gave us hot tea. We had been lying in our wet clothes for hours, so the tea was wonderful.

There were two camps in Cyprus, a summer camp and a winter camp. We had come to the summer camp and some of us remained there and others went to the winter camp. We were given the documents of immigrants, and I was listed as among the workers at the camp. We were working on the garbage trucks of the camps, and in that way were able to go from camp to camp. The winter camp was under the jurisdiction of the Joint Distribution Committee(JDC) and the Joint supplied instructors and nurses to the camp.

At first, we had the same conditions as those of the Joint people, but once we started training the immigrants we thought it best to live under the same

conditions as them. We ate the same food that the immigrants ate, which was prepared in a common kitchen. We did not die of starvation but we never felt that we had eaten our fill either. We lived in a long hut built of corrugated iron which was divided, in the length, into rooms. The clothes we wore were supplied by the Joint, except for the red blouse that I had brought from home.

I instructed a group of girls in Morse code, first aid, sports and self-defense. We did not teach the men how to use weapons, which only arrived some time later. We knew that these young people would be going into the army as soon as they arrived in Israel. This was the only training they were to get before going into battle. The ones we taught became instructors for the other camp inmates. Men taught men and women taught women.

The British had an allotment of 1,500 certificates a month for the immigrants within the camps. Someone thought up the idea of using the immigrants to transfer explosives to our people, who would blow up the deportation ships in Haifa after the immigrants had disembarked. We studied how the British examined the immigrants as they went onto a ship. They went through a long tent, men in one line and women in another, holding their bags or valises to be examined by the Military Police. The police mishandled the immigrants in a brutal fashion and the women MP's were worse than the men.

We put the explosives inside toothpaste tubes or shaving soap tubes and passed these into the hands of our people on to the ships. Until the tunnel was dug, we were not able to leave the camp. I had a severe crisis at one time and did not know what to do with myself. I had been sent to Cyprus for three months because there had not been a ship available, and now I saw that ships were arriving all the time. I was stuck in the camp and had been here for more than six months. Yosefele came to Cyprus and I reminded him of what he had promised me. He said that we had done excellent work and had nothing to be ashamed of. However, I still insisted, and he promised that within two months I would be released. This depressed me terribly and conditions in the camp deteriorated, just to make me feel worse. There were sandstorms and the water system failed. We had to fill buckets of water and pour them over ourselves in order to shower.

In addition to the training courses of the "Defence Forces". I also taught younger children history and geography of Israel. Yosefele had seen me at one of these sessions and was very pleased with the work I was doing. Nevertheless, the confinement bothered me a great deal. Another girl who looked somewhat like me, gave me her papers and I and another girl got a pass to leave the camp for a day. We went into the hills and it felt so good to be free. Then we had to return.

We found someone among the immigrants who was an expert at forgery. Even with a magnifying glass you could not tell the difference between the real thing and his copy. He fixed me up with a pass so that I could visit my friends in the other camp. I would go there with a kerchief on my head and wear dark glasses. A soldier at the gate ordered me to remove my glasses, and examined the pass

and examined me again and again. He, obviously, suspected me of something. In the end, he let me pass through. I had phoned a Cypriot taxi driver and he came, picked me up, and brought me out that same night. These drivers deserved a word of praise. They moved explosives for us and they transferred weapons. They were loyal to the "Defence Forces" and I think that they did not do this just for the money. They did it because we were fighting the British.

I became particularly friendly with several of the girl immigrants. One of them had been active among the youth in the city of Bialystok. She knew Hebrew well and in time I even learned some Yiddish. She was in wonder of us and our exploits. I told her that for us it was in a way an adventure but for them after what they had gone through, it had been a fight for life or death. She insisted that they had no choice, but we did. That was our bravery. Finally, I made my way back to Palestine as a new Olah on the "Knesset Israel".

When we arrived at Haifa, some of our Palyamniks gave out work clothes to the other men and told them to leave the ship with them as port workers. When I asked what about me I received no answer. I decided that I would not go to Atlit. I told the driver that I was an Israeli and that he should drop my suitcase off at his company office. He did so and I jumped off the bus as it moved through the port area. I came out unscathed but did not know where to go.

I approached two girls and they asked me if I need the key, which was for the nearest toilet, I assumed. That was a good start, so I used the key and brought it back to them. Someone walked past me and told me to leave by Gate One, and pointed to the Main Gate. I had no documents and was uncertain as to a course of action. I entered the coffee bar of Chanoch which was near the gate, and thought I would observe for a time and see what happens. Two girls were working nearby who were helping new arrivals from Cyprus. I approached one of them and said that I had just come from Cyprus and could she give me a few coins for a cup of coffee. She did and I went in and ordered a cup. Two British officers were sitting at the next table and I started to sweat. I drank a bit, paid up and then walked out of the café.

Once out of Cyprus and out of Haifa port, I went back to the Palmach's 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion and instructed various courses in signaling and first aid, and then the War of Independence broke out. Part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was sent to Kiryat Anavim to fight for the road to Jerusalem. I was transferred to the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the capacity of company nurse and later battalion nurse. All during the siege of Jerusalem I was either in the City itself or taking part in the fighting for the road. During the first cease-fire I was injured in a traffic accident and discharged from the army.

It took a long time to recover from the injury, but when I was well, I started to work for the Zim Company as a nurse on ships bringing immigrants to Israel. I then worked for the Jewish National Fund for 20 years, and for the Israel Defense Industry for 15 years (1973-1988). I also devoted much of my time to helping absorb Russian immigrants and am still active in this area.