

Keiny, Shoshana (Bentwich)  
Born 1927 in Jerusalem  
Joined the Palmach in 1944  
As part of a whole group that joined.

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

I studied at a number of schools and at the High School in Beit HaKerem which is called today 'the high school that is next to the University'. I was lucky to have very good teachers (such as David Benbenishti, Avraham Even Shushan, Tzvi Adar, Yeshayahu Leibowitz and others) and it was very pleasing to learn, nevertheless the center of my activities was my youth movement, the Tsofim, in the Modiin troop, and in later years my activity in the framework of the Hagana.

When my studies were over in 1944 I went with a training unit to Degania and Poriah. Our aim was to establish a new settlement and in due time this group did establish Hatzerim which was one of the eleven settlements established overnight on the eve of Yom Kippur 1947. We were known as the mishkistim (economically minded), and did not like to send many people to courses. In this we were not like most of the other Palmach groups who placed more emphasis on the training courses and less emphasis on work.

I was sent to the first course for sport instructors of the Palmach which took place at Heftzi-ba, near Hadera, in the winter of 1944. We were 13 girls, all in one tent, and about 50 or 60 boys. We practiced judo and "kapap" (fighting with sticks) and even boxing. Our instructor was Shtibel. We also slid on omegas across the Hadera Stream. I wanted to go back to the rest of our group and not continue on to the non-com training course. This little anecdote will describe the situation: Battalion Headquarters sent instructions for me to go to Ein Harod and give a series of lessons there in sport. I told them that I can't go because they need me for work in the cow barn. The battalion commander, Moshe Nosovitsky (Netzer), himself a kibbutznik, called me to him on a Saturday and convinced me to go and do my job. At least that gave me a few more days to stay where I had been (together with Leah Shlossberg (Rabin) and Zohara Levitov (of blessed memory)).

The following year we joined a group in training at Kibbutz Afikim and we also absorbed some people from Kibbutz Bet Ha'arava, and some others from the Teheran group of youngsters. All these were later the founders of Kibbutz Hatzerim.

These were troubled times and we were in constant friction with the British. One result of this tension was "the night of the bridges". One night in June of 1946 we went to blow up the bridge of El Hama. I was assigned to guard the saboteurs. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of June there was the big search which also included Afikim. Most of the boys from my unit were rounded up in this operation and sent to Rafiah. In July, the Etzel (the right wing Irgun Tzvai Leumi) bombed the King David Hotel and in August I was on my way to England as an emissary to

the Habonim Youth Movement. The main reason why I was chosen for this job was that I had a British passport. Later on, when I was in Italy, my passport allowed a good number of girls to make Aliya in what we called Aliya Daled (immigration with false papers).

In London I worked with young people on the East Side of London. This also served as a good cover for my work in the Hagana. Three Israelis and I lived in an apartment together and Tzvika built a radio set there. Every night, at 1:30 in the morning we would pull the set out of the closet and listen for any message (the set was only a receiver). At first we received very few messages but after the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1947 the set gave us the news in plain speech and not in code. I was the one who gave this news to the Jewish Agency in London.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> May I was transferred to Italy and I was added to the group of Gideonim at Aviata Guannecona, north of Milan. I learned to receive and to send messages quickly and worked a regular shift. This station was then transferred to Rome. In September I was sent as the Gideoni on the ship "Mishmar HaEmek".

### **The Voyage of the Mishmar HaEmek, September 1 – 19, 1948.**

The ship was anchored at Naples, and this was my first encounter with an immigrant ship. Pini Tennenbaum (Ashuach) was commander of the vessel and Yuval Tzislung was his right hand man. Ariel Vardi (Arilik) was also the Gideoni. Until then, all my knowledge of radio communication had been gained from private lessons that I had had with Zaki in Milan, and I was not yet considered a full-fledged Gideonit. Nevertheless, Arilik gave me his full backing and signed all the documents that I gave him. At Marseilles, Arilik was given orders to leave the ship so that a Gideonit who had to get back home in a hurry could take his place. This was Aya Pinkerfeld.

It seems that we had two Italians who were stowaways somewhere on the ship and we thought that we would dump them at Capo de Pierro in Sardinia, but a storm came up so we did not enter the port. Meanwhile, 3 calm days of sailing had gone by and we were doing 6 knots. That was the calm before the storm, because the next day the ship was hit by heavy winds and cast about wildly. The radio conked out and I was terribly seasick. The water barrels broke loose from their ropes and slid all over the deck. The mast was also broken in the storm. I accepted stoically the fact that I was to be drowned at sea.

We did not make any progress that day and entered the Bay of Iris to seek shelter from the storm. The following day we advanced at 4 knots and the cook served some hot tea; he had also been seasick and did nothing the day before. We expected to arrive at Marseilles sometime between 4 – 6 in the evening. It took us 4 days to repair the damage to the ship and we then loaded the immigrants on board. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September we were out at sea and able to report that "things were normal" and we were progressing at 7 knots .

While in Marseilles an Israeli on another ship yelled to me that in Israel the Palmachnikim are now wearing the symbol of the Palmach openly and not on its backside, as the custom had been. On hearing the news I turned my symbol over to its right side out also. (I had worn it constantly in Europe, but with its back side showing). We also took Yuval, who did not understand one word of French, to the barber and told that gentleman to give him the complete works. Yuval, the kibbutznik, sat there and received a thorough shampoo and shave and a haircut and finished up with powder and perfume and was totally demolished by this scissor operation. When it came his turn for a manicure we rescued him from his misery and almost died laughing.

I was limited in my communication with the immigrants because I did not understand Yiddish. One group of young people who had studied Hebrew taught me some Yiddish songs. We also had a wedding on board for a young couple. We made a "chupa" of a sheet and Pinny acted as the rabbi. There were also several births on the voyage. Our doctor had dubious training in his craft, but to everyone's joy there were no untoward mishaps.

I would like to mention another group that we had on the ship, the MACHAL, (volunteers from abroad). These young Americans joined us to help in the illegal immigration and later joined Tzahal (the Israeli Army) to help us attain independence.

We are now approaching the coast of Israel with the intention of docking at Haifa, which is already in our hands. When the coast is in sight Pinny calls for everyone to come on deck and gives a short speech. The immigrants break out spontaneously in singing Hatikva and some cry, overcome by emotion. It then turns out that our Italian captain is not positive if the city that we see in the distance is Beirut or Haifa. Wouldn't that be great, to sail into Beirut in the middle of the War of Independence! In order to make sure of our whereabouts, we send a telegram asking the port if the lighthouse is working normally or if there is a blackout and we receive notice that the lighthouse is working normally.

Now we had only to wait for nightfall so that we could identify the lighthouse, as each one has its own code. We dropped anchor and waited until dark. As the lights in the harbor and in the city were lit we waited for the lighthouse to go into action. After a short wait we all breathed a huge sigh of relief; the lighthouse was that of Haifa. We raised anchor and headed for the port where we were met by a pilot who directed us to our berth. A short time later I was on my way home to see my parents.