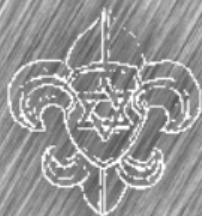




# Kaleidoscope of Israel

*Notes from a travel log*



**Jitka Radkovičová – Tiki**

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# Autumn 2013

Here we come. I am at the check-in area at the Prague airport and I am praying pleadingly. I have heard so many stories about the tough boys from El Al who question those who fly to Israel that I expect nothing less than torture.

It is true that the tough boy seemed quite surprised when I simply told him I am going to look for evidence concerning pre-war Czechoslovak scout Jews in Israeli archives. But then he put on a poker face and quickly changed the topic.

He probably could not understand why on Earth I would want to spend my vacation in archives. If it was a study stay, that would be ok, but vacation? I was saved by my blue folder which contained my electronic correspondence with directors and archive workers from various Israeli institutions ranging from museums to kibbutzim. Then there weren't any more questions and I got on the plane.

I have strange feelings. I always fly with a group of friends. Or, when I fly alone, then it is to some place I know. Now I am flying alone and I don't know what to expect from Israel. It doesn't really help to know that from time to time there are suicide attacks in buses, or rocket attacks (which make no distinction for civilians). However, I am also aware that I have a lot of work to do—I need to make the best of all those archives and people, so that I can use it once I come back home.

In the early morning when I arrive at the Ben Guiron airport, another level of torture awaits me, the Israeli customs. Here they are giving me the hell. But I guess that someone who is spending a vacation in archives is a rare phenomenon. Nevertheless, I have to admit that I understand the procedure; it is quite understandable, because there are only few countries which have to deal with terrorism on such a large scale. They need to be wary.

I exchange my Euros and Dollars for Shekels, I get on a train and then on a bus and in Old Yaffa I am looking for Old Yaffa Hostel. It's Friday, early morning, the city is waking up

and I buy a cup of coffee in the only Arab stall that is already open. The coffee is so strong that it almost gives me a heart attack, I sit down on the seashore and I'm thinking about my first impressions.

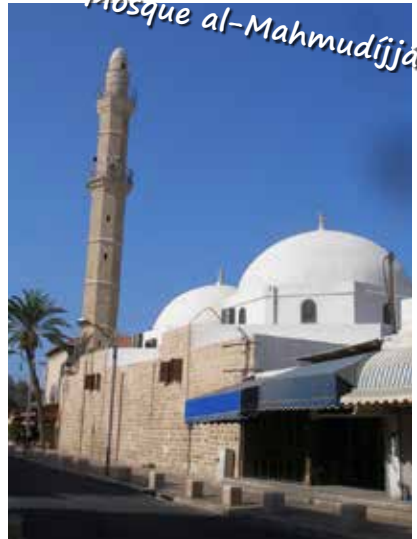
*Azure beach in Tel Aviv*



When a prominent Zionist official and the father of Israel, Theodor Herzl, began writing his novella *Altneuland* (The Old New Land) and mentioned a fictional “Mound of spring” (Tel Aviv in Hebrew), he certainly did not expect to see his fiction would be turned into reality so soon and that it would become a modern city with everything that comes with the territory. Turning fiction into reality is after all something quite peculiar to Israel. You can see the hard work of the previous generations on every step. So now, thanks to Herzl, I can admire the coastline architecture with the azure sky above it.

Then I put my backpack on and head to the hostel. I am greeted by an old colonial building surrounded by a market. There is an incredible

*Mosque al-Mahmudijja*



atmosphere, a nice young man at the reception, and a nice room with a small coffee table, which is the most important thing right now. I take off my backpack and I try out the table. I also take a shower, as the temperature here is unbearable; it is 37 °C in November. I turn on the air conditioning and I'm going to look around a bit.

There is a terrace with an outdoor kitchen and a place where you can sleep under the stars. This would have been great for this kind of weather if I had not taken a laptop, cameras, voice recorders and similar things that I would really hate to leave unattended. And it's breakfast time, so I'm making my second coffee today by myself.

To go on with enumerating the pleasant aspects of the situation: I'm starving, and I'm having the first Israeli dish, which is some kind of a mixture of seafood; I guess it's a fish steak tartare, delicious home-made bread, butter and a mysterious yet fantastic paste.



I didn't plan anything for today, because I did not know how I would feel after the flight, so I reserved some time for the necessary acclimatization. I am going downtown to see the city.

I am walking through the Old Yaffa; from the clock tower at the Clock square, through the Kikar Kedumim square to the mound above the city, where there is an arts quarter and gardens blooming with flowers and small crooked streets in the direction downhill and towards the sea. I take these streets and I am exploring the port. I stay there for a while, since I'll be working from the next day on and because I have an interview to prepare for tomorrow and I take out my note-book.

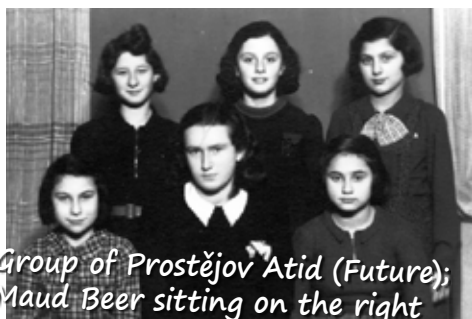


In the evening I'm coming home and I'm socializing with a Swedish volunteer and some Polish people. A muezzin is singing at a nearby mosque, I don't understand anything except Allahu akbar.

This day later turned out to be the one and only free day I had in Israel.

## Maud Michal Beer

On the following day I phone to make sure there are no changes of plans concerning my visit and I'm heading to meet Maud Michal Beer, a native of Prostějov and a member of a scout movement Tchelet Lavan.



*Group of Prostějov Atid (Future);  
Maud Beer sitting on the right*



*Maud Beer with family,  
Tel Aviv 2011*

It runs in the family: when she was a young girl, her mother was a member of Blau-Weiss in Prostějov and Maud then just continued in this tradition. Blau-Weiss and Tchelet Lavan are the same thing, both means blue and white (in German and Hebrew respectively), which are the national colours of Israel.

I am taking a bus from Jerusalem road in Yaffa to Ibn Gabriol, I need to find Shmuel Hanagid. In the trains, the notices are sometimes in English; however, the public transport is a downright tragedy. The notices are in Hebrew only, so I need to ask all the time. Fortunately, my fellow passengers are very nice and they do speak English. Anyway, I realized I need to do something about it and so the first words I learned in Hebrew were *Hatachana haba'ah*—Next stop. *Hatachana haba'ah Shlomo Hamelech*—Next stop King Solomon.

I stayed at Maud's until late; there was so much to talk about. She has a phenomenal



*Public transport timetable  
in Tel Aviv, it is a struggle to  
find your way in timetable  
like this ☹*

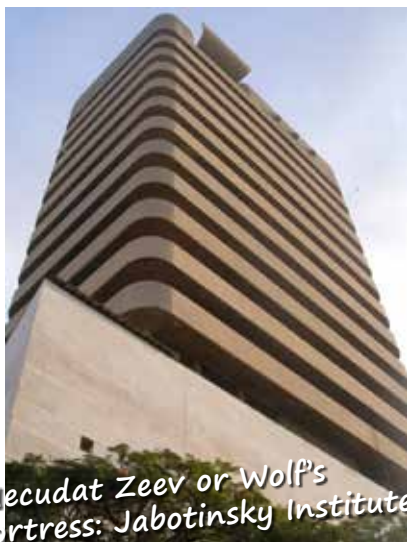
memory, she was able to write the names of all the people in the photos, and so I was recording and taking pictures and notes... And because it is Saturday and it's rather late, I am going home on foot, along the seashore. It is about five or six kilometres long, the beaches are crowded with people. There was a great smell of barbecue and a pleasant atmosphere. I am beginning to understand the Israeli passion for barbecue. I would love to have a steak myself, but I need to get home quickly and to note down my impressions from the meeting. I made the first recording here, took a lot of pictures of interesting artifacts, for example an authentic Jewish star ripped off from the sweater after return from Theresienstadt. I also got tips for two new books in Hebrew, I need to get them in Prague by hook or by crook; there are pictures of Jewish scouts from Prostějov and their biographical data. I hope my friends from the Jewish Museum in Prague will help me.

The evening walk was very nice, I wrote down all I needed to and then I just dropped in my bed.

## **Amira Stern (Jabotinsky Institute), Tel Aviv**

Today I worked from eight a.m. till the evening in the Jabotinsky Institute in spite of today being a Sunday. I was not even sure that I would get there, because there are loads of buses going from Old Yaffa to the city centre, but all of them are crowded, it is the first day of the week, plus there is the morning peak. So when I finally got on some bus, I stood in a place where I could not see where we were and I did not know where to get off. Classic. Nevertheless, I was successful. Partly because the Mecudat Zeev building or Zeev's fortress (Zeev Jabotinsky was the leading ideologist of the revisionist movement) is hard to miss and also that the bus stopped right next to it.

The queen of this archive is Amira Stern. The archive contains documents of the Zionist movement of revisionists, to which also a Czechoslovak scout movement Brit Trumpeldor claimed allegiance. Thanks to our e-mail conversation of preceding months everything goes swimmingly: there are several boxes full of various documents awaiting me. This movement was a corporate member of the Czechoslovak scout union and their characteristic trait was a high level of organisation with a military undertone. The Betar movement supported the



idea of not only building the Jewish state, but also fighting for it, if needed. Knowing what we know now, it may seem like they looked in a crystal ball...

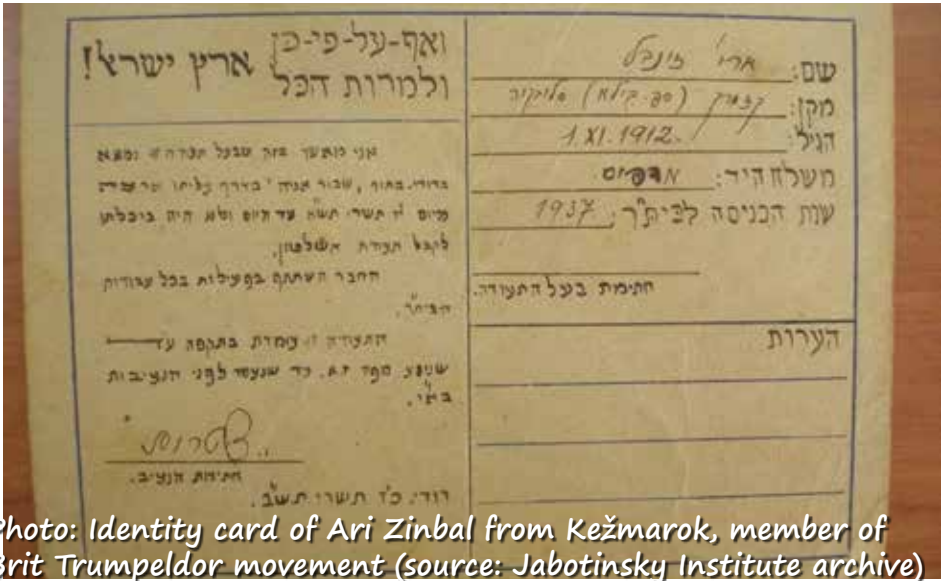


Photo: Identity card of Ari Zinbal from Kežmarok, member of Brit Trumpeldor movement (source: Jabotinsky Institute archive)

Today, it is not as horribly hot as yesterday. Just on the contrary. The air conditioning in the study room of Jabotinsky institute is working so hard that I am actually freezing. I left some of the boxes untouched. Even though I am leaving, I am sure I will come back again. Eventually, I came here twice more. But still I have not seen the museum dedicated to revisionists, to Jabotinsky, force squad Betar and the Irgun organization. I hope I will return someday...

In the evening I realise that my last meal was breakfast. So as I am taking my laptop to the terrace, I am also carrying a falafel and something of which I do not know a name, but it is big and it smells delicious—some kind of flat bread with spices. It is sold at the Arab stalls down on the market. I check the pictures I took today, I try to translate German headlines of the Tel Chai magazine, and I am trying to decipher the correspondence... But then I conclude that my translators will do a much better job and I stop. I get stuck in the story of a Betar commissar Naftali Faltin. In 1940 he tried to transport several hundreds of Jews from Prague, which was then occupied by the Germans, to the free world. And he succeeded. On a ship called Sakaria, he managed to save over five hundred people, predominantly Czechoslovak members of Brit Trumpeldor.



## Yael Diamant (Beit-Haedut), Nir Galim

My communication with the Director of Beit-Haedut (when I was still in Prague) looked like this: If you come on Monday or Thursday, you will have an opportunity to meet a descendant of the founders of The Bnei Akiva Scout movement in Nitra. My reaction went like this: OK, I'll come when it's convenient, just tell me your address so I can find the Institute. He answered: No, we don't have an address... And I imagined a dune in the desert with a moshav on it and a building in the middle of the moshav signed as Beit-Haedut (The Testimony House), with me being unable to even read the sign as it would be in Hebrew. So I sat down at my computer to have a look at the website of the Institute and to print the opening photo, because perhaps otherwise I wouldn't be able to identify the building when I get there.

It got to a problematic start already in Tel Aviv. Surprisingly, I found the right bus without any trouble, even though the central station has seven floors, forming a perfect labyrinth. However, I had a problem with all the other things: the public address system crackled in Hebrew only, and I really didn't know exactly (again!) where to get off. Just a short conversation with the driver solved my problem and I got off onto a busy highway, where crossing to the other side seemed to be an impossible feat. Well, I took the risk and crossed the road only to notice that there were traffic lights only a bit farther. After a while I stood at the entrance gate to Nir Galim trying to read a sign over which the national flag hung limply (the national flags are indeed everywhere in Israel, which I commend).



Apart from the year, of course, I wasn't able to decipher anything. The signposts looked mysterious too. So I reached into my bag for the photo which I had prudently printed out in Prague and through the gateway I entered the moshav. Just as I was staring into some palm

brushwood trying to compare what I could see with the picture, the brakes of a car next to me gave a wailing sound; a nice girl looked out and said: You are Jitka, aren't you? In a bit of a shock I replied "Yes" and inquired: How come you know me? She said she didn't but there weren't that many people from Central Europe straying into Nir Galim and that I had been expected at Beit-Haedut. Then it was all very quick. I got a cup of coffee and we talked. As my time in Israel was very precious, ten minutes later I started looking for the Director Zeev, and especially for the descendant of the founders of Bnei Akiva in Nitra that I had been promised to meet. Yael looked at me as if I was a bit out of my mind, and then declared: But that's me!

*Yael Diamant: That's me!*



Shocked, I dropped the spoon into my coffee and did everything I could to suppress my surprise. You see, all those "descendants", which I have met so far, were venerable nonagenarians (or something like that) with white beard (or without it) but definitely, none of them was in such a good shape as Yael. In this particular case, I had expected to meet an elderly man with some knowledge of Slovak... So, out of my pocket I got the voice recorder and began what was a standard procedure for me. We went around the Museum, explored the library, and ended up in a study with tons of documents, photographs and books. Yael belongs to the third generation, has an incredible knowledge of everything related to the

history of the Bnei Akiva movement and—this was the biggest surprise—an absolute grasp of Central European history. I just stared in silence. This was something I hadn't been expecting at all. Her family "story" is a telling, classic Jewish story in a way: some left Slovakia for Palestine already in the 1930s, some stayed on, fought in the Slovak National Uprising and were killed; some were forced to go into a transport and didn't survive concentration camp. Different people, different stories. Indeed, Israel is full of stories.



*Summer camp of the Bnei Akiva movement, Kamenica 1932  
(source: Beit-Haedut archive)*

Scouts from the Bnei Akiva movement differed from other Jewish Scout organizations in their approach to the scout issues; they were mostly deeply religious people and they introduced the issue of Zionism as a new topic to their families, while the clash between generations frequently occurring in the other movements didn't take on the form of a sharp conflict. For the members of Bnei Akiva this was something that wasn't quite possible—as the Old Testament rule “Honour thy father and thy mother” was still held good and respected. However, Bnei Akiva members managed to push through their agenda. Zionism became their “domain” too.

Going back to Tel Aviv I took a sherut (a shared taxi) and I had a lot to think about. Today was a great day, and thank God for that! I could say that so far I was doing well “professionally”, as well as otherwise. I could feel Divine Providence over me. Where else if not in the Holy Land should one feel looked after? So, I asked for Divine protection hoping that I would be able to continue to take full advantage of everything that was being offered to me here and that I had come here for—to work on “the hereditary role of the Scouting nation”.

## Tel Aviv and other places

After some days spent in the Jabotinsky Institute, in Beit Haedut and other archives I start to feel like I am running out of air and so I am going to explore the coast of Tel Aviv and the city itself in the evening. Tel Aviv is best known for its specific Bauhaus architecture (which reminds me a bit of the European functionalism), thanks to which it is listed on the list of UNESCO world heritage. It is a very strange feeling, up until now I have known these places only from literature and old First Republic Jewish newspapers and magazines. Now I am walking through the avenues Ben Gurion, Arlozorov, Dizengoff. The names are telling their stories and the history is still present.



*This dune is Tel Aviv in 1909  
(source: [http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tel\\_Aviv](http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tel_Aviv))*



*For comparison: it would be difficult  
to find a dune here (TLV 2013)*

It is similar to other places in the country. Decades ago, everything you could find in Palestine, which later became Israel, looked mostly like random inhabited areas in the desert and a bit like our scout camps: the basic element was a couple of tents which looked a bit like our hangars, where the settlers lived for years, until the economic conditions were favourable

enough to build the kibbutzim like we know them today. And I am beginning to understand why Zionist leaders used scouting as a means and a way. Common settlements were in the wall and tower style. Both the wall and the tower were convenient, as Arabs would raid the settlements quite often.



*The time of tents... source: Mordechai Amitai: Together*

At some places, the settlers irrigated the desert, at elsewhere they dried the swamps, but wherever they went, it always meant an enormous amount of work. The evidence of that hard work can be seen until now in Israel and the building of the state which we know from the Czech area has suddenly got a new dimension in Israel, because Zionists literally built on a greenfield site, well, except for the fact that the field was seldom green.



*What a wall and tower settlement looked like... source: Hashomer Hatzair songbook*

There is a fitting joke about American tourists who come to kibbutz and evaluate the selection of the surroundings as appropriate given that there is a lot of greenery around and they are absolutely ignorant of the fact that there was no greenery before the kibbutz was built and that all they can see is a fruit of hard work...

## Muzeum Etzel

During one of my walks on the Tel Aviv shore I stumbled upon the building of the Etzel Museum, which is dedicated to the history of one of the three armed groups: Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization), which existed before the state of Israel and IDF were established. (The other two groups were called Hagana and Lechi.) It is a place of memorial, where fights over Yaffa took place in 1948. As the chief leader of Betar, Zeev Jabotinsky greatly participated in founding of Irgun, I wanted to fill some gaps in my education and see the museum. However, I came at the moment when the flag was being pulled down—it was too late. They were closing. So once again, I will come and see it next time, but I don't know when exactly. But I know I should think about it already.





## Intermezzo

*Generally speaking, the stay here is demanding. In the mornings, I don't have breakfast so that I would have more time. Breakfast is served from eight o'clock and by that time I'm usually off to adventure, or to be more precise, to see archives and tons of documents. The days are somewhat short this time of year in Israel. When I get up at five or six, it is after dawn, but shortly after five p. m. it is already dark. I am usually working all day long and then I come back to the hostel for lunch and dinner at six p. m. or later. In the evenings, I sit at the terrace, checking the pictures I took and charging up all my electronic devices. Luckily, I do not need any socket reduction, as the old colonial house has European sockets.*

*And it is also mentally demanding—I need to keep a lot of things in mind, to get on and off at the right stops, sometimes I need to speak with the conductors, which is not always easy and I depend a lot on whether they remember to kick me out or not, but if I did not try to keep track of where the bus is going, I probably would not be as successful. Every day is a new challenge.*

*However, it should get better now, I'm leaving Tel Aviv tomorrow and I'm heading north, to the city of Kiryat Ti'von in Galilee, to my guardian angels Chava and Max Livni. They are both of Czechoslovak origins, former members of the Makabi Hatzair movement, both have survived concentration camps and death marches and both are absolutely amazing. I am looking forward to meeting them so much.*



*Working at the terrace of the Old Yaffa Hostel*

## Chava a Max Livni, Kiryat Ti'von

I pack my backpack and for the first and last time I am having breakfast at eight a.m. at the terrace of the Old Yaffa Hostel. I pay and I go have a run on the beach one last time, where I run up to Kedumin and look at the Yaffa port saying goodbye to all that—at least in my mind. Then I go to the central bus station, to the first platform on the seventh floor where I take the bus heading north. This time, the driver remembered to tell me when to get off and so now I am at something resembling a square in Kiryat Ti'von. It is easy to find the right street and the right house and now I am greeting my friends whom I first met a year ago in Prague.

Chava is from Bratislava, she survived several concentration camps, including Aushwitz, she survived a death march and she was finally liberated in Mauthausen. Max Lieben, member of a prominent Prague orthodox family lost the remains of his faith on his way through Nazi

“sanatoriums”, he had also been to Aushwitz, and he was liberated in Allach. The two met in Bratislava, where they ran the house Makabi Hatzair for Jewish orphan children. After some time they got married and after some more time they moved to Israel. First they lived in the Kfar Hamakabi kibbutz and then they moved to Kiryat Ti'von, into the house where we are now.



*My friends from Kiryat Ti'von, Chava and Max Livni, former members of Makabi Hatzair*

The house is built on a hillside and it's very nice. We are looking at the other side of the forest meadow where is an archaeological site Beit She'arim. There is a lot of greenery around, but the Livni say that when they moved here in the 50 s, there was not a single tree. It was all planted and looked after by the settlers. Chava says something about ten buckets of water for each tree every day. I cannot really picture that, but I am not so surprised now. That is the typical Israeli attitude. It seems like anything is possible in this country.



*Evenfall in Kiryat Ti'von*



*The view from the terrace onto a place which used to be a desert*

I was assigned to the guest room. After dinner we talk for a long time about everything I have found in the archives and we consult the materials in Hebrew, which is most of them. These conversations and consultations then become our pleasant evening tradition, because Chava and Max are waiting for me with dinner and a glass of cognac when I come back from my trips to nearby archives. How different from my lonely life in Tel Aviv!

## Kfar Hamakabi

On the following day I am going to Kfar Hamakabi near Kiryat Ata, which was built in 1936 by the Czechoslovak members of the Makabi Hatzair movement. They claimed allegiance to scouting, even though they did not submit an official application to the Scout Union until 1938. Because of the lack of time the application was not processed. Hitler was around the corner and scouting was being done away with.

I am passing through Haifa, a splendid seashore city, but I don't have enough time to stop and have a look. And so as Jews in diaspora used to say *L'shana Haba'ab Y'rushalayim* every year, which means "next year in Jerusalem", I say to myself: Next year in Haifa. I travel to Kiryat Ata by a super modern black and grey bus called Metronit. It has a special lane on the motorway, which makes the transportation as fast as possible.



Metronit in Haifa (source: <https://www.google.cz/search?output=search&client=psy-ab&q=metronit+haifa&btnK=>)

In Kiryat Ata I am looking for a taxi, because there is no other way of getting to Kfar Hamakabi. The kibbutz is not that far, but if I had to go there on foot, I would probably die of heat in spite of my "Saigon scout training".

I have no clue how to find the canteen where I am supposed to meet the archivist. The Hebrew script is—and it will remain to be—all Greek to me. The signpost does not help me at all. And so I am at least trying not to forget the Hebrew expression for canteen *chadarbaochel*,



which Chava told me this morning so that I could ask the passersby where the canteen is.

And here comes Ruth Bernat, the archivist. The role of archivists is—similarly to other kibbutz activities—largely voluntary. Nobody is a professional. The job is simply carried out by whoever likes archives or history of the kibbutz. However, their approach is professional and so they help me a lot.

I am looking at a photograph on display and I'm trying to remember the name of the person who is in it. That's where "rollercoaster ride" begins. I know I saw it in some Jewish press from the First Republic era and at the same time I can see the striking resemblance to Miss Ruti. Finally, I remember: It is Polda "Tuvia" Reiss, a prominent

*Where is the canteen?*

member of the Slovak Makabi Hatzair movement. When I ask about him, the archivist looks at me in disbelief and then she says: "He was my father. How come you know him?"

And so when I leave it is already evening, because it is hard to process the tons of documents I was given after such an introduction. I got correspondence of the founding members, Polda Reiss' diaries where he describes activities of Makabi Hatzair branches all over Slovakia, pictures of the very beginnings of kibbutzim—simply everything a researcher could ever wish for.

At "home" I have dinner and a long conversation about my day. We sit and talk until late and I ask my hosts about their experiences from the kibbutz I have just returned from. We raise our glasses of cognac to *l'chaim!* (to life) and then I drop exhausted to my bed.



*Ruth Bernat, the archivist  
in Kfar Hamakabi*



*This looks like a bad propaganda film, but that was the reality: national flag in one hand, submachine gun in the other (the Makabi Hatzair group in the times of building of the Israel state; source: Kfar Hamakabi archive)*



## Beit She'arim

Today is Saturday. The Israeli celebrate it and so archives and other institutions are closed to public, I am using this time to see ancient the Jewish site Beit She'arim (House of Gates) in the morning. In its prime, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, this city was the centre of Jewish life in the area. There is an elaborate system of underground catacombs, some of which have survived to these days. Max told me that when they moved to Kiryat Ti'von, they came here for one of their first trips with children. On one of the tombs, they found a name of rabbi Gamliel, a son of Jehuda ha-Nasi, about whom Max heard when his father was reading Talmud. Max thought Gamliel was just a mythic character, but here he realised that Gamliel was a real person, a scholar who once lived and taught and was buried in these catacombs.



*Archaeological site Beit She'arim, House of Gates*



## Alexander Zaid

Then I go up the hill over Beit She'arim and I am awestruck. Perhaps I'm even hallucinating. In Israel, it is almost impossible to find any statues, but suddenly, there is one, a huge man on a horse dominating the scenery. The ban on statues is related to interpretation of the biblical passage: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." (Ex 20, 4). So I am curious about who is this man. A scrubby green sign says that Alexander Zaid came to Palestine with the so called Second Aliyah in 1904. His experiences from Russia qualified him to become a defender of kibbutzim from Arab raiders. He was one of the founders of self-defense organisation [Bar Giora](#) and in 1909 he co-founded also its successor—organisation Hashomer (The Guard).



*Alexander Zaid,  
guardian in Israel*

He was one of the founders of self-defense organisation [Bar Giora](#) and in 1909 he co-founded also its successor—organisation Hashomer (The Guard).

I remember I read an article about Hashomers in Galilee in Jewish newspaper from the 20 s. At that time, news about the troops of guardians of the Jewish land were met with a wide interest of Jewish public and it occurred to me that maybe it was these Hashomers who inspired the founder of scout movement Hashomer when he was picking the right name (Kadimah and later Hatzair). If that movement looked for a suitable and identifying name, they could not have chosen better. I do not have any confirmation for my theory of course, but I can picture it vividly.

When I am coming back to Kiryat Ti'veon I find a cemetery where these Hashomers were buried. And I lay a little stone there...



*Hashomer cemetery*

In the afternoon we are sitting down and working again. I am recording an interview with both of my hosts Chava and Max and sometimes it is hard to hold my tears. (This happens to me quite often here in Israel.) It is hard to get my head around what the Jews had to go through because of a single Austrian freak with a moustache. When I hear about Chava who made her younger sister eat soup made of roots, rocks and sand on their way from Aushwitz in order to keep her alive (because she promised it to her mother), I am telling myself that a woman can bear more than a horse. And Max weighed only 29 kilos... I better not picture that. Fortunately, they also talk about other things. For example about the youth Zionist movement of Hilfsdienst (helping service) which was inspired by the scout commandment of a daily good deed. They helped the old, sick or disoriented people with preparation for the transports. Somewhat similar was the youth in Theresienstadt called Yad Tomechet (helping hand), they were again helping the old, because they were the most disadvantaged and in the greatest risk.



*Chava and Max Livni,  
Zilina 1947 (source:  
Livni's private archive)*



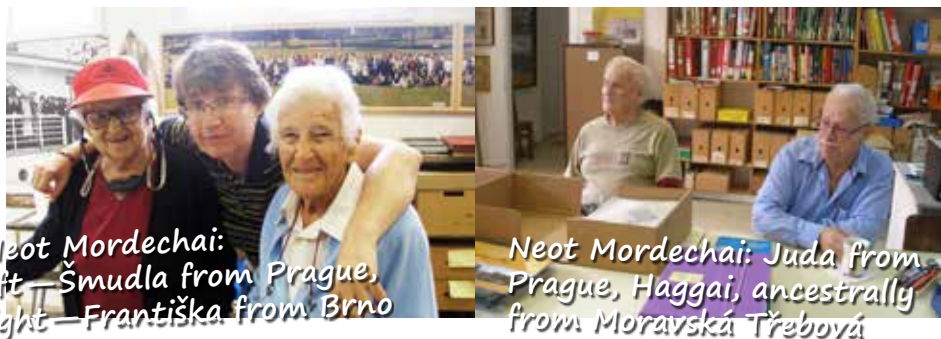
*Chava and Max Livni,  
Kiryat Tivon 2013*

I am listening to the story about how Chava used to take empty Kennkarte forms at the Bratislava register office. These would be forged to help to save lives of hundreds of young Jews who looked at least a bit Aryan. And I think to myself that these are the kinds of role-models we should stick to even today: Help wherever you can, regardless of the danger involved. And then it was not just danger, but even death. After this conversation I cannot fall asleep as there is a carousel of sentences and images that cannot be even put on paper.

I am also preparing for the following days and trips in Galilee. Luckily, it is possible to consult everything in great detail with my hosts who give me a plethora of priceless advice and it makes everything easier.

## Neot Mordechai

I am heading north just below the Golan Heights. I take the bus to Haifa and then a longer ride almost to the Lebanon borders, to Kiryat Shmona (the City of Eight—eight people lost their lives in the nearby villege Tel Hai in a battle with the Arabs, including Josef Trumpeldor, the iconic character of Israeli history and a “patron saint” of the Betar movement). Israel is a bit noodle-shaped around here. There is Golan on the right and Lebanon on the left... I take a taxi from there and at the scheduled time—nine a.m.—I am camping in the Neot Mordechai kibbutz, I let the local archivist know that I have arrived safely and I am picked up by her husband. I scheduled and arranged the meeting with Tami Alexander, the archivist, several weeks beforehand via e-mail. I do not leave anything up to chance.



Neot Mordechai was founded by the members of the oldest Czech Jewish scout movement—Tchelet Lavan (Blue and White) and by members of the newest movement El Al (Up). As we are walking through the kibbutz, I look in amazement at all that used to be just a desert and is now blooming. I cannot even imagine how much hard work, sweat and blood it must have cost to build all this. Everything was built literally from scratch over here. And I am also getting used to another thing that simply happens in Israel—the archive is right next to the cover. The covers are all over the place in this country.

The visit of the archive is very special, because apart from a load of documents, there is also a complete Czech set—those who ran away from Hitler from Czechoslovakia in the last minute in 1938—1940 and those who went through various Nazi camps, but they all have one in common: They are all former members of either Tchelet Lavan or El Al. I am turning on the voice recorder and asking them about their scout experiences from youth. (Tchelet Lavan was a member of the federation of Czech scouts since 1924). They are all talking at once,

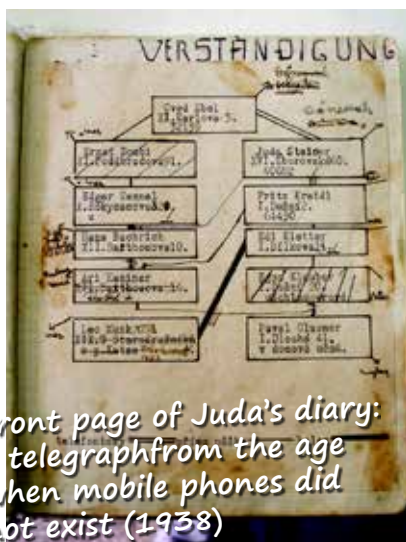
I am trying to record them one by one, but there are simply too many voices and I know the recording won't be of much use. Nevertheless, I keep recording and hopefully there will be at least some usable bits. When Šmudla, who is almost blind now, talks about her experience in the concentration camps, I am overcome by emotions again.



*Cover—a common feature of daily life in Israel*

The oldest one is Růženka from Ostrava who is 95 and she remembers virtually all the Tchelet Lavan celebrities including Jakob Edelstein, František Kahn and other. Juda Steiner from Prague fled from Hitler right under his very nose—through Denmark. I feel like I am in a well full of stories. These stories all confirm that Hitler was born to the misfortune of the whole world as well as his own (which is originally a Thomas Mann's quote). But they also confirm how resilient the Jews are. I don't see any trace of resignation. On the contrary.

Only after they leave in late afternoon I can have a look at all the documents that Tami and her husband have prepared for me. There are tens of archive boxes and though I spend the remaining part of the afternoon examining them, I cannot possibly get through all of them now. I find for example some pictures of one of the oldest so-called hachshar (a practical course of agriculture and crafts) which was associated with a Tchelet Lavan scout camp in 1924. I am taking pictures of private diaries. I find pictures of Blue and Whites' camps and other events.



*Front page of Juda's diary: a telegraph from the age when mobile phones did not exist (1938)*



It's perfect. I'm quite excited about all these documents, because they are real treasures and there are loads of them. It is clear that this visit was just the first one and there are many more to come. And I'm already looking forward to that. In the evening I'm leaving totally exhausted but happy.



At home there are my hosts and dinner and we spend a large part of the night by looking at the pictures, Chava and Max are helping me with translation of some texts from Hebrew, I'm learning new words, we are doing anything but going to bed. With a glass of cognac we close the day or rather the night and it is now clear that I haven't come here in vain.

I'm working on Saturdays as well. I use them to write the journal and various notes. I try to write down everything, because my memory is not infinite. I put together various papers, back up photos, and I prepare for more travelling. And I am also enjoying some of the ordinary Israeli life. This Saturday the family is coming together for breakfast—daughter Liora, granddaugter Sivan and her friend Moran. For lunch, there are family friends Peter and Irit (who are also Jewish scouts, Peter's father was roshgdud, i.e. a kind of a regional leader of all groups or troops of Makabi Hatzair in Čadca, Irit's father was a member of the Hanhala movement, which administrated Makabi Hatzair in Bratislava). In Israel family cohesion is vital, and I am enjoying that.



## Eva Adorian, Ma'ayan Zvi

The youngest Zionist scout movement called El Al (Up) was established as late as in 1937. It did not have virtually any time to develop in the Czech environment, but it was probably endowed with some kind of a special internal drive, because it managed to set itself up in almost all the larger Czech cities. However, too many leaders and members of the movement had died in the family camp in Birkenau. So finding a living member is a challenge, but not an irresolvable one. Max calls to kibbutz Ma'ayan Zvi and arranges a meeting for me—with Eva Adorian, former Prager and a former member of the movement.

My bus goes along the shore, then turns sharp left and I get off at a stop near the kibbutz where Eva is waiting for me. And one of the greatest and strongest experiences here in Israel begins. I hear (and record) her life story; she talks enthusiastically about her membership in El Al, she describes the activities, the trips, the meetings. All that the Czech scouts know very well. What we don't know that well are the circumstances: they had to walk to the meetings, because first the Jews were ordered to use the back platform in a tram and on Sundays using public transport was forbidden completely. And how do you organize a meeting when the Nazis ban gathering of Jews? And where do you go when dogs and Jews are forbidden in parks? To a theatre or a cinema? The same problem. And is there even any point in organising meetings when there are remaining fewer and fewer of us? Our friends seem to vanish and we have no idea where they ended up. At first they could at least go to the city park of Šárka, later on they could only go to Hagibor. There was no other place a Jewish child could go.



When Eva stands up to sing the Jewish scout anthem, it gives me goose bumps. Then she raises her right hand, forms the scout greeting and adds: and we greeted each other like this. My breath fails me and there are tears in my eyes. Then she talks about her job in a Jewish orphanage which must have been difficult, it is still the happier part of the story. The worse one is yet to come.

Going to Theresienstadt, then through various concentration camps including Auschwitz, then liberation in Mauthausen. But that is still not the end of her sufferings, she had to figure out how to get her seriously ill mother to Prague. Then she arrived to Israel and had to start anew, which was tough as well. Her son Eli (who was a father of four) became a victim of two Arab suicide bombers at Jerusalem market Yehuda in 1997. Her story has some typical Israeli features. But there is no sign of resignation, on the contrary. She is a very enthusiastic person and still a rightful member of the kibbutz, she is interested in its history and she interviews the old inhabitants (called vatkim) and she records everything that has some meaning for the future and what the next generations should remember. It is clear that Eva is quite resilient. I love people like her. I put her on the pedestal of Jewish scouts who set an example worth following together with Maud, Chava, Max and others. And when I'm taking the bus home I have plenty to think about.



*Eli Adorian was killed during suicide attack in July 1997. This is also a part of Israeli reality*

## End of the first phase

Time is up and I have to leave. I pack my luggage and say goodbye to my friends in Kiryat Ti'von, we have one last glass of cognac, a final l'chaim! And then I get on the bus back to Tel Aviv and I am preparing for the airport security procedures. They are ok, even though there are four of them this time.

That l'chaim still echoes in my ears during the flight and long after I came back at home in Prague. That l'chaim sounds so different in comparison with the Czech *na zdraví* (to health). Because we really do drink to health, but the Jews drink to life, which has by some miracle went through the worst events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could have seen and still remain in a good spirit and that l'chaim proves it.

I arrive to Prague at a little after 9 p. m. and it is very cold. It is a bit of a shock to go from the temperatures in Middle East to minus Celsius. And then there are only memories ahead of me, so the best I can do is to process the acquired materials and... to begin planning another journey.

# Spring 2014

After my first exploratory journey I roughly know what to expect and I am preparing for another Israeli adventures. It is absolutely necessary, because I am waking up at night, thinking about all the materials that I left behind undocumented. And I am dreading that a bomb might hit places such as the Tchelet Lavan documentation centre in Neot Mordechai before I managed to get there again. Well, it is definitely not impossible, Lebanon is in range. The Israeli must face completely different challenges than we do in central Europe. Actually, we don't really have to face any similar challenges for several decades, thank God.

And so I willingly undergo some austerity measures and start saving up and I also book some air tickets. I am considering whether I can afford to rent a car, because the time spent in public transport was the time I wasted. So I try to talk my friend into becoming my personal driver, because after all, Israel is not a very safe place to be, but she agrees willingly and we agree to set off in May.

This time, we are flying with the Czech Airlines. We somehow get past a strict security lady and we rent a car, which turns out to be a genius move. We have much more time and it's way safer. The last time I was here there was some Arab freak that had killed a nineteen years old Israeli soldier Eden Attias with a kinjal on a bus from Nazareth to Tel Aviv near the city of Afula. I paid much more attention to who was sitting next to after this incident.



*Our car camping underneath a fig tree near the Old Yaffa Hostel*

We get the GPS up and running and head to my favourite Old Yaffa Hostel. I can see that Čičako is an excellent driver and she goes through the narrow kinky little streets like a native. A problem arises when we find out how many parking spots the hostel has (three) and that they are all full. So we put the car somewhere nearby, underneath a tree and the following morning we find that we have been fined.

### **Jabotinsky Institute for the second time**

Thanks to the car we get to the Institute even before half past eleven and in front of the good old Mecudat Zeev building we are greeted by the head of the Jabotinsky Institute, Amira Stern. Same as last year, I arranged all the meetings beforehand and I try to stick to the plan.

I plunge into the work which I left the last time I was here and I am going through boxes containing precious information about the Brit Trumpeldor movement activities in Czechoslovakia. The work goes swimmingly, as I have an amazing colleague; it turns out that apart from driving, she is excellent in a whole host of other things, which makes everything easier. In the evening we go to chat with Amira in her office.



*Head of the Jabotinsky Institute archive, Amira Stern*



*Invitation to the Brit Trumpeldor purim soiree of 1936; one of the protector was Menachem Begin, future prime minister of Israel, however, then he was only a Jew scout leader*

The Stern family comes from Poland; Amira's father was a Betar commander in the city of Suwałki. Her uncle, Avraham Stern, came to Palestine and founded a radical militant national organisation Lechi, which was very different from other Jewish military organisations. They for example refused to collaborate with the British, who were in charge of administrating Palestine, even in the difficult times of the Second World War. I see they have a rather rich family history.

Our conversation seems like it will never end, we are talking about our possible further co-operation, but it is already clear that I have taken advantage of everything I could in this archive. And because I had promised to myself to spend some time visiting other monuments than archives, we are ending the conversation and going for a walk through Tel Aviv and Yaffa.

The regular evening walks become a pleasant and relaxing tradition, fast walks along the shore become my favourite sport, and sometimes they are even twelve kilometres long.

## Shoshana Zachor, Kfar Saba

On the following day we are going to Kfar Saba (Granddaddy's village) to meet Shoshana Zachor (née Renata Hönigsberová), a former member of the Bnei Akiva movement. She managed to flee Slovakia before it was too late. After the fascist regime rule and transports of Slovak Jews to concentration camps there is only Shoshana and one cousin who are alive from the whole family.



It was Yael Diamant who arranged this meeting. I'm bringing her Czech stamps and for her son a DVD with the fifth episode of a documentary entitled *Process H* about Milada Horáková (it is the only one which has been translated into English). Just as I am more and more interested in the history of Israel, Yael's interest in the Czech history is growing too. And the emails we exchanged often featured quite detailed historical information, including questions about the communist regime brutality.

We meet outside the house and when we enter, the door opens and Shoshana greets us with a smile and she says in Slovak: "I haven't spoken Slovak for seventy years, but I'll do my best now." I don't get it how can these people do it (Shoshana is not the only one). They don't speak their mother tongue for decades and then suddenly they are able to switch into them effortlessly. They are unstoppable and make no mistakes. However, in a minute the conversation turns into a tower of Babel; from Czech and Slovak we switch to English and then the Israeli girls speak in Hebrew. We get a poppy seed cake; I would never have expected that in these whereabouts. And it tastes delicious. The Israeli hospitality is renowned.

The last time I was here it was Eva Adorian's story that had touched me the most. This time, it was Shoshana's. It is not about concentration camps but now I hear for the first time about the events in Slovakia that happened after the so-called Vienna Arbitration in November of 1938. Jews were banished from their homes after the changes in borders in Southern Slovakia. It was a harsh autumn and subsequently also winter and there were thousands of people without home or food in the no man's land in the border areas. There was an immediate human response and help—from the Jewish communities and from scouts, especially from the Hashomer Hatzair movement. They were building tents and field kitchens; they were giving out sleeping bags and blankets and so on. It was not a five star hotel, but it was enough to survive. And at least the scout material was put to some use unlike in the Czech lands, where it was simply confiscated by the Germans.

When this storm was over and Shoshana came back to Nitra, she refused to go to Realgymnasium secondary school, but went to hachshar on the Zobor hill beyond the city. She spent a year there. Then she and other members of Bnei Akiva got into Palestine with fake documents and everything was fine. After the war she married her madrich (leader) from Bnei Akiva who went from Nitra via Bergen-Belsen. Fortunately he survived.



Shoshana Zachor (Kfar Saba): a member of Bnei Akiva in Nitra



*“Work group” in Kfar Saba: Shoshana, Yael, Tiki*

She studied pedagogy at Tel Aviv University, worked as a teacher for a bit and then she had been a host of popular TV educative programmes for children for twenty six years. We get a VHS with these programmes and I’m curious whether my personal translator will be willing to translate them for me.

But the highlight comes after about fifty minutes of our conversation. I was warned in advance that the Israeli will be celebrating two important holidays during our stay. This means that if I hear the sirens, I shouldn’t duck and cover, but stand up to pay tribute. So today we are celebrating Yom Hazikaron, a day of Remembrance for the Fallen Soldiers of Israel. Yael tells us the memorial ceremony will start shortly. I don’t know exactly what to expect, we are in a private flat after all. But as I am asked to do so, I turn off the voice recorder. We are turning on the TV with the live programme. The sirens are sounding both from the outside and from the TV set. All of us are standing at attention and I am automatically doing the scout salute. The life in the whole country stops for two minutes and people are remembering their dead. Yael is praying and I am thinking to myself that this is exactly the kind of patriotism that we lack



*Toya Feuer (my friend Yael’s grandmother), after making the scout promise. 1940s (source: Yael Diamant’s private archive)*

in the Czech Republic; inobtrusive, discreet, yet somehow natural, without jumping about in public places (who's not jumping, isn't Czech).

After this private ceremony we are going back to our interview. I also learn about the activities of a scout troop named Kfar Saba here in Israel. In the 40s, they would signal warning against Arab raids through a flag semaphore, because they didn't have other means to do that. Another way of making use of the scout education ☺.



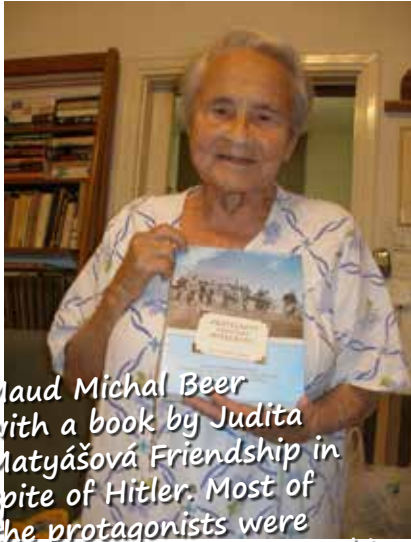
Scout troop in Kfar Saba, 1940s  
(source: Yael Diamant's private archive)

When we are leaving in the afternoon, we are so full of today's experiences that we get a little sick on the road.

## Maud Michal Beer for the second time

We are giving Maud just a short visit this time, they have guests from Brno and we don't want to intrude. We are bringing some Czech crosswords as Maud mentioned how much she likes them. Even though this time we visit her purely for social purposes, I still get the voice recorder and ask some questions related to our interview from last year. I am asking especially about Tchelet Lavan and their rival from Prostějov—Makabi Hatzair—their potential collaboration and the stories of the members whom I found at home thanks to the information I had got in Israel last year.

Then Maud shows me the book *Friendship in spite of Hitler* by Judita Matyášová which is about the lives of young Jews who escaped holocaust by fleeing to Denmark. Most of them were members of either Tchelet Lavan or Makabi Hatzair. I know a thing or two about the book and the author, sometimes we consult each other, and so I'm sending the picture to Judita. Later on,



*Maud Michal Beer with a book by Judita Matyášová Friendship in spite of Hitler. Most of the protagonists were either members of Makabi Hatzair or Tchelet Lavan.*

I find out that in Israel this book is known virtually by anyone coming from Czechoslovakia.

The celebrations go on. It's now Yom ha'acmaut, the Independence Day. This means (among other things) that the beaches are crowded with people, there are BBQs, singing, flags everywhere, in our hostel too. It is the first celebration that I accept without a murmur—even though it goes on until late night or early morning and we only get to sleep at 5 a.m. ☺.

## Masada, Brit Trumpeldor

In the application for approval of the Jewish Scout Association's articles, which was addressed to the Prague police presidium in 1933, we read: "Masada is the name of one of the last Jewish fortresses in Palestine during the last Jewish uprising led by Bar Kochba. That is why it became a symbol of honour,

strength and endurance to the Jewish people. These characteristics are the aim of all the Jewish organisations. That is why we chose to name our organisation Masada."

So one day we take several litres more water with us and we head to carry out our documenting work on the place which once inspired our Jewish colleagues who were looking for a name for their organisation. We are heading to the desert near the Dead Sea. It takes several hours and multiple small events to get there from Tel Aviv. For example Čičako, my driver, admires the desert street lighting (how she calls the lamps along the road). True, you wouldn't find likes of these in Sahara. One of the best small events is coming across a herd of camels which comes out of the blue, but before I get my camera out they disappear again. The countryside looks very unusual, ochre yellow. We descend to the Dead Sea and then it comes. There is the majestic massif of the fortress and our jaws drop. The heat is unbearable, there is no shade, but it is not an optical illusion. We have arrived to our destination.



*Old Yaffa Hostel reception and the flag of Israel*



*On our way to Masada*



*Her Majesty Masada*

Masada is known across Israel until today. It is a symbol of the Jewish people's resilience and endurance, as written in the application. There are two ways of getting up to the fortress: taking the so-called snake path or the cable car. We would usually not try to avoid walking, but when we take the temperature into account, we opt for the cable car.

The fortress itself is located on something that could be called a table mountain (a mountain without the top), except that it is way bigger than usual, it is actually a plateau four hundred meters above its surroundings. I am amazed at the complex system of water collection and the rock-hewn cisterns.



*Model of the fortress*



*Yellow, yellow everywhere*

When we finish our tour in Masada, I understand why Jews only speak about Masada with respect. During a war against the Romans, it was the last point of resistance until 73 CE—its defenders never gave up and after several years of siege they had better opted for a mass suicide. The genius loci is truly awe-inspiring. No wonder our Jewish brothers and sisters chose this name.

What follows is the way back home through the Judean desert and then a well-deserved stylish dinner—a salmon—on the seaside.





*My excellent driver Čičako with a well deserved beer*

## **Etzel Museum, Irgun Zvai Leumi Muzeum, Tel Aviv**

It is said that all the days in Israel are beautiful, even the rainy ones. In the evening, there is a storm and the following day it's raining a lot. (Last evening there was a storm and it seemed like it was going to rain for the whole day.) It's pouring with rain so much that we're buying some umbrellas. I certainly did not expect this kind of weather over here. Rain is actually a rare sight in Israel. So today I am visiting two museums which I did not manage to visit last year. However, it was clear that I would need to see what's inside sooner or later, because they are interconnected with the history of the scout movement called Brit Trumpeldor (Betar).

So we are heading to the shore to a former Jewish house from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (which had to be renovated after the battles of 1948) where the Etzel Museum is. We first need to undergo a routine entrance security check (which included also going through our backpacks, but by now we have got used to it) and then we are reading through the exhibition panels which make it more than clear that they paid (understandably) a lot of attention to military training.

Then we are going to the Irgun Zvai Leumi Museum, which is located in the city centre. It is dedicated mostly to one of the founders of the Zionist movement Zeev Jabotinsky, who founded the Jewish legion during the First World War and who co-founded the Brit Trumpeldor movement in central and Eastern Europe. The Irgun commander then was Menachem Begin, who later became prime minister and a Nobel peace prize laureate and I remember that for some months in 1936 he was also the head of Czechoslovak Betar.



*Wall and tower model in the Etzel Museum*

Some sources even claim that Brit Trumpeldor would do military training also during its post-war summer camps and the members would then go immediately to the front lines in Palestine.



*Irgun Zvi Leumi Museum: training of the Betar movement members*



The rain stopped, so we are going to explore the streets of Tel Aviv. Last year, I was already interested in the Bauhaus architecture which makes Tel Aviv the White city. This year, I have a new piece of information which could be interesting for scouts: There was an architect and builder who took part in building Tel Aviv and Haifa, his name was Philip Böhm, he was a member of Blau-Weiss (later Tchelet Lavan) and he was born in České Budějovice. He also did some scouting during his studies at technical school in Pilsen and he was nicknamed Filoš. He was one of those who helped to raise the Pilsen Blau-Weiss class to a much higher level. My Israeli guardian angels, Chava and Max Livni did some persistent investigations and they managed to find his great-grandson—he lives in Haifa. Meanwhile, I found out that Philip Böhm was building the Workers' House and an amphitheatre for 2000 people

in Haifa in 1926—1927. That must have been hard work. Apart from these two, he realized over 200 other buildings in Haifa.



We are on the Masaryk Boulevard. The first Czechoslovak president is very popular in Israel: There are streets named after him in seven towns and cities and there is also a village named after him—Kfar Masaryk in the North District, and also a forest which was planted in 1930 near the Sarid village is named after him. It should not come as a surprise: After the establishment of Czechoslovak Republic, he advocated for Jewish rights and he sympathized with Zionism. I realise that also Czech Jewish scouts were collecting money for the Jewish National Fund for buying land and also for buying young trees for the forestation of desert. The small blue and white cash boxes called IMI or so-called young tree donations were very popular. All of this helped to establish and build Israel as we know it today.

## **Kvutsat Yavne and Beit-Haedut**

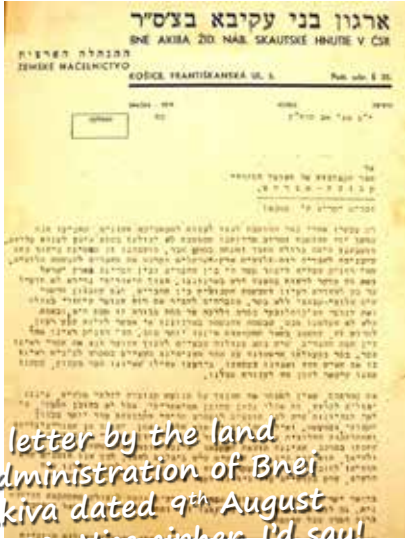
We are heading to Nir Galim and I am very grateful for the car and the air conditioning. Although we are leaving early in the morning, I'm not sure if we can make it on time. There is Yael waiting for us in Beit-Haedut. I know her and several other people from the last year, they are all greeting me, but we need to continue in our way to Kvutsat Yavne, which is another religious kibbutz founded in 1929. In their archive, they have documents of the Bnei Akiva scout movement which was focused on religious Jewish youth.

And so we camp here for some time. I am taking pictures of magazines issued by the movement, of the Bnei Akiva leaders' correspondence, and of various war and post-war situation reports which focused mainly on the numbers of refugees into Erec Israel (the land of Israel) and the numbers of survivors. It does not make for a happy reading. The archivist Kvutsat Yavne is putting on some Beethoven and so the work seems to be going in a nice pace. Yael is helping me with the documents in Hebrew and so I at least have an idea of what I'm taking pictures of. After the experience from last year, I know how much such basic information helps—it makes the subsequent work with documents much easier.



*Hadar Bashan, the archivist  
in Kvutsat Yavne*

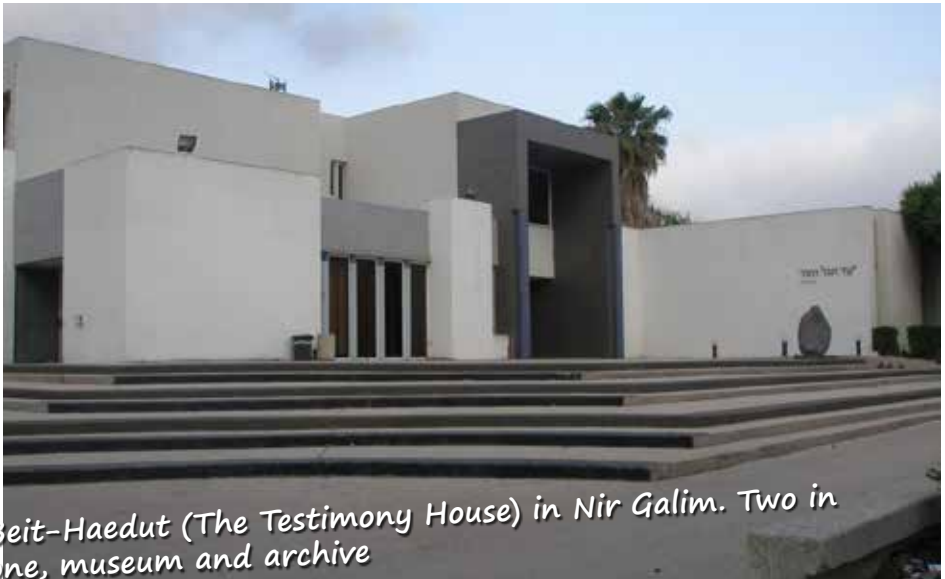
We are returning from Nir Galim to Beit-Haedut to accept the invitation of having lunch together. Then the so-called afternoon shift begins. As I have already talked to Yael about what I want to focus on this time, there are dozens of boxes waiting for me. And they contain great treasures. I'm taking pictures of whole chapters from various books, where so-called Shlichim describe their experiences in Czechoslovakia, they, among other things, comment on the situation in various Zionist scout movements. The



*A letter by the land administration of Bnei Akiva dated 9th August 1933. Nice cipher, I'd say!*

Shlichim were Jewish emissaries from Palestine who went to Europe to help the movements there. They were almost always originally from those countries where they came from, so they knew the language and the situation in the country and this made their stays easier. Their presence was very important for the movements: They informed them about the situation in Palestine, or they ideologically supervised individual groups. In a nutshell, they provided their knowledge to others. Anyhow, their reports are another source which sheds some light on the activities of scout Jewish movements. I even got one of these books as a gift. Now I just need to find someone who will translate it for me ☺. I am very thankful for that, because it is quite difficult to find information about the Bnei Akiva

scouts in the Czech Republic. And when I ask how come, I get a strange answer: They didn't have a good PR.



*Beit-Haedut (The Testimony House) in Nir Galim. Two in one, museum and archive*



I cannot look in the personal records of Bnei Akiva members, because I know I would spend the rest of my life here if I did. I took loads and loads of documentary pictures and I'm quite sure it will give me a heart attack when I come back home.

I also get an English—Hebrew dictionary from Yael with a dedication in Hebrew: *When you are able to read these lines by yourself I will know that my gift was not futile.*

## Ruth Bondy, Ramat Gan

In the morning and with the help of our GPS we are going in the direction to a town with a poetic name Ramat Gan (Garden on a hill). We are having a break in a park under the cooling shade of trees and I'm preparing for an interview with Ruth Bondy. Some time ago, Ruth pointed out that my articles about Jewish scouts don't mention "her" movement El Al. So I filled this gap in my knowledge last year with the help of Eva Adorian and now I am going to further improve with Ruth Bondy, who was Eva's madricha, or leader. El Al means up, but it has nothing to do with today's airline company.

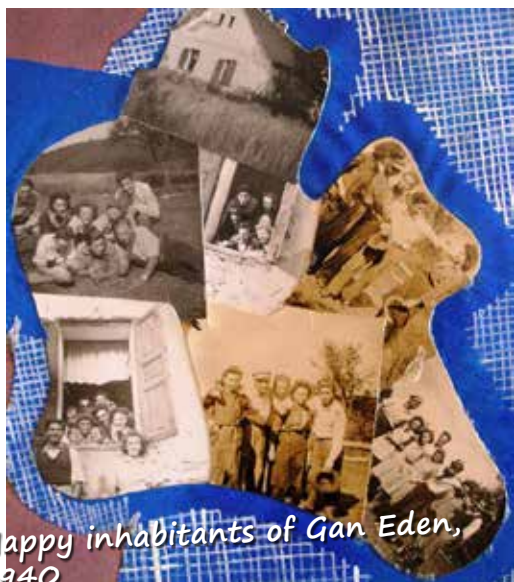
Ruth is a likeable woman with sparkling intellect, a renowned writer and a translator of Czech books into Hebrew. As I found out later, she has translated forty five books including *The Good Soldier Švejk*. This information shocks me. There are people who don't even read this amount of books in their lifetime. While I'm imagining all that work, Ruth is speaking about the pre-war times in El Al, I hear about the very beginning of the movement, about the founder Pavel Kohn, about cousin Otto Klein who was also a founding member of the movement and who later became leader of boys' home L417 in Theresienstadt), about Honza Bram-



Writer Ruth Bondy,  
former member of the  
El Al movement

mer, a Prague law student, and about many others. I'm finding out about the tests they would voluntarily undergo. For example about one which (with

a slight stretch of imagination) resembled something like a merit badge of thirst. It meant that a person who went to Palestine would need to be duly equipped and prepared for the lack of water. So they needed to learn to economise water. And so during the themed trips they would purposefully avoid wells. It was also a kind of ideological preparation for living in a place where water truly is scarce. Today's doctors would probably freak out, given how obsessed they are with the water intake. However, in that situation, the motto "who is prepared will not be surprised" was of use. The Zionist youth would go on with various tests like this also in Theresienstadt. Except for the test of hunger, because that one was the same for everyone, all the time.



*Happy inhabitants of Gan Eden,  
1940*

agricultural work was a hard row to hoe for everyone, especially when they were not used to manual labour. However, they still regarded that place and time as the true paradise, because unlike the rest of the world around it, it was filled with a friendly atmosphere and mutual understanding; the Germans and their anti-Jewish orders were far far away and the world seemed to be alright.



*That's how they felt about the place.  
Gan Eden — home and paradise*

Ruth also speaks about a hachshar near Teletín where youth from El Al would undergo practical training that prepared them for their departure to Palestine, in this particular case in the field of agriculture. Only few of them had actually left, for the other ones it was too late and the only departure that awaited them was the one to Theresienstadt and subsequently to a concentration camp.

Only some of them survived. There is a treasure that comes out of a drawer—a photoalbum full of pictures and I am listening to the stories about plugá (group) and a place called Gan Eden—the Garden of Eden. The hard

At that time, there was only little fraction left of the El Al activities, because they were closely watched by the Germans. Ruth is talking about their fruitless waiting for the British certificates that would entitle them to go to Palestine: “One day they banned leaving to Palestine and we got stuck in the protectorate.”

Then there were orders for transports, Theresienstadt and a family camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the feeling of belonging and responsibility grow even stronger. Later on, Ruth and her sister and other prisoners were sent to clean up after Hamburg air raids. She was liberated in Bergen-Belsen and she came back to Prague on a truck. She already knew then that she was not going to stay in Czechoslovakia. She made use of the opportunity she had, she became a member of the so-called Jewish Brigade, a military organisation that was being prepared in Czechoslovakia by the soldiers of the future Israeli army. She left for Israel in 1949 and—as I said before—she became a renowned journalist, awarded by multiple awards and even distinctions.

When Mrs Ruth tells the whole story and I turn off the voice recorder, we say goodbye and I feel like I don't want to leave at all. I'm telling to myself that when I come back home I need to find a place by the Vltava River called Gan Eden to pay tribute to the memory of those who spent their youth there and to whom the world still owes pretty much everything: Five of the nine members of the group died in the holocaust. The quote “death is not bad, it doesn't hurt” rises up in my mind. Nevertheless, in these particular cases, the quote is absolutely wrong, because as someone once said: Six million dead Jews is a statistics, but only until you start to see an individual and his fate behind each of these deaths. We can only guess what the life of the Gan Eden members would have looked like and what they could give to the world had the Jewish community not been so tragically decimated. Ruth contributed more than generously. That's for sure.

## Kiryat Tiv'on again

We pack our things in Tel Aviv and take the only toll road in Israel in the direction of Galilee and we go to Kiryat Tiv'on. Greeting and talking to Chava and Max was warm and honest. There is so much to talk about, because if it were possible, I would have lived in the Jewish Prague Museum library for the past six months, as I supplemented the documents I had brought from Israel by the documents from the library. Now I need to consult and contextualise all this knowledge. My guardian angels in Israel are helping me with this and frankly, without them I would be lost. Their support consists of much more than talking. I am aware of and deeply grateful for all that I am receiving from them, including the material help (and I'm quite sure we aren't even not even after we had invited them for dinner in a restaurant on the last day of our stay in Tiv'on.)

We set our base for trips in the guest room and shortly it looks quite messy. There are backpacks everywhere, the table overflows with papers, notes, maps, cameras, voice recorders, dead batteries and all the other things a traveller needs in a foreign country which really isn't that



*Hospitability in Kiryat  
Tyon: Chava, Max and  
Cicako*

foreign. I'm far from calling myself a domesticated individual; however, under certain circumstances I can imagine I'm at home over here.

Despite the overwhelming amount of work we also have our l'chaim, so familiar to me from the last year. The only exception is that now there are four of us drinking the cognac. We brought an excellent French brand; however, several bottles were emptied during our stay, we simply could not turn down the evening toast. And it is so nice to sit and talk about the events of the past day and mostly to get advice about the way to handle certain situations, to get to a place without getting stuck, about pronunciations of some words...

Same as the last year, Chava and Max are helpful in every possible way. And Max is afflicted by something that could be called a ban on thanking. We cannot even let the word "thanks" slip out of our lips, because the immediate answer follows that we should only thank at the end of the visit. But when the end comes I cannot get anything past my tightly pressed lips, let alone big thanks. I put all my power into not saying anything and it is very hard not to burst into tears.



*still life with cognac. The smallest one of these huge shots is  
mine and no, we did not make plans to wear red trousers.*

But I am getting ahead of myself. Now we are just jotting where we want to go and how we want to get there in the maps, we are adding the coordinates of places where we need to go, we

are preparing for interviews with interesting people. It seems that there are no uninteresting people in Israel. And this again confirms the words about a country which is like a reservoir full of stories. I feel that even if I spent the rest of my life here, I would not be able to take all the pictures, voice recordings and notes that would be necessary to document it all.

The voice recorder, our faithful friend, is available again and so apart from the usual evening work, we are recording whatever we did not have time to record last year. Chava and Max add details and the result is something almost like a large epic, so I'm thinking about what would be the best use of it. And I am thinking of a nice and clearly arranged biography. But I am getting ahead of myself again.

I'm also taking pictures of chapters from Max' book *Israelis coming from Czechoslovakia*. I'm asking at least for translations of the titles in the chapters about Jewish scout movements, so that I know what to have translated first when I come back home.

### Kfar Ruppin (Ruppin's village)

On Sunday we go to Kfar Ruppin (Ruppin's village) near the Jordan border in the north of Israel, where we are awaited by archivist Elijahu Chaviv and his wife Edna. Arrangement of this visit was a bit complicated, last year I didn't succeed in contacting the archive, so I say to myself that this year, hopefully, it will be better. It ought to be.

Role of the translator is undertaken by Hanka Raz, originally from Prague, with whom we spent several hours in the archive, during which we in turn talk and photograph the submitted material, which are brought in and out by Elijahu. Hanka translates that Hebrew gibberish and I am very grateful for this help on which the person without knowledge of the language depends here almost exclusively. Hanka got to Palestine from Prague through England where she lived during the war and she is in regular contact with "her" English adoptive family until today. From her original family, there isn't anybody left. There are plenty of documents, unfortunately most of them in Hebrew—the kibbutz was founded by the members of the Makabi Hatzair movement, among others even from Czechoslovakia, so I have found quite a fair amount of Czech traces.



Kfar Ruppin; Teacher Hanka Raz and archivist Elijahu Chaviv





*Ellen Glassner with her friends from Makabi Hatzair movement after arrival to Czechoslovakia in 1936*



*Ellen Glasner today*

Thank God there is still a lot of living Czechoslovaks (even naturalized), because in addition to Hanka we later meet other interesting people. For example Ellen Glassner, a former member of Makabi Hatzair who escaped from Berlin to Prague in 1936, in desperate times, when Germany made life more and more difficult for Jews. It was believed that the democratic society of Masaryk's republic wouldn't allow similar atrocities in our country. Ellen became a member of Prague's girls' kvuca (group, division) called Ester right away in 1936 and after some time she worked her way up to the position of the chief. Her story is similar to the dozens of those which I have already listened to. She also managed to leave the growingly dangerous Czechoslovakia before the worst happened. Fortunately. We talk for a while, and then I photograph her scout picture album.



*Edna Chaviv, she saved us from dying of starvation.*

Only that in a while, our guide Elijahu comes in and tell us that "the kibbutz is full of Czechoslovaks and we have to visit a few more", so we visit one after another, depending on who has got the time to spare at the given moment. It is not unusual that even people in their nineties attend various lectures, courses and participate in a wide range of educational activities (which could be likened to our "Lifelong Learning") so almost always there's nobody at home, when we first try to visit.

After that, Edna invites us to the kibbutz diner for lunch and during our meal we are learning how she or her family got here. Edna belongs to the second generation of incomers, unfortunately she can't speak Czech, and so we both try our best and

communicate in English. I found out that Edna's mother came from Přerov, where she was

member of Makabi Hatzair. In her family, there is a story about how she met the legendary Fredy Hirsch, then also a member of Makabi Hatzair and at the same time Makabi instructor, on a summer camp in Hranice. She fled to Palestine just before the war—it appears that today is the day of stories with happy ending ☺.

Then we continue in a bit of a rush. Lastly, we meet up with Anina Korati, a sister of a former spokesman of Charter 77 Josef Vohryzek (I remember his texts, among others, from the samizdat magazine *Kritický sborník*). Anina remembers the youth spent in Makabi Hatzair: “I think that the founder of the scout movement was a psychology genius who knew exactly which components are vital for youth. Nobody could take away from me everything I have learned in scout.” She also remembers the start of the occupation and she mentions that the presence of Germans in Prague was like a dark cloud.

Nevertheless, stories with happy ending are still coming up; Anina also managed to leave sooner than anything happened, thanks to the perfect organizational work of Makabi Hatzair and its superior movement Hechaluc. Her brother Pepík survived as well, their parents sent him to Sweden still soon enough. Yet Anina’s rescue wasn’t without complications: She left Prague in 1939, but the whole contingent of expatriates got stuck in Bratislava for nine months, and because of the unprecedented English politics for another five years on Mauritius, and only then the group of Makabi Hatzair called “Gimmel” (named after third letter of Hebrew alphabet; all migrant groups of Makabi Hatzair were listed in this alphabetical way) arrived to Kfar Ruppin. Nevertheless: Still the Gimmel group could consider itself lucky, because people from the fourth group Daled haven’t managed to get away from the country at all. Most of their members died in concentration camps.





Then we make joint photo, we stand and salute in a scout manner. Anina observes me for a bit and then she shoots off: “You’ve got it wrong”. At first, I don’t know what I got wrong, but when I see her staring directly on my right hand in salute, I inspect it critically as well. Čičako slowly puts away the camera, until we figure out the salute, but I can’t find anything wrong with it. I stare incomprehensively, then I ask and discover another interesting thing: With Czech scouts it is: “The strong protects the weak” and thumb overlaps the pinkie. With Jewish scouts it is different: “The strong supports the weak” and thus thumb slightly supports the pinkie. Bingo! It’s not wrong, just slightly different.

We don’t have enough time to photocopy Anina Korati’s scout album—we don’t even get to begin—which is only one reason more why we should start to plan the third journey (when I don’t think about the official reasons like that there is a huge Central Zionist archive in Jerusalem, which I haven’t visited yet and similarly there are personal ties, which become to have growing significance).

We don’t have time to visit the archeological ground Beit Shean, which is near the kibbutz, it is pretty late when we leave for “home” to Kiryat Tiv’on, and I say to myself—we will visit it next time. This “next time” slowly becomes a mantra.

## *Intermezzo—Searching for Rudolf Menzeles (aka Mysteries remains even after seventy years)*

*Now comes the time when I have to mention the story for the resolution of which I didn't even dare to hope. When I was writing the book on the topic of scouts' involvement in resistance movement during the Second World War in Northern Moravia and Silesia, I discovered a half-forgotten story about a Jewish boy Erich, from the Klein family. He was a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> boys' scout troop in Ostrava and boys called him 'Skeleton'. Rumor has it that he went to Theresienstadt voluntarily, to establish scout troop and help with education of the children in a difficult circumstances. He said goodbye and—disappeared. Nobody ever saw him again, nobody ever heard about him. Not during the war in Theresienstadt, and not even after the war in Ostrava or anywhere else.*



*The 1<sup>st</sup> boy's scout troop in Ostrava, led by the legendary Vláďa Čermák. Several members of this troop worked during the war for resistance movement. Erich Klein—Skeleton standing in the top row, second from left.*

*I followed the story, because some of the circumstances didn't fit in. For example: Some contemporaries mentioned that Skeleton said his farewells to them before departing for Theresienstadt, he went to tell good-bye to the girl scouts from the associated 1<sup>st</sup> girls' scout troop in Ostrava who were at that time staying in a camp. There is an undated photograph of this which depicts girls' scouts (one of them, Zorka Salická is wearing the scout uniform)—and Erich, called Skeleton. Without uniform—and without a David's star and that turned out to be a significant detail in my search. I derived from that several conclusions, if Zora is wearing the scout uniform then it had to be the camp in 1939. In the 1940, scout uniforms, together with other scout attributes, were banned and*

furthermore most of the camps were dispelled by the Nazis. The fact that Skeleton is not wearing a star on his shirt is significant as well. In the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia Jews were bound to wear it from September 1941.

The bottom line is that Skeleton couldn't have planned the departure for Theresienstadt during summer holidays of 1939, since Theresienstadt didn't yet function as a place for concentration of Jewish citizens; the first Jews sent for the preparatory work left as late as in November 1941. Besides that, I have discovered that Erich's name is not in the official list of prisoners in Theresienstadt. Thus: To where exactly Skeleton disappeared?

I wondered if it's possible that he was sent to Nisko, in Eastern Poland: first Jewish transports left from the republic in the October 1939 in that direction, and it was mostly Jews from Ostrava and Northern Moravia region (it was a test of what the 'final solution' should be like). Theoretically, it could be feasible, if there wasn't one crucial mistake: Skeleton is not on the list of the prisoners, nor on any other list. His name is nowhere to be found. But the major blow to the theory provided Mrs. Salomonovičová, a genealogist from Ostrava, who informed me that she doesn't have Erich Klein in evidence of Jews from Ostrava at all. And yet all the scouts remember him, many of the boys of the Klein family were members of the scout troop of Vláda Čermák who used to be brothers and cousins... simply—a mystery.



Erich Klein saying good-bye to girls' scouts from 1<sup>st</sup> girls' scout troop in Ostrava (1939)

Some light was shed on the mystery by the leader of the 1<sup>st</sup> girls' scout troop in Ostrava, Jaryna Kostková who is still alive (on the photograph she stands Skeleton's right). She remembered that in that period, several of her Jewish schoolmates from the secondary school were preparing for the



*journey to Palestine and Skeleton might have joined them—and then his disappearance would make sense (yet what wouldn't make sense was that he didn't contact anyone even after the war). She also remembered that on some international meeting of PE teachers just after the war, she stumbled upon a Czech-Israeli originally from Bohumín by the name of Rudolf Menzeles, who before the war rescued Jewish youths in Northern Moravia and transported them to Palestine; he may know more about the whole thing. She told me then: Remember that name very carefully and look for it.*

*'Look for it' is easier said than done, especially when person knows that almost every Czechoslovak changes their name to Hebrew after they arrive to Palestine or later to Israel. It's like looking for a needle in a haystack. I tried to search even during the first residence in archive Makabi Hatzair in Kfar Hamakabi, because I supposed that Menzeles as a PE teacher could have been a member of Makabi before the war. But to no avail.*

*After the arrival to the Czech Republic I examined materials from Kfar Ruppin and when I read through different texts, I stumbled upon letters addressed to a certain 'Ruddi'. It occurred to me that Kfar Ruppin was also founded by the members of Makabi Hatzair... What it took was only one telephone to the archives in Kfar Ruppin and Rudolf Menzeles was discovered. And I don't believe in coincidence. It remains to decipher his Hebrew notes and maybe later I will also find out if Erich Klein—Skeleton is on the list of his wards and what happened to him.*

## **Neot Mordechai for the second time**

As one of my last year's "debts" I must include archive in Neot Mordechai, thus we set on a journey to the Northern Galilee. Although I have been here and already took some pictures, it is nothing in comparison with the amount of material stored in the archive of the Tchelet Lavan movement. And well, it is easy to travel to a place I already know ☺. We are again expected here and Hagai leads us to the "study room", where we are greeted by Tami. When I see all those boxes around, I actually feel a bit desperate. Sometimes I think that it would be best to relocate to Israel for about two years and these worries and other things would go away.

This year, it is without participation of the Czechoslovak party; its only representative is 95-year-old Gogo, formerly from Ostrava, who compiles annotations to historical photographs. We are left speechless just by how well he handles the computer. Gogo belongs to one of those people whose "memory reservoir" is bottomless and he is quick with dates and names. Driver Čičako is working together with him, while I for a change am focused on photographing hundreds of pages of different materials as usual.

This time I focus on materials documenting the work of Tchelet Lavan in Czech and Moravian cities (this movement never caught up in Slovakia). I spent the whole day on this job, with the exception for lunch-break: Tami leads us to the kibbutz diner, where everything is plenty, so in a while we are full. I revise my original enthusiasm for relocation, because this much of great food would probably make me to rounded to walk.



Another “work group”, this time in Neot Mordechai, 95-year-old Gogo is sitting in the center, an Ostravian member of Tchelet Lavan.

In the end, when we are looking for something completely different, Haggai pulls out the folder of the architect Phillip Böhm, who was already mentioned earlier, who set up Tchelet Lavan in Pilsen, the so-called hachshars of this movement in Göhle in Western Bohemia and Stará Libavá in Moravia, just to leave for Palestine and build parts of Tel Aviv and Haifa here. Five volumes of memoirs fall out from the folders. They are written in Hebrew and I am again left speechless, because in this Hebrew written sea I can occasionally glimpse text in German or English and when I start reading it, the importance of Phillip Böhm called “Filos” for Israeli architecture and constructions is becoming more and more obvious. It is clear now that I have to pay closer attention to this man. In the archive they have two copies of the fourth volume of Böhm’s memoirs in Hebrew, so I receive one copy as a gift. It’s cool. Finally, I’m returning from Israel with more books than I have brought here, including the crosswords for Maud Beer.

Phillip Böhm’s Certificate of apprenticeship



Workers’ House with amphitheatre, which was built by Phillip Böhm, member of Tchelet Lavan in Haifa (source: Historical archive Technion, Haifa)

We start our journey back pretty late, yet we try to look for the cult place of Israelis—Tel Hai. GPS navigation, which can normally get us out of any trouble on the road, has apparently decided to live a life of its own for a change and it gets us to some shady spot near the Tel Hai Industrial Park. We are just going around in circles and we aren't getting anywhere, so at this point we give up the search for the monument and return home.

## **Yet again Eva Adorian, Ma'ayan Zvi and Ramat ha-Nadiv**

That day we want to visit Eva Adorian in Ma'ayan Zvi in the morning and to drive to Kfar Masaryk in the afternoon. Eva is a former member of the El Al movement, and the Masaryk's village was established from a great part by the Slovakian scouts from the Hashomer Hatzair movement. But man proposes, God disposes. And this time Eva did some “disposing” too.

We are arriving at the kibbutz and I rack my brains for the image of Eva's house. Even though it isn't that much of a “racking” since the house has a beautiful garden which I remember from last year, so we don't actually search for it at all, we just drive straight to the place. After the necessary coffee and several glasses of water without which a person travelling in these parts of the world would soon die of dehydration, we turn to the voice recorder and notes from last year, we fill in missing information and new names are mentioned.



*Ramat ha-Nadiv: this place used to be called “the miserable one”*

### Coastal Plain Observation Point

The names of settlements founded or aided by the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association (PICA) and by Baron Edmond de Rothschild, are engraved on this stone relief map. In addition, the names of several other cities have been added for geographic orientation. The cultivated fields and fish ponds seen below on the coastal plain, were developed following drainage of the Kabara swamps, an initiative of Baron Edmond de Rothschild during the years 1922-1926, which eliminated a source of malaria and swamp fever.

### *Text about the origins of this place*

After an hour or so, when we want to get up and leave, it is impossible, because Eva says: “Since you are already here, you have to see Rama ha-Nadiv, so that you aren’t always just working.” Secretly I think about the proverb which says that courtesy costs nothing and I quickly bid farewell to the Kfar Masaryk—and we go elsewhere. We are going to the hilltop city of Zichron Ja’akov, where the French philanthropist of Jewish origin, baron Edmond Rothschild, founded a beautiful park and a garden. Ramat ha-Nadiv was originally a place full of malaria and mosquitoes which transmitted it; only that such places were often chosen by the Jewish settlers who ameliorated them and thanks to the heavy toils of the previous generations it has lost its original rough character. Along the way the place has also lost its original Arabic name “Ummalaleq”; The English called it “The miserable one”, which both means the same thing ☺.

Philanthropic activities of Baron Rothschild are well known all around Israel, he financed and organized Jewish colonization of Palestine, he is responsible for funding the total of 44 places, moshavim and kibbutzim, including this beautiful park. And to this very place, his beloved spot, from Paris and with all the state honors his remains were later moved and buried here. Also there is a mausoleum which commemorates Edmond Rothschild as an important figure of Palestinian and Israeli history.

We are walking around the spacious premises of the monument, Čičako is taking pictures of the garden which is intended for the blind as there are pleasant smelling flowers whose names are written in Latin, Hebrew, English, Arabic and also in Braille. We are talking about other aspects of life than only El Al—only now we are in a local vegetarian restaurant. Eva collects memories and documents lives of the so-called “vatikim”, migrants to Israel, about whom I have already written.

It is similar in a way to my “Israeli” work so I listen curiously and we compare our experiences. “My” respondents get to Israel from Slovakia,



*Eva Adorian in Ramat ha-Nadiv*

Czech Republic, and possibly from Subcarpathian Rus', while "hers" come from all over the world, so each of them is a part of mosaic of the global as well as local history. And it doesn't matter if part of his "pre-Israeli" life he lived in England, Tunis, Siberia, Germany or even Palestine under the British Mandate. In each case, it is a lively testimony which is worth preserving for future generations.

When we say our farewells, she recommends to us to see an honorable member of El Al, Věra Jakubovič who lives in the Upper Galilee, which is one more reason to contemplate a journey to the north once again.

## Věra Jakubovič, Sde Nehemia—or Cross the Jordan

We go to the Chul valley to Věra several days later. We have made our best efforts to follow the description of the route which we received from Eva, including the impeccable sentence: "When entering the kibbutz, you will cross the Jordan over the bridge; the river will be on your left side, go on until you come to halt by a big garbage can." But there were too many big garbage cans in the kibbutz, and we couldn't tell which one is the right one, so we were driving around a little. Well, truth be told: We kept driving around for quite a long time.

When this visit is over, I think maybe this chapter could be called for example "Small chapter about a big woman" even though Věra is not very tall. With regard to Věra's age I have planned this visit for the shortest duration possible; also because preliminary brief telephone conversation didn't sound very encouraging: You know, I don't remember that much... Only for "that much" to be pretty much, so we end up staying in Sde Nehemia for lunch and we keep on listening. Consider for yourself: When else you can listen to a woman who was as they say a "living witness" when the youngest First Republic Zionistic youth movement, which by their charter claimed allegiance to the scout movement, was being founded? Listening to the story about a lecture



*Věra Jakubovič, pre-war member of the El Al movement, who doesn't remember "that much"*

of Jewish philosopher Martin Buber which was delivered in Prague in the beginning of 1937 sends shivers up my spine. She also talks about a young man called Pavel Kohn who "lurked" young Czech Jews into his plan (at this very lecture)—to found an exclusively Czech movement which would counter-balance the organization of Tchelet Lavan, some of whose members spoke German. I am listening and I come to understand the differences by which El Al distinguished itself from the other movements. Because most of its members came



from an assimilated environment, “their” Zionism was of a little looser concept, nevertheless the beginnings of the movement that did not have enough time to establish itself on the scene was grandiose. My knowledge which has been so far derived only from literature or some fragments of documents in the Neot Mordechai archive, gets a clearer shape now.

Eventually, Eva stuns me completely, when she pulls out some seventy-five year old correspondence—letters that were sent between members of the El Al movement; between those who managed to escape the country to Palestine with those who had to stay in the Protectorate, because for them there weren’t any English certificates left. It is said that there is no firmness without trembling, but in this particular case letters on the page bounce in front of my eyes, so finally I give up and decide that I will read the correspondence at home in peace. My hands tremble so much that you couldn’t really talk about firmness at all and I was hardly able to hold the camera. Pavel Kohn, a founding member of El Al, didn’t live to see the end of the war. He was one of those who didn’t manage to leave. He died in a concentration camp. Most of those who went through the so-called family camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau didn’t live to see the end of the war neither. It was the El Al people who acted as custodians in the children’s section. In my mind I return to the visit at Ruth Bondy’s: She too knew many of the founders. Information interconnects remarkably, yet the mess in my head is equally as notable. The letters are full of life and hope. Unfortunately, during this work I stumble upon the Auschwitz chimney too often. I’ll never get used to it.



*Josef Trumpeldor (source: Wikipedia)*

## Tel Hai

We are looking for this place for the second time and I believe that we are goint to succeed. We have to find it this time. For once, it is a holy place for the Israeli and for me too, because it was chosen as an insignia by the Jewish scout movement Brit Trumpeldor (shortly called Betar). I say to myself: When there’s a will, there’s a way—and in my mind I persuade the GPS navigation not to get sidetracked by the industrial park again and to lead us to the correct location.

In a while we are arriving on the hill and I subconsciously look for the statue of a lion between the trees, about which I know partly from the publications from thirties and partly from the photos from recent era. It is hot as hell, and we

stopped in the parking area and walk on the sidewalk up the mild hill. Finally, the Roaring Lion emerges. The statue is smaller than I imagined, yet it is dignity personified. There

are Israeli flags everywhere. Not far from here, Josef Trumpeldor defended the village Kfar Giladi against Arabian attack in 1920 and he died together with other defenders. Tel Hai means Mountain of life.

Trumpeldor—paradoxically—lost his life here. He became an icon of the Jewish revisionists. Posthumously, the Trumpeldor alliance (Brit Trumpeldor) was named after him and the expression “Tel Hai” became a greeting of this movement, it is used as the Czech “nazdar”.

I am standing by the statue, looking in the valley and I hum silently the song “Shir Betar”, which was the anthem of the Betar movement—and thus also an anthem of Czechoslovak scouts who professed their allegiance to Betar. It is an upbeat song expressing vigorous

aspects that made its movement famous, but in parts the lyrics are strangely poetic: *Ivrim gam be oni ben sar*—which means “Even in times of despair, a Jew is a prince”. When Zeev Jabotinsky wrote the lyrics of this anthem, he couldn’t have known about what is in store for the Jews. The melody and lyrics of the song strangely fit to this place.

We couldn’t find Trumpeldor’s grave, because tombstones are—quite understandably—written in Hebrew (even though occasionally an English inscription appears) and there are hundreds of them. Behind the cemetery wall, in the direction to Kfar Giladi we find a modern sacred place: The memorial of young boys, soldiers who were killed at this place during attacks of the so-called Second Lebanon War in 2006. As everywhere in Israel also here the history is connected with the present.

Kiriat Shmona, a city under the hill, commemorates the legacy of Josef Trumpeldor and those who died in the same battle by its name. It means the City of Eight: That was the number of the dead Jewish defenders. Just like in the case of Masada I understand why Trumpeldor was chosen as the frontrunner and that revisionists named their youth organization by his name. It gives them something to aspire to.



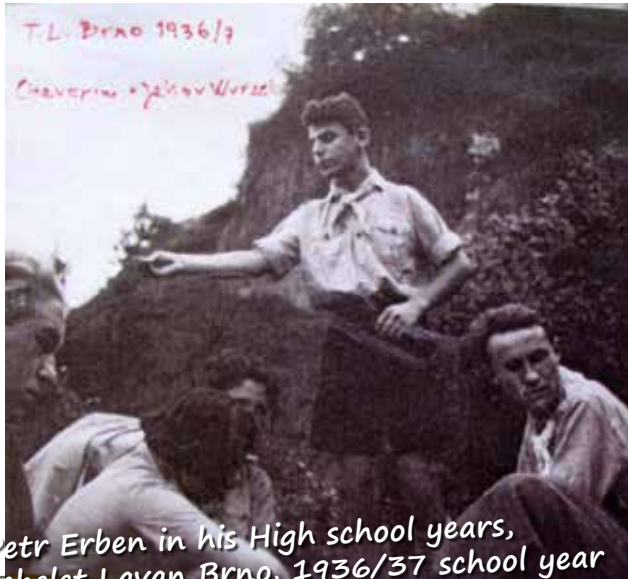
*Roaring Lion: Inscription on the memorial: *Tov lamut bead arcenu — It is good to die for our country (supposedly last words of Josef Trumpeldor)**



*Cemetery in Tel Hai (photo: Helen Kotisová—Čičáko)*

### **Petr Erben, Ashkelon**

We are driving on Highway 6, from the north to south and I am feeling excited. Last year, in the kibbutz Neot Mordechai, I heard this line from the witnesses: Whatever Petr Erben doesn't know about Tchelet Lavan isn't worth knowing. So, I am very well aware of who we are going to see, we are about to meet a legend of the Czechoslovak Jewish scout movement.



*Petr Erben in his High school years, Tchelet Lavan, Brno, 1936/37 school year*

In addition to my curious questions I'm carrying greetings from the scouts in Northern Moravia represented by Dracula and Elf Foldyn who spent many hours in the archive in Opava in order to unearth documents relating to Petr's family of Eisenbergs, formerly based in Ostrava and later in Frýdek. Petr was a member of the scout troop Tchelet Lavan in Frýdek and Foldyn brothers—the local experts on regional scout history—obtained several interesting documents which I bring along with me.

After the arrival to Ashkelon, we look for the right street and in a while we talk with Petr over the coffee about his scout youth, "residence" in concentration camps and about his life here in Israel. From the very beginning it is clear that I am talking to a living encyclopedia. Petr started to attend the Tchelet Lavan troop in Frýdek when he was thirteen years old. In 1936 he left to study in Brno where he continued to be active. He remembered the last big camp in August 1939 in Orlické hory, Pastviny and also meeting with Fredy Hirsch. This contact came in handy later in Theresienstadt. He also remembered the interesting experience from summer vacation in 1940, when he singlehandedly organized a "work scout camp with watchtower and with everything necessary", as he called it himself, because beyond the classical camping it also included working on a nearby farm. Along with him, the camp included total of 40 youths.



*Assemblage of photographs from an irregular camp Tchelet Lavan. Prštice near Brno, 1940*

Only that Germans “removed” the camp and destroyed it. Then there were different kinds of camps; penal labor, departure to Theresienstadt in 1942, then Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Gusen... Petr survived thanks to his physical strength and also thanks to large share of luck. In 1948, after the communist coup, he left Czechoslovakia and—as a married man—he set himself in Israel.

From Petr’s wife I know how the knowledge of knots came in handy: When they were sailing to Israel, they were caught in a storm somewhere near Sardinia and the boat skewed heavily, waves were lashing the deck, so they were forced to spend some time in a cabin. Eva was pregnant and the situation was far from optimistic: Eva lay on the bed and she didn’t feel good at all, not by a long shot. Add the constant bumping from one side to another... Petr opened the suitcase and he took out some neckties—he had a lot of them—and I look at him, oh, God, why neckties? In this terrible situation? For what? He tied them together and then he tied me to the bed, so that I wouldn’t roll down... Well, isn’t this a scout thing to do?”

The Erbens started off well in Israel and have lived there ever since. They built a beautiful house; the land of Israel accepted them. Petr built beautiful houses, and Eva first worked in health service, then she started to write books. They both embraced the idea that everything important should be stored in memory for future generations and they became members of the Beit Theresienstadt alliance, an educational and documentation centre which unites former prisoners from Theresienstadt and their goal is to preserve memories of those who died during holocaust.

## Conclusion

The journey to Israel has come to an end. In Kiryat Tiv’on we bid farewell our guardian angels Chava and Max, and in mind we say goodbye to the whole country—and we don’t feel cheerful. On the airport Ben Gurion we return the car, we find our way to the terminal at 3 a.m., just before 6 a.m. we manage to get to the airplane and after 9 a.m. we land in Prague. Even though it is the end of May, we are greeted with winter weather and the knowledge that the “Israeli” part of the job is done for now, nevertheless the “Czech” part is still ahead of us. What it takes is to evaluate the visit, “digest” the impressions and get to it.





It is also crystal clear that one of my translators from Hebrew Jiří Pokorný, a student of Hussite Theological Faculty, will not like me, as almost all of the material which I have brought back is in Hebrew (this man also belongs to my guardian angels, for he receives his reward in the promise that it is God who will repay him).

We note again that there wasn't any time left that for tourism, in the traditional sense of a word; all that we saw in Israel was somehow connected to the scout movement and youth organizations, so the purpose of the journey has been fulfilled. We wonder what sets Israel apart from other countries and we agree that it is also order of words one has to learn at first. As I have mentioned somewhere earlier, my first Hebrew words were: "Hatachana haba'ah", next stop. Second word was "miklat", cover. Knowledge of these words can sometimes save people's lives. Fortunately we didn't have to use them, only one month later Kassam rockets fell down on Israel more than usually. Single explosion we encounter happened during our return flight: My ballpoint pen exploded. It was a mess, but except the blue disaster there was no harm done.

Israel is also the only country which is slightly different when it comes to the native language: it is true that Hebrew is the only native language in the world that has to be taught to parents coming to Israel from all over the world by their children.

In Leon Uris' book "Exodus" we can read the following about the young people: "It was the Israel army and there was no power in this world that could stop them." I am proud that parts of this youth were in the scout movement in Czechoslovakia, to which I hold infinite trust and which belongs to one of the best things that have ever happened to me in my life.



*This picture says more than words can say...  
(source: archive Kvutsat Yavne)*

*Written in Prague, in August and September 2014 and dedicated to all the “guardian angels” which I have in Israel and the Czech Republic.*

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