

THE MEMOIRS OF MY FATHER

CHAIM SCHULTZ
(1896 – 1987)

My father wrote these memoirs in 1984. The first section was written in English and in Yiddish using the Roman alphabet. These I translated. The rest was written in Yiddish using the Hebrew script.

In 1985/6 my father's brother-in-law Lazar Beitz freely translated most of this section to his daughter Judy, my son Adam, and to me. We wrote or typed as he read. I translated the remainder from my father's reading of it.

My father died on 12 November 1987.

THE EARLY YEARS

1896 – 1914

The family in perspective

When I was born on the 20th of December 1896 our family consisted of Papa Hirsch who was born in 1856, Mama Golde who was born in 1863, their eldest son Schmu-el-Behr/Sam born in 1884, Motte-Fishel/Mark born in 1886, their eldest daughter Lea-Gietel/Lena born in 1887, Schneier/Sydney born in 1889/90, and Zillah who was born in 1892.

My father was born in Shavel¹ in Lithuania. He was sociable and generous and had lots of friends, both Jewish and Christian. Most of his friends were ordinary people who used to work in the leather factories in Shavel; some were Lithuanian peasants. He was always willing to help anyone when asked; he even gave unsolicited help. He used to invite the workers from Frenkel's² leather factory to the house and they would drink tea and gossip in our sitting room. Papa enjoyed looking after cows and goats best. He once had a horse and he took us children for rides. I think he would have done well as a farmer.

Papa's oldest brother was called Moshe-Ruben. He lived with his family in Libava³ a port town not far from Shavel. I met him for the first time at the wedding of his daughter Liebe-Gieta, also known as Luba, and occasionally later when he visited Shavel.

It is difficult for me to remember our first meeting but the later meetings made a good impression on me. He was a sympathetic person. He had two daughters and two sons. I remember his younger daughter Liebe-Gieta well. She was lovely and kind and always reminded me of my own sister Lena. His son Chloine was a traveller and took an interest in me. When he came to Shavel I would visit him in a hotel where he would stay. Like his father he was sympathetic, interesting, and worldly. Solly, uncle Moshe-Rubin's other son, immigrated to South Africa. He farmed for a while in the

1 Shavli in Russian and Šiauliai in Lithuanian was founded in 1236. By the end of the 19th century it was the third largest city in Lithuania. More than half the population was Jewish. It was known for its leather industry. It is in the north of the country at the crossroad of merchant routes.

2 Chaim Frenkel owned the biggest leather factory in Russia.

3 Lebava or Libau in German and Liepāja in Latvian is in western Latvia on the Baltic Sea. It was founded before 1250. In the early 1900s it was the main embarkation port for Jewish immigrants to the USA.

Transvaal near Hendrina⁴ and afterwards moved to Durban⁵. I later met Uncle Moshe-Rubin's grandchildren Aviva and Mina in Israel. They were the daughters of his eldest daughter Yetta. After Moshe-Ruben came Itzik, Papa Hirsch, Motte-Josse, who was later called Marcus, Chatze-Leib and Sora-Reva.

Uncle Itzik was an exception among the brothers. He loved women and had children from three wives. Two of his wives died. I do not know what happened to his third wife – perhaps he divorced her. He was never short of women, if not Jewish girls, then shikses.⁶ Perhaps he preferred shikses. The whole town knew about his affairs.

He had a big family of children. I remember his daughter Chaye-Sora well. She was brought up by Bobbe Malke. I was present at her wedding at Raditshin, a shtetel a few stations from Shavel. I met her son Zamel Lewis again in Hendrina when he travelled⁷ for my youngest brother Norman and other wholesalers. I also knew her daughters Fera/Mary and Masha/Malya. Both later immigrated to Australia. Itzik's son Robert immigrated first to South Africa and then to America. He visited Johannesburg in 1960. Lazar a son of the first wife had a limp. He stayed in Shavel and was friendly with my brother Schmuel-Behr. He was a partner in a leather business. Then there was Schneier who emigrated to South Africa and Schmulke/Sam who was a year older than me. He also came to South Africa. I went to the same junior secondary school as Schmulke and we were friends then.

Uncle Itzik was at first the richest among the brothers. He owned a stand in Shavel with four houses and had a shop of his own. Later uncle Marcus overtook him in wealth.

Marcus was the most good-looking among the brothers and also the most endowed. He had stature. He quickly worked himself up. Before the First World War he was already a rich man. He dealt in leather and became the only Angora wholesaler in Shavel. Uncle Marcus was very popular and used to make jokes and tell stories. He looked for and found a wife, a high society lady – a groise madam fun die heiche vensteren (a grand madam from the high windows) – who spoke only Russian at home. She was very proud and did not fit in with the other sisters-in-law. His family was big: six

4 Hendrina, a small town now in the province of Mapumalanga, was carved out of the old province of Transvaal after the change in government in South Africa in 1994. I lived there from 1935 to 1951.

5 Durban, the capital of the province of KwaZulu-Natal, is a port city on South Africa's east coast. Evidence suggests that in ~ 100,000 BC it was inhabited by hunter-gatherers. The modern city dates from 1824 when the site was granted by the Zulu king Shaka to a British adventurer. It is named after Sir Benjamin d'Urban when he was governor of the Cape. It now forms part of eThekweni metropolitan district.

6 shikse – a non-Jewish woman.

7 travelled – as an itinerant salesman for wholesale traders and manufacturers

daughters, but only one son. Olga, the oldest was two or three years older than me. Sonya was in my years. Then there was Rifke, Etia, and Sarah and the twins: a boy and a girl called Luba.⁸ Olga immigrated to Brazil and Etia to the United States of America. Sonya moved to Riga. There was a time when I often went to their house. Olga taught me to write. With Sonya and Rifke I once acted in a Chanukah⁹ play called *The Chimney Sweep*. I was the chimney sweep and I was all covered in soot. Everybody had a good laugh. This was during my first year at school.

The youngest uncle Chatze-Leib was in South Africa for a few years. Things did not go well with him there and he returned home where he started a leather business. Most of his customers were shoemakers. He was a jolly man and was popular with his customers. He made a fine living. A year or two after he returned from South Africa he married. He had two sons and a daughter. The daughter married well into a rich family of manufacturers in Riga. They made woollen dresses and jerseys. Uncle Chatze-Leib became a partner in their business.

In 1921/22 at the time of the great hunger when I was in Odessa I had a letter from him. He was then living in Leningrad. During the Second World War the family fled from Leningrad and was for a while in Stalingrad before being evacuated still deeper into Russia. On their way back to Leningrad after the war a kist full of the family's belongings was stolen. I wrote to him. I had much sympathy for their condition but at the same time I praised the Soviet state. I received a very bitter reply. He said that I was misinformed about Stalin and about what was going on in Russia. We used to receive books and literary magazines from Russia. We read that all was well under Stalin. According to Khrushchev's speech at the Communist Party Congress in 1952 this was not true as Stalin and his helpers had done gruesome things in Russia.

After Auntie Sora-Reva's wedding she lived in Mazheik.¹⁰ All her children were born there. The oldest was Fera then came Schneier, Etia, Leibke/Leon, Leike/Lee, and Miriam. Another son Mottel-Fiske died in 1918. Fera died in 1919. Etia who lived with her husband a doctor in Leningrad died in about 1981. Leibke never married but for more than thirty years he was very devoted to his non-Jewish girlfriend. He remained like me sympathetic to socialist ideals. After retiring from business he devoted all

8 According to a family tree there were 7 daughters and the twins were called Monya and Sarah.

9 Chanukah is a Jewish holy day commemorating the re-dedication of the temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean Revolt in the 2nd century BC.

10 Mazheik or Mozheik in Yiddish, Mazeikiai in Lithuanian, and from 1899 to 1918 Muravyov is in north west Lithuania. Jewish settlement started only in the 1870s. Jews owned shops, warehouses, tanneries, and factories. Many left for the USA, South Africa, Australia, England, and Ireland before and after WW1.

his time to the care of disabled Jewish children. Lee married Nat Herman and they had two daughters. They lived in Johannesburg.¹¹ Leibke died in 1983 and Lee in 1985. Miriam immigrated to Israel. I was to see much of her there many years later.

When the family moved to Shavel I often visited them. Their house was next to their flourmill. They also owned wool-spinning machines where the peasants used to bring their wool to be spun. The mill and the spinning machines interested me very much.

Mama came from Mena in the province of Chernigov in Ukraine. Her father Zalman Podlashuk and her mother Liebe (her maiden name was Ribnik) lived there. Mama was the eldest in her family. She had three brothers Sam, Philip, and Charlie and two sisters Deborah and Pauline. The eldest brother Sam was the first to immigrate to South Africa. Philip followed Sam. Charlie the youngest son also left for South Africa as soon as Sam was established and able to take care of him.

Deborah married Abraham-Leib Schwartz. They had two sons: Chaim who was two to three years older than me and Alick who was my age. Uncle Abraham-Leib left for South Africa in 1895 and when Bobbe Liebe died in 1897 Auntie Deborah, her two sons, and her young sister Pauline came to live in Shavel. Uncle Abraham-Leib used to send Auntie Deborah money from Bloemfontein¹² where he had settled. Auntie Pauline went to the newly-established Women's Gymnasium in Shavel and completed her schooling there in 1901. Mama used to visit her two sisters very often and I remember that I usually went with her to play with my cousins.

Mama's uncle Yudel Podlashuk also lived in Shavel. He had two sons Boris and Abrasha and two daughters. Uncle Yudel was well established and had a nice home. I remember when my parents used to visit them.

Mama was a very serious woman and very clever. She was the boss, so to speak. She was a good baleboste (housekeeper) at home as well as a big

11 Johannesburg, the capital of Gauteng province (carved out of the old Transvaal province) in South Africa, is on the mineral-rich Witwatersrand range of hills. The region was originally inhabited by late iron-age and San tribes. By the 13th century it was settled by Sotho-Tswana people from the north. During the Difaqane wars (1795-1821) they were largely displaced by a Ndebele off-shoot from Zululand. The Dutch-speaking Voortrekkers arrived in the early 1800s. Gold was discovered in 1886 and Johannesburg founded followed by the gold rush, the Anglo-Boer war, large-scale immigration, miners' strikes, and rapid industrialisation.

12 Bloemfontein, since 2000 part of the Mangaung municipality, is the capital of the Free State a South African province and the judicial capital of South Africa. It was founded in 1846 by a British army officer as a fort. He bought the land from a Trek Boer from the Cape. Griquas and Basotho tribesmen also lived in the area but not on individual land-holdings. During the second Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902 British forces captured the city and built a concentration camp nearby to house Boer women and children.

help in the business. We loved and respected her. She was too clever for her in-laws.

Births, deaths, departures, and other happenings

My brother Lipa was born in February 1898. The name Lipa was given to him in memory of our grandmother Liebe who had died the year before.

In January 1900 when my brother Norman was born I was four years old. I remember his bries (ritual circumcision). It took place in our sitting room. Our many uncles and aunts and their children came for the seder¹³ that evening. It was also an enjoyable time for the children. We spent the evening in our tiny bedroom which was next to the dining room where the grown-up guests were drinking la Chaim (a toast to life) and wishing the family mazel-tov (good luck).

On Christmas Eve in 1900 Schneier, Zillah, and I went for a walk. It was a lovely evening, not very cold, and we were warmly dressed. Not far from our home in the same street where we lived there was a house where a Christian family lived. The house had a big window facing the street and in the window we saw a Christmas tree lit up with many candles and hung with stars and other wonderful things. It was something we had never seen or dreamed of.

We crossed the street and were standing in front of the window when the door of the house opened and a nicely dressed man and woman came out and invited us in. After some hesitation we went in. They took us to the Christmas tree. The children were dancing and singing carols around the tree. They took us by our hands and made us dance too. They gave us some nice things to eat and drink. We spent an unforgettably enjoyable evening with them and before leaving we were given some of the things that were hanging on the tree. We thanked them and returned home very happy. We told our parents what had happened. They were surprised but pleased. We cherished the presents we had received and played with them for a long time afterwards.

Good news came from South Africa in 1901. Uncle Abraham-Leib was in a position to support his family and he was sending papers for them to come to him. Sam was also well established and he sent papers for Mama's sister Pauline and our brother Mark to come to South Africa.

¹³ seder – a set of prayers for an occasion.

Auntie Deborah went to South Africa with her sons. Pauline and Mark left not long afterwards. They left by train for Libava. They then went by boat to London¹⁴ and together with Auntie Deborah and her sons took a larger boat from Southampton¹⁵ to South Africa. Uncle Sam was very attached to Mama and looked after Pauline and Mark well.

Before Mark left we went to a photographer for a family photo which I still have and cherish. In the picture Mama stands holding Norman who was then six months old. Next to her stands Papa. Lena, Schmuel-Behr, and Mark stand in front of them. I stand in front of Mama and Lipa sits next to me. Zillah and Sydney are on the side of Lipa.

1902 - a year of great sorrow

In spring we had a visitor Mama's cousin Mordechai-Leib Fischer. He had changed his surname from Ribnik to Fischer (riba in Russian means fish). Mama knew him from Mena and gave him a warm welcome. He was on his way to South Africa. He was a professional photographer and while he was with us he took many photos of the family. One of the photos was of Sydney, Zillah, and me. It was taken in the garden next to our house.

Soon after he left I got sick with dysentery. I was very ill and for a week I was semiconscious but then I started to recover. When at last I was able to get out of bed and walk out of our parents' bedroom where I had slept while I was sick I found my brother Sydney in bed with the same illness.

He lay in the sitting room which was also used as a bedroom for our large family. He had a high temperature. I was told that he got ill a few days after me and that he was still very ill. A few days later his condition deteriorated and the feldsher (medical doctor's assistant) was very worried about his condition. Papa decided on the advice of his friends to try some curing grass obtainable from a woman who lived not far from Shavel. He

14 London, the capital city of England and the United Kingdom, is on the river Thames. It was possibly inhabited by 4500 BC and recently earlier Bronze Age remains were found. It was founded by the conquering Romans in 43AD. In about 61 it was occupied for just 17 years by a tribe led by Queen Boudica. It became the capital of Roman Britannia in 100 but was abandoned when the Roman occupation ended in 410. In the 6th century Anglo-Saxons Germanic tribes from Jutland and Lower Saxony settled outside the city walls. Then in the 9th century the Vikings invaded. The Norman conquest (Viking descendents from Normandy in France) in 1066 was followed by more wars of conquest and succession, plagues and fires, and in the 20th century, the German blitz. But London survived.

15 Southampton, a major port on the south coast of England, was probably inhabited since the stone age. After the local Britons were conquered by the Romans in 70AD a fortress settlement was established. The London experience with invasions and conquests was replicated. By the 13th century Southampton was a leading port. During the Middle Ages shipbuilding became important and later the port was regularly used for military embarkation, during the wars with France, and in the Crimean, Anglo-Boer and world wars.

took me with him by train. This was a treat as I had never been on a train before. He got the healing grass and we went home. The grass did not help and Sydney died soon afterwards.

His death was a great shock to all of us. He was so good-hearted. I loved him very much. I could never understand that I, a weak child, recovered and he, such a strong and healthy one, did not. Sydney had a camera and had taken many snaps. He used to develop them himself while I watched. I still have some of his snaps in my album.

A year after Sydney's death we went to the wedding of our cousin Liebegieta. The wedding took place in Mazheik in Auntie Sora-Reva's home. The day before the wedding Auntie Sora-Reva's children took me all over the little village and also to their flourmill. I was so tired afterwards that I fell asleep in the middle of the wedding celebrations which took place that evening. I was taken away and put in a baby's cot! When I awoke in the morning I was ashamed of it. And so ended my first attendance at a wedding. My eldest brother Schmuel-Behr left for South Africa the same year, 1903. I don't remember his leaving.

My first meeting with Zeide Meyer and Bobbe Malke (grandfather Meyer and grandmother Malke) was in February 1904 when I went to sleep at their house on the evening of Esther's birth. Next day when I came home I was told that a new sister had arrived.

I saw Bobbe Malke many times after this but not Zeide Meyer. Bobbe Malke was a very good person. She enjoyed helping people. She always had tasty things to offer us and we loved her, not for the goodies but for her goodness. Papa was like her. She helped her nephew Motte Sacks when, as a young man, he was on his way to South Africa. He did not forget this. When Mark arrived in South Africa Motte Sacks helped him.

I once met Zeide Meyer in his leather factory. I met him a second time in the street as he was going to his shop. I greeted him with a, "Good-morning, Zeide". He asked me if I was Hirsch's son. "Yes, Zeide", I replied. He walked very slowly so I only walked with him for a short distance. And again I said, "Good morning, Zeide", and I ran home. Children tend to run away from old people.

The last time I saw Zeide he was lying sick in bed. Bobbe Malke gave me tea and goodies and then said that I should go and see Zeide. I went into a small bedroom and saw Zeide in bed. He did not recognise me. The atmosphere in the room was very heavy and I went out immediately. Bobbe told me that Zeide was very sick. A few days later I walked a short way beside his coffin to the graveyard.

After Zeide died I went to visit Bobbe Malke often. She first stayed at home with her grandchild Chaye-Sora. When Chaye-Sora married Bobbe Malke went to stay with her only daughter Sora-Reva who had moved to Shavel by this time.

Of all her sons, Bobbe Malke liked Papa the most and one day she suddenly left Auntie Sora-Reva's house when nobody was at home and came to us. She complained that her daughter did not treat her well. Auntie Sora-Reva must have been tired of looking after her mother. Bobbe Malke stayed with us that night. We convinced her that, as Papa was busy in the factory and Mama spent the day in the shop and as all the children were at school almost the whole day and we did not have servants there would be nobody at home to look after her. While this was going on Auntie Sora-Reva arrived and Bobbe agreed to go back. A few years later in about 1911/12 Bobbe Malke died.

I was reminded of this fifty years later in Ramat-Gan¹⁶ in Israel when Auntie Sora-Reva, now eighty years old and totally blind was staying with her own daughter Miriam and complained to me about her daughter's treatment of her.

About houses, streets, and schools

I must now write about our old apartment and of the other people who lived on Mr Weis' stand on Sadovaya Street. There were five wooden houses in the fenced-off stand. Each house consisted of two apartments. Most apartments were small and some were tiny. Two houses fronted the street. We stayed in the smaller of two apartments in one of the houses in the middle of the stand. A Mr Kron and his family lived in the bigger apartment in our house. Mr Weis lived with his family in an apartment in the house next to us. Zeide Meyer and Bobbe Malke lived in the small apartment and Reb¹⁷ Mottel Aronstam, his wife, and unmarried daughter stayed in the bigger apartment in the fifth house. In one corner of the stand in an area almost as big as three houses was an orchard. One side of it was in front of our house.

We played with the many children who lived on our stand. Children from neighbouring stands came to play with us and we also went to play with them.

¹⁶ Ramat Gan was established as a satellite town of Tel Aviv. It had been a moshav that grew wheat, barley and watermelons. The first plots of land were purchased between 1914 and 1918. In the 1940s in the country's language wars a Yiddish language printing press was blown up by Hebrew language supporters.

¹⁷ Reb is used as a title of respect for a man

We had a Jewish woman servant who came from a little village not far from Shavel. She later married the shoemaker who lived in the small apartment in the second house and whom I used to visit. From this young woman we heard tales of the ghost called in Yiddish Shed. There were many stories about him, each one more frightening than the other. I mention this because one summer afternoon when we were playing hide and seek we were so engrossed in the game that we did not realise that it was already dark. Then one of the children saw some animal running across the yard and, jumping over the fence, he screamed, "Children, a ghost". We got such a fright that we ran away home and locked the doors behind us.

On the right side our stand was separated from another stand by a brick wall. There all the buildings were made of brick. The stand belonged to the government. There were offices, a vodka distillery, and apartments for the staff with their servants and many children. We had a lot of trouble with these children. They used to climb onto the wall, call us dirty names, and throw stones at us. One day when we were playing in the street, Lipa was hit on the head with a stone. We had to take him home and put cold compresses on his head.

The Jewish community lived mostly in the centre of the town and it was very dangerous for us children to venture to the outer streets. I know it from experience. During our early childhood and even when we were quite big boys we Jews would get involved in wars of stone-throwing with the Christian children. Once when a group of us came from an outing to the fields outside the town we were attacked by Christian youth and a friend of mine also got hit on the head with a stone.

After the Rosh Hashonah¹⁸ holidays in the year of Esther's birth I was taken by Papa to a Rebbe¹⁹ to be taught the Torah²⁰. The Rebbe stayed some distance from our home in a poor area and at night his street was dark. He had a small two-roomed wooden house. One of the rooms was our schoolroom. It had one little window which was high up; a candle burned day and night to supplement the poor light. In the autumn it often rained and it got dark early. We used to come to school in the morning and go home at about six o'clock in the evening. I was given a tiny lantern. As there were no street lights the lantern made my trip home easier. Luckily I made friends with two boys with whom I walked part of the way.

18 Rosh Hashonah – New Year.

19 Rebbe in this context means teacher, mentor, or master. It is derived from the Hebrew word Rabbi

20 Torah, translated as learning, instruction, or law, refers either to the Five Books of Moses or to the whole of Judaism's legal and ethical religious texts.

Our Rebbe was a very old man. He was not hard on us. Besides teaching us the Torah he also taught us to write Hebrew. I studied at the Rebbe's school until the summer when Lena took me to another Jewish school. It was a progressive school. The schoolroom was big and bright with big windows. The seating arrangement was modern and the method of teaching Hebrew was new. We were not taught to translate the Hebrew text into Yiddish but to use the Hebrew language to explain the Torah and for talking. The teacher was a young man. What I disliked was his habit of meting out physical punishment to offenders and the fact that he did so in front of the class. It was not progressive at all. I myself was never punished. I attended this school until 1907.

We move to a new home

In 1905 we moved to Nikolayev Street. The house was very near our shop. It stood at the top of a hill on the other side of which was an open field.

Our new apartment was much bigger than the old one on Sadovaya Street. There was a stable for a horse and a cow as well as a yard and a place for keeping wood. It had a cold-room without windows for keeping food cool and water cold. The rooms were much bigger. The sitting room had three windows, a round table with chairs, and a cordoned off area with three little iron beds on which Lipa, Norman, and I slept. In the dining room stood our dining table at which there was place comfortably for six people and also for four more, not so comfortably. There were also two divans; one by the window and the other opposite in a corner. The kitchen was big. A baking oven and an iron stove took up a quarter of the space. There was also a middle-sized window, a kitchen table, and a bed for a woman servant cordoned off with a curtain. In our parents' bedroom there was a double bed, a chest of drawers with a basin and ewer on top, and quite a big window. The second bedroom was for the girls. It was bigger than our parents' bedroom and had two windows, two beds, a writing desk, and a wardrobe.

There were two entrances to our apartment, one from the street and another through the kitchen from the yard. A stairway led up to the front door. It was not very stable or safe so we used the kitchen entrance most of the time. We had to bring drinking water for the house from a hand pump in the market square. We could also get drinking water from a fountain in a stand at the bottom of the hill. This water was delicious. But it was difficult to carry the bucket up the hill. I know because I used to carry it.

A widow lived in the other apartment in our house with her two daughters. In the attic there were two rooms in which the owner of the house, a

bachelor, lived with his two old unmarried sisters. There were cellar-apartments under the house in which poor Christian families lived with their many children, big and small. If we used too much water to wash our apartment the water would flow into the cellars especially into the cellar under our kitchen.

Opposite our apartment there was a large house where Christians lived. The children from that stand also used to throw stones at us and tease us. Then there was the Yiddish-Russian higher primary school where I studied for two years. It was built of bricks. Near it was the house of the school manager. It stood in a small garden. Next to the school grounds was a stand where other Christian families lived.

Next to this stand stood uncle Itzik's stand with four houses and a small garden of fruit trees. He lived in the house by the street. Uncle Chatze-Leib lived in one of the houses and Uncle Marcus in another. In the last little house Bobbe Malke used to live with Chaye-Sora.

A Christian family lived in the next stand. It had a single house with a garden in front facing the street. Next to them there was a house where a Jewish family called Milwidsky lived. There was also a garden in front of the house. I had a friend who lived there and used to visit him often. Christians lived on the next stand.

On the other side of our stand lived the official rabbi appointed by the Russian government. His was a Russified family with whom we spoke only Russian. The left-wing shoe-maker who also stayed on this stand was Lena's friend. He belonged to the workers' movement. On the next stand which belonged to a Christian family there was a tiny shop, so small that when there were three people in it at one time, they almost stood on each other's heads. The shop belonged to Chanah Dembovsky a widow with two sons. We used to buy our groceries there.

To the right was a narrow alley. It stretched the width of a shop and was lined with stalls where assorted food was sold to the peasants. Every Friday fishermen brought in barrels of live fish for the Yiddish Sabbath. They tell of a rich Jewish woman who lost a golden ring while searching in a barrel for a cheap fat fish.

On the same side as the alley was an inn where rich farmers used to outspan their horses and in front of the alley was a row of shops facing the market square. One of the shops belonged to Papa. Uncle Itzik also had a shop here and so did Uncle Marcus. Opposite the market square was a bar where people could buy beer or tea and something to eat such as herring

and bread or a kind of white challah.²¹ This bar was used mostly by the peasants when they came to the market.

Reb Mottel Aronstam and his wife Mumme²² Pesse shared our shop. Each family had half the shop. It was not divided with a wall but we used the right side and they, the left side. We sold leather and they sold sackcloth, hessian, rope, iron pots, and assorted small hardware items as well as raisins for Pesach²³ wine. Mumme Pesse did all the selling. Reb Mottel came to the shop every day for a few hours only.

Reb Mottel used to be called the wine-maker because he made kosher wine for Pesach. He was well-learned in Yiddish writings and was very religious. He went three times a day to pray in the shul (synagogue) where he would also study a page of the Gemara²⁴. He was highly respected in the community as a religious and honourable Jew. The relationship between our two families was always friendly and considerate. I was friendly with their grandchildren since childhood when we lived in Sadovaya Street in the same yard as Reb Mottel. I visited their grandchildren often. We remained friends and met again in Israel.

Conscription into the Russian Army

My eldest brother Schmuel-Behr did not stay in South Africa. Less than two years, soon after we had moved into our new house he came back home. I remember one morning when I came into our dining room I found him fast asleep on the divan. He had arrived the night before. I suppose he was not successful in South Africa because he was not well. When he was a small child he had been ill. As a result one of his feet was deformed and he suffered from epilepsy. In South Africa he worked in a concession store on a gold mine. This work was too hard for him and he was also not able to start his own business.²⁵

In the same year (1905/6) Schmuel-Behr had to be medically examined to see if he was fit enough to join the Russian army²⁶. My parents were very

21 A round loaf of yeast-leavened egg bread traditionally eaten by Jews on holidays and other ceremonial occasions. It is similar to a kitke which is however usually braided and eaten on the Sabbath.

22 I think this is a term of respect for a woman.

23 Pesach (Passover) a Jewish holy day commemorating the escape of the Jews from enslavement in Egypt.

24 Gemara is the part of the Talmud (discussions on Jewish law, ethics, customs, and history) that contains commentaries and analysis of the Mishnah (first written record of Jewish oral traditions).

25 He is said not to have liked white traders taking advantage of black people by selling them useless baubles.

26 Lithuania like the other Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia was then part of the Russian empire.

sure of his unfitness and that he would be disqualified. Instead he was pronounced fit and in due course he was sent to Russia to be trained. He suffered a lot and a few months later he returned home having been discharged as totally unfit.

Mark was in South Africa when the time for his medical examination for military service was approaching and Papa was worried. Perhaps he thought that Mark was still listed. Papa went to Bialystok²⁷ a faraway town in Poland and came back with a young Jewish man about the same age as Mark. He was to substitute for Mark at the commission. The young man had certain failings which they were sure would get him exempted. Perhaps he had already been exempted before. He stayed with us for a few months and at the commission he was pronounced unfit. The whole thing, besides being risky, cost Papa a lot of money.

The new tannery

On Schmu-el-Behr's return from the army in 1906 he went to help Mama in the shop. They were managing well and Papa lost all interest in the shop. His job now was to buy leather and leather products for the shop. Some of the goods he bought at the villages near the tanneries but most he bought locally especially from Mr Frenkel's leather factory.

Mr Frenkel had been at school with Papa and they remained friends. I presume Papa was jealous that his friend had become such a rich man and he dreamed of a leather factory of his own. So when a piece of land came up for sale he bought it. The land was about three kilometres out of the town on the road to the German border. The land was swampy and not suitable for growing corn (wheat) so it cost very little. Mama and Schmu-el-Behr were very critical of the purchase and there was a great "how do you do" about it. They said that the cost of drying the land and putting up the fence would be more than the land itself.

Papa, notwithstanding their censure, went on with his purpose. He spent all his time on the project. He hired workers and built a high wooden fence around the land. He hired special carpenters to build big wooden barrels in holes in the ground. These had to be installed before the walls and roof could be built. Besides this he built a house for the master who would operate the tannery, another house for a supervisor, and a large shed of

²⁷ Bjalystok in Yiddish and Polish, Belostok in Russian, and Balstog in Lithuanian, is in the north-east of Poland near the border with Latvia. It was given its name in 1320. Jewish settlement dates from the 17th century. In June 1906 there was a pogrom by Czarist forces when Poland was part of the Russian empire.

bricks for drying the leather. We children were very excited about all this and we often went to see how things were progressing.

Even before the buildings were completed Papa had to get a partner. Mr Isserlis became Papa's partner. He was prepared to live with his family at the factory and help manage it. At that time Schmu-el-Behr decided to go to the tannery everyday to look after Papa's interests. The tannery required more capital to purchase raw materials and they decided to get another partner. Mr Gordon agreed to join with the necessary capital and the tannery started production.

Then Mr Isserlis and Mr Gordon conspired to buy Papa out. They called a meeting of the three partners. The meeting held that the two partners were in the right because they were in the majority. Papa did not agree and asked our chief Rabbi to arbitrate. Papa complained that his two partners wanted to remove him from his own factory. The Rabbi called in all three partners and told them that he was going to judge the issue. He appointed a spokesman for each partner. His decision would be final. They all agreed to this and each in turn put his case to the Rabbi. Then the Rabbi and the three spokesmen went to discuss the matter. Their final decision was that, as Papa had established the tannery, he could not be removed. The Rabbi said that if Mr Isserlis wanted to remain a partner he was welcome to do so and that the tannery would buy Mr Gordon out and pay him when it was able to do so. And that was final. Mr Isserlis remained a partner and Mr Gordon was paid out within a couple of years.

By 1913 the tannery was a going concern. Although we were driven out of Shavel in 1915 when we returned in 1920 the tannery was started up again. The two families made a nice living from the tannery until 1942 when the Nazis came.

The first Russian Revolution – 1905

Russia suffered a great defeat in the Russian-Japanese war of 1902 - 1904 and had to sign a dishonourable peace. There was also big trouble inland. There was much dissatisfaction among the workers resulting in big strikes and demands for more rights. The government granted some freedom to the workers' movements and allowed free meetings and freedom of association. This was the revolution of 1905.

Shavel soon felt the impact of the revolution. Small and young as we then were, we children were very aware of what was going on. I remember what happened at Uncle Marcus' house. He employed two house-servants. I was

present one evening when a delegation of workers arrived and demanded better pay and conditions for the servants. He agreed to their demands.

Lena, who had just completed her examinations at the gymnasium also joined the revolutionary movement. She left home, rented a room in town, and became independent making a living by giving private lessons.

But the new freedoms did not last long and one day it came to a sudden end. I was to witness it in Shavel. That day the workers in two big leather factories went on strike for better pay. The main street was full of striking workers. We children were very excited and went to where the workers were marching. We also saw Chaim Frenkel in the street arguing with the strike leaders. Suddenly I noticed far away in a side street a company of Cossacks on horses riding towards us. They were approaching the main street. The striking workers also noticed them and in no time the street was empty. The strikers disappeared into the side streets and we children did too. We ran all the way home. Martial law was proclaimed the next morning and all gatherings all over Russia were prohibited. Many of the workers' leaders and their progressive followers were arrested.

More departures, births, and schooling

Lena who had been noticed by the police because of the part she played in the movement was advised to leave town. She went to stay with Auntie Sora-Reva in Mazheik. There Lena again made a living by giving private lessons. At the same time she applied for admission to the medical school at the University in Strasbourg in Germany. She came to Shavel and told our parents about her plans. They were at first against it but on considering her future in Russia after what had happened during the revolution they agreed and helped to finance her studies.

I was very attached to Lena and loved her dearly. She was very good to us, her little brothers and sisters, and we all felt very sad about her leaving.

When she was settled in Strasbourg she continued to enquire about our schooling and well-being. She wrote to our parents in a very nice Yiddish and to Zillah and me in Russian. She wanted me to study at the gymnasium in Shavel where she had studied. She arranged with Zillah to send me to a teacher to prepare me for the entry examinations. We found a teacher and I sat the examinations but failed them miserably.

In September 1906 on the 5th of the month Papa asked me to go with him to a midwife. He explained to me that it was a Jewish custom that he should not go alone on this mission. We brought the midwife home. The next morning Feigele/Fay was born. That was Mama's last pregnancy.

When Esther was four years old she went to a progressive kindergarten which had recently opened. The children were taught to write and read in Yiddish and learned about Jewish history and festivals in a modern and progressive way.

When Fay reached the age of four, she too entered this school. On Erev Pesach²⁸ during Fay's first year at school she surprised the whole family as we were celebrating the traditional Pesach seder. Papa was sitting at the head of the table on a big chair stacked high with cushions reading the Haggadah²⁹ when our little four-year old Feigele went up to Papa and said that she would like to tell the story of Pesach. We were all very surprised. Papa picked her up and put her next to him on the cushions and she told us the story of Pesach as she had learned it at school. We sat listening to her in great awe. She told it so well that we all applauded her. That evening has remained in my memory ever since.

Zillah who was four years older than me matriculated from the Shavel Gymnasium in 1911. She had no ambition to study further but wanted to be independent and left home after school to find a job in Riga. She got a job as a governess but because of her pretty face her employer was attracted to her. She left and came back home. Seeing an advert in the Russian papers for a governess in Warsaw she tried again. But the same thing happened and she returned home.

In 1909 after passing an examination in the two-year class I entered a four-year Russian school. The school had just been opened. All the teachers had recently come from central Russia. Most of the scholars were Lithuanian. They came from the farms around the town. There were also many Jewish scholars and a few Russians. The behaviour of the teachers and the non-Jewish scholars towards us Jewish boys was good. I was well liked by the teachers and the principal and established a friendly comradeship with my fellow-scholars. All the Jewish boys were my friends and I used to visit them in their homes. I have happy recollections of the time I spent at this school and I benefited much.

In my last year of school some Lithuanian boys from my class invited me to their rooms. It was my first such meeting and it was very informative. I learned of the aspirations of the Lithuanian youth. There was a nationalist movement which worked for the eventual liberation of Lithuania from Russian occupation and its complete separation from Russia. It also wanted to revitalise Lithuanian literature and culture.

28 Erev Pesach – Passover eve.

29 Haggadah is the religious text that sets out the order of the Pesach Seder. Reading the Haggadah is a fulfilment of the commandment to "tell your son" about the liberation from slavery in Egypt.

On another occasion I was invited by one of them to accompany him into the Catholic Church and to the top of its high steeple. It was a rare occasion and I did not want to miss it. So I agreed and I never regretted it. We could see for miles around our town. The lake of which I had heard a lot impressed me especially. It was ten kilometres long and four kilometres wide, an unforgettable sight.

I leave school

In 1912 after I had finished the Russian school I decided to help Mama in our shop. Schmucl-Behr was busy full-time in the tannery and Papa no longer came to the shop. I was sixteen years old.

That summer when Zillah was home and Lipa, Norman, Esther, and Fay were not at school because of the holidays Papa arranged a three week summer outing for us on a farm about ten kilometres outside Shavel. The farmer was a Lithuanian acquaintance of Papa. We took provisions and left by bus. We had to walk about one kilometre from the bus stop to the farm.

This was the first time that we had such an opportunity. The farmer was not a rich man. He gave us the best room in his house where we all settled down while he and his children slept in the hayloft. Zillah was the eldest and she looked after us, providing meals and entertaining Esther and Fay. I looked after Lipa and Norman. We enjoyed ourselves very much, so much so that I can remember it clearly until now.

The farm was in a valley surrounded on two sides by forests. Lipa, Norman, and I went for long walks and explored the country around us. Once we visited a small Jewish shtetl (village) and another time we went to a Jewish krezne (roadside inn). The owner told us about a place in the vicinity that was worth visiting. It was a big lake surrounded by pine forests. We went there and were overwhelmed by the sight. We had never seen such a lake before. I noticed that when we spoke loudly in the direction of the forest we heard an echo. By the lake the echo came from all four sides as the forest encircled the lake. We also visited a mill that was driven by water and we gathered berries in the nearby forest. I learned how to cut hay with a scythe.

Once I went by foot with the farmer's oldest son to Shavel. He told me that his parents had a very big family and that the farm could not support all of them. He had therefore to look for work in the town where he was now studying. He also told me about the movement among the Lithuanian youth who were struggling to free themselves from Russian domination.

When we came home Papa hired a young man to continue my Yiddish education. He was from the modern school and I made good progress in Hebrew. I worked hard and was busy all day. In the evenings I used to visit my many friends.

I remember one evening when I went to listen to a magid (preacher) in the great shul. I had heard that he was a very good speaker. His theme was Shiva Zion, the return to Zion. He spoke about the bitter position of Jews in Russia, of a people without a future, and about their suffering from anti-Semitism. He said that Zionism, the going-back of Jews to their original home, was the only way to free the Jews of the Diaspora. He believed there was a need for Jews to settle in Palestine. The lecture made a strong impression on me.

In Kiev³⁰ the capital of Ukraine the trial of an innocent Jew by the name of Beilis was taking place. He was a victim of a blood-libel charge. He was arrested and charged for allegedly killing a Christian child so that the child's blood could be used in matzot.³¹ The trial, called the Beilis process, went on for a long time from 1911 to 1913 when a jury acquitted him. A progressive Russian newspaper published in Kiev which I used to buy every day, as well as the world press, strongly condemned the process and considered the evidence to have been fabricated. It was seen as another instance of anti-Semitism in the Ukraine just like the pogrom in Kishinev.³²

In the evening I used to read the books of progressive Russian writers. Many of Lena's books from the revolutionary years were still in the house and Zillah had obtained some new ones. I also read the Hebrew paper *Ha Tzvira* published in Warsaw which I bought in a bookshop in the town.

Once when I was in the bookshop I met the bookseller's son Mendel. He was my age. He said, "I see that you read the *Ha Tzvira*. I suppose you must know Hebrew. Perhaps you would like to meet with other young people who are also reading this paper". This is how I met a group of young people who used to speak only Hebrew among themselves.

30 Kiev is one of the oldest cities in Eastern Europe dating back to the 5th century when it was a trading post. From its founding in the 9th century until the early 20th century it was like most of the Ukraine ruled by powerful neighbours except during the 10th and 11th centuries when the Ukraine was the largest and most powerful state in Europe. In 1667 Kiev became part of the Russian empire. After the 1917 Russian Revolution it was the capital of several short-lived Ukrainian states changing hands sixteen times before August 1920. In 1934 Kiev became the capital of the Ukraine Soviet Socialist Republic.

31 Matzot is unleavened flat brittle bread traditionally eaten during Pesach

32 The Kishinev pogrom occurred in 1903 during the Orthodox Christian Easter. A Russian boy was found murdered in a nearby town. It was alleged that Jews killed him and used his blood in the preparation of matzo. Forty-seven Jews were killed, 600 were wounded, and over 700 houses looted and destroyed. No attempt was made by the police or military to intervene until the third day.

In this group were two brothers Eliahu and Ben Gliek. We became good friends. I was a frequent visitor at their home. Eliahu attracted me very much. I introduced him to my cousin Fera and her friend. Together we used to go for long walks discussing Russian literature. We all enjoyed it very much. We met another young man Moshe Saks a bookbinder by profession. He was from the Workers' Zionist Party. He was older than the rest of us in outlook and learning. He was well read in Yiddish literature. We attended his lectures on Yiddish authors such as Sholem Aleichem and Peretz. He started a group of young people, boys and girls, that met to read and discuss these authors. He widened our horizons.

It was an interesting time. Another young man Zwi Gordon whom I had known before (his father had been a partner in my father's tannery) joined our group. He was a few years older than us. In addition he was heavily built and very strong. He had been in Palestine for a few years and spoke Hebrew. He told stories of Palestine where he had trained to be a boxer. Boxing was popular there. From Palestine he had gone to South Africa where it had apparently not gone well with him and he had come home. He once gave us an example of his strength: when young Christian boys threw stones at us in the park he chased them away.

Our sister Lena

At home in the meantime, around about 1913, there was very important news. Our sister Lena was coming home from Strasbourg. She had done well in her studies and had obtained her doctorate in medicine.

We had not seen her since 1906/7 and were very pleased to have her home. Many friends came to see her. I remember one day when I was helping her in the dining room a young man in her years arrived. The happiness of their meeting was a great pleasure for us. He came from Vilna³³ especially to see her. He stayed a long time and we were reminded of the revolutionary days of 1904/5. She told me later that he was in fact her friend from the Socialist Movement at the time of the revolution.

Then Philip Lopatnikov Lena's boyfriend arrived from Germany. This was the first time that we met him. He was quite friendly. He came to marry

³³ Vilna in Russian, Polish and Yiddish, Vilnius in Lithuanian, is located in south-eastern Lithuania near the border with Poland and Belarus. In the early 20th century Jews constituted more than 40% of the population and from the 18th century it was a centre for Torah studies. Uprisings against Russian rule were frequent. Poland and Lithuania both regarded the city as theirs. In 1922 it was annexed by Poland.

Lena and they wanted a very small wedding. This is what they had decided. A week later he left for Mitawa³⁴ near Riga where his father lived.

He returned soon with his younger sister, in my years or perhaps a year older. His father was not well and was not able to come to the wedding and his other sister had to stay with her father. Our uncles and aunts and their children joined us at our home. We drank to the couple's health in the hall in our house, wished them mazel-tov, and had some sweet things to eat. I went for several walks with Philip's sister in our famous Zoubov Park.

After the wedding Philip went to the United States of America where he had obtained a post as a mechanical engineer. Lena stayed with us until he could fix up a house and get the necessary papers for her to join him. When he left he drove with Zillah to Switzerland where he arranged for her to attend a university. Our parents had given permission. We at home were very satisfied to still have our dear sister Lena with us for some time.

It was a happy time in the house until, with the coming of the autumn rains and the wet weather, Lena got a cold. In Strasbourg the previous winter she had developed kidney trouble after a cold. It was the same again this time. She was ill for a long time. With our mild winter without rain or snow Lena began to feel better and by spring she was almost well. In March the papers and tickets for her trip to the United States arrived. Lena started getting ready.

Mama decided to go with her to London. She wanted to visit her brother Philip who had a business and a fine house in London. He lived with his wife Rebecca, their two sons Bernard and Leonard, and a toddler Esther-Luba. Mama's visit was, however, cut short as it was May 1914 and the war between Germany and Russia was imminent.

Chaim Schwartz Auntie Deborah's son was in London then and he asked Uncle Philip if he could accompany Mama to the Russian border. When Mama and Chaim arrived in Berlin³⁵ the Russian border with Germany had already been closed. Chaim arranged for Mama to go with others like her through Sweden and Finland to Petrograd. It took many weeks before they arrived in Petrograd. Then we received a telegram that Papa should come and take Mama home. Papa got the necessary permission to go to Petrograd and he brought Mama home.

34 Mitawa in Yiddish and Polish, Mitua in German, and Jelgava in Latvian is in central Latvia.

35 Berlin in north-east Germany dates from the 12th century. It was ruled from 1435 to 1918 by members of the Hohenzollern family. After the city lost half its population in the 30-year war (1618 – 1648) immigration was promoted and many French Huguenots settled in Berlin. In 1701 Berlin became the capital of the Kingdom of Prussia and in 1871 the capital of the German Empire. At the end of WWI after a failed communist revolution Berlin became the capital of the German Weimar republic and in 1933 of the Third German Reich. After WWII it was divided into East and West Berlin but re-united in November 1989.

We had been very worried and were happy to have Mama with us at home again. She told us what the journey had been like. The trip on the ship from Germany with many nervous women made Mama forget about herself and she set about to calm the women. She succeeded and when they arrived in Petrograd the women thanked her for her help.

WORLD WAR I

Shavel

The Germans invaded Lithuania in 1914. Shavel was only a hundred kilometres from the German border. We were reminded of our closeness to the front when one day in April 1915 we noticed a Zeppelin pass over the town. It was flying towards Riga.³⁶ At the time only the Germans had Zeppelins. Soon the town awoke with great alarm to the sound of artillery fire coming from quite near. The Russian troops were retreating through the outskirts of town towards Riga. When the noise of the artillery fire was very near some people started leaving town. Papa, Mama, Esther, and Fay were among them.

I was near our house when the bombardment of the town started. Some houses on our side of the street were burning. When I reached our house it was already burning fiercely. I could not get into the house through a door. I broke the window facing the street, climbed in, and carried some of our possessions to the window. Then Schmuel-Behr and Lipa arrived and carried the stuff to the opposite side of the street. I was the only one inside the house but I could not go in far because of the heat. I saved whatever I could before the fire engulfed the entire house. Our house was the last one on the street to burn. The next house was further down the hill and did not catch fire.

Meanwhile our parents and the girls had been forced back to town by the German soldiers. When they arrived there was no home left. The four brothers had in the meantime moved whatever was saved to the school on the opposite side of the street. All the houses on that side of the street were untouched. Our neighbours whose houses had been destroyed also brought whatever they had saved to the school. The classrooms were filled to capacity with us refugees and our things. But at least we had shelter.

36 Riga was founded in 1201 but in the Middle Ages it was already a centre of Viking Trade. It was strategically located on the Daugava river which was part of the Vikings' Dvina-Dnieper route to Byzantium. Before and after its membership in the 13th century of the Hanseatic league, an economic alliance of trading cities, Riga was the object of military, political, religious and economic desire by Crusaders, Lutherans, Danes, Germans, Sweden, Poland, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, eventually to be conquered by Russia in 1710. Baltic Germans dominated until 1891 when Russian became the official language. Riga became an important industrial port and by 1990 in the Russian Empire and its third largest city. After WWI it became the capital of an independent Latvia.

The Germans soon took Shavel and the bombardment stopped. A small garrison of Germans arrived in the town and took over the administration. They organised some youngsters to help put out the fires³⁷ and prevent looting. Soon things became reasonably orderly. The Germans were generally quite civil to the population. Coming home one day, however, I noticed an elderly Jew running behind a German soldier. The German soldier had an armful of white challes and the old Jew was begging him to return them to him. The German soldier pushed him aside and ran on. It was very sad to watch. It was lucky that the German soldier did not also assault the Jew. Another time I saw how a German soldier stopped a young man whom we knew. We called him the "permanent student". He was a man in his thirties and always wore a student gown. The soldier wanted to arrest him but when we declared that we knew him as the "permanent student" they let him go.

The German occupation of Shavel did not last long because the Russians counterattacked and drove them out. Nevertheless the Germans continued to fire artillery at the town for a while. The Russians positioned their wagon artillery at the market place. I remember one day when Papa and I, having loaded a wagon with leather from our leather factory, were driving it to the cellar of our shop the Germans were shooting with artillery directly onto the street where we were. We drove into a side street. The attack did not last long. When we arrived at the cellar we saw that the wagon had been hit several times.

Not long after this the Russians recaptured Shavel and drove the Germans back to the border. A few days later the Commander in Chief of the Russian Army ordered all Jews to leave Shavel and the surrounding district within 24 hours. He claimed that Jews were seen shooting from a cellar at the Russian soldiers when they were withdrawing from Shavel. I remember that at the time of the shooting we had hid in a garden and our Feigele had made a lot of noise crying. No soothing helped; it was not possible to calm her until the shooting ended.

The Jewish population of the town was about fifteen thousand – rich, middle-class, and poor. It was a gruesome order and the old people could not survive it. An acquaintance, the ladies' dressmaker Herr Weiss, is an example. He was a member of our shul. He went into the shul and took out a Sefer Torah (Torah scroll). As he walked out of the shul he fell down and never got up again.

37 During the war about 65% of the buildings were burned down and the city centre was destroyed.

Flight into the interior

Papa hired wagons from some Christians to cart our household goods and the ready leathers from the factory and the shop out of town. In the evening of the same day, the day of Shavuot,³⁸ we left Shavel together with Auntie Sora-Reva and her younger children. Shavuot always falls in the middle of the month when the moon is full. If it were not for the sadness of the occasion the sight of the full moon would have been truly magnificent. I remember it clearly to this day. Mama, Schmuel-Behr, Lipa, and Norman were all on the same wagon. Papa was with the other two wagons loaded with the leather. The next day we arrived in a village called Bakroi.³⁹ Not far from Bakroi Papa had an acquaintance, a settler. He allowed Papa to unload the leather into his shed.

We rode further and then we stopped in the middle of the field to allow the horses to rest and to be fed and watered. Here in the middle of the field something happened. Mama and Schmuel-Behr criticised Papa's handling of the leather that he had unloaded at the farmer's place. It distressed Papa very much and he ran away into the fields. When I saw how Papa ran away I ran after him. I stopped him and calmed him. He cried bitterly and I also cried.

We returned to the wagons and the next morning we arrived in Kupeshok⁴⁰ a small Yiddish village. The village miller, well acquainted with Papa, gave us a room in his house. We planned to stay there until we could return to Shavel. Auntie Sora-Reva and her family were settled in an inn at first but later they rented a house in a small place five kilometres from Kupeshok. We often went to visit them there. Her husband and her son Schneier were living in Pskov⁴¹ having moved there even before the Jews were ordered to leave Shavel.

I met the youth of the village and explored the surrounding areas with them. There was a large lake with clear water not far from the village where we swam. The local youths could all swim well. We also met to talk and sing Yiddish and Hebrew songs.

38 Shavuot commemorates the day God is believed to have given the Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai.

39 Bakroi in Yiddish, Pakruojis in Lithuanian is in north-east Lithuania.

40 Kupeshok in Yiddish, and Kupiskis in Lithuanian is near Bakroi. It dates back to the 3rd century BC. It was not a Jewish village but many Jews lived there. It was linked to Riga and Shavel by road and rail.

41 Pskov in Russian, Pskovas in Lithuanian, Pleskau in German is in north-west Russia. In 1242 Prince Alexander Nevsky defeated the invading Teutonic Knights at Chudskoye Lake just outside the town.

Papa went to Riga where he obtained permission to take the remaining half-prepared leather out of Shavel. He took the leather to Riga and sold it there. He also sold the leather that had been left near Bakroi. He met his partner and they divided the money between them. Then he came back to us in Kupeshok.

Not long after he returned we heard shooting. We realised that the Germans were near. Feigele again began to cry and scream. We hired a wagon and went back on the road. It took us a good many days before we arrived at Dvinsk⁴² which was quite a big town. The Yiddish community there gave us a temporary place to stay; this time it was an empty storeroom.

And again it was Papa who cared for us. Dvinsk was full of refugees. The government had arranged a goods train for the refugees and we all left on it to an unknown destination far in the east. We were unloaded in small numbers in different towns and villages en route. Together with others we arrived in a little village called Kirsanov in the province of Tambov in Russia. The Yiddish community of the village met us at the station and gave us a very heartfelt reception. There was a small shul, commensurate with the population. The local Jews had prepared tables with food for us and they expressed their sympathy with us.

We stayed in the shul until they found a place for each family to stay. We were given a two-roomed dwelling. Papa quickly made friends particularly with one family the Polonskys. Mr Polonsky was a respected bank manager and he interested himself very much in us. The family often invited us to visit them. Mr Polonsky found out that Papa had a leather factory in Shavel and as he had a brother in Yeletz a town in the province of Libetskaya in east-central Russia south of Moscow where there were many leather factories he advised Papa to go there.

In the meantime I arranged for Esther and Fay to attend the gymnasium and Lipa and I got jobs in a sunflower-pressing mill that worked on steam. But we stayed there for only three days. I also worked in the bank where Mr Polonsky was the manager but again only for a few days. Papa returned from Yeletz and told us that he had bought a place. We packed our belongings and said farewell to our new acquaintances and especially to the family Polonsky, whom we thanked warmly for their friendship. We thanked the whole Jewish community which had received us so kindly and caught the train to Yeletz.

42 Dvinsk in Russian, Daugavpils in Latvian is in south-east Latvia near Belarus and Lithuania. Its history began in 1275. From 1784 it had a large Jewish population – about 44% according to the 1897 census.

Yeletz, Tula, and the February Revolution

On the plot that Papa had bought stood a little old wooden house on a peaked mountaintop. The garden was on the mountain and sloped until it reached a small river called Yeltzik. In the spring when the snow melted the Yeltzik came down in force bringing with it big pieces of ice. We settled into the house.

Father hired some workers and not far from the river they dug big holes. In the holes they built big wooden vaults for the leather. This was the beginning of our factory. He also had a bridge built over the Yeltzik at the bottom of the hill. We made friends with Mr Polonsky's brother and his family as well as with his sister and brother-in-law Vlotnikov. The Vlotnikov family had a son about my age and two daughters. I became very friendly with the older girl. We spent a lot of time with our new friends.

While Papa was building his factory and the bridge over the Yeltzik Lipa and I worked in Polonsky's factory where they made shells for the military. Local Russians and Russian youngsters as old as us were also employed there. The youngsters teased us and nagged us. After work they often threw stones at us. A young Jewish man who worked with us suffered badly from the hooligans and Lipa and I protected him from them. We became friends. He told us that his uncle had obtained work in Tula⁴³ – also in an ammunition factory. He believed that we could get work there too. He got in touch with his uncle and gave me his uncle's address. I decided to go to Tula. My parents did not object.

I arrived in Tula and got a job in a factory that was making certain gun items. I rented a room and started working. A month later Lipa arrived and was employed in the same factory. Back in Shavel Lipa had worked in a key business so in Tula he got qualified work. The young Russians with whom I worked did not worry me but Lipa who worked in another division had trouble with his Russian co-workers. He told me about it. I went to his workplace and warned the youngsters to leave my brother alone. If they did not, I said, they would have to deal with me. It worked and they no longer pestered Lipa.

Lipa set himself up with me in my room. The room had only one bed. The factory worked three shifts, eight hours each. I worked from four in the

⁴³ Tula dates back to 1146. The first armament factory in Russia was built there in 1712 and by 1724 it was the greatest ironworking centre in Eastern Europe. The city grew rapidly in the early 20th century as a result of arms production during the 1905 Russo-Japanese war and WWI.

morning until midday and he worked from eight in the evening until four in the morning. This is how we shared the bed. We fixed things up well with our meals too. We both ate lunch in a vegetarian kitchen.

We made new friends and also met an old friend of mine Nadel. He was working as a bookkeeper. One of our new acquaintances was a Jewish boy whose name I have forgotten. He was a very strict vegetarian and a follower of Tolstoy. He did not wear leather shoes and had other ideological scruples. He later left for Moscow.

I walked a lot all over the town in my free time. Here there was also a Nevsky Prospekt⁴⁴ where we used to go for walks in the evenings. The climate in Tula in winter was much colder than in Shavel. Since I started work at four in the morning and had to walk about three kilometres out of the town to the factory it was quite difficult in winter when there was frost and snow and in spring too when it used to rain. I remember early one morning when I was going to work the frost was more than 30 degrees and there was wind and snow as well.

I met a Russian worker who worked on my floor. He was a specialist and worked with sophisticated machines. He was a member of a political workers' movement. We talked about political issues. He told me that we could expect political developments soon. A few weeks later there actually took place the greatest political event ever in Russia: the revolution of February 1917 when we deposed the Czar and set up a revolutionary government under the leadership of Kerensky a right-wing social-democrat.

When we found out about the revolution we immediately stopped work and left the factory to march into the town singing revolutionary songs. On the way many more workers joined us. The town was already packed with demonstrators. Many went into the parks where meetings were held and speeches made. Others joined those who were at Government House and a delegation was sent to the Governor.

The soldiers of the garrison were not allowed to leave their barracks. But they could hear the songs and the slogans of the demonstrators and realised what was happening and why they had been locked in. At the end of the day the Governor resigned and handed over power to the revolutionary committee. The town council did the same. The soldiers were let out of the barracks and left-wing officers took control. The soldiers were allowed to march through the streets and to take part in the

44 Nevsky Prospekt is the main street in St Petersburg.

meetings. The roads were full of demonstrators and the town's orchestras and the soldiers' bands played music.

There was so much happening all the time. First I went to the Governor's house. From there I went to the parks to listen to the speakers. The newspaper reporters would grab us to find out the latest news; they could not keep up. The whole population was celebrating, not only the workers. The atmosphere was very stirring. I was totally overwhelmed and sympathised with the prevailing atmosphere.

May Day in Moscow – 1917

In March and April I travelled several times to Moscow where I again met Nadel. I remember in particular my visit to Moscow on the 1st of May. My idealistic acquaintance, the vegetarian whose name I have forgotten, had left Tula for Moscow. He invited me to visit him. I arrived the evening before the 1st of May. He lived in the house of a friend who was also a follower of his ideology. His friend gave him a place in his kitchen where there was a narrow bench on which both of us slept that night.

Very early the next morning we went to a hall where his friends and members of his movement had gathered and were singing their songs. Then with flags and songs we joined the May Day procession in which hundreds of organisations each with their own flag and orchestra as well as platoons of soldiers with their flags and bands took part. The procession occupied miles to end in Red Square. There on a platform stood the delegates of the government and representatives of the Communist Party which had led the revolution. The square was crowded with demonstrators.

The joy of the huge crowd cannot be described; it was such that Moscow had never before experienced. For me it was also something that I could not have imagined, especially the great joy of the whole population. The same evening I returned to Tula. Lipa told me that in Tula too there had been big demonstrations.

I join the Peoples' Revolutionary Army

I continued to work in the factory until mid-May. I had received two letters. One was from my friend Eliahu and the other was from Philip Lopatnikov's youngest sister, the one who was at Lena's wedding in Shavel. Eliahu was staying in Mariupol a town near the Black Sea. Nadel

had given him my address. He proposed that I visit him. Philip's sister also invited me. She was staying in Kharkov⁴⁵. I was very keen to see Eliahu and as I had to pass Kharkov on the way to Mariupol I accepted both invitations.

I freed myself of my position in the factory, said good-bye to Lipa, and took to the road. I met Philip's sister and she took me to see her father and another sister. The visit was not very pleasant and I brought forward my departure.

After one day's travel by train I arrived in Mariupol. I stayed with Eliahu in a room and we spent a carefree summer together enjoying the good climate, boating and swimming in the big Kalmius river that flowed past Mariupol to the sea. We often went by boat to a little riverside settlement. When ships passed us the waves they made were huge and almost turned our boat over.

By the end of June 1917 the money that I had saved was finished. The news in the land and on the front with Germany was bad. The government called for volunteers for the army. Both of us decided to join up. Many young Jewish men from the surrounding Jewish settlements also joined the army then. We were sent by train to Moscow for training. I met Norman in Moscow. He was working in a shoe factory. From him I became aware of my parents' position in Yeletz. I also met an old friend Schlomo Aronstam from Shavel. I inquired about his family and in particular about his Zeide Reb Motte Aronstam the wine-maker.

We did not have much free time. I nevertheless attended several meetings in the parks. There were heated arguments between the different parties: the communists, social-democrats, democrats, and reactionaries. These meetings reflected the atmosphere in the country at the time and the attitude of the people towards the war against the Germans.

We did not stay long in Moscow. Together with many others in a platoon we were sent by goods train to a small station not far from the Austrian front. We were by then a battalion with officers and a command. We set off by foot on a hot summer's day on a road near the front. We were going to be soldiers of the revolution. After two days marching we were

45 Kharkov was founded in 1654 but there is evidence that people lived there from the time of the Bronze Age. It is in the north-east of Ukraine. It was built in the 16th century as a fortress against invading Crimean Tartars. In 1859 when Jews were allowed to live outside the Pale of Settlement a few Jewish merchants and craftsmen settled there and many Jewish youth from the provinces studied at the University of Kharkov. During WWI Jews expelled from their places of residence or escaping from the fighting or pogroms took refuge in Kharkov and it became an important Jewish centre.

exhausted from the heat and the marching. When we arrived at a clearing not far from a Ukrainian settlement and some Jewish settlements we set up camp and organised a kitchen. Here we were taught to march and drill, to shoot, to run in an attack, and to stab.

The young Jewish volunteers from Mariupol were still with us. On our free days the Jewish soldiers used to go together to visit the neighbouring small Jewish settlements. We made friends with the local young people most of whom had Zionist inclinations. One day we took a photograph of all the Jewish soldiers from our battalion. I sent a copy to my parents in Yeletz. Years later I got the photograph from Fay. I had it enlarged and have it in my album. As my friend Eliahu was with me the whole time it was quite pleasant. They did not weary us very much with the training.

One day Eliahu told me that he had decided to leave the army. In a little village nearby he had met a tailor who would give him some civilian clothes and who would send him to his parents. He proposed that I should do the same but I did not want to. When the time came for him to leave I accompanied him for a short distance to the village. It was for me not a pleasant feeling and I returned embittered. Years later I reminded him of this and he answered me that he had left to join the Red Army. I did not believe him.

The position on the Austrian front became serious and our battalion was marched to the front. We went by foot for a whole week until we arrived at the front which was already in Austria. I was sent together with ten other soldiers to join another group. Before we got there, however, the Austrians carried out a big attack. The Russians could not withstand the attack and started pulling back along the whole front.

We withdrew with them. The Austrians threw bombs on us until the evening when we arrived at a small Austrian village. The Jews in the village were very scared that the Russians would start a pogrom. But the Russian army had in mind only to save themselves. The Jewish house where I was billeted allowed me to come inside and sleep over. Only then did I tell them that I was a Jew and that they had no need to be scared of me.

When we arrived back in Russia, we were regrouped and driven to the old border between Austria and Russia. It was a very rainy autumn day when we slept over at a small Ukrainian village in the homes and stables of the peasants. I remember how cramped it was in the stable where I had to sleep; the farmer's house was already overfull. I managed to squeeze myself into the stable so that I would not get wet in the rain. We were

very tired from marching the whole day and it made little difference where we slept.

By the next day the rain had stopped and we marched to the front. We could hear the shooting. We were placed in formation and the officers told us that they needed several soldiers as telephonists. Volunteers were called for. I preferred being a telephonist to staying in the trenches and stepped forward. We were immediately taken to the front.

I was a telephonist for a divisional officer. There were two telephonists. Each one was on duty for twelve hours. The officer stayed in a bunker. It was fairly quiet on the front. The only time I had to go out of the bunker was when the telephone wire broke. I had to find the break and repair it. Only towards the end of the operation when the whole division had exchanged places with another division and we had to roll the telephone wire up and carry it to the base did I feel in danger of being shot.

We then transferred to a town not far from the front to have a rest. When one day I went to collect wood for the kitchen in a little forest nearby I chopped my foot with an axe. I returned limping to the base and was in great pain that night. In the morning they took me to a military hospital.

When my foot was healed I had to return to the front but I did not want to. I went to the chief doctor who was a Hollander and told him that I would rather stay behind and help out at the hospital. He was sympathetic and gave me a letter to the administration. If they would allow it he would take me on.

It was winter but the climate in this area was mild. The fields were covered in snow but it was not very cold. I went by foot to the administrative offices and obtained permission to join the hospital. I stayed there the whole winter until the war ended in 1918.

When the war ended the military hospital withdrew from the front to a settlement not far from the town of Proskurov.⁴⁶ My job then changed. The person in charge of the hospital took me on as his secretary. I had to balance the books. Little by little the officers and the nurses started going home. I remember a wedding between an officer and a nurse. We danced, sang, and drank the whole night. In the morning the couple said good-bye and left for their home.

46 Proskurov, originally Ploskirow, renamed Khmelnytski in 1954, in the western part of Ukraine was founded in 1493. Many pogroms were carried out in the region.

One day I got permission to go to a small Jewish shtetl where I had made some friends before going to the front. I got hold of a horse and rode out. I spent the day there.

I became friendly with several soldiers at the military hospital. One Russian I particularly liked. He was the shoemaker of the division. He told me about himself and about his family in Russia. The hospital was in a British [sic] home near a Ukrainian village that we often visited. The soldiers used to get very drunk there. Among the soldiers was a man from the Ukraine. One Sunday when the soldiers were very drunk the Ukrainian and the Russian had an argument. The Ukrainian stabbed the Russian with a bayonet and killed him. They arrested the Ukrainian and sent him off to a town not far from where we were stationed. Later I heard that he got off lightly. The death of the Russian soldier had a bad effect on all of us and particularly on me because I had liked him very much.

While we were in Proskurov I became acquainted with a young girl from the library where I used to borrow books. I inquired from her about the position of the Jews. Who was to know then that in February 1919 Ukrainian soldiers would come here and make a pogrom among the Jewish inhabitants? Many Jews were killed. In 1923, in retaliation for this pogrom, a Jew Schwarzband killed the commander of the Ukrainian army Petlura in Paris. There was a big trial and the Jew was freed. In 1936 I met him in South Africa.

The people in charge of the hospital wound up all the accounts and I was freed from service. I got my release from the Ukrainian office, my demobilisation papers, and a free trip to my parents in Yeletz. I travelled on a goods train together with a lot of Russian women and workers who had been requisitioned to work in the area and were now returning home. The trip took a very long time.

When we arrived in Kiev the capital of the Ukraine we had to wait for another train on which to continue the journey. We stayed at the Kiev University. I used the time to tour the city and to look at the old city with its famous places. The memories of the little mountain and the cathedral from where you could see the great and wonderfully beautiful river Dnieper stretching for miles have remained with me.

TRYING TO GET TO PALESTINE

Lipa and I get typhus

I had last seen my family at the end of 1916. I arrived in Yeletz and was reunited with my parents, Schmuel-Behr, Lipa, Esther, and Fay. Norman was still working in Moscow. The house and tannery had been taken over by the Bolsheviks. No one in the family besides Norman worked and I did not know where the money came from.

Lipa and I went to lectures at the Volks University. Plays, concerts, and the use of the university library were all free. I met a number of old friends and got in touch with the Zionist organisation where one could get newspapers and hear news of Palestine.

I learned that there was a way of getting to Palestine via Odessa⁴⁷ a port on the Black Sea. Odessa was at that time occupied by Denikin a Czarist general and his White Army. This army was fighting the Red Army of the Soviets. I told my parents that I would like to go to Palestine. Lipa said that he wanted to join me. Our parents agreed. We were given the address of the major Zionist organisation in Kharkov. But as winter was approaching we decided to wait.

In February 1919 when the weather was a bit warmer we said good-bye to the family and took the train to Kharkov. There we were given advice and the addresses of people we ought to see on our way to Odessa from where we would travel to Palestine. We then took the train southwards. After a day and a half we stopped at a village called Nova Poltavka. It was already warm here. We stayed overnight with some Jewish farmers and were advised to go to Nikolayev⁴⁸ and from there to take a boat to Odessa.

47 Odessa was an ancient Greek colony. In the Middle Ages it was ruled successively by nomadic tribes, Genghis Khan's Mongols, Lithuania, and the Ottoman Empire. It was conquered in 1792 by Russia. In 1819 it became a free port and home to a diverse population of Europeans, Armenians, Turks, Tatars, Jews, Russians, Poles, Lithuanians and itinerant traders. Despite many pogroms almost 40% of Odessa's population by the end of the 19th century was Jewish and the city was a centre for Jewish immigration to Palestine. In the 1905 revolution Odessa was the site of the workers' uprising supported by the crew of the Russian battleship Potemkin commemorated in a famous film. After the 1917 revolution it was recurrently attacked by the Red Army and the White Army with its foreign anti-communist backers. In 1920 when the Red Army took control Odessa became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

48 Nikolayev in Russian is a river port near the Black Sea. It was founded in 1789 as a shipyard.

The first night we would have to stay over in Jefingar a Jewish settlement. And so with our rucksacks over our shoulders we proceeded to Jefingar. A Jewish farmer by the name of Moshe Krol whose daughter Zelda belonged to the Zionist organisation lived in Jefingar. The family Krol gave us supper and made beds for us in their lounge.

Early next morning we went on and came to a German settlement. A peasant gave us permission to sleep over. I did not feel well. The next morning we heard the sound of cannon-fire. The farmer told us that the Red and White armies were fighting on the road to Nikolayev. He said that it would be dangerous for us to go on. We decided to go back to Jefingar and to wait there until the danger had passed.

The walk back was very difficult for me but luck was with us. The same Moshe Krol passed us with a wagon full of hay. We told him about the battles on the way to Nikolayev. He had also heard the gunfire and told us to get on the wagon. Lipa had no trouble getting onto the wagon but I needed his help to get on.

Moshe Krol took us back to Jefingar. When we arrived in Jefingar he took us to his house. Zelda heard our story and was very sympathetic. That night before going to bed I took two aspirins. In the middle of the night the farmer woke us up and asked us to help him as a cow that was about to have a calf was having trouble. We helped as much as we could and then went back to bed.

I felt very hot and must have lost consciousness. When I came round after several days I felt myself being covered in wet sheets and discovered that I had a very high temperature. The doctor had ordered this treatment to reduce the fever. That was the crisis in my illness. After that my temperature started to drop. During my illness I was in an altogether different world. I dreamed that my sister Lena had come from America by aeroplane and was covering me with wet sheets. I dreamed that she had promised to take Lipa and me to Palestine in her aeroplane.

After a while my condition improved and the doctor allowed me to get out of bed. It was then that I noticed Lipa writing a letter to our parents. He asked me to add a few lines. I wrote that Lena had arrived by aeroplane and was taking me to Palestine. Lipa did not read the letter and sent it off as it was. It unfortunately caused my parents much distress.

Lipa also got sick and spent a few days in bed but he was not as dangerously ill as I had been. He told the doctor that we had been in a public bath in Kharkov and as we both had typhus that must have been where we got it. We stayed with the Krol family until we were quite well.

While we were ill the White Army occupied a big part of the Ukraine and in Yeletz the Cossacks made a lot of trouble for the Jews. They nearly killed Norman. At the same time bands of robbers roamed through the Ukraine attacking local Jews especially in the small towns and settlements. It has been estimated that these bandits killed about 100,000 Jews leaving many orphans. Later I saw many of them in the orphanages of Odessa. In Jefingar things were quiet but it was still too dangerous to travel to Nikolayev.

The Jewish Agricultural College

Near Jefingar there was an Agricultural College where Jewish children lived and studied. Many young Jewish people were also employed there particularly people like ourselves who wanted to gain some experience in agriculture having Palestine as our ultimate destination. Lipa and I went to work there and learned a lot. I helped in the fields. I cut hay by machine and harvested wheat and oats. I also worked in the dairy. I learned how to make butter and cheese. Lipa who preferred to work with horses was given an opportunity to do so. But whenever there was urgent work to be done in the fields they recruited everybody.

Times were very unsettled. We heard continually about the roving bandits. The management of the college decided to let the children go home. Later the teachers also left and then even the managers. Lipa and I remained behind together with a few other young people.

There was a very nice dairy at the college. There was even a separator to make cream. Making cheese was easy. We used to make butter and send it to Nikolayev every week. The trains were running again after the White Army freed the town and one could travel by train all the way from Kharkov to Nikolayev.

Life at the Agricultural College changed, however, with the arrival of robber bands. One day we heard artillery fire from the other side of the station and soon the bandits were at the College. They found three other young Jews and me in the attic where we were hiding. They were going to shoot us. However, the College secretary told them that we were workers, the same as they were, and they left us alone.

Lipa was not with us. Two days earlier he had taken a horse and cart to visit the Krols in Jefingar. He was on his way back when the robbers attacked him and took away the horse and cart. Luckily they let him go.

They did not attack Jefingar because they made their way along the railway line.

Via Nikolayev to Odessa

Lipa and I decided to return to Jefingar and wait for the day when the road to Nikolayev would be free again. The Krol family again allowed us to stay with them. We tried to pull our weight by working in the fields and the homestead. Yet we still felt we were taking advantage of their hospitality. Zelda introduced us to her friends and time passed quickly. The autumn rains came.

One day a friend of the Krols arrived from Nikolayev and bought a young calf from him. He needed somebody to drive the calf back. I offered to help him. The Krols had a married daughter who lived in Nikolayev and they asked their friend to direct me to her home.

It was on a cold and rainy day that I drove the calf to Nikolayev. Tired and wet from the rain I arrived there that evening. I stayed with the cattle dealer that night and the next morning he took me to Krol's daughter. She inquired after her family and explained to me how to contact the Zionist organisation.

Lipa also arrived in Nikolayev and got temporary work there. A week later I left for Odessa by boat and arrived within a couple of hours. Lipa undertook to drive a herd of cattle to Odessa by road. It took him a couple of days to get there.

We rented a room and got work with a blacksmith who made primus stove heads. We got in touch with the Zionist organisation and registered to go on the next boat to Constantinople. A few weeks later we discovered that the Red Army was not far from Odessa and that the White Army had confiscated all the boats in the port in order to transport the remnants of their army to Constantinople. They had been defeated and were retreating. Then the Red Army arrived and put a lid on our plans to go to Palestine from Odessa.

We worked at the blacksmith for a few more weeks and then we got the sack. By that time we had made some friends in Odessa and through them we got work in a factory that produced toilet paper. My job was to stand at a machine that converted used paper into pulp. The pulp was taken to the second floor on a belt-driven platform and thrown into a big drum with a mixture of chemicals. The contents of the drum together with hot water used for washing the pulp went through filters and hot steam

until all the fluid had been removed. The water went into a machine and was stored. The pulp went through further processes and was finally turned into rolls of toilet paper. It was very interesting for us.

The ORT Hachshara

In the evening Lipa and I used to meet with our friends. From them we learned that a cooperative farm or Hachshara⁴⁹ for the training of young Jewish pioneers who wanted to live in Palestine had been established by ORT⁵⁰ just outside Odessa. The Hachshara was run on a collective socialist basis like a kibbutz. It was housed in an agricultural school. We went to work there.

I can recall only a few of the names of the chalutzim (pioneers) on the Hachshara. There was Dolinsky who had broad shoulders and was very robust. Then there was Chaimke and his sister. To distinguish between Chaimke and myself they named him, la Chaim. There was a married couple and their little daughter Frathe. Then there was Zipora Twersky a granddaughter of the first Rebbe of Skvira⁵¹ whose father was now the Skvira Rebbe and Sima Lieberson the daughter of the Rebbe's Gabbe (secretary or personal assistant). They had run away from Skvira to Odessa to become independent. After working at several places there was again no work for them. They found out about the Hachshara and with the help of ORT they joined it. Later two other girls joined. They were students. One of them was also called Sima. We called Sima Lieberson, Sima the Big One, and the other Sima, Sima the Long One.

At this time the White Army was again in Odessa having chased the Red Army out. The White Army was anti-Semitic. We feared that they might come at night and make a pogrom on our Hachshara. Bands of roving bandits also used to attack the farm. So for the sake of safety we slept in a cellar. There was a wooden trapdoor to the cellar. Bags of potatoes were placed on top of the trapdoor. We never left the cellar before dawn. As soon as it was light and everything was quiet outside Dolinsky would push the trapdoor open with his strong shoulders. Then we would all get out.

49 Hachshara was a Zionist youth movement formed to promote the educational and social development of Jewish children. All the youth movements emphasised the national revival of Jews in their own homeland, aliyah (emigration to Palestine) and community. Many also espoused a return to nature.

50 ORT is a NGO whose mission is the advancement of Jews through training and education

51 Rebbe Itziki Twersky known as the Godly philosopher was the founder of the Shvira Hasidic dynasty. His son Rebbe Dovidl, Zipora's father, was a grandson on his mother's side of Rabbi Hershele a direct descendent of the Baal ShemTov. He was himself also a well-known Hassidic leader.

That summer there were many chalutzim at the Hachshara and not enough work for everyone. Some of us found work with a private farmer who grew vegetables under irrigation by special permission of the municipality. We often met him and his family.

When it was time to harvest the winter crops and to plant the large fields with maize, watermelon, and sweet melons there was again plenty of work for everyone on the Hachshara. We had a horse-drawn machine to cut the wheat but when the robbers stole it and the horse I had to finish the job with a scythe. When all the wheat had been cut down I left it in the sun to dry before taking it to the homestead for threshing.

During harvesting in the summer of 1920 we had unexpected visitors. Zelda Krol and a friend came to visit Lipa and me. I was very pleased to see Zelda. It was a very hot day and I was cutting the wheat with a borrowed scythe. I inquired after her family and seeing that I was busy she excused herself and went with Lipa to meet the girls who were working in the kitchen. I thought she would stay a while but then from afar I heard her saying good-bye to Lipa. She left the farm without greeting me. I felt that she was hurt by the way by my treatment of her.

It distressed me very much. Until this day I cannot forget how silly I had behaved towards her. I should have left my work and have attended to her with the same kindness and consideration that she had shown me when, as a total stranger, I lay ill in her home. Towards this Zelda who did so much for me and Lipa I behaved so badly and heartlessly. It was a shame and a blemish on my character.

The next morning Lipa decided to return to Yeletz to see the family. I learned later that he went with Zelda to Jefingar and stayed there for a short time before going home.

The next summer there was enough to eat. The melons ripened. We had a field of buckwheat from which we used to cook porridge for breakfast. We ate green mealies⁵² for lunch. We took some bags of our own wheat to a primitive mill where a donkey turned the grindstones. With the flour we baked bread.

Suddenly one day the Soviet police arrived. They asked to see our documents. They took all the young men except Kerson who had a bad eye and me. I was left behind because I was a Lithuanian subject. Lithuania had become independent in 1919. The two girl students Long Sima and her friend returned to Odessa. Chaimke had run away when the

52 Mealies also called maize in South Africa and corn in the USA

police came but later he returned to the farm. Zipora became homesick and returned to Skvira. The married chaltz drowned on his way to Odessa and his widow and child left the Hachshara.

The summer was over. There were only four of us left on the farm: Sima Lieberman whom I was soon to marry, Kerson, Chaimke, and myself. We moved the harvest to the empty schoolrooms and arranged our accommodation in the kitchen. The men still had work to do. We had to shell the maize and winnow and grind the buckwheat. I made brooms from the buckwheat stems. We would sell them in the suburbs of Odessa. Later another couple moved into the house of the chaltz who had drowned. The man was a cobbler by trade and a Yiddish poet. He also wrote Jewish songs. His songs and their melodies are still in my memory.

We still got visitors from Odessa. One such visitor was a certain Resnick. He was an interesting and intelligent person, a printer by trade. He liked Sima very much. She told me that during one of his visits he proposed marriage to her to which she had replied that she liked him as a friend but not enough to marry him.

That year the winter in Odessa was mild. Hardly any snow or rain fell. We could not do any planting because not only was the ground too hard but we also had no seeds. During autumn and winter we had ground the few bags of wheat that we had and had used the flour for baking bread. Before spring we applied to the ORT for seed. They gave us a letter to the Soviet Department of Agriculture. There we were given another letter to take to the management committee of a nearby village requesting them to give us some wheat to sow in our fields. Some soldiers were also instructed to help us.

Just before the soldiers arrived Sima and I decided to get married. One morning we went by foot to a Soviet office on the other side of one of the saltwater lakes. It was quite a long way from the Hachshara. We took a shortcut over some mealie fields. At the office we were given an official marriage document. When we came back to the Hachshara we told our friends. Unfortunately we had nothing with which to celebrate and had to be satisfied with tea and bread.

The soldiers brought with them a cart and horse with which to transport the wheat seed. Sima and I went to fetch the wheat and this journey served as our honeymoon. We arrived at the first village in the afternoon and handed over the requisition papers to the secretary of the local Soviet. He told us that he had no seed to spare and gave us a letter to the neighbouring village. We arrived there unhitched the horse and were given a little hay and oats for the horse. As it was getting late we were

taken into the office of the local Soviet where we spent the night. The next morning the secretary said he was sorry but he was also unable to help us. He gave us a letter to another village Soviet and more fodder for the horse. We had to go through Odessa and past a cemetery on the other side of the city to get to that village. Eventually we arrived at the third village where they gave us two full bags of wheat and one bag of oats. That evening we returned to the farm.

The soldiers ploughed the field and sowed the seeds. The rain that fell made the wheat and oats grow but the young seedlings dried out when the rain stopped. The heat was intense. Our food was just about finished and on top of that the members of the Hachshara who had been mobilized returned. We had to do something about food and decided to trade in salt.

In Russia, though not in Odessa, there was a shortage of salt. We got the salt from the two saltwater lakes that were about five miles from the farm. They were originally part of the Black Sea but had become separated from it. We made dams in the sand not far from the lakes. Then we carried the salt water from the lakes to our dams. Within a day or two the water dried up in the heat. We removed the salt in our two-wheel cart and spread it on the schoolroom floors. We sold the salt to traders who took it by train to other parts of Russia. The traders made a lot of money; we were able to live for just two months on what we had been paid.

The Jewish Orphanage in Odessa

At the end of August 1921 Sima's friend who often visited the Hachshara offered us positions in an orphanage in Odessa. The orphanage had originally been established for Jewish children but had been taken over by the Soviets. After the pogroms in the Ukraine thousands of Jewish orphans came to the orphanage from the villages. They were aged from four to fifteen years. The orphanage gave them food and clothing, dormitories in which to sleep, and classes for learning.

It was autumn when we arrived and met these children who had experienced such hard times. Sima was put in charge of a class of small children. To me fell the task of teaching the older children how to plant and tend a vegetable garden. It rained intermittently but was not yet cold. The food too was not yet as bad as it was to become later. I could still pick a few youngsters to help me dig up a patch for vegetables.

One evening at the end of September soon after we arrived Sima and I went out for a walk. It was drizzling but not cold. We saw a little boy in

the street not far from the orphanage. There were a lot of people around him. The poor boy did not know the name of the street where he lived or his surname. He was altogether lost. The people wanted to take him to the police station. Sima and I undertook to do it. We took him by the hand and made our way there. We gave them our names and address and told them that we were teachers at the orphanage. It was agreed that we would take the youngster with us to the orphanage and that the parents could come and fetch him there. The little boy also agreed.

We entertained him, fed him, and made him a bed. Sima told him some fairy tales and he fell peacefully asleep. In the middle of the night there was a knock on our door. The boy's parents had come to fetch him. They woke him up saying, "Moshele, come home". "No", he replied, "I like it here. Aunty Sima tells me nice stories". They wrapped him in a blanket and took him home.

That year the harvest in the Odessa area was bad. There had been a drought throughout the Ukraine and the Soviet Government did not have sufficient wheat to sow. Our rations became smaller month by month until it came down to two slices of bread a day with a cup of hot water.

The salary Sima and I were supposed to receive from the Government came only once every three or four months. In addition the value of money fell by the day. During November and December our salary was a couple of million roubles. With this we could buy only a loaf of bread made of corn (wheat). We ate it all up on our way home from the shop.

As long as it was warm the lessons went on as usual. But when winter came even though the climate in Odessa is relatively mild the endless rain went right through you; a snowfall would have been better.

Most of the children had no shoes and suffered from the damp. The dormitories were big rooms without heating, not even at night. And as winter drew on the rations became smaller and smaller. The children drank a lot of hot water to get warm and used to wet themselves at night. We decided that a teacher should wake them in the middle of the night and give them buckets in which to relieve themselves. It was enough to break one's heart to see the little ones suffer so.

Sima taught the younger children and told them stories but all they wanted to hear was how Sima's mother used to cook tzimmes⁵³ and other dishes. Sima had to tell them this every day. The director of the orphanage could not get any footwear for the children so when the cobbler

53 Tzimmes is a traditional Jewish dish of stewed carrots, sometimes combined with dried fruit.

left the Hachshara we brought him to the orphanage. He and his wife made shoes for the children out of old blankets and such like.

I became friendly with a teacher who had a class of small children. He was finding it difficult to control them. He had a violin and would play to the children to help them forget their hunger and the cold. He sometimes invited me to come into the classroom when he played to them.

One day he told me that his father who had also been a teacher had passed away. That year cholera had broken out in Odessa and hundreds of people died. The corpses of the dead were left in the streets. The municipality would take them away to be buried. My friend asked me to accompany him. He hired a horse and cart and we set out for the cemetery. On the way we passed a house and through a window we saw a room full of corpses. "You see it", he said to me, "I did not want this to happen to my father." He hired some men to dig a grave. The ground was frozen and it took a long time. We buried his father and he left a mark next to his father's name, so that he could put up a matzerwa⁵⁴ later.

March arrived and it got warmer. The children spent time outside in the sun as the classrooms were still very cold. I got the garden ready to plant vegetables. On my own I carted manure from the police horse-stables. The children did not help; they were too weak to do anything.

I remember also what happened when a 13-year-old boy stole one of the blankets and sold it in town. When it became known the children discussed the matter at a meeting. The majority opinion was to forgive the boy seeing that it was his first offence. They made him promise not to do it again. The teachers also held a meeting. They recommended that the boy be sent to Boys Town an institution for about 20,000 homeless children that the Soviets had established outside Odessa. It had its own board of management and all the facilities of a town. Government teachers and other personnel worked there.

In February Sima got ill. She had a high temperature and went to see a doctor. He gave her medicine to take but it did not help. She then went to see a specialist who gave her different medicines but these did not help either. With the advent of spring she became a little better. The increase in food rations also had a good effect. At this time we received a surprise food-parcel of chocolate and condensed milk from a charitable institution in England as well as some footwear and articles of clothing. Before the revolution rich people in Odessa had summer villas by the sea. These

54 Matzerwa is a tombstone resting upright on a grave.

were confiscated and used as sanatoria and were available to institutions such as ours. We were sent to one. It all helped and in time Sima was well again.

Return to Shavel

We found out that the Lithuanian consul in Odessa could help us to return to Lithuania. I went to get registered. As the Lithuanian government did not recognise civil marriages Sima and I had to be married by a Rabbi. He went through the whole ceremony and I even walked round the bride seven times. I had to get a ring to put on Sima's finger but she never wore it.

We were due to leave at the end of August and this gave us enough time to get ready. The children and teachers gave us a farewell party. The children in Sima's class gave us a very nice present, a book with songs written by the children. It unfortunately got lost during our wanderings.

We left Odessa in the same type of goods train in which the Jews had arrived from Lithuania in 1915. Our first stop was Kiev. At every town Lithuanian refugees boarded the train. The journey took three weeks. At last we arrived at a small town on the border. We disembarked and sent my parents a telegram. We slept at a local inn that night.

The following day Papa arrived and took us to Shavel by taxi. We had a warm reception. Of our large family only Feigele was at home. Schmuel-Behr had his own room in town. Esther was at school in Kovno⁵⁵; she came to see us later.

Our parents now stayed in the house next to the factory. It used to be the home of our master tanner. Our partner Mr Isserlis lived in the house before the war and occupied the larger part of it now. They gave Sima and me the spare room. There was another bedroom occupied by my parents and Feigele, a dining room, and a small kitchen with a baking oven and a cooking stove. As the Russian saying goes, we were crowded but happy. We heard of all that had befallen the family since my departure in 1919.

55 Kovno in Russian and Yiddish, Kaunas in Lithuanian, was established by the Romans in Nero's time and founded in 1030. It lies at the confluence of two large rivers. Jews first arrived in 1410. They settled in the Slobodka district of Kovno; before 1858 they were not allowed to live in the city. Kovno was a peaceful manufacturing and commercial centre until it was attacked in 1665 by Russia and in 1701 by Sweden. In 1795 it was annexed to Russia. In the 19th century there were several uprisings against Russian rule. After the 1917 revolution in Russia Kovno became the capital of an independent Lithuania.

My parents returned to Shavel with Schmuel-Behr and Feigele in January 1920 and were later joined by Lipa, Norman, and Esther.

Towards the end of 1921 Lipa managed with the help of the Shavel Zionist organisation to get a visa for Palestine. He left by boat with my friend Eliahu Glick. Lipa went to Rehovot⁵⁶ and stayed in the house of our late grandfather Zalman Podlashuk. Norman also went to Palestine but the British would not let him land in Haifa because he was wearing a red tie and was thought to be a communist. He returned to Constantinople from where he got in touch with Mark who got him a visa to join him in South Africa.

I also heard from Mama that our sister Lena had passed away in the United States of America. She left three young children two sons Philip and Daniel and a daughter Miriam Ella.

From October 1922 until our departure for Palestine we stayed with my parents. They were very good to us. Papa especially befriended Sima. She often did not feel well and Papa used to amuse her with his stories and by playing cards with her. While we were in Shavel Sima visited Auntie Sora-Reva and my friends from before the war. We also met uncle Itzik. Sima impressed him so much that he invited us to his factory. This was a special honour. He had never visited our family in their home.

On our way to Palestine

My parents wanted us to stay on in Shavel but we had made up our minds to go to Palestine. They fitted us out with clothes and gave us some money for other necessities. When Papa saw us off at the station he called me aside and said to me, "One thing I would like to ask you: that you should remain a Jew". I do not know what he meant by it seeing that I was going to Palestine to help make it a home for Jews.

We were met by Esther in Kovno. She took us to her lodgings. Then she took us to the Zionist organisation from which we had to get instructions on how to proceed with our journey. On the train to Berlin we had a pleasant surprise; we met my cousin Chloine, uncle Moshe-Rubin's son. When we arrived in Berlin, we hired a taxi and went to the offices of the Zionist organisation. They arranged lodgings for us until the time would

⁵⁶ Rehovot was built on the ancient site of Doron first mentioned in Jewish oral history records and later inhabited during Roman, Byzantine, and Arab periods. In 1890 it was founded as Rehovot by Polish Jews as a township independent of the Baron de Rothschild. It is named after a biblical town in the Negev.

come when the group of immigrant chalutzim would be complete and we would all go together to the port of Trieste.⁵⁷

We finished our shopping in Berlin. Things were very cheap there at the time. We met a lot of old friends from Shavel including Mottel Aronstam's daughter who was then living in Berlin. We stayed for ten days and then left for Munich⁵⁸ where we met the rest of the group.

The Zionist organisation met us at the station and we marched singing to our hotel. We were received there with friendship and fiery oratory. In the evening we attended a banquet in our honour. That evening we slept in a beautiful room at a hotel. Again with songs and good wishes we were seen off at the station. From Munich to Trieste the rail-line passed the magnificently scenic Schwartzwald⁵⁹. We then went through a very long tunnel at the end of which was Trieste. We were met there and walked through nice clean streets to the port where we boarded a boat that left after a while for Alexandria⁶⁰.

On the boat were some people from Austria who were going to Egypt on contract work. One man understood our Yiddish and we understood his German. We became friends. We had many interesting conversations with him. He told us about the work he was going to do and also about himself. The journey passed quickly.

The boat stopped at Port Said⁶¹ and we had an opportunity to see the town. An Arab who was following us must have liked Sima so much that he gave her a pinch on the bottom. She jumped in the air. We visited the bazaar and looked around at all the things that were new to us, especially the women in their veils. We listened to the shouting of the salesmen as they tried to attract the attention of everyone to their wares. When we returned to the ship, we watched the Arabs loading coal and their voices, shrieks, and laughter could make one deaf.

57 Trieste is on a narrow strip of land at the head of the Gulf of Trieste in the Adriatic sea. It was originally an Illyrian settlement. In 177 BC it was ruled by the Romans and in 476 it became a Byzantine military outpost. It then changed hands several times but from 1382 to 1918 it was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. In 1920 after the end of WWI Trieste was officially annexed to Italy.

58 Munich (Munchen in German) is assumed to have been founded in 1158 when a toll bridge was built over the river Isar to serve the ancient Salt Route. It has been the capital of Bavaria in Germany since 1506.

59 Schwartzwald in German and Yiddish, Black Forest in English, is a wooded mountain range in Baden-Wurttemberg in south-west Germany bordered by the Rhine river valley to the west and south

60 Alexandria is the largest city on the Mediterranean coast. It was founded around in about 331 BC by Alexander the Great of Greece. It became Egypt's capital and remained so for almost a thousand years

61 Port Said established in 1859 during the building of the Suez canal was linked to Cairo by rail in 1904.

The following morning we left for Haifa⁶² and arrived there the next day. At last we were in Palestine.

Government officials from the British mandate met us and inspected our papers. We were told to have a bath and our clothing was fumigated. We were then taken to the immigration headquarters and given breakfast.

62 Haifa was built on the slopes of Mount Carmel and dates back more than 3,000 years. It was known by various names and conquered and ruled by the Phoenicians, Persians, Hasmoneans, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Ottomans, French and Egyptians. In the 3rd century the city was a Jewish fishing village and the home of Jewish scholars. Greek speakers living along the coast were engaged in commerce. The German Templers arrived in 1868 settling in a German Colony, the first Jewish settlers came from Romania at the end of the 19th century, and in 1909 members of the Baha'i faith moved to Haifa. When the Ottoman empire collapsed at the end of WWI Palestine became a British mandate.

PALESTINE

The Kibbutz at Tira

We inquired how we were to get to our final destination, the kibbutz⁶³ at Tira where Sima's brother Levi stayed. We were told that Tira was only seven kilometres from Haifa and that an Arab with a cart and horse would take us there. On the way we met a man on a wagon. It was no other than Levi who immediately recognized Sima. We transferred to his wagon and he took us to Tira.

We were given a warm reception. Sima's loud talk and laughter could be heard from far. It was no wonder that they nicknamed her, the loud talker.

As there was no room for us inside, I was handed a tent and told to erect it. Never having handled one before, I did not fasten it down correctly. As our bad luck would have it, it rained very hard that night and the tent was blown down. Fortunately our hosts came to our rescue and took us into the kitchen where we spent the rest of the night. They made a big fire to dry us out. For the following few days, Levi gave us his room. We soon had to move again as we could not stand our neighbours, the bed bugs. This was not a nice experience for newcomers.

Slowly things improved. The kibbutz was situated on one side of the Haifa to Tel Aviv⁶⁴ railway line. On the one side of the railway line was the Mediterranean Sea. It was so near that we could easily run from our room to the sea to have a swim. On the other side of the kibbutz, and not more than one kilometre away, was the Carmel mountain.

On a free day we would go for a walk up the mountain. Sima's friend from Skvira Zipora Twersky worked there in a sanatorium. We used to visit her. One Friday after work when we went to visit her she was not in. She had gone to Haifa. We could not walk back as it was already evening. We nearly froze that night. It was much colder in the mountains than by the sea and we had nothing with which to cover ourselves as her room was locked.

63 Kibbutz – a collective agricultural community

64 Tel Aviv was founded in 1909 by the Jewish community of Jaffa an ancient Arab port city.

We were not members of the kibbutz but only visitors. However, we had to work as hard as regular members. Sima helped in the kitchen and in the farmyard. I was given work on the fields.

The kibbutz had a two-storey building. On the top floor there was a big kitchen with a baking oven and a dining room with a long table at which everybody sat to eat. The dining-room table was also used during meetings to plan the business of the kibbutz. There were a few rooms in this building for members. There were wooden rooms for the other kibbutzniks (people who stay on a kibbutz).

There were several cows on the kibbutz and a dairy. The cowshed also served as a stable for the horses. There was a bull that was kept in a stall in a separate yard. There was a storage place for fodder as well as a small mill for grinding beans for the livestock.

The bull was very wild and was chained to an iron ring in the wall. For mating purposes a cow was brought into a yard and fastened to the fence. Then the bull was brought in to do his duty. Nobody was allowed to approach him but the chaver (comrade) who looked after him would afterwards take the ring and return the bull to his stall. The first time I witnessed these proceedings was when it was my turn to work in the dairy.

I worked on the night shift - from the time the cows were milked in the evening until they were milked the following morning. I had to give the cows their fodder and see to it that they stayed in the cowshed. Early in the morning I had to fill a barrel with water and give each cow a bucketful. Then I had to wake the dairy workers. I had to give each cow some bean meal so that they could eat while they were milked. Then I had to put the milk through a separator. Before I went off duty I also had to wake the man who was to take the milk as well as the vegetables to the mashbir in Haifa. The mashbir was a cooperative shop. It served as a centre for the surrounding kibbutzim, handling their products and supplying them with their needs.

Next to the stable was an open well without a pump. There was a wheel with which to bring the water up one bucket at a time. This water was good only for livestock. Water for drinking had to be fetched from a fountain or from a pump that belonged to the nearby German colony. The land around the farmyard was good for vegetables like carrots and onions. A little further away were fields for mealies, hay, and lucerne.

When there was no work on the farm the kibbutzniks used to deliver building sand to the builders in Haifa. This was also arranged through the mashbir. I had a turn at doing this; it was very hard work.

All the kibbutzim belonged to the Histadrut, a workers' organisation or general trade union. The members of the kibbutz elected a committee with a chairman who acted as a manager. If they could not solve a problem they used to consult a member of the Histadrut.

While I was at the kibbutz a member disobeyed orders given to him by the committee. He was a Sephardi⁶⁵ while most of the members were Ashkenazi.⁶⁶ He was different in other ways too and behaved strangely. He had his own horse and used to ride around evading his duties. He was supposed to be the guard of the kibbutz. The committee called on the Histadrut for help. They sent an arbitrator, one chaver Hartzfeldt, who was a very respected member of the Histadrut. A meeting was called. It was a very stormy meeting and when the accused would not keep quiet after being called to order several times Hartzfeldt hit him in the face. Cursing, the accused left the meeting and the kibbutz. It was all very unpleasant.

Once when I was getting water from the well I hurt a nerve in my hand. I was in terrible pain and had to go to a doctor in Haifa. He took X-rays of my hand and sent me to the Italian Hospital. My hand took a long time to heal. I had to give up my work at the dairy and worked with the vegetables instead. When the time came to cut hay I cut it with a scythe as I had done in Odessa.

I travel alone and with Sima

Lipa lived in Rehovot but I had not seen him since coming to Palestine. So when I got a few days leave I took the train from Haifa to Tel Aviv and met him and Mama's cousin Mordechai Fisher the photographer there. Mordechai had stayed for a short while only in South Africa before leaving for Palestine where his father and brother lived. In Tel Aviv he was very

65 A Sephardi Jew is a Jew descended from, or who follows the customs of, Jews who lived in Spain and Portugal before their expulsion in the late 15th century. This includes the descendants of crypto-Jews (Jews who converted to Catholicism to escape persecution while secretly practicing their faith) who remained behind and who later left for North Africa, Asia Minor, the Philippines, and elsewhere.

66 In the 11th century Jews living in northern Europe called themselves Ashkenazi Jews, after the biblical figure of Ashkenaz. Jews from western and central Europe and those who migrated eastwards were later also called Ashkenazi. They adopted the German language writing it with the Hebrew alphabet.

hospitable to me. He liked Mama very much from the days at her parents' home in Mena. Lipa told me about Norman's baggage that had arrived in Rehovot without Norman.

Tel Aviv was still a small village but building was being undertaken on a large scale and many chalutzim were given work there. In Tel Aviv I met some fellows with whom I had worked on the farm school in Nova Poltavka. One of them had made a big success not from hard work but as an entrepreneur. The other one worked as a builder and was very often hungry. He later left Palestine for Europe.

On my return to the kibbutz the work went on as before. Sima and I visited her friend Zipora in Haifa several times. In Haifa I met Abezalel Aronstam another grandson of Reb Mottel Aronstam. He worked as a bookkeeper in an agency. I also met a young man who had worked with Lipa and me in the factory in Yeletz. He recognised me.

In the summer of 1924 we decided to walk from Tira to Rehovot to see the house of my late grandfather Zalman Podlashuk and to meet his second wife whom we called Mumme and the rest of my family.

From Tira we went to Achlit where we saw the salt pans. There we drank some cold water that was given us by one of the Jewish settlers before continuing on our way to Zichron Yakov⁶⁷ where Sima had friends from her home. We met them in a small forest outside the town. In Zichron Yakov we visited a kibbutz where there was malaria. Our friends advised us not to stay overnight. We went back to the station and spent the night under a hayrick that belonged to the kibbutz. It had been a very hot day and I went for a swim with members of the kibbutz in an earthen dam. Evidently I was bitten by mosquitoes while swimming and was to pay dearly for it later. Lazar Beitz who later married my sister Feigele was at that kibbutz but I did not meet him then.

From Zichron Yakov we were advised to take a train to a station not far from Petah Tikva⁶⁸. It was said to be dangerous to walk there as the local

67 Zichron Jakob at the southern end of Mount Carmel was founded in 1882 by Jewish pioneers from Romania. Many left soon afterwards because of malaria and because the soil was very rocky. When Baron de Rothschild became its patron he built French-style houses, a synagogue with a majestic white marble ark, and established successful vineyards and a winery.

68 Petach Tikva meaning "Opening of Hope" was founded in 1878 by religious pioneers from Europe. It was the first Jewish agricultural settlement in Ottoman Palestine. They were allowed to buy land near the Yarkon river in a malarial swamp but left when they became ill. They returned in 1883 when the swamp was drained with financial help from Baron de Rothschild and were joined by other immigrants from Eastern Europe. During WWI it was a refugee town for the Jewish residents of Tel Aviv and Jaffa who were expelled by the Ottoman rulers for refusing to serve in the their army against the British.

Arabs were hostile. When we came to Petah Tikva, we stayed over at a kibbutz. The next morning we crossed the river Yarkon and arrived in Tel Aviv. We left again the next morning.

On our way we stopped in Rishon le Zion⁶⁹. We had a good laugh there with old friends from Odessa with whom Sima had worked. Sima was often also called the laughing one. The next day at noon we were in Rehovot. Rishon le Zion was a very nice little town but Rehovot was nicer and bigger.

Mumme was very surprised to meet yet another grandson of her late husband. She stayed in grandfather Zalman's old house which was owned by his son my Uncle Sam Podlashuk. Later Sam sold it to his brother Philip. Lipa had lived there since his arrival in Palestine. When Sima and I arrived Lipa was busy airing Norman's clothes something he did often. Norman had nice clothes and underwear.

Mumme gave us her bedroom and went to stay with her son. Not long after our arrival I developed a high fever. The doctor was called and diagnosed malaria. Sima looked after me. I must have got malaria in Zichron Yakov from the mosquito bites. I was in bed for ten days, and when I got up I was very weak. Sima cooked for us. Lipa invited some of his friends who were vegetarians to visit. We grew very close to them and they would often stay overnight on our large verandah. We all ate vegetarian food.

Later Lipa got work elsewhere and Sima received a letter from Levi informing her that their mother and youngest sister Ruth had arrived from Kishinev⁷⁰ in the Ukraine. Sima had expected them to come to Palestine. I bought her a ticket and put her on the train for Haifa. I decided to remain in Rehovot.

69 Rishon le Zion south-east of Tel Aviv was founded in 1882 by ten pioneers from Kharkov. It was part of Ayun Kara an Arab village. Farming was difficult but when Baron de Rothschild took over and underground water was found citrus groves and vineyards were established. The first Hebrew school in Palestine was opened in Rishon le Zion in 1899.

70 Founded in 1436 Kishinev in Russian, Chisinau in Romanian, was part of Moldavia. It was ceded to the Russian Empire after the Russo-Turkish war from 1806 to 1812 and became the capital of the Russian province of Bessarabia. In the late 19th century many Jews settled in Kishinev and by 1900 43% of the population was Jewish. It was the site of the Kishinev pogrom in April 1903. After the 1917 Russian revolution Bessarabia declared independence and joined Romania. It is now the capital of Moldova.

Sima and I separate and I travel alone

We were anyway about to part company. The reason was that since our marriage we had never had any sexual relations. This caused us both a lot of anguish both physical and moral. In Shavel already I had visited a doctor. I also visited a doctor in Berlin who gave me a remedy but it did not work. I could not stand Sima's suffering and suggested that we separate for a while. It was decided that I should stay at Rehovot while she would go back to Tira.

When I had fully recovered from the attack of malaria I went on holiday. My friend Eliahu Gliek was working in Jerusalem⁷¹ building the Hebrew University and he wanted me to visit him. I had some money but decided to walk to Jerusalem. I enquired about the route and worked out a timetable for myself. With a rucksack on my shoulders I set out.

The first place I came to was a little settlement called Gedera⁷². Not far from there was a big kibbutz. From a nearby station I took a train to Jerusalem. I had not realised how high Jerusalem was and how difficult the walk would be.

Eliahu lived in a tent, cooked his meals on a primus stove, and worked very hard preparing stones for the building. He took the day off to show me Jerusalem. We visited historical places: the Mount of King David, the Jerusalem library, the Wailing Wall, and the old city walls. We had lunch in a cafe and returned to his camp. The next morning I took my rucksack and started on my way back, not by train this time but on foot. It was all downhill now.

I had heard that some of the chalutzim from the ORT Hachshara near Odessa lived on kibbutz Eretz Israel which was halfway between Jerusalem and the Emek (Jezreel Valley). I wanted to meet them again. I met a kibbutz wagon with empty milk cans. The driver gave me a lift. I

71 Jerusalem, one of the oldest cities in the world dates from the Copper Age (4000 BC). It was destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times by Jews, Babylonians, Assyrians, Persia, Rome, Byzantine, Arabs ruled by Muslim caliphates, the Ayyubid dynasty of Kurdish Moslems under Saladin, Crusaders, Tartars, Syria, Mamluks, Mongols, Egypt, and Ottoman Turks. There were also revolts, earth quakes, plagues, and name changes. It is a holy city for three religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In 1922 Britain was given a mandate over Palestine (which then included Transjordan). In 1948 Jerusalem was partitioned between the new states of Israel and Jordan and in 1967 East Jerusalem was captured from Jordan and annexed to Israel.

72 Gedera or Hadera was established in 1891 by members of a Zionist group from Lithuania and Latvia

told him that I had some friends who were members of the kibbutz and mentioned their names. He did not know them. The kibbutzniks made me very welcome and showed me round their farmstead and vineyard. I stayed over that night and the next morning continued on my way.

The nearer I came to the Emek, the hotter it got. I passed a monastery surrounded by a tall stone wall. I found a pipe with running water and a tap. As I was very thirsty I first washed my face and then drank the water which was as warm as the air around me. I now headed for the kibbutz Beit Shenan and arrived there in the evening. The custom in any kibbutz was not to ask a visitor where he came from or where he was going. Any visitor was made very welcome. When the evening meal was announced I was invited to partake. Although they were not well off they did not hesitate to share what they had with a visitor.

I met another fellow who was also going to the Emek. We joined forces and this made the walk pleasanter and more interesting. We took the train to Zichron Yakov and visited a kibbutz that made a living growing flowers. From there we went towards the Jordan River. Our road led through Arab villages that were not too friendly towards Jews. However, except for some stone-throwing by youths and some curses we had no trouble and came through the hills to the Emek. Our destination was a station called Afula⁷³.

From there we went to a progressive left-wing kibbutz Tel Josuf where I had a friend called Quint from Shavel. He was married and he and his wife had a baby. They lived in a wooden room near a garden and some beehives. It was his job to look after the beehives. We had a long talk about our past life in Shavel. He showed me round the kibbutz and we stayed overnight. My friend looked very sad not at all as I had known him. Later I learned that he had tuberculosis and that he had died very young.

From Tel Josuf we went to the Kibbutz Bet Alfa which was newly settled by chalutzim from Austria. They still spoke mainly German. The farmstead was very clean. My intention was to go to the Kibbutz Degania which was located at the source of the river Jordan where it comes out of Lake Keneret. I looked round the kibbutz and was then invited to supper and given a place to sleep. From Degania I went to Tveria which is on the shores of Lake Keneret. The town was one of the oldest in Palestine and

73 Afula, founded in the 12th century by Saladin, was formerly a Crusader castle. It was purchased in 1909 by Yehoshua Hankin, a Zionist activist responsible for major land purchases, from the Sursocks, a Greek Orthodox Lebanese trading and land-owning family. The Arab tenants of the villages were evicted to allow Jewish settlers to move in. This sparked bitter disputes between Arabs and Jews. The Arab villages were abandoned, and in 1925 a modern Jewish community was founded by American Zionists.

boasted mineral baths and a small bazaar. It was neglected and the only attraction was the lake.

By this time I was very tired and decided to return to the Emek. I inquired about the shortest way back. I was told that I would have to go over the mountains. There I would find an old settlement and the people there would tell me the way further. I got to the top of the mountains from where one could see the lake and all the surrounding settlements.

I came to a village and inquired from a Jewish peasant how to get to the Emek. I had bought some food in Tveria and sat down next to a haystack to eat. I did not stay there long. I came to another village and knocked at a door of a cottage. A woman came out and I asked her the way. She pointed to Mount Tabor and told me that the Emek was on the other side of it. A little further on I saw a man coming out of a house. He made a living by farming on a piece of land he had bought. He was all by himself. There was food cooking on a fire. He took it off the fire and put it in a big dish and we had a meal. I thanked him for his hospitality and left him.

On top of Mount Tabor in another house I met Zipora Twersky. It was a big surprise. She was working there and after work we had a long talk. I told her about Sima and myself and she told me how things were with her. She was expecting a visitor but she did not tell me who it was. To my further big surprise it was Sima.

I told Sima about my experiences and that I was on my way to Haifa and Tira. The next afternoon Sima and I took to the road together and came to Nahalal⁷⁴ where Sima had friends who asked us to stay. Sima and I slept in different tents, she with the women and I with the men. In the night Sima woke up with a start because she felt a face by her feet. A man had gone into the wrong tent. The next morning we had a good laugh when Sima told us the story. She certainly could tell a story well.

Right after breakfast we were on our way to Haifa via a shortcut we had been told about. Coming nearer to Haifa we found a better road than the one we had been on. That evening I met Sima's mother and her sister Ruth for the first time.

74 Nahalal was established as a moshav in 1921 by kibbutzniks from Degania on land given to them by the Jewish National Fund. They initially settled on a hill near an Arab village away from the malarial marshes while they drained the marshes. They wanted to live in family units on a community farm rather than in a kibbutz where the housing of children and most other aspects of domestic living was shared.

Not long after our arrival in Tira I got sick again and the doctor diagnosed a stomach sickness. I spent ten days in hospital and then returned to my work on the kibbutz in Tira.

In September I again told Sima that we could not go on as we were and that seeing that we could not have a normal life together it would be better for us to part. She wept and asked that we should not part. I was adamant and the next morning I left for Rehovot.

Rehovot

I worked in Rehovot in all sorts of jobs, whatever came to hand. One month I worked in a quarry and then I got work making bricks from cement. Lipa was working in Jerusalem at a quarry that had a machine to crush the stones, a difficult and unhealthy job. He had to give it up. For the rest of his life he continued to suffer from the effects of this job.

I made friends with a family from Germany who bought a house in Rehovot. I helped them to erect a fence around the property and with other things around the house and garden. Their parents and a brother arrived in Palestine and settled in Tel Aviv. They brought with them all their furniture in a container as big as a room. When they unpacked their things they brought the empty container to Rehovot. The young people wanted to use it as a storeroom and I was asked to find someone to help me make it. I had an acquaintance who undertook to help me. We completed the work and I have a photo showing the two of us standing next to the storeroom.

Here I must mention something that has remained in my memory. One night as I went to bed, I heard the alarm. I got dressed quickly and together with others hurried to the town hall. There we were told that a guard in a vineyard had been wounded by Arabs. A doctor who examined him said that he had to be taken to the hospital in Tel Aviv. A lorry was standing in front of the door. A nurse was ready to go too. I got on the lorry to help. The lorry drove off at high speed. I helped the nurse as best I could. When we arrived at the hospital it was light already but the guard was dead. We were all very affected by this. Everyone's eyes were full of tears. We took the body back to Rehovot and all the towns-people attended the funeral.

At about this time we learned that Uncle Abraham-Leib Schwartz and Auntie Deborah had bought our grandfather's house and were coming to settle in Rehovot. Lipa had left Jerusalem and had settled in a colony

called Bat Schlomo⁷⁵ not far from Beit Yitzhak founded in 1940. When the Schwartz family arrived they compensated our Mumme who was now living with her son. He was a builder by trade and Uncle Abraham hired him to improve the house and the verandah.

They also promised to build on another room at the side of the long stand for me to use. I had to make the cement blocks for it. Uncle Abraham provided the cement and the sand. I began working on it right way. I made a mould from wood and within a short time had a hundred blocks ready.

Then I received a letter from Sima saying that she had suffered from her feet and had been sent to a professor in Jerusalem. He had ordered special shoes for her. She had spent the last few months working in Tel Aviv and was going regularly to the Kupat Cholim clinic. She wrote that she would like to see me. She was staying with a friend from Skvira and mentioned her address.

It did not take me long to make that visit. Sima told me all she had suffered during the past year. Poor Sima. I had longed for her all the time. She kept the best news for the last. Her doctor had told her the reason for her suffering and had asked to meet her husband. He said he knew of similar cases. She showed me how she had arranged her lodgings with her friend. She had a mattress but no bed. So I went to my cousin Mordechai Fisher and borrowed a bed from him. I carried it to where Sima was staying.

Back in Rehovot my uncle suggested that I should build a barrack rather than an extra room and that I should use the cement blocks to make a proper foundation. He gave me ten pounds to buy galvanised iron, a door, and a window. My cousin Harry who was visiting his parents helped me build, as did Lipa.

The barrack had two windows and a door. A part was partitioned off for a bedroom. I erected a shower next to the tap outside, covered the sides with sacking and made the roof like a sukkah⁷⁶ from branches. We also put up a verandah. Everything was ready for Sima's homecoming.

I had word from Sima that the doctor would see me between four and five o'clock any afternoon. The following day I took the bus and went to see him. He examined me and told me that I was well. He asked me to

75 Bat Schlomo, a moshav near Zichron Yakov, was established in 1889. It was named after Baron de Rotshchild's cousin Betty Salomon and funded by the Baron

76 Sukkah is a temporary hut constructed for use during the week-long Jewish festival of Sukkoth.

accompany him as he had another appointment and he would speak to me on the way. He said that cases like mine often happened to Yeshiva boys. He told me what to do and promised to tell Sima what she had to do.

When we returned to Rechovot and furnished the bedroom all our troubles were over. We started a new life. I got work and life was normal.

Bat Schlomo

Lipa bought some land in Bat Schlomo. One day he came to visit and told us that there was a vacant house near him. He said that it would be possible for Sima and me to settle there. We were promised a sum of five pounds per month and ten pounds for a horse by the rich Rothschild family who owned the settlement and wanted it developed. We sold our barrack to a friend Vizgordiski, took leave of our aunt and uncle, and started a new life at Bat Schlomo.

We arrived at the end of September 1926. Altogether there were seven families. All the houses were on one street. Our fields surrounded the houses. The first settlers had been given lower land that was easier to work than what we were given. Lipa showed me a piece of land that he was tilling with the help of a hired Arab labourer. The labourer was paid two shillings per day and had to feed himself. He came from a nearby Arab village.

While our house was being repaired we stayed in Lipa's house. He introduced us to his neighbour a doctor who had a nice farmstead, a horse and cart, and some cows. His fields were tilled by Arabs.

We also made friends with the local teacher and his wife. Reb Yankel and his three sons lived across the street from us. The older two did all the farm work. Their father was a good friend and always ready to help us. When we received the money for the horse he took us to the monthly market at Nazareth. He spoke Arabic and knew many Arabs. All we could get, however, for ten pounds was a smallish horse. We tied our horse to the back of the wagon and took him home.

As the rains had not yet come I made a garden in front of the house. At the back of the house there was a piece of land that was full of weeds. While clearing this land to start a vineyard I was bitten by some fly and suffered a whole week from it.

I had a donkey on which I used to ride to Zichron Yakov. Once when I had to go there to buy groceries I borrowed a saddle from Reb Yankel. As I

was inexperienced I did not fasten the girth properly. When the horse saw a snake cross the road it shied and I fell off and hurt my finger. I had to visit a doctor. I also had to visit a doctor when in winter I was caught in a rain and got wet right through. I had to stay in bed for one week on that occasion.

We kept in touch with our friends. Eliahu paid us a short visit once. On another occasion Sima accompanied me to Haifa to buy seed. We stayed with Zipora and met her future husband Naphtalie Zuchman, later changed to Nesiahu.

Not long after this they were married. Our friend Reb Yankel took Zipora, Naphtalie, Sima, and me to the Rabbi in Zichron Yakov. The ceremony was short. When we returned to Bat Schlomo we celebrated the event properly by eating and drinking and dancing till the early hours of the morning. Later that same morning the newly married couple left for Haifa.

With the help of my horse and an Arab I thought I was ready to plough my land. But when it was time the hired Arab did not turn up as he was busy with his own field. I had to do it myself. The gradient was steep and I had to take the stones away before ploughing. The plough was light and my horse small. The job took me two days to complete. Then I sowed my first crop, the summer beans I had bought in Haifa.

Sima was kept busy at home with her daily chores. Once a week she baked bread and it was my job to put it in the oven. We had a special Arab-made oven that was in a cellar outside in the yard. The oven was made of red clay and was about a metre in diameter. It had an opening on top that was closed with a clay lid. I used to put a lot of straw along the inside of the oven. Sima would have the loaves of bread and a pot of meat ready. In the evening I would put it all in the oven and fire the straw. In the morning the bread and the meat would be ready.

In the spring we had a visitor: Uncle Abraham and Auntie Deborah's daughter Carmel. She was a lively young girl and she soon made friends with all the young people in Bat Schlomo. She had a camera and she took a lot of snaps which I still have in our album.

The time came round for harvesting; it was quite hot already. After cutting the oats we harvested the beans. Once more our neighbour Reb Yankel helped us out with his wagon and the harvest was brought into Bat Schlomo. Each farmer had a place to put his harvest that was threshed in a very primitive way. We put a piece of timber on the wheat and a horse was used to pull it across the ears of the wheat. Then it was left so that

the wind could separate the seed from the straw. In the end I had about ten bags of wheat and mealies as well as oats and beans.

We Leave Palestine

I was very tired. Sima did not feel well either so we decided to visit Zipora and Naphtalie in Haifa. There Sima went to see a famous doctor, a Dr Joffe. He examined her and found her very run-down. In her state she could not think of having children. This made what I felt worse.

I do not know who told my uncle and aunt in Rehovot about my health but I learned later that they wrote to my brother Mark to arrange for us to go to South Africa. Evidently Uncle Abraham had discussed the matter with Sima. I had no say in the matter but I asked Mark to state that I was a farmer.

I paid the government a tenth of what I had received from the harvest, cancelled my contract at Bat Schlomo, and we left for Tel Aviv where Levi Sima's brother lived there with his wife Bobzie and their ten-month old baby Nachum. Sima's mother Esther lived with them. Levi found us a place to stay but after a very strong storm we were flooded out. We then hired a room on the second floor of a building. We got ready for our trip to South Africa. Mark asked Uncle Abraham to give us some money on his account and to buy us suitable clothes. I took lessons in English.

We often went to visit Rehovot. On the stand where I had built my little house there now stood a big house of cement blocks. The tenant Vizgordiski and his wife Jehudith later became relatives of ours because Lipa married Jehudith's sister Rivke. We took leave of all our friends. Zipora and Naphtalie came over from Haifa. We posed for photographs with them as well as with Sima's family: Sima's mother, her sister Ruth, Levi, Bobzie, and their baby Nachum. The photographs were very good and I still have them.

At the end of December 1927, we left by boat from Jaffa.

SOUTH AFRICA

We arrive and meet the family

The journey was very interesting and the weather was good as there were no storms. We only stopped at one place, St Helena⁷⁷, and after travelling for twenty days we arrived in Cape Town⁷⁸ at the beginning of February 1928. We said good-bye to the Lerners whom we had befriended on the boat and arranged to meet in Johannesburg.

We were met by a cousin of uncle Abraham-Leib. He helped us get our baggage and took us to a hotel. Feigele was at school in Cape Town. It was a big joy for us to see her as we had last seen her in 1923. We had tea together at a cafe. She treated us to strawberries and cream. We did not have time to see Cape Town properly before Mr Schwartz put us on a train to Johannesburg. We spent about twenty-four hours on the train. Esther met us and took us to a private house of a Jewish widow where there was a room to let.

Our arrival in Johannesburg was not very pleasant. Mark could not come to meet us and Norman was working. We wandered alone around the strange streets. Then Norman invited us to his boarding house on Sunday but the visit was not enjoyable. It seemed my family was ashamed of us because we spoke only Yiddish. It was obvious that we were not urban sophisticates. In Israel our acquaintances had loved Sima's clipped Yiddish accent but here it was different.

Mark eventually met us at lunch on a Sunday at the house of Motte Sacks where Mark felt at home. Motte Sacks was our Bobbe Malke's nephew whom she had helped years before in Shavel. He had done well for himself. He owned a few farms, in one of which Mark was a partner. We

77 St Helena, an island off the west coast of Africa, is a British overseas territory. It was uninhabited until 1502. It became a stopover for ships sailing between Europe and South Africa and a place of exile for opponents of Britain including Napoleon, King Dinizula and more than 5,000 Boer prisoners of war.

78 Cape Town, a port city on the southern tip of Africa and legislative capital of South Africa, was probably inhabited by the Khoikhoi and the San about 15,000 ago. European visitors arrived in the 15th century but only in 1652 were a few Dutch people settled there primarily to produce and supply fresh food to Dutch trading vessels en route to the East. Slaves from Indonesia and Madagascar from the 17th century, French Huguenot refugees in 1688/89, British settlers in 1820, Xhosa labour migrants from the eastern Cape in the 20th century and the remnants of the original inhabitants were prevented by restrictive laws to mingle and inter-marry and still live in segregated race and class-based enclaves.

were welcomed by him and his wife. He liked Sima and her Yiddish. I understood from Mark that he did not think it would be suitable for me to become a farmer. I was not at all pleased with his decision. I again had no say in the matter.

Uncle Itzik's son Sam had also done well for himself and he invited us to visit him in his flat. I heard from Norman that Sam like his father had a weakness for gentile women. He never married. He wanted to find out what sort of a woman I had married and he formed a very good opinion of Sima unlike my brother Norman. He was impressed with Sima's intelligence and the quality of her Yiddish. In Shavel my family thought that Sima was too clever for me. It did not worry me. I was quite satisfied.

Rooifontein

Within our first month in South Africa Norman made me a business proposition. The wholesale business where he worked belonged to Cecil Schwartz uncle Abraham-Leib's brother. A customer who owed them a lot of money had to give up his business in a district where only black people lived. Mr Shmulowitz their traveller planned to take over the business together with the debt. As he was going to that part of the country soon Norman suggested that I should go with him to have a look at the business. What could I do? I consulted with Sima and we decided that as we would not like to be a burden on my brothers I should go and have a look. When I came back we would decide.

I accompanied Mr Shmulowitz to a station on the Springbok flats the other side of Pretoria⁷⁹ and Pienaar's River. It was much hotter there than in Johannesburg. It was the end of February. From the station we took a dust road for about ten miles to a place called Rooifontein a lonely spot where there were two tin shanties, one a shop and the other a storeroom. In front of the shop there was a small cement platform on which was built a little room where the shop-owner Mr Bailey lived. He was an English Jew who understood a little bit of Yiddish but spoke only English. Mr Bailey was a pleasant companion and of good cheer as we found out later.

⁷⁹ Pretoria was inhabited by the Southern Transvaal Ndebele by 1600. It is close to the Sterkfontein caves where remains of early hominids have been found. During the Difaqane refugees under Mzilikazi arrived but were forced north in 1832 by Zulu armies. Pretoria was founded in 1855 by the Voortrekkers and named after the father of their leader. It became the capital of the South African Boer Republic. It was involved in two wars against the British. When the four British dominated white states in Southern Africa were united in 1910 in the Union of South Africa Pretoria became its administrative capital.

Mr Shmulowitz asked me how I liked it. What could I say? I did not like it but as Mr Shmulowitz would be a partner and Mr Bailey would stay with us for a while to acquaint us with the customers I felt that I could learn the business. I had no money of my own and in this respect it would be an opportunity for me. We took stock of the goods in the store. Mr Shmulowitz continued on his rounds as traveller for his company and promised to fetch me on his way back to Johannesburg. In the meantime I had to look around.

On my return I told Sima everything. She would have to stay in Johannesburg until such time as I had built some sort of dwelling for us. I also told Norman what had happened and he said, "Beggars can't be choosers". He promised to do whatever was possible to help. Mr Shmulowitz phoned me a few times but nothing came of the proposed partnership. Nothing could be done; they got me into it and I had to do what I could. Mr Bailey was a big help and kept his word.

A couple of weeks went by and I got a letter from Sima that she could not and would not stay by herself in Johannesburg. I replied that there was no proper place where she could stay. Sima wrote back to me that wherever I slept there would be room enough for her and she repeated that she would under no circumstances remain by herself in Johannesburg. I then asked Norman to see that Mr Shmulowitz brought Sima to me and also ordered timber to build a house. Eventually Sima arrived. We installed a bed in the storeroom and settled down together with the mice and the rats. There were also stinking hides and bags of lime in the storeroom. Poor Sima had to be satisfied because I had warned her.

In the meantime Norman bought some second-hand galvanised iron and timber for us. Mr Bailey took me to a nearby farmer who undertook to put up a house of raw bricks. We agreed on a price and the farmer sent a few Blacks to dig up clay not far from the shop and make bricks out of it. It was very hot and soon the bricks were dry. The timber and the galvanised iron arrived and we built a three-roomed house with a veranda on two sides as well as a corrugated iron annex with a separate shower room and kitchen. The kitchen had an iron stove. There were two bedrooms and between them there was a dining room with three more doors, one to the kitchen and two to the veranda. We put the ceilings in later. At the end of April we moved into the house and that was a big undertaking realised.

It took me some time to get acquainted with the shop's customers. Most were black peasants from the Pedi tribe. Their houses were spread all around at some distance from the shop. Every family had a bit of ground to till. Most were poor but a few were well off. Among the better off was the chief who, together with his two sons, came to meet us. Mr Bailey

introduced us and he had to speak for us. The shop-rent, five pounds per month, was not paid to the chief but to a government department. Once a year the chief would come to the shop for a present which was usually a second-hand jacket. White farmers also came to the shop but we could never satisfy their needs.

Little by little I got used to the new life. I served in the shop and learned to write orders. I opened an account at the bank with a written guarantee for an overdraft from Mark. We ordered a daily newspaper *The Star* which helped us to learn English. I also learned a little English from Mr Bailey. We employed two black men. One worked in the kitchen and the other in the storeroom. Once a week one of them would go to the nearby railway siding at Chester to collect our mail and to send away not only our mail but also the mail from most of the inhabitants of Rooifontein. So we were the local postmaster too.

Business was quiet at first. The busy months were after the harvest. I bought the bean, sorghum, and mealie harvest from the Black peasants. The bags of mealies would be stacked on the cement floor in front of the storeroom. In a good year there could be as many as 200 bags of mealies. It hardly ever rained in winter but we had a big tarpaulin ready in case it did. The mealies were sold to an agent in Johannesburg. We had to hire a wagon to take the mealies to Chester.

We also traded in pigs and chickens. We made a pigsty and a chicken run in the yard. Once a month, or sometimes more often, the pig Jew – I have forgotten his name but that is what we called him between ourselves – used to buy the pigs and the chickens from us. He was a very nice man. His home was in Pretoria.

I had the storeroom cleaned with soap and hot water and built a cooling room out of wire-mesh and covered it with wet sacks. I hired a workman to build an oven not far from the storeroom and I employed a woman to bake white bread. With the help of Mr Bailey we would buy a cow and slaughter it. The meat was kept fresh in the cooling room until it could be sold. The meat was not sold like in town, different prices for different cuts. All the meat was sold at six pence a pound and a big loaf of bread was also sold for six pence. Thanks to Mr Bailey everything ran smoothly. Our customers enjoyed the fresh meat and bread immensely.

Mr Bailey had an opportunity to collect his outstanding debts. Then when things quietened down in the shop he locked himself up in his room and we did not see him for a week. The store-man Samuel then explained to us Mr Bailey's absence. He had received a box of brandy from town. After he had finished every bottle he had a wash and a shave and came out of

his room. He came up to Sima and said, "Mrs Schultz, I had a very bad cold but I am feeling much better now".

Such colds happened a few times. Once he had his orgy in Pretoria. When he came back he gave some money to the black woman with whom he had a child, said good-bye to us, and that was that. He had stayed with us for a little over a year. When Norman heard that Mr Bailey had left he sent a young Jewish man Lenson to take his place. He was a very nice fellow, but inexperienced. However, he quickly learned the business and the local Black language. Unfortunately he often suffered from colds and he used to cough a lot. Norman found out that he had tuberculosis; he died soon afterwards.

It was a time when many young Jewish men immigrated to South Africa and Norman sent us another helper whose name was Moshe Silver. He was a healthy fellow and very good. Both Sima and I were satisfied with him. But he did not stay with us for long.

About this time Zillah visited us with her baby Leon who was not even a year old. Her husband Piet van der Westhuizen used to go around the country with a travelling cinema. He left Zillah and the baby with us for a while and went about his business. They stayed in Pretoria. In 1929 both Esther and Fay came to visit. We then had an assistant by the name of Victor, also a nice fellow who used to sing German songs. Victor's brother worked nearby in a shop in Pienaar's River. He used to visit us often. After one of his visits Victor told us that his brother needed him and he also left us. Once again Norman sent us an assistant one Rosenzweig an experienced shopkeeper. He was quick and handy in many fields.

The police from the village Skilpadfontein about twenty kilometres from us used to visit us often to check for any trouble. One morning I noticed that the lock of the shop was broken and a number of things were missing. I phoned the police. They arrived promptly with their specially-trained sniffer dogs. It did not take them long to catch the thief. They phoned to tell me that he would be appearing before the court in Pretoria. I went to Pretoria and identified most of the stolen items. My uncle Charlie Podlashuk who was an attorney practising in Pretoria was at the hearing. When my name was called he realised that I was his eldest sister's son. We had never met. He inquired how things were and that was that. The thief was sentenced and the goods were returned to me.

When the policeman visited us again I asked him for a license to have a pistol. It was granted to me almost immediately and I ordered it from a traveller. I only used it once when one of my customers pointed out a snake in a tree which I shot. In 1964 I sold it to Leo Norman's son.

A few months after Mr Bailey left I noticed a new shop being built not far from us. It was much smaller than ours but a competitor anyway. I got to know the owner. His name was Mr Judim, a big happy fellow. He was helped in the shop by Percy Weingren a nephew of a Mr Davidowitz. Mr Davidowitz was a rich shopkeeper whom we knew from before and with whom we were friendly. Mr Judim like Mr Bailey used to drink. On top of it he was a gambler. He used the money from the shop to bet on horses and to drink. He also had a motorcar.

One Erev Pesach we were all invited by Percy to join him at a Seder in Pretoria at the house of his married sister. We accepted with pleasure and Mr Judim, Percy, Sima, and I went in Mr Judim's car to Pretoria. Percy's sister welcomed us and Sima's laughter made us all happy and jolly. We used the opportunity while in Pretoria to take some photos.

Mr Judim's business did not last long. He broke the building down and sold the goods. Percy got a new job not far from us and regularly visited us.

Effie is born

In 1930 Sima did not feel well. A traveller who called on us offered to take Sima to a doctor in Nylstroom. The doctor examined her and advised us that she should stay a week or two in Nylstroom under observation. His nurse would give her a room and look after her. I was to go home and he would let me know what was going on. Sima did not like the idea. A Jewish couple who lived not far from Nylstroom invited Sima to stay with them. She accepted and stayed with them for about ten days. Still the doctor could not diagnose anything. A traveller who was going our way brought her home.

But she was not well. We decided to go to Johannesburg. We stayed at a hotel in Joubert Park not far from the station and right away went to see my aunt Pauline Podlashuk who was now a doctor. After examining her Auntie Pauline phoned Professor Gordon-Grant an obstetrician and asked him for an immediate appointment. She took Sima. He examined her and told us that Sima was pregnant and that she could expect a baby in April. He said it would be better if she stayed in Johannesburg until then.

This was good news for Sima and me. With the help of Esther and Auntie Pauline we found a room at a Mrs Reubenstein's house in Yeoville. There was a couple staying with her, one Mofson, whom I had known from home and his wife. Satisfied that Pauline and Esther would take good care of Sima I returned to Rooifontein.

I phoned Sima very often and visited her regularly. I was pleased with the way the Reubensteins looked after her. Sam a black man who worked in the kitchen was particularly kind and attentive to her. Esther visited her often and used to take her to town. One day I got a telephone call from Auntie Pauline and Sima saying that Sima had trouble with her teeth. The dentist said that Sima was suffering from pyorrhoea and recommended that all her teeth be removed. Sima was reluctant to have it done and she wanted to know what I thought of it. Eventually it was done.

On 12 April 1931 I had a telephone call from Johannesburg. Sima had given birth to a little girl at the Queen Victoria Hospital. I left that same evening and arrived the next morning. They allowed me to see Sima and the baby the same day. The baby was big and healthy and Sima had enough milk for her. I visited them every day during my stay as did Esther and Auntie Pauline.

I arranged for Sima and the baby to stay at a boarding house while I returned to the shop. We named the baby after Sima's father and my grandmother. His name was Moshe Ephraim and my grandmother's name was Liebe. So the baby was named Ephira Liebe. I asked Esther to go to the wholesale clothing firms where I had accounts and buy the necessary things for Sima and the baby. When Auntie Pauline and Sima agreed to it I would fetch them. A few weeks later Sima decided to return to Rooifontein with the baby.

Our assistant Rosenzweig talked me into buying a car that was going for a reasonable price. He undertook to teach me to drive. Soon I was driving a second-hand Dodge.

One morning when Effie was about eight months old I opened the shop and Rosenzweig arrived. I went home for breakfast. On the way back to the shop I saw a woman carrying a bag of mealie-meal. She told me she had bought it at our shop for two shilling and six pence. When I came into the shop and looked in the till there was no money there. I called Rosenzweig and I asked him whether he had sold any mealie-meal. He denied it. When I told him about the woman he ran out of the shop and returned with a revolver. He then ran out again saying that he was going to shoot himself. I ran after him and took the revolver away from him. I told him that I did not need him anymore and that he had to leave at once. He went to a nearby shopkeeper and I went to tell Sima what had happened. A little later he sent me a note asking me to return his revolver and his belongings. I agreed and within the hour we were rid of him.

His successor was a man by the name of Israelson who came from Warmbaths where his brother was a bookkeeper. He was a different type

altogether. He came from Russia and kept company with Chinamen who taught him a lot of tricks; but he was good company.

Our friend Percy told us on one of his visits that he had met an Afrikaans girl. He had become friendly with her and she had fallen pregnant. The girl demanded that he marry her because should her parents get to know about it they would murder her and him also. He asked Sima's advice: should he offer her money or just disappear as the land was big and they would never catch up with him. The alternative was to marry her and she was quite willing to become a Jewess. Sima advised him to do the latter. He followed Sima's advice but we never saw him again. We heard that he did well. He bought a business in Skilpadfontein and he also had a farm and a family of three children. He later sold the shop but carried on farming. They settled in Johannesburg where the children were educated.

Israelson left us soon afterwards and we were without an assistant for a short time. A Hollander by the name of Willem, a man in his thirties, then arrived. He stayed with us until 1934/5. We also employed a young Afrikaans girl sent to us by Percy to help us with the baby and Effie learned to speak Afrikaans.

At this time Mark came to visit us with his wife May and their little daughter Liebe. The visit was quite unexpected and a very pleasant surprise. We had not met May or Liebe before. Liebe was two and a half years old and it was the first time that Effie met a little white girl. The visit was a great joy to our Effie. Before their arrival we used to call her Fika. When Mark and May heard that they did not like it and asked us to change it to Effie. We ourselves also preferred the name of Effie. They stayed with us for a week.

The harvest that year was good and we accumulated a lot of mealies. Unfortunately the price of mealies fell. I wrote to my merchants and asked them to have patience but they would not. We had to sell the mealies. We also had trouble with our customers on this account. They expected to get the old price for their mealies. As we could unfortunately not meet their price they boycotted us and did not come into the shop for a whole week. One day they had a meeting in front of the house and demanded that we pay them the old price for the mealies. The same day the chief invited me to a friendly meeting in his kraal. He was there with his two sons and twenty odd of his elders. I explained my position and as best as I could the economic situation in the country. They agreed to end the boycott.

In 1934 Effie became ill with typhoid. We went to see our doctor Dr Goldberg in Pretoria. He put her in hospital straight away. We hired a room from the same Jew who used to buy our chickens and pigs, the pig-

Jew, and Sima remained behind in Pretoria. He and his wife were very considerate and helpful to Sima. When Effie got out of hospital Sima decided that she did not want to return to Rooifontein.

The family got to know about it. Norman who was travelling in the Eastern Transvaal heard of a shop for sale in a little town called Hendrina about thirty kilometres from Mark's farm. I slept at Mark's farm one night and the following morning he and I drove to Hendrina. We met the seller. He told us that he was doing quite well but wanted to move to a bigger town.

Besides the shop that was for sale there were four more shops. Three were run by Jews and one by a Lebanese family. There was a school, a Dutch Reformed Church with a predikant⁸⁰, a bank, a hotel, a cafe and bakery, a garage, and a doctor. It was a proper town with its own municipality but no train station. A small Black population lived in a "location" nearby. Hendrina was in a good farming district.

We told the shopkeeper that we would think it over and that we would be in contact with him soon.

80 Predikant is a minister of religion in the Dutch reformed churches.

HENDRINA

We move to Hendrina

I returned to Pretoria and told Sima about the shop and she agreed to the move. When the travellers who used to call on us in Rooifontein learned that we wanted to sell our shop they quickly found a buyer. With the cash from the sale of our shop we were able to move to Hendrina.

One day at the beginning of 1935 we arrived there in our car followed by a lorry with our household goods. We brought with us an Afrikaans girl whom we employed to look after Effie. She was good to Effie. Her life in Rooifontein with her parents had been difficult and she was happy to go with us.

Next to the shop was a house and a yard. The house had many rooms. The front room was large. Leading off it were three bedrooms and a passage. At one end of the passage was the kitchen and at the other end was a big dining room. Next to the dining room was the pantry and between the pantry and the kitchen was a bathroom. The toilet was outside. On the far side of the yard were the outbuildings: a garage, a stable, and rooms where Black servants stayed.

Actually we only bought the stock and the goodwill. The buildings were rented from a rich Jewish landlord Sam Gordon. The people of Hendrina were very hospitable. The other Jewish shopkeepers called on us, the Afrikaans families came to meet us, and even the predikant invited us to his house. We also met the schoolteachers.

The contrast between our life in Rooifontein and our new life in Hendrina was big and we felt it very strongly. Sima was naturally sociable and liked company. She enjoyed the change. A Miss Krige who had worked as a shop assistant with the former owner of the shop remained with us and we got better acquainted with our customers, both Black and White, through her. Our relationship with the Jewish families was also good. And the local doctor became a good friend.

About my brothers and sisters

In 1936 Fay invited Sima and Effie to visit. She had married Lazar Beitz in 1934. They had a shop in Venterstad near the Orange Free State and Cape border. Their son Henry was four months old. Sima accepted the invitation and I put them on the train in Estantia a small railway siding near Hendrina. They spent a few days in Bloemfontein where Esther and her husband Karl Freund lived. They then spent a few weeks with Fay and Lazar. Effie celebrated her fifth birthday on the same day as Henry turned five months.

Fay and Lazar left Venterstad in 1938 and went to Johannesburg. They had a new baby Judy and they came to visit us. I remember it well as it was the first time that I met Lazar who came from the same town Shavel as I. He had a brother more or less my age with whom I had been at school. Lazar and I understood each other well and developed a close brotherly relationship. Sima and I visited the family quite often in Johannesburg and stayed over on weekends and they often came to us in Hendrina.

We were invited to Norman's wedding. We travelled to Johannesburg and stayed at a hotel that belonged to Uncle Philip. We met Norman's future wife Helen. They were a very good-looking couple.

When we left Palestine in 1927 Lipa was living in Bat Schlomo. Once when he and I visited the family Visgordiski in Rehovot we were shown a photograph of Jehudith's sister Rivke who was then eighteen or nineteen years old. Lipa fell in love with her picture. He asked uncle Abraham to arrange a visa for her to come to Palestine. He wanted to marry her on arrival. And that really came to be.

Lipa and Rivke (later called Reva) lived at first in Bat Shlomo and then they too decided to come to South Africa. They wrote to Mark and he sent them the necessary papers. They arrived in South Africa a year after us. We saw them shortly after their arrival. The family found a business for Lipa with Leibke/Leon Joseph, Auntie Sora-Reva's son as his partner at Aberfeldy a station in the Orange Free State. Leibke remained Lipa's partner for a short while only.

We use to visit Mark and his family often on their farm Mayfair near Davel a very small railway town about forty kilometres from Hendrina. May was very hospitable and their daughter Liebe and Effie became friends. We used to go on Sundays and they used to visit us as well, almost every week. Mark had another farm Kromkrans not far from Hendrina on the

road to Carolina and every time he went there he would buy something from our shop for his labourers.

Once in a while May would invite us over for a weekend. They had a big house and would have big weekend family gatherings. We met Lipa, Reva, and their children, Lazar and Fay with their two children, and Norman and Helen once with their first-born Vicky (later called Tora).

One weekend when we visited the farm May's family was there. May and her relatives spoke only English and Sima could not take part easily in the conversation. So she told some stories in Yiddish. Mark and May did not like it and after supper Mark called us aside and told us not to speak Yiddish. We were greatly distressed and soon left the farm.

On Erev Pesach in 1943 Norman lent us his driver who took us to Bloemfontein to visit Esther and her family. I had not met her husband Karl before. We had a Seder with them. They had two daughters Laurine and Merle. We also visited Lazar's relations who lived in Bloemfontein and we spent two days with Carmel and her husband Isaac Shevel on their farm at Thaba Ntshu near Bloemfontein. Back in Johannesburg we saw Norman's fine house and his wholesale men's clothing business. Lazar was then a partner in this business.

Our life in Hendrina

Business was not bad. We had a good Black assistant in addition to Miss Krige. I also learned to speak Afrikaans. Effie made friends with the children of several Lebanese families in the town. As the children all spoke English Effie learned to speak English.

Liebe went to an English medium school in Ermelo. She stayed at a boarding school in the town. Mark and May advised us to send Effie there as well as she would have an opportunity to be taught in an English school. Effie, like her cousin Liebe, fell in with the idea and we also agreed. In 1938 when Effie was only seven years old she left home. It was very hard on Sima. We used to visit Effie in Ermelo often and we used to bring her home for weekends.

Many Jewish commercial travellers called on us in Hendrina. Norman and Zamel Lewis my cousin Chaye-Sora's son were among them. They were always very welcome. Once a man came to sell a Jewish encyclopaedia. He was none other than Mr Schwarzbard who had shot the Ukrainian Army general Petlura in Paris. We ordered a set from him. We only received a few volumes. The encyclopaedia was published in Vilna and

when Vilna was taken over by the USSR, publication apparently stopped. In 1961 when we immigrated to Israel I donated the volumes I had to the Jewish Old Age Home in Johannesburg.

We had accustomed ourselves to the life in Hendrina and felt at home with both white and Black customers. We had a separate department for the Blacks and also a Black salesman. He was short and was called Picannin. He worked for us for three or four years. Over the weekend he used to preach in a small church in the location and eventually gave up work in our shop to become a full-time preacher. Miss Krige also left us to work for Sam Gordon who in addition to owning land, houses, and shops also ran a hardware store. His customers were mostly rich white farmers. Sima took Miss Krige's place in the business and became a successful saleslady. With Effie at school in Ermelo she had a lot of free time. We also had a good housemaid Bettie Mngidi. She worked for us for twenty-five years.

Hitler, anti-Semitism, and World War II

In 1933 when Hitler rose to power in Germany we were very concerned about the persecution of the Jews. His propaganda against the Jews affected the Jews in South Africa also, particularly through an organisation called the Ossewa Brandwag⁸¹ an Afrikaner extremist nationalist movement.

A German immigrant came to Hendrina and became friendly with Joe Abrahams a Lebanese garage owner. This was just before the outbreak of the Second World War. He tried to become friends with the Jews as well but we did not trust him. When war broke out he disappeared.

Hitler's arrogance and aggression increased. His friendship with Russia was hard to understand. The change from a bitter hatred of communism to a warm friendship was inexplicable. The persecution of the Jews in the occupied territories of Poland got worse. Germany's success in the war and the occupation of Belgium and Holland were worrying. Russia occupied Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as well as a part of Rumania.

We continued to get letters from our parents and from Schmuel-Behr who had married ten years earlier and had a family of two sons. The last letter we received from them was shortly before Hitler declared war on Russia

⁸¹ The Ossewa Brandwag was started in February 1939 as a cultural movement to promote the freedom ideals of Afrikaners. But when South Africa became an ally of Britain in WW II, the organisation sided with Germany, became anti-Semitic, and sabotaged the war effort.

and invaded Lithuania in June 1941. He wrote that everything was quiet, everybody was well, and our parents were in good health. By the time we received this letter Hitler's army had already occupied Lithuania and all communications ended.

Norman made inquiries through the Red Cross and after a long time got a reply. Our parents were killed the day the Jewish people were transferred to the ghetto. We only heard details of Schmu-el-Behr's fate later from Baruch Sheftel, Harold's (Effie's husband) uncle when he came to Johannesburg in 1959. Baruch was in the Shavel ghetto with Schmu-el-Behr. Because Schmu-el-Behr was a cripple he was one of the first to be killed by the Germans. His family was also killed. Their fate was the same as that of the six million Jews annihilated by Hitler in the concentration camps, crematoria, gas chambers, and ghettos throughout the German occupied territories. Through uncle Chatze-Leib and his wife Auntie Sonia who lived in Stalingrad and who had been evacuated further east during the war and had survived the war we found out that fifty members of our family were killed in Lithuania and Latvia by Hitler.

A representative of the Zionist Organisation visited Hendrina and asked us to contribute money to help the victims of German persecution. He described the catastrophe that had befallen the Jews in Europe and exhorted us to give generously. He suggested that we each give a thousand pounds to be paid out over three years. But nobody volunteered. So I stepped forward and signed the pledge. The others had no alternative but to follow suit. Later on there was an appeal for help for the Russian army.

Many Afrikaners were still very anti-British and wanted the Germans to win the war. Many also fell under Hitler's racist spell and supported the Ossewa Brandwag and other anti-Semitic and fascist groups. South African Jews felt their antagonism badly.

Despite the Balfour Declaration⁸² Britain did not allow Jews to settle in Palestine without restriction. In the years immediately before the Second World War Jews tried to leave Germany but were not welcomed

82 The Balfour Declaration of 1917 was a letter from the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Baron Walter Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, for transmission to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. It was widely canvassed and carefully phrased. It stated:

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country".

everywhere. During the war still fewer countries gave them refuge. A boatload of German Jews was accepted into the United States of America. A few boats went to South America but were turned back and we know what their fate then was.

South Africa declared war on Germany in November 1939. Many young Jewish men volunteered for the army. I was already too old for the army but I joined a volunteer command of local residents, the National Volunteer Brigade. While Hitler's armies were successful the propaganda of the Ossewa Brandwag in South Africa got stronger. Only when Hitler's downfall came nearer did the local government imprison its leaders. And only then could the Jews heave a sigh of relief. The war ended in 1945.

Changes in Hendrina

In Hendrina in the meantime there were changes. We bought a new shop and a bigger house and garden opposite the town park and not far from the shop. We employed another shop-assistant called Hester. She was a good saleslady as well as good company for Sima. She taught Sima to knit. Soon Sima became an expert knitter of dresses. In my free time I busied myself in the vegetable garden and with the fruit trees. We had a Friesland cow that gave good milk and brought us a calf every year. We reared one of her calves and when she in turn calved we sold the old cow. We installed a toilet inside the house. Later we also erected a windmill for water, installed electricity in the house, and built on an extra two rooms with a bathroom and toilet and a covered verandah where Effie liked to sleep in summer.

JOHANNESBURG AND ISRAEL

Effie finished school and decided to study medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. After three years Sima was very homesick for her only child so we decided to sell the shop in Hendrina and to move to Johannesburg. Lazar's nephew Jack Beitz bought our business. I joined Norman in his men's clothing factory and wholesale business.

I paid in some money to become a partner. I also loaned the company some money. There was another partner Ruby Swerdlow who travelled for the business. Norman owned a double-story building in President Street. The wholesale department was on the first floor. The stockroom was also there. The material was cut and sewn up on the first floor. Zillah worked there. She looked after the workers and was the pay-clerk. I worked on the second floor where the items were finished off and pressed. In the beginning the business did quite well. Norman earned R600 per month. Ruby Swerdlow and I had a monthly salary of R300. Our salary was adequate.

We had bought a house in Bramley and were quite comfortable. We had our Bettie in the kitchen and Sima became a full-time baleboste. But she met few people and was lonely.

As the factory closed for three weeks at Christmas time Sima and I went on holidays. One year we went to Durban. Another year we went to Muizenberg a seaside resort not far from Cape Town. We visited uncle Philip who lived in Muizenberg with his second wife. She was much younger than he but very sickly. Philip looked young for his years and had a business a few stations away from Cape Town. He used to leave work early every afternoon in order to be home with his wife. He was very attentive to her. Later I heard that she left him to live in Johannesburg with her sister. Once I met her in Johannesburg and she told me that uncle Philip was killed in a car accident.

We also met a Schavler landsman Zalman Osher. I had been friendly with his younger brothers at home. We had gone to the same school. Zalman was a watchmaker. I often used to pop into his shop in Shavel. One evening at the hotel I got a message that someone was looking for me in the foyer. It was Zalman Osher. When he saw me, he cried out: "Chaimela, dos bienst du!" (Chaimela, it is you!). I was glad to see him. He invited Sima and me to a seaside cafe where we met another couple from Shavel. We spent a very pleasant evening with them.

Zalman did not have a very happy married life. He had a daughter who was already independent but he was on bad terms with his wife. Another Schavler landsman whom I met a year later in Johannesburg told me that he committed suicide.

The wife of the couple we met in the cafe was a sister of Chanah Dembovsky, the widow who ran the tiny grocery store in Nikolayev Street in Shavel. She told me that Chanah was living in Johannesburg with one son. The other son was shot by the Russians although he had been a very faithful communist and quite high up in the party ranks. Sima's brother Dovid had met the same fate. I visited Chanah Dembovsky once in Johannesburg. She was the same Chanah but very old. She was taken aback when I mentioned the Bolsheviks forgetting that they were the cause of her son's death. She was so distressed that I had to say good-bye and leave.

In 1951 we went to Liebe's wedding in Ermelo. Norman took us in his car. There was a big crowd and the whole family was there. I had a long conversation with Uncle Charlie whom I had not seen for many years. Liebe and her husband Harold Henen settled in a flat in Johannesburg where their first child Jonathan was born. We saw them quite often.

In 1952 Lipa's eldest daughter Gieta got married and again the whole family was present. It was a grand occasion. Uncle Philip was also there. After the wedding we took him to visit us in Bramley. That was the last time we saw him.

In 1953 we decided to visit Israel. Our visit gave us a chance to meet Sima's relations and friends. We stayed with Sima's sister Ruth who had a house in Givataim. She had two daughters Aviva and Tami. We gave them a fridge as a present; they could not afford to buy one themselves.

When we had left Palestine in 1927, it was under Britain's mandate but now it was our own land Eretz Israel. It had changed a lot in the twenty-five years that we had been away. The towns and cities were built up.

After spending a few days in Tel Aviv we went to Haifa and stayed with our friends Zipora and Naphtalie. They made us very welcome and took us to meet other landsleit (fellow citizens) from Skvira. I also visited my old friend Bezalel Aronstam and my aunt Sora-Reva. She had come to Palestine in 1932. In 1953 Uncle was no more and Auntie was blind. She recognised me by my voice. She took my hand and kept on saying "Chaimle". It was sad to see her in such a state.

She was living with her daughter Miriam and her son-in-law Luova Rabani. They had two daughters. Edna was already engaged to be married and Nili

was still at school. We met Edna again in 1959 in Johannesburg with her husband Natie. In 1970 when Nili was married and had three children she stayed near us in Sandton in Johannesburg. Nili was very friendly with our family. She now lives in America. I still correspond with her.

From Haifa we went to the moshav Tel Adashim near Afula where Levi and Bobzie lived. Their daughter Zipora was already married and lived at a seaside moshav in Michmoret. Levi hired a car and took us on a tour of the northern part of Israel. From the Galilee we visited Tveria, Safed, Tel Hashomer, and Methula⁸³ on the border of Lebanon. We had lunch in a very fine cafe in a very quaint little town called Naharia on the Mediterranean Sea. From there we visited Acco adjacent to Haifa, an old city from the time of the Crusaders now inhabited by Arabs. Then we went to the suburbs of Haifa, through the Emek, and back to Tel Adashim. A few days before we left we also visited Sima's aunt the Dodde Nachuma her mother's sister and her big family.

In 1955 we sold our house in Bramley and rented a flat in Yeoville. But we, and Sima in particular, did not adapt to living in a small flat without a garden so we bought a house in Observatory. Effie, having graduated from Medical School, was working at Baragwanath Hospital near Soweto⁸⁴.

83 Tveria is on the western shore of Lake Tiberias. The city was the seat of the Sanhedrin court in the 2nd century and contains the shrines of several Jewish saints. The Arab population of the town fled in 1948.

Safed was according to legend founded after the great flood by a son of Noah. It was an important strategic and cultural centre for Crusaders, Kurds, Turks, Druze, Muslims, Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews and the British mandate. In 1948 the city had a population of about 1700 Jews, mostly elderly and religious, and about 12,000 Arabs all of whom fled in fighting even before Israel was declared a state.

Tel Hashomer then called Tel Levinsky was established as a moshav in 1934 by academic immigrants from Germany and Poland. During WWII the land was expropriated for a British military base and later to house Italian prisoners of war. In 1948 when the Jews secured the area against Arab forces it was renamed Tel Hashomer after an early Jewish defence organisation.

Methula a town in the north of Israel bordering Lebanon dates back to the 3rd century. The Jewish settlement was founded in June 1896 by families from established farming settlements, non-farming professions and some scholars from Safed. Most were originally from Russia. The purchase of the land was contested and there were violent clashes between the original Druze inhabitants and the Jewish settlers. After WWI the town was also disputed between the French and British mandate authorities. The flow of illegal immigrants across the border precipitated more clashes and even riots from 1936 to 1939.

84 The Imperial Military Hospital Baragwanath, named after John Albert Baragwanath, was built in 1941 during the Second World War to serve as a British Military Hospital. After the war it catered exclusively to non-Whites. Soweto a very large ghetto adjacent to Johannesburg was established in 1904 following an outbreak of plague as a dumping ground for Blacks evicted from White residential suburbs, industrial and commercial areas and later also from the city's Black freehold townships.

Effie marries and we leave for Israel

Effie and Harold were married January 1959. We celebrated the wedding in our house in Observatory. They and Harold's sister Dolly, who was not well, stayed with us. After a few months Sima and I moved out and went to stay in a boarding house in Berea.

About this time I decided to leave the business and return to Israel. Sima was against it. I explained to her that business was not good and the sooner we left the less money we would lose. We had enough funds to keep us going to the end. I was already sixty-four years old and Sima was seventy-two. Sima agreed and we arranged to leave early in the next year. Lisa our first grandchild was born on 17 October 1959. We moved back to the house in Observatory for the last three months of our stay in South Africa.

Before leaving we met a couple from Israel. They had an apartment in a cooperative building in Ramat Gan. We rented it as it stood with all the furniture and appliances. Our things were packed and we were ready. We said good-bye to our relatives and friends and took the plane for Israel.

Sima's family met us at Lod airport. Again we stayed with Ruth in her house. The next morning, we fetched the key of the apartment in Ramat Gan. The very same day we moved in. The flat had everything: bedding, blankets, and in the kitchen there were all the appliances that we needed.

Before leaving South Africa Edna had given us her parents' address. After we were settled in our new home we set out to visit Miriam and Luova but the driver could not find the place and brought us back. I don't remember how Miriam got to know about us and our address but she came to visit us and took us to her home. It was just around the corner from our flat! We had a good laugh about the man who drove us round and round. Since then we were frequent visitors at her house. Both Miriam and Luova were very attached to us and we felt at home with them.

The shops were not far from us. This made our shopping easy. But Sima was homesick for Effie and Lisa. One day Lily Effie's friend with whom we too were friendly visited us with her husband. Sima's longing for Effie and her Lisa was such that she complained to them and blamed me for bringing her to Israel. So instead of finding the usual ebullient Sima they met a woman full of complaints and heartache. When they left I accompanied them to the road and explained that Sima had her family

around her and lots of friends from her hometown. I was sure that she would soon settle down and would be her old self again. And so it was.

Shortly after our arrival, our old friends came to visit. The first was Chaim Rom. We were together in the same cheider⁸⁵ and I used to play with him and his brother. After ending school we still met in town. We re-established our friendship now. Schlomo Aronstam and Eliahu Glick came to see us. Sima's family visited often. We were invited out often and Sima did it wholeheartedly. Life became more interesting and that helped to appease Sima.

We decided to buy our own flat. We chose one on the ground floor of a new building. It was also run on a cooperative basis. We bought furniture, a fridge, and a washing machine and ordered a stove from England. We settled in and were ready to receive visitors again.

There were many shops up the road and it did not take me long to orientate myself. Our neighbours came to get acquainted and we became friends. I planted flowers and vegetables in the garden as I always liked this sort of thing and I now had enough time for it. We joined two libraries: the local municipal one and the English library at the American embassy in Tel Aviv.

Back to South Africa

One day we got a letter from Effie asking us to return to South Africa. She had two children now and she found it hard to look after the children and to work. In May 1962 we left the key of our flat with Luova and empowered him to let the flat until we would come back.

Effie found a flat for us not far from the house in Observatory and we settled in. We used Effie's very small Fiat car to travel between our flat and her house. We would spend the day with the children while Effie was at work. We had to look after Lisa who was already two and a half years old and David who was ten months old.

We renewed our friendship with our Hendrina friends all of whom by now also lived in Johannesburg. We visited them and took part in all their simchas (celebrations).

85 Cheider – a traditional elementary school teaching the basics of Judaism and Hebrew

To Israel and back

We left for Israel again in 1964. In 1968 Sima broke her hip and an operation to fix the fracture was not successful. We found it difficult to manage in Israel. We made the flat over to Sima's sister Ruth and left Israel for good.

Since our return to South Africa my life has been very uneventful. We moved into a flat near the hospital where Effie worked so that we could be near her and also near the hospital where Sima was receiving physiotherapy. Later we moved to a flat in Sandown a suburb in Sandton near the school that Effie's children attended. They visited us every day. Sima told them stories and I read to them and played chess with them.

We moved home again in May 1985. The flats in Sandown were to be converted into offices. Our new flat was near Fay and Lazar's flat.

Sima's last years were very uncomfortable. She had become bedridden in 1980. She continued to read the daily newspaper and books until six months before her death in December 1985.

I stayed alone in our flat for three months and then I went with Effie to Israel for a month. Five months after our return, I obtained a place in Our Parents' Home a home for Jewish aged in Johannesburg.