

Tamar Grueg (of blessed memory)

Born in 1922 in Czechoslovakia

Joined the Palmach in 1944

Joined the Gideon network in 1947

Died 16th February 2001

This Is The Way It Was

I was born in 1922 to the Schoenberg family in Czechoslovakia (Slovakia today). My parents came from a religious background but they both left a religious way of life when they were young. I grew up in a non-religious, Zionist home that was open to western culture and identified with universal humanitarian ethics. At the same time we celebrated all the Jewish holidays and our parents instilled in us a pride in our Jewish identity.

In the spring of 1938 Germany annexed Austria and Slovakia and the Fascist movement grew stronger, as did the desire to separate from Czechia. As a member of Hashomer Hatzair I participated in all the demonstrations against Fascism. In the fall of 1938 the Germans invaded northern Czechoslovakia and this gave the Slovaks the opportunity to sever themselves from Czechia and found an independent state, with the condition that the southern part of Slovakia be turned over to Hungary, an ally of Germany. This was the region of Slovakia in which we lived. As we had no desire to become Hungarians in any way, we moved to another region of Slovakia. Our life became much more difficult. Our parents sent my sister and I to Czechia so that we would not suffer from the torment of the Slovakian regime. In the spring of 1939 the Germans invaded Czechia and I was witness to the entrance of German tanks to the city of Prague.

That very winter I made Aliya legally – I received a certificate from the allotment that was granted to the Hashomer Hatzair movement. I was 17 years old and knew only a few sentences in Hebrew. I had never done any physical work in my life as I came from a family that had a good financial background and the children were meant to study. However, because of my Zionist education I was able to accustom myself to physical labor and to even enjoy it. Life in Palestine was not so easy in those days and Kibbutz Ma'anit that I had joined had not yet settled on its own land. Income producing labor was hard to find because of the World War and we were very worried about the fate of our families in Europe. (It was not until after the War that I learned that all my family had been killed in the Holocaust.)

In the fall of 1944 I volunteered for the Palmach. Joining such an outfit was a frequent occurrence for youth especially in the Jewish settlements. A strong influence in that direction was the fact that Haviva Reich was a member of the same kibbutz and while she was in the Palmach she volunteered to be a parachutist and was sent behind the enemy lines. I was sent to a new platoon which was in the process of formation, a scout platoon which was attached to "G" Company. I do not know what the rationale was for the creation of this unit nor do I know if it fulfilled the expectations of those who established it. For me it turned out to be a very interesting experience, starting from the first night in the

woods at Mishmar Haemek. I was present at the farewell party that was made in honor of the "German" Company there, in the famous cave. Then there was the experience of our training and finally we helped in unloading Olim when we joined the Naval Company.

The woods at Mishmar Haemek were a good place for other units to train also. That is how we happened to meet the "Black" Company and we heard stories of the Arab countries from some of its members. We also met the first pilots there. After "Black Saturday" in June 1946 our company was disbanded and I was sent to a non-com officers' course. I finished the course and wanted a discharge as I had already served three years, but I was given an offer that I just could not refuse: a course for Gideonim (radio operators). I served as a Gideoni for about six months for the 4th Battalion. In the fall of 1947 I was sent to Prague in order to set up a transmission station there. This did not work out for reasons over which I had no control, so I was sent to Italy, supposedly for several weeks. This turned out to be a two year stay since the State of Israel came into being and the War of Independence broke out and there was much to be done.

Most of our contacts were with Israel and with the ships, those that carried Olim and those that carried equipment. I will never forget the first contact with the ship, "The Pirate". Dudale was the seaman and Oved Sadeh the Gideoni. This was very exiting and also funny because Oved used a vulgar word which I did not understand. Only after I announced myself did he realize that he was conversing with a woman. My first place of work in Italy was in Magenta, not far from Milan. Our living conditions were very poor (considering the winter of North Italy). Nobody complained, and we really did not have time to waste. We worked round the clock and in the few hours off shift that we had, we slept, or we went to Milan to enjoy ourselves for a few hours.

When the first consulate of Israel was established in Rome, we moved to Monte Mario in the vicinity of the city. Our work was now legal but I still had no legal document, as did most of the other Israelis there. My Palestinian passport had been borrowed for use in Aliya Daled (immigration to Palestine with the use of false passports or other false documents) and I had the papers of a refugee who had already made Aliya to Israel; although this did not cause any particular problem and was accepted by us as 'the usual'.

In 1949 diplomatic relations were also established with Czechia and it was suggested to me to transfer to Prague. However after spending five years in places where I slept with my suitcase under my bed I was ready to go home, to normal civilian life. How was I to get back to Israel without any legal documents? I was sent a passport that had already expired and which had a legal entry visa to Italy, but it was still a question of how to leave legally. I was given the papers of a refugee girl; all these peculiar documents managed to get me back to Israel. A short time after my return I married and nowadays I am grandmother to 9 grandchildren. 50 years have gone by, during most of which I have worked in the field of special education in our high school. Since 1979 I work in the bookkeeping department of our factory. Tamar died at her kibbutz on 19th February 2001. (She wrote her memoirs in December 2000.)