

SHOWERY MATZUVA IN APRIL 2011

[757 MILLIMETERS OF RAIN SO FAR THIS SEASON]

It's been a very rainy month so far at Matzuva during the crazy weather the world has experienced this year. In between a few sunny days we've had cloudbursts and continuous showers. Quite a number of kibbutz members now collect rainwater from the flat roofs of apartments into plastic 1000+ liter PVC containers in their gardens. Due to excessive price of water it is used for gardens thus saving cash as there is a penalty price for using water for gardens or exceeding the family water allocation. The rainfall has also been very helpful for our various fruit plantations. The eventual solution are the desalination plants but on a national level this is a number of years away. Meanwhile, half-way through the month we now have a heat wave (36⁰ C.) with a promise of some rain on the eve of the Pesach Festival.

Vera Tal ל"ר



VERA TAL

31/07/1923 – 23/03/2011

Veteran member Vera passed away during March another one of the "Meyasdim" (Founders) group of Matzuva members who are, unfortunately, diminishing from year to year. Today, they number 37 with 6 members being aged 90+ years.

Vera was born in Hungary the middle child in the family with her younger brother being the late Arye Rona who was a member of Matzuva. At school she was one of the few Jews at the school and even then felt that the Jews were disliked. In 1944 the Germans occupied her town and the Jews were concentrated into a ghetto. Vera at the time was just 20 years old and was sent off with other Jewish women to work at building sites. This continued until she was sent from the ghetto with a group of Jews to Budapest.

There she was placed in a safe house of Raul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat, where she received shelter and food.

She managed to earn some money doing laundry for persons in the camp.

At the end of the war, Vera and her mother returned to their town and met up with her future husband Yitzchak. They married and had two children – Gilad and Miriam. When the Hungarian Uprising took place in 1956 the couple and the family decided to go to Israel and they arrived there in 1957 and settled initially in Yad Natan near Akko. Gilad the eldest child went directly to school at Matzuva. After the death of Vera's mother Arye her brother brought them to Matzuva in 1958.

Vera worked in a toddler house for a number of years and worked as a seamstress in the Matzuva textile plant. Vera was a person full of vitality but her lack of Hebrew hindered her enthusiasm beyond her work prowess. After the passing of her husband and brother and later the death of her sister-in-law Yardena she was the sole survivor of her family from Hungary. However, she participated in the cultural life and enjoyed it.

Despite health problems she continued to be active and left home regularly at 6 in the morning to travel to a day centre run by the regional council returning home at midday to feed the many cats that waited daily for her food handouts. Vera was always neat and spruce and never complained. Her children were at her side at the end with her son Gilad coming over from Washington to be with her. Vera was mourned by her 2 children and 4 grandchildren and the whole Matzuva family. May she rest in everlasting peace.

PURIM CELEBRATIONS

Despite all the upheavals in the volatile Middle East and North Africa with most of our neighbours seeking some measure of democracy for us in Israel, being the sole real democracy in this part of the world, we celebrate our freedom and remember our adversity and tribulations. We celebrate the freedom of expression for all, equal opportunity for both sexes, all religious denominations, gays, free press and the right to vote for whom and for what we wish.

At Matzuva we also celebrate the Purim festival that means fancy-dress, booze, letting your hair down and dancing until dawn.

For those not of the Jewish persuasion, here's why it's celebrated: The irony of it all is about that ancient Persia that is Iran of today who this time round want to wipe us off the map! – no democracy there!!

Purim means "lots", and commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish population of the ancient Persian Empire from Haman's plot to annihilate them, as recorded in the Biblical Book of Esther (*Megillat Esther*). According to the story, Haman cast lots to determine the day upon which to exterminate the Jews.



YOUNG & OLD CELEBRATE – Photos: Max Nathans

THE BIG INTERVIEW – DR. ZVI AM-AD



I lost two things during the War (WWII) –

Fear and the ability to be Happy!

[Translated excerpts of interview by Edna Nathans, editor of the Matzuva Newsletter]

Edna: Zvi has just reached his 90th birthday. He has regularly written articles that maybe sometimes searching, critical, cynical, wise and humorous. He has contributed frequently to the Matzuva Newsletter. A few months ago he reached a decision that he would cease to write to the newsletter – "*I an unable and don't want to anymore...*" This was a courageous and difficult decision for someone who's writings were for him his very essence. I wanted to meet him to celebrate his milestone and to listen to what he has to say and congratulate him on his birthday. I contacted him by telephone and after a little hesitation he agreed to meet with me.

"What do you wish to hear?" asked Zvi

Edna: First of all, the story of your life.

"I'll tell you how I joined the Zionist movement" "My family lived in Hungary and the local Jews would visit the synagogue 3 times a year – the Jewish New Year, Yom Kippur and Pesach. The synagogue was gigantic but empty. I celebrated my Bar-Mitzva and was circumcised but I was far removed from Judaism".

"I was born after the First World War that left Hungary economically and spiritually in crisis firstly with a communist regime followed by a fascist one. The Jews were accused of everything contributing to the demise of Hungary. Hungary had sunk into dire poverty. Anti-Semitic laws further restricted the livelihood of Jews – one of the Hungarian ministers said there isn't any need to kill mosquitoes...just dry up the swamps. We likewise lived in poverty during the decade after the war and up to the age of 6 I grew up at home among adults as there were no kindergartens. From the age of 3 I became interested in grammatical characters. My mother bought me a book and by the age of 4 I was fluent in Hungarian".

Edna: How was it as a child in that reality?

"I absorbed everything, poverty at home and I learnt early on not to ask for anything from my parents that they were unable to afford. As I was at home until the age of 6 I had no contact with other children (after 4 years in elementary school I spent 8 years in a high school. I also learnt not to raise my hand in school as I didn't want to upset my fellow students as I was fluent in the language being able to read and write. I read anything at hand even an encyclopedia and took out a subscription at the library".

"I had no social life and I managed to attain my matriculation but in 1939 war broke out and Jews were then banned from universities. I didn't know what to do and I wasn't sure if I'd stay in town. I was 19 years old and met a person from the Maccabi youth movement who enlisted me into that Zionist organization. We went together with others to a summer camp in Slovakia – we stayed there 2 weeks and it was great – I felt good and decided this is for me! I returned home for a year earning some cash teaching children and moved on to Budapest.

There I was welcomed – I don't know why but who cares. A month later I was a youth leader and twice a week we met and on weekends went up to the Buda hills. We learnt about the land of Israel, sang songs in Hebrew and we loved each other. We were 3 people running the movement – the one from Slovakia disappeared, the second one got a permit and left for Palestine and I was the only one left but was joined by a person called Joseph Sheffer and we continued to run the movement.

When the Jews began to be persecuted in Slovakia the situation in Hungary was a little better. The Slovakian Jews moved over to Hungary and we provided them with documents and food rationing cards. Saving these Jews was our priority but one of the refugees was caught and after torture he exposed us. We were jailed in a detention camp for a year along with communists, black marketers, thieves and homosexuals. This was my university and here I was able to become acquainted with the dregs of society. Towards the end of year we heard of the first transport of Jews from the periphery. They were placed into a synagogue and they were burnt alive inside. Those that escaped the fire were butchered by Ukrainians. We knew what was in store for us and we appealed to the Zionist movement. A suitcase of dollars from Switzerland saw us released and for 6 months we were free. We were then mobilized for a work camp in Russia with the main reason being to enslave us and to let us die. Hard labour 12 hours

a day with very little food and the guards would ask each other when would they return to Hungary – the reply was when the prisoners are no more. The years were 1943-1944 and they began to send us on a forced march. Luckily I was ordered to move the prisoners on quicker but they didn't have the strength to move quicker. When we arrived at the new camp a Ukrainian woman shouted – the Russians are coming – I just went on sleeping.

Later in life my wife, Esther, always used to say to me that I was never happy. In the morning I awoke and Russian platoon appeared and luckily their officer was Jewish. We were released and each prisoner went in his particular way. I then began my 3-month odyssey in Hungary going from village to village asking for a bed for the night. Thus I progressed with the Russian invasion. I reached a castle where Russian soldiers were staying. I saw them tear up first-edition books 300-400 years old and use the pages to roll up their cigarettes. I came later to the home of a Protestant priest – the family were poor but they received me well. He was a fantastic person. There was also another priest staying with him and I told them about the books. That Jew, they said, despite his tribulations still mourns those burnt books – I saw they were puzzled at my sorrow. I managed to survive despite all the dangers I faced – it was down to a miracle and my resourcefulness”.

“From my mother I received a printed postcard with a handwritten addition We are fine everything's OK. Apparently they were given this postcard when being herded onto the train to Auschwitz. Apart from an uncle and his wife all my large nuclear family perished in the gas chambers. I finally arrived in Budapest via side roads and there I met up with my uncle. They took me to my girlfriend, Judith, and a few days later we married in a cellar conducted by a rabbi who survived the war. A year later my eldest daughter Naomi was born. The marriage didn't last long and later I married my present wife, Esther”.

Edna: You spoke earlier how you didn't know how to be happy – how is that?

*“In the war I lost any **fear** – that's a real story of how many times I should have died and not when. At the age of 23 I was an orphan – my father luckily died earlier but all the rest of my family perished in Auschwitz – I lost my ability to be **happy**...”.*

"After the war we had the task of gathering kids from the streets – they didn't even know their names. We placed them in kindergartens and children's houses and we also worried about sending people of all ages to Mandated Palestine until the Hungarians stopped it. The communists were already in power and we began to send people clandestinely and most were eventually interned in Cyprus. Esther and I reached Italy and were detained as we did not have passports. In the end we were issued passports as Palestinians who had sold them previously to the Jewish Agency to rescue Jews. Thus we arrived in Palestine on a regular boat. We decided to go directly to Matzuva having been in contact with the late Matzuva member, Yaacov Ben-Meir, and so we arrived in Matzuva in 1948. Shortly afterwards a member asked me How is it in Matzuva? – Zvi replied – Not Good – there's no equality here”.

"My view of life was different to those of the founding members who arrived before WWII and underwent training as farmers. I arrived at Matzuva one day before Matzuva was besieged along with other settlements in Western Galilee. Nobody had time to teach me Hebrew and I didn't want to talk until I knew the language while Esther spoke fluently after 6 months. I taught myself Hebrew and if I made a mistake I would force myself to write the words down again and again until they stuck. I had a vocabulary of 1000 words and then I turned to the Bible and began to read it from the Creation to the end and from there started reading dictionaries. At the same time I worked in forestation

until the party organized a 2-year training programme for young activists at the Bet Berl Seminary. I studied sociology and after a year I had the option for university studies. A few years later I became editor of the kibbutz movement weekly journal called "Igeret". Some years later I finally arrived at a university at the aged of 52. My entrance paper was good and I was invited to join the psychology and sociology study programme. I completed my B.A. studies within 2 years and my doctorate I completed at the Hebrew University while at the same time I also worked in the kibbutz kitchen. I also worked 2 days a week at the Kibbutz Research Institute at Haifa University and engaged in gerontology [study of the aged]. Nevertheless I loved physical work and worked with the compressor, in the bananas and ruined my back, worked the 3 shifts in the textile factory with the then primitive looms. I didn't feel injustice at Matzuva like others – however, the Hungarian groups and the founder members never were on close relations such as drinking coffee together at teatime".

"I was always in the opposition at Matzuva – I would argue with the chairperson but my viewpoint was never contested– they just ignored me!"

Edna: And now at the age of 90 years looking back do you have regrets?

"I have no regrets whatsoever"

Edna: And what are you proud of?

"In the end I have remained at Matzuva – I have never thought of leaving the kibbutz. Esther is annoyed that I spent so much time away from the kibbutz. She wanted me to be a banana worker, a textile spinner, a stay at home. Even today, she still raises this issue".

Edna: Have you any observations, reflections about yourself, the kibbutz, on life?

"I'm 90 years old – everyone's congratulating me – it's not a blessing it's a curse!! I'm actually in this case – a Buddhist. According to Buddhism life on earth is a punishment. All the suffering of the human race is due to one's former life".

Edna: With these Buddhist perceptions I bade farewell to Zvi. We also talked about other things – some personal that I haven't included here. I saw Zvi in moments of emotion and pain. **I recognized pride and satisfaction but... happiness wasn't present.**

PASSOVER 2011 OR PESACH 5771 (פסח תשע"א)

Matzah and all that... Whatever your feelings are about the unleavened bread the Jews eat during Passover and called matzah it's always been a central item on the menu during the week. I sympathize with all the ex-ulpan and volunteer guests who had to put up with it for a week without a piece of bread to be found unless stored clandestinely prior to the start of the festival. It of course signifies "the" Exodus dated in the year 2448 since the creation when it is written that Jews had no time to bake leavened bread. It's all told in the Good Book but unless you eat the matzah with honey or chocolate spread it ain't too good for the digestion. Today, in modern Israel the day after Passover is devoted to the Mimouna festival, a North African Jewish custom of over indulging in exceedingly lavish calorific pastries and sweetmeats. It's now a state festival and if you've got traditional dress or just a fez like me or know how to belly-dance it's all good fun after that matzah.

Finally -

A Happy Pesach and Easter to all our friends abroad!

That's all for now – take care and be in contact.

Best wishes

Baruch
Matzuva – April 2011



MATZUVA'S 70th 71st YEAR



100 YEARS OF THE KIBBUTZ MOVEMENT