

Chapter 20: The Reunion

It was the 5th discus throw at the 1960 Olympic trials in Israel which changed the path of my life to one of studies, inventions, unbelievable experiences, and love. Without that throw, I simply would have become an excellent physical education teacher at Wingate, and I would not be writing this book. What gave me the courage and the confidence and the drive to make that throw? The answer, in retrospect, were the eight years at Hadassim. Those years produced enduring friendships that were a lifeblood to me, academic challenges and interests that survive to this day, and tenacity to confront and resolve every situation that came my way. The discus and shot put throw that made my

life are shown on page 526. I broke the Israeli records in each event and this qualified me to compete for Israel in the Olympic Games in Rome, 1960. Seven years of training in Hadassim made me the athlete and tenacious individual that I was then and remain today.

Fifty-five years later, I looked back to those formative years of my childhood and remembered all of the people I knew at Hadassim. The teachers were like parents to us, and the other students like brothers and sisters. We had been a family and not recognized it as such. Our class, the Class of 1958, had fused each individual into a unique family. Although I had traveled to Israel many times to meet with





*Discus and shot put Olympic trials for 1960 Olympics
I broke both Israeli Records*

Hadassim friends during the intervening years, we had never had a gathering of our entire class.

I have described many of my childhood experiences at Hadassim in a previous chapter. Even after fifty years, many of us were still in touch with each other. Others had slipped away as though engulfed by fog, not dramatic departures, but slipped away and out of touch. I often remembered those

*The Tree of Hadassim with Yakir
Sitting on the top ready to jump*



days, the teachers, friends, and experiences during those moments when thoughts meander randomly without guidance or concentration. I had flashes of thoughts about someone or something which had occurred at Hadassim. There were frequently little tickles of thoughts and memories of experiences. I had photographs of many of my friends and some of the historical photos.

Suddenly, I experienced one of those phenomena that occur when you least expect it. It was a day like every other day, with no rational mental guidance, when my random thoughts jelled into an idea. I realized that what I really wanted was to organize a reunion for the entire Class of 1958. Not just a small picnic at a local park but a giant Hollywood Oscar presentation-sized gala for everyone in my class.

I broached the idea with Ann and she thought it was terrific. We had spent the previous year organizing our wedding, so we felt confident that we could do something as wonderful for my classmates. We decided to organize the reunion, hire the appropriate staff to assist us, and pay all the expenses. We would need someone with skills similar to our previous “wedding coordinator.” Someone who knew how to organize a gala event in Israel and could work under our guidance. We wanted the event to be held in a fantastic hotel. We wanted everyone in the class to attend and they would be allowed to have one person accompany them, such as a spouse or friend. We wanted the event for our class only, not an enormous, out-of-control picnic where people brought their entire family!



Hadassim historical photographs

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1263>

The evening would begin with a meet and greet with all our class members and their companions. Everyone would be given a name tag and a program at this time. It would be followed by an elaborate and delicious dinner. Then we would have an evening of organized entertainment, followed by the distribution of a special memorial book which would have to be written and published in advance.

While Ann and I were beginning these preliminary steps, I realized how little any of us actually knew about each other prior to our arrival at Hadassim. Whether we should have learned about what each of us had experienced before our arrival is up for debate. The Holocaust survivors certainly did not want to talk about how they had seen their parents killed. Nor did they want to discuss the details of their dangerous survival in often unbearable conditions. The children with family problems, such as myself, did not want to discuss the problems we had at home, our feelings of abandonment, or difficulties with parents. Those who were there because their parents were in the government or were privileged in some way could not understand why they were sent away from their families to live at Hadassim. Because of the difficulties that each of us had experienced, all of us had maintained silence about our past life before arriving at Hadassim. It was as though we were born and our lives began on the day we arrived at Hadassim where we flourished under the loving care and directions of Rachel and Yirmeyahu Shapira.

There had been a strategy behind mixing these three groups of children together. The Canadian women's group of WIZO planned with Rachel and Yirmeyahu Shapira, the deans of Hadassim, to provide an environment to help each

of these disparate groups of children. The three backgrounds that needed to be integrated were: (1) the rich kids who must grapple with the realities of others' struggles; (2) the troubled kids who needed to grow in a positive environment and learn that success would result only with effort; and (3) the Holocaust survivors who could encounter a new, healthy, open world and develop a free and thriving Israeli identity. In the end, these children of the Holocaust became Israelis, while the troubled kids transcended their backgrounds and ascended to the top strata of their professions, and the privileged learned to live uncorrupted by their bounty.

At the time we were students at Hadassim, the actuality of our existence was about the present and the future, but

Rachel and Yirmeyahu Shapira, deans of Hadassim, with WIZO representative





Jewish refugee children gathered in the US zone of occupation in Germany

nothing of the past. We were young people not focused on looking backwards. We were in the present and we were building our futures.

Now, after all of these years, I wanted a memorial book which would tell the story of each child before they had arrived in Hadassim and what they had done in the intervening years. I wanted to distribute this book to everyone attending the reunion.

Ann and I continued to think and plan the reunion at our home in California. We realized that soon, we would need to travel to Israel to find the “coordinator,” arrange for the hotel, and solidify other associated details. I also needed to find someone who could interview our classmates and write their stories in a book.

I remembered one of my classmates, Uri Milstein. In the 10th-grade literature class, we were tasked with weekly compositions on a subject chosen by the teacher. Each Sunday, the class teacher would randomly select two of the pupils to read their composition in front of the whole class. I would usually calculate the probability of the teacher calling me, so for a few weeks, I would take the chance of not writing the

composition and use the time to practice throwing the discus! Luckily, I was never caught unprepared so, when I was chosen, I had the composition ready.

However, Uri experienced something quite different. One week we had been assigned to write a composition about Israel’s War of Independence in 1948. That was one of the weeks I had not written a composition. But I was happy to listen to what the others had written. Uri was selected that Sunday to read his composition. It was a fabulous presentation, with details, dates, and amazing stories from the War which we had learned throughout the course. Uri’s composition was so good that, when he had finished reading, the teacher asked Uri to give him the notebook so we could publish it for everyone at Hadassim to read. Uri said that he did not want to turn over his composition. However, the teacher insisted and threatened to give him a zero score if he refused. When the teacher approached Uri and extended his hand to receive the notebook, Uri handed it over. The teacher, Michel Kashtan, thanked him and opened the notebook. The notebook consisted of blank, empty pages. This amazing “composition” had been delivered extemporaneously rather than

"כאן היינו יחד, משפחה אחת..."



הגברים שלנו, ימי הבלורית והתואר



טוב לו לאדם ההולך על שניים,
אך טוב יותר לזה שרוכב...



First group of children in front of the Hadassim gate in Israel

read. Needless to say, Uri was in trouble and had to write his entire speech as an essay or receive a zero grade in the class. I remember how riveting the story had been as Uri wove the dates, people, and events into an exciting narrative. After it was revealed that his “composition” was unscripted and spontaneous rather than written, I was even more amazed.

That incident had fascinated me for years. I thought that, if I wanted to write a book with all of the stories of the students in our class, no one would be better for this task than Uri Milstein. Since I had not been in touch with Uri for the past 50 years, I had no idea where he was or what he was doing. My friend, Hillel, on the other hand, had kept in touch with many of our classmates over the years. I was sure that Hillel would know how to contact Uri or would find someone who could. When I called Hillel, he told me that Uri was a very famous writer and, in fact, had written more than 20 books which were quite popular in Israel. This was music to my ears since I really wanted to find someone to write the stories of our classmates and, with a history of published books, I knew that I should find Uri. Within a few days, Hillel gave me Uri’s phone number.

I called Uri from my home in California. “Hello Uri, how are you?”

“Who is this?” he answered in typical Israeli gruffness.

“This is Gideon Ariel, your classmate from Hadassim.”

Uri remembered me immediately and was very excited with this renewed contact. We had a long conversation about the past and present. Then, I said, “Uri, I must have a book about the kids at Hadassim. No one knows anything about anyone’s past nor do we know what happened to them after we all left Hadassim. When we were students together in those days, we only knew the present and looked towards the future. Now is the time to amplify what we know about each of our friends and classmates. My plan is to write a special

memorial book about each individual and hand the book to each of the ‘kids’ at the reunion that I am planning for May of 2006.”

At first, Uri thought it was an impossible task to accomplish in such a short time, but he agreed to try. We settled on the price I would pay him to write and publish this book. I told him that I wanted a hard copy, first class book printed on the best paper and with lots of photographs. He told me this quality of book would be expensive. I told him that this was not a problem and to let me know where to send the checks.

After a week of research, Uri told me that it would take eight months to complete the job, he would have to interview each one of our classmates as well as some who were above us and below us. Because Hadassim was small, we were all affected by students ahead of our class and behind it, so Uri suggested that we include some of those individuals who had significantly impacted our class, including many of the teachers. I agreed, and the job began. We called the book, “Oasis of Dreams.” Our book is available online, in English and Hebrew, via the link on page 531.

Step one had now been implemented with Uri working on the memorial book. At this point, Ann and I needed to go to Israel to organize the other aspects of the reunion. My plan for the reunion celebration was for a date in the month of May 2006. May is nice month because the weather is not too hot, people will not have left the country for vacations, and it is between the Jewish holidays of Passover and Shavuot.

Very shortly after Ann and I arrived in Tel Aviv, we met with some of my friends who wanted to help with the reunion. Before our arrival, I had let them know my intention of hiring a “coordinator” to organize and conduct the tasks. I asked my friends to try to find some candidates for this job. To organize the reunion which I envisioned, I would require a professional who would, of necessity, be an Israeli and would have to be a genius at handling this monumental task.

We met several potential “coordinators,” but the woman suggested by Safra was the one who was most impressive. Her name was Dalia Guttman and she had organized many union events as well as honorary affairs for government officials. One event which she had organized was a gala affair honoring the retirement of General Ariel Sharon. One of my friends, Ilana Geva, had attended this event and her recollection was that it was marvelous. Clearly, Dalia was skilled at her profession.

Ann and I decided that of all of the people we had interviewed, Dalia was far superior to the other ones. She expressed a willingness to execute the task as we wanted it done and not be diverted by other input. I had emphasized that we were making the decisions regarding the activities of the reunion. She should listen to any of the class members who had suggestions, let us know what the ideas were, and then the three of us would make the final decisions. The reunion had been my idea and, like the Frank Sinatra song, was going to be done my way.



The Oasis of Dreams
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1264>



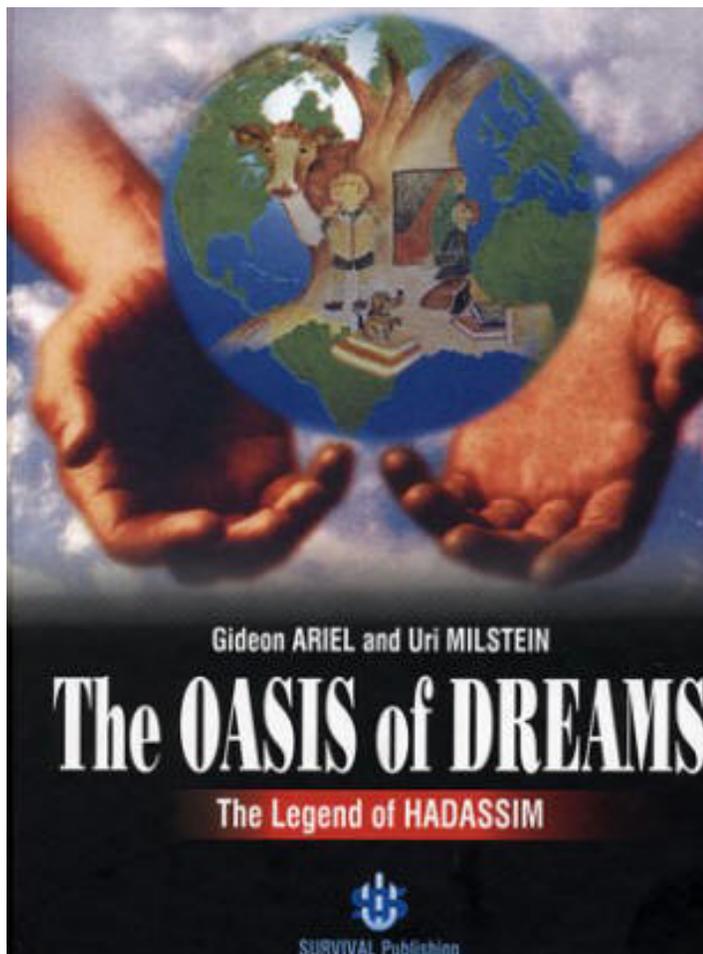
Children of the Holocaust by Uri Milstein
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1265>



Children of Distress
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1266>



The Princes:
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1267>



I learned that Dalia Guttman had worked in television for many years before she became involved in producing events such as my reunion. For more than 25 years, she had worked in production, editing, and executive positions at the Israel Broadcasting Authority including “The Voice of Israel” and “Channel One.” Among her achievements, she headed the Mabat culture desk, produced a weekly cultural magazine, and in her most recent position at Channel One, served as the director of programming.

As an independent producer, Dalia Guttman had produced films on the disengagement in Gaza and the defense industry for the Ministry of Defense as well as features for Channel Two’s Friday night news program. In 2007, the year after she had organized our reunion, she produced “Tehran Children,” the first documentary ever made of this poignant episode in modern Jewish history.

During our meeting to sign her contract, I said, “Dalia, I have two requests for you when organizing this reunion. First, this reunion is going to be the best meeting you have ever organized. The second request is that you will never be able to organize a better one in the future.” She laughed with me at this level-of-excellence requirement and, so, our work towards a perfect reunion began.

Another idea I had was to make a movie about Hadassim: “Then and Now”. When I brought up the idea with Dalia, she became very excited about the project. She had been a film



Hadassim, my family
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1036>

producer before she began her career of producing events. She said that she knew exactly who to approach to do the movie, Yehuda Kaveh.

Yehuda Kaveh is a documentary film director. In his career in Israeli television, Yehuda Kaveh has directed more than 40 documentary films on a wide range of topics relating to Israel's political history, the Israel-Arab conflict, Jewish history, as well as the nation's artists, poets, and songwriters. As an independent director, Kaveh directed the "she produced "Tehran Children," with Dalia Guttman and David Tour. Kaveh was currently teaching at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Haifa University.

Dalia suggested that the movie incorporate the early years of Hadassim and Israel from film archives for what we were calling the "then" segment. For the current, or "now" portion, two boys and two girls from the class would be interviewed. In this portion of the film, the four former "children" would return to Hadassim and describe their life there. The completed film would join these two segments of our life in Hadassim.

Following the discussion about the movie, we addressed who the participants should be and how were we going to find all of them. My goal for the reunion was to include anyone who had been in our class, including the ones who were not enrolled for the entire eight-year period.

Fortunately, some of my classmates, including Hillel, Alex, Safra, Uri, Rachamim, Eli Shabo, and Joseph, volunteered to find the names and addresses of these far-flung

Hadassim graduates. Their diligent efforts were fruitful as they located many students throughout Israel and beyond. They found one classmate living in a suburb of Paris, France while another one had emigrated to Canada. They even found one girl who had gone to India, changed her name, and was living in Hawaii. Another classmate, Lazar, had moved to New Jersey in the United States. However, since no one had been able to find him, everyone assumed that he was dead. It was quite a relief when he was located alive and well after all of those years! We did our best to find every one of our class. I wanted everyone who had been a member of our class to be invited.

I emphasized that each class member could attend with one other person. The person could be a husband, wife, friend, or anyone they chose. This reunion was focused on the class members, not their extended families, so we had to very specifically explain in the invitation who could attend. We also made it clear that people needed to respond before a specific date so that Dalia could inform the hotel about the number of people that would be attending and plan dinner arrangements accordingly.

In addition to the students, I wanted to invite as many teachers and staff members as we could locate. My thinking was that Hadassim was not just a school, but had been a family of young people, teachers, and staff members. I wanted all of these people, the whole family, to come together to celebrate. Now our net had been cast wider but Dalia was certain that we could find many of these people through the various connections that Israelis have with each other.

One of the first decisions that Dalia wanted us to make was for the master of ceremonies. She explained that an event like the one we envisioned had to include a strong, forceful "leader" as master of ceremonies. Otherwise, the event would become a "free for all" with competing interests struggling to take over. Dalia's suggestion as the perfect person as our master of ceremonies was Chaim Kenan. Chaim had been one of the students at Hadassim in a grade or so behind ours. Dalia had worked with Chaim's previously and, in her experience, he was the perfect choice for the role. The job of the master of ceremonies required knowing how to control the flow of events, when to ease up, when to crack down, and how to execute these tasks so that everyone was happy. Without this ability to judge the situation and adapt accordingly, we could have a real mess of a meeting. I readily agreed. Not only did we need a master of ceremonies, but I would not have to play the role of the "bad guy" when someone wanted to talk longer than his or her allotted time or change the program in some other way. Dalia said she would work on securing Chaim for this job.

We were making good progress, from my point of view, to make this reunion a reality. The next step was to select



Dani Dassa

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1268>

and book a hotel to host the event. My first choice was the Dan Accadia Herzliya Hotel. This serene enclave is perched on a cliff, directly overlooking the Mediterranean Sea and is located on the seafront of the upscale town of Herzliya. Herzliya was named after Theodor Herzl who was an Austro-Hungarian journalist, playwright, political activist, and writer. He was one of the fathers of modern political Zionism. Herzl formed the World Zionist Organization and promoted Jewish migration to Palestine in an effort to form a Jewish state (Israel) in the late 18th century.

Herzliya had developed into the home of many of the high-tech enterprises that have made Israel famous. A few steps down from the Accadia Hotel's terrace, a path takes you to a tranquil and seemingly endless shoreline. Herzliya's sandy beaches are the perfect place to catch some sun or bathe in the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The Accadia Hotel is a self-contained resort that allows indulgence in a host of leisure-time activities without leaving the property.

In addition, the Accadia Hotel is near the Herzliya Marina which is the city's main entertainment hub. In 1995, the marina was declared an international port and was the

biggest and most modern marina in the Mediterranean basin with an international seaport of 700 moorings. It hosts national and international sailing events and has many water sports activities. Around the marina, there are inviting restaurants and bars, as well as boutique shops. There is also the Arena Mall which specializes in fashion and accessories.

For our purposes, the Accadia hotel would be a perfect venue. It was close to, but not inside the bustling city of Tel Aviv, where it can be difficult to drive and park. It had a beautiful location, could accommodate visitors who wanted to stay at the hotel, had all of the facilities necessary for a group our size, and it had delicious food.

Dalia, Ann, and I met with the head of the conference and meeting staff. We explained about our reunion needs. He showed us the options available for a group our size. We selected the patio for the initial greetings, the indoor room for the buffet dinner, and a large meeting room with a raised stage for the after-dinner show and entertainment. We arranged to have time from 4:00 pm until 1:00 am. Everyone assumed that this would be long enough. I guess they forgot



View of the hotel with the patio designated for our reunion

that there would be 200 Israelis that had not seen each other for more than 50 years!

The last item to decide was about food choices. The conference manager explained several alternative menus and the associated prices. After patiently listening, I asked about the food served in their restaurant. The man explained that it was better and, obviously, cost more. I told him that I wanted the same, or even better, food than they served in their best restaurant. The manager's answer was that the price would be much higher than normal. My response was that this reunion was special and "higher than normal" so I wanted the best food regardless of the cost.

By this point, we had accomplished most of the important preliminary details for the reunion. Uri and I had met several times and made some decisions about the final appearance of the book. We arranged to stay in touch regularly so we would be able to finish it in time to distribute it at the reunion.

Dalia and I had a list of things to accomplish. In order for us to keep in touch and be able to handle situations quickly, we arranged to communicate via Skype. It was quicker and simpler to ask questions, discuss situations, show pictures or diagrams on a computer screen. Dalia could show me the two choices she recommended for the invitation, for example, and I could tell her about another person that might be able to help her. It was a fantastically useful tool and saved me from having to fly to Israel many more times than I had previously anticipated.

One of my self-imposed jobs was to collect as many photographs as possible. These could be incorporated into the book Uri was writing or in other ways which Dalia might need. Not only my photographs were compiled, but any con-

tributions from other class members were included in the assembly of photographs.

After we had returned to California, I called my old teacher, Dani Dassa, to let him know the dates of the reunion. I told him that everyone that I talked to in Israel had made me promise that Dani would be there! He assured me that he and his wife, Judy, would come to the reunion and would even stay at the Accadia Hotel.

The months passed more quickly than I could have imagined. I had to travel to Israel several times to participate in our movie, "Hadassim: Then and Now." The "four children" were Hillel and me for the boys, and Nurit and Iris for the girls. As we walked around Hadassim and discussed our days there, remembered events and people, we were either doubled over in hysterical laughter or crying.

May arrived and Ann and I flew to Israel. We checked into our hotel and immediately contacted Dalia. She had a list of items that she needed to discuss with us and to finalize the details of the reunion day. We met for dinner and I agreed with everything she suggested. After all, she had accomplished this entire meeting in just 7 months. I knew how difficult this venture had been since working with Israelis is like trying to herd cats.

Our teacher and friend, Dani Dassa, had arrived in Israel the day after Ann and I had. He and his wife, Judy, were staying at the Accadia Hotel, so we arranged to meet them for breakfast at a beautiful, near-by restaurant, Terrassa, which prepared delicious Israeli food. Dani and Judy are shown on page 536 as we waited for our coffee:

As I sat across the table from Dani, once again in Israel, I experienced waves of emotions from my past background with Dani at Hadassim, as well as a lot of excitement about

the upcoming reunion. The last time he and I had been together, sitting beside the Mediterranean Sea, was 1956.

Finally, May 20th dawned. I could not believe that the reunion was happening in just a few hours. All of the planning was completed. The anticipation of seeing friends and teachers and the celebration of the most important time in the lives of so many people was only a few hours away. I was a bundle of nerves. I do not even remember putting on my tuxedo or Ann fixing my tie. Everything was a giant blur until we arrived at the hotel ahead of all our guests and friends.

From this point, the reunion became a fantastic experience that blended the youth of our childhood and the wisdom of adulthood. The Class of 1958 began to arrive, a few at first, and then a flood. The first step was for them to sign in at the registration desk and receive their name tags and a program of the evening's events. The class members had blue lanyards with their name tags. The other, non-class attendees had name tags on white lanyards.

The joy and excitement of the "kids" was incredible to see. Smiles, screams of joy, shocked recognition, the entire gamut of emotions was evoked with each new individual as they arrived. Regardless of whether the student was currently living in Israel or had arrived from some far-flung corner of the world, riotous enthusiasm prevailed. The patio welcoming room became packed with people and the hubbub escalated with each new encounter. The time set aside by Dalia for people to arrive, receive their name tags and program, was one hour and a half. The plan was for everyone to then go inside for dinner.

The time came for the group to go into the dining room for the meal. However, after three attempts by the hotel staff to alert the group to come to dinner, Dalia went to Ann in a panic! She needed help in getting the people inside while the food was still delicious and to keep the program schedule intact. If we fell too far behind on the timetable, we would



Hadassim historical photographs
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/2783>

An hour before the beginning of the reunion





Hadassim Class of 1958

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/4037>

not be able to complete the entire program. This was the first time in Dalia's and the hotel's experience that Israelis had not rushed for the food as soon as it arrived. Not only had they not made a dash for the dinner, they had not even responded to the repeated requests for them to go to eat.

Dalia, Ann, and I circulated among the guests, and urged them to go into the dining room for dinner. After we had some of them moving in the right direction, it was easier to guide the rest of the group. Of course, the conversations continued non-stop throughout the meal. There were many positive comments about how tasty and delicious the food was, and the numerous trips to the buffet tables proved the point.

Dani Dassa and his wife Judy at Terrassa Herzliya



After the dinner, the group was directed to the room for the organized show we had prepared.

The show began with an introduction by the master of ceremonies, Chaim Kenan. He had been a student at Hadassim although a member of the class behind ours. He began by having everyone turn off his or her cell phones which was not something that would have even been contemplated in the 1950s. Then he told everyone that there were tissue papers at each place on the table because everyone was going to need at least one before the evening was over.

Chaim Kenan explained that he had turned down the job as master of ceremonies at least three times. "Why should I do it?" he had asked Dalia. They were older and seemed so much bigger than I was. I was not part of their groups, sports, or classes. What did any of this mean to me? Then I began to think about Hadassim as a school and as a special place for children. I realized that all of the Class of 1958 had grown to be leaders in every realm of life: business, military, government, education, professional, medicine, and so on. They had achieved these levels because the school and environment at Hadassim had given them the tools and the confidence to try and persist until they succeeded. Chaim said he realized that he, too, had followed in this tradition and realized that he wanted to be a part of the celebration of this class and this school.

Following Chaim's introduction, the program began with the short movie about Hadassim with Hillel, Iris, Nurit, Miriam Sidransky, and me. We were laughing and crying together in the film and now, during the reunion, as well. Some of the segments of Hadassim in the early years were actually filmed by the famous and prolific producer, Steven Spielberg, which Dalia and Yehuda Kaveh had found in the Israeli film archives.

I had been especially amazed to discover a link between Mr. Spielberg, Hadassim, and our class.

When the film ended, Chaim called to the stage Shevah Weiss. Although Shevah was two classes ahead of ours, he had made a strong impact on me, individually. When Dani Dassa had worked with Shevah in throwing the discus, I had



A fantastic experience that blended the youth of our childhood and the wisdom of adulthood

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1287>

been so captivated by the event that I asked if I could retrieve the disc each time it was thrown. Shevah had also been my inspiration in lifting weights since he was a relatively small fellow but quite strong. He could carry two or three older kids on his back with no problem. No one was aware of his past, at that time. Now, at the reunion, Shevah described how he arrived at Hadassim.

Shevah was born in Poland in 1935. He had been rescued by some partisans during the German occupation of Poland. After surviving the Holocaust, he described being taken with some other children to Italy where they were housed in a palatial mansion formerly owned by Hermann Göring. Among the hundreds of orphans housed in this mansion, Shevah was one of eight orphans who won a lottery for a passport to Palestine, which was controlled by the British under the British Mandate for Palestine. He and the other seven children were transported from Italy to Palestine by ship, and from there to Hadassim. Prior to their arrival in

Israel, the eight children decided among themselves to never tell what had happened to them in Europe. Each of them would have a future but not a past. In 1962, when Israel tried the notorious Nazi SS officer and one of the major organizers of the Holocaust, Adolf Eichmann, Shevah learned, for the first time, what had taken place in Europe. Until then, he had lived in Hadassim, oblivious of Europe's World War II catastrophes.

Shevah reminded the audience of the group who routinely went running with Dani Dassa. Where were they running? No one knew, but when Dani and Gideon started running the 8 km across the sand dunes, the other kids ran as well, merely for the sake of running with Dani.



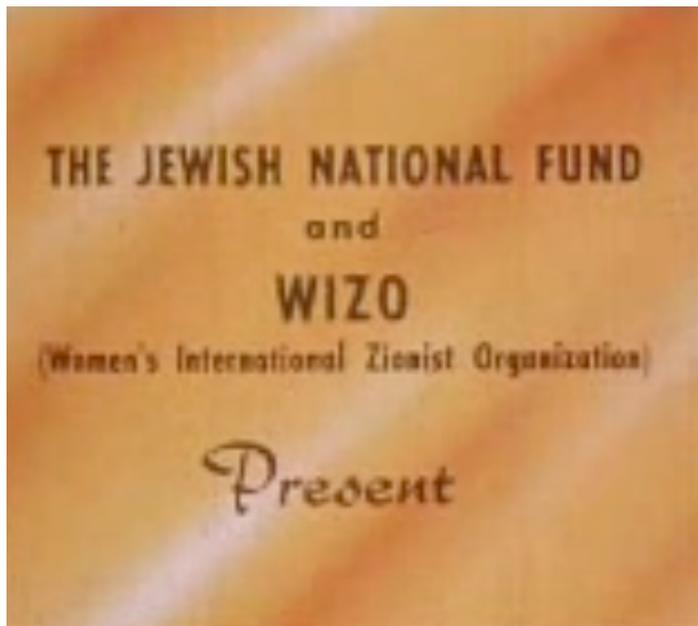
How far did we get?

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1288>



WIZO Hadassim, a children's village

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1289>



Chapter Eight: How Far Did We Get

A. "I am the Israeli Nation in Manifold Ways."

Israeli political life remained outside of Hadassim's realm. The main vehicles of political indoctrination, the youth movements, were excluded from our village, and we were thus spared the sort of brainwashing that many in our generation were subjected to.

This ideological mechanism emanated from the survival motivations of our politicians, but in truth it serves as an entropic-degenerative fuel for any political system. It worked wonders for the Zionist movement, beginning with the second wave of immigration at the turn of the 20th century, but in the long term it distorted our culture and political habits.

Interestingly, many politicians came to admire the Hadassim miracle; they didn't trouble us with talk of political vision, which they themselves never took seriously. Most of the students at Hadassim weren't interested in politics anyway. Our teachers mainly belonged to the central political movement – MAPAI – but the extent of their involvement consisted in voting. This, too, was an expression of the degenerative process of our political culture.



Shevah Weiss

Shevah Weiss was the exception. He was a political animal of the intellectual-ideological type. But Shevah came to politics not through a youth movement, like his idols Yigal Alon and Yitzhak Rabin, but through his Platonic tendencies: the philosophical commitment to an ideal state. As he put it: "I was a politician from age zero, and my two dreams were: to be a legislator, even the Knesset Speaker, and to be college professor. From a very young age, I thought of intellectuals as occupying the supreme sphere of activity; but from the moment I finished my degree, becoming an associate professor at the young age of 39, my attention turned to politics. So in the end I achieved both my ambitions."



Hillel (Chili) and Iris, revisiting the past
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1290>

Chaim asked Shevah what the most important thing about Hadassim was. His answer was “everything.” He had learned to respect and not to hate, to recognize mistakes and learn from them, and that it was permissible to make errors in leadership but correct them without hatred. His successes as a teacher, as a government leader, and as the Speaker of the Knesset, resulted from his life among the teachers, leaders, and students at Hadassim. His last comment was that every child at Hadassim, Holocaust survivors, those from broken homes, and the elite, were disaster cases. But Hadassim had made each of them whole and healthy.

After the interview with Shevah, the program continued with a musical performance. The musicians were Gil Aldema, on piano, and Shalom Gerstein, playing the accordion. Gil Aldema was a famous Israeli composer and conductor, but prior to these successes, he had taught music at Hadassim. For many years, he had collaborated with Dani Dassa, who choreographed the steps, to create many new Jewish dances. The musicians played several of their songs and the audience joined in to sing the lyrics.

After the singing, one of the class members, Safra, presented a slide show of what Hadassim had looked like when we were students. In addition, she included many photographs of our class at that time. It was fun for everyone to see themselves playing sports, climbing rocks on a school outing, and other events. In addition, another student, Gila, presented an amazing booklet that described each person in our class.

Chaim then called Dani Dassa to the stage. Apparently, Dani had not expected this and was quite flustered when he first arrived on stage. He told Chaim that he does not like to talk with his lips but with his feet in dance. However, he answered Chaim’s questions and then brought his wife, Judy, on stage to demonstrate one of the Israeli dances that he had

Chaim Kenan & Shevah Weiss, former Speaker of the Knesset

created. He then gestured to the rear of the room where four of our classmates, Hillel and his wife, Thalma, and Avi with his wife, performed one of Dani’s dances. Dance had been an important aspect at Hadassim and Dani had been a significant factor in it.



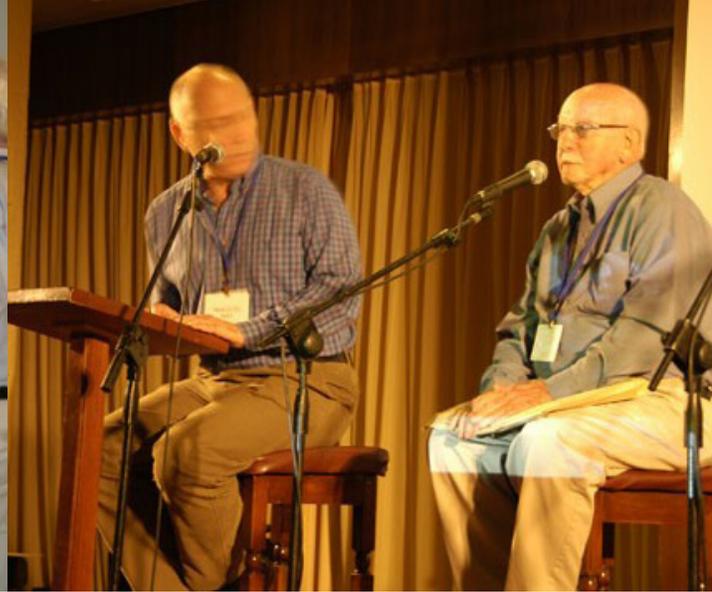
Hadassim booklet by Gila (2006)
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1291>

הדסים היה הבית

כנס מחזור ו' של הדסים
כ' אייר תשס"ו 18.5.2006



כפר הילדים. הדסים - ויצו הדסה קנדה
היום הראשון לפתיחת דאר הדסים
OPENING OF HADASSIM POST OFFICE



Performing at the reunion meeting & interview of a teacher by the master of ceremonies, Chaim Kenan

The next teacher Chaim introduced was Avinoam Kaplan, our biology teacher. Avinoam had been, and continued throughout his life to be obsessed with nature. He was an environmentalist before the name and idea became popular. For example, the municipal authorities planned a road along a scenic area of the coast between Haifa in the north and Tel Aviv in the South. Avinoam and a group of his student went through a long section of the still untouched wilderness and carefully dug and transported hundreds of the native flowers. They rescued as many plants as they were able before the road was built.

Following, Avinoam, a group organized by Hillel's wife, Thalma, sang an original song. The lyrics had been written by Chaim Kenan and the music composed by Gil Aldema. It was a beautiful and unique song and was appreciated by everyone.

The next speaker was Ann, my wife. I was shocked when she asked if she could make a few comments at this reunion since she normally refuses to engage in public speaking. Of course, I said yes, and was pleased to see her go up on stage. Her speech was in English, but most of the audience under-

stood English. Her talk was actually pretty funny since she reminded them about some of the stories that she had heard over the years. Most of the stories were escapades that had involved me, but the entire audience remembered these notorious and outrageous events. She also noted that the stories and misdeeds were about boys. Her conclusion was that the girls were perfect or had been too smart to get caught. Her talk was quite funny for my classmates since no one else on stage that evening would dare to have revealed some of our many misdeeds.

Her speech concluded with the admiration that she and the other "outsiders" have for the cohesive uniqueness of this Class of 1958. She explained that the spouses and friends of the members were always on the outside looking in at this amazing group of people. We listened to the stories and escapades and watched the special bonds when they were together. However, even if you were married to one of the Class, you were not "in" the class. We, the members of the "outsiders", could merely watch with awe and admiration the special relationship that bound them to each other. I was very proud of her that day as I am every day.



Dani Dassa & Gila Almagor, writer and actress of stage and screen
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/2782>



Gila Almagor

More images



Signing the book "The Oasis of Dreams, the Legend of Hadassim"

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1293>

Before Chaim called me to the stage, he thanked the people of WIZO which is the Canadian Women's Organization which had created and funded Hadassim. Without them, many of us would have suffered terribly rather than becoming the outstanding members of society that we were.

Then, Chaim called me to the stage. My heart and mind whirled with emotions. I tried to explain that Hadassim and all the people, classmates, teachers, experiences, and studies had made me the success that I am. Life had been a roller coaster ride for each of us, before and after Hadassim. But the lessons and friendships we had experienced in that childhood paradise could never be repeated or repaid. I had spent my entire adult life remembering the place and the people. This had been my motivation for wanting all of us to be together one more time and, thus inspired, came the idea for the reunion. I thanked the people for coming to this special event and, after we finished the last song, each of them would receive the book Uri and I had written about us.

As I was finishing my speech, another famous Israeli, Gila Almagor, appeared at the back of the room with her

cousin, Asher. Asher was one of our classmates, Gila was his younger cousin and has enjoyed a long and illustrious career in film and theater.

I was pleasantly surprised when, at this point, my classmates presented me with a "thank you" plaque. The message was their appreciation for the idea and the fantastic implementation of the reunion. Ann and I had tried our best to arrange for the best location, the most delicious food, and a memorial book for them to read and treasure. I felt that the plaque and the applause were a heartfelt thank you for this effort.

I announced that the program was concluded. I reminded them that at the back of the room were the memorial books which Uri and I had written. There was a copy for each of them. Following much applause, the audience got up and went to retrieve their books.

This amazing group of Israeli classmates of mine continued to surprise everyone. It was well after the time that the hotel had given us and most of the people were still socializing and signing each other's memorial books. Finally, the ho-

tel staff insisted that we leave so they could clean everything and let their own staff go home for a little sleep!

Two days later, Ann and I settled into our seats on the airplane for the long flight back to California. We agreed that the reunion had been a spectacularly successful event. As we sat, thinking and discussing, I realized that all of my classmates were proud to be Hadassim “kids” and each of us had accomplished much in our lives. That educational system of creative dialogue and love for its students produced whole and healthy citizens who contributed greatly to their country and to their families.

For me, the reunion completed a 360-degree circle of my own life. I started the circle at Hadassim which created my foundation. I completed the circle with the reunion at Hadassim since it was the reason I had accomplished so much in my life. I know my classmates felt the same way.

More than sixty years have passed since the first eight Holocaust survivors began their new journeys to the unparalleled marvel of Hadassim. The Hadassim project was a success primarily because of the complex, sometimes chaotic evolution of a radical idea: “creative dialogue”. The concept was given to Hadassim founders, Rachel and Yirmeyahu Shapira, by Schwabe, Buber and Yehoshua Margolin. “Creative dialogue” meant that learning and living must not

be done by rote, but by active and participatory questioning, and integration of others’ ideas with our own. We all learned from each other. Rachel and Yirmeyahu’s ability to fashion and crystallize that concept in institutional form was the sustaining pillar of Hadassim. They succeeded where others might have failed because they took their philosophical masters both seriously and critically and gave authentic material form to their legacy.

The WIZO idea of appointing two directors for Hadassim, and those leaders’ abilities to maintain a creative dialogue between them, was a necessary condition for the success of the Hadassim experiment. Rachel and Yirmeyahu had chosen teachers for Hadassim who were inexperienced. They believed experienced teachers would bring their educational baggage with them and either distort or disrupt their unique, Schwabian conception. Hadassim was a place of learning not only for students but for the teachers as well.

The reunion had been my “thank you” to the friends and teachers and country who taught me to risk, invent, and continue to grow. These principles have not only directed my life but have been the source of my happiness.

As we flew high above the Earth, back to our sunny home and fascinating work, I experienced a sense of fulfillment and joy. I felt ready for the next challenge in my life.

