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לויז פרנק

מתנדב מארה"ב באוניית ההעפלה "יציאת אירופה תש"ז"

ה ע ש נ ה ג י ש ' 0

I was born in the West End of Boston, Massachusetts on April 3rd, 1924. Both my parents came from the vicinity of Kovno in Lithuania. My father was a truck driver, my mother was at home, and later was a seamstress. I have no formal Jewish education, but spoke only Yiddish until I was six years old. My neighborhood was made up of almost all Yiddish speaking Jews.

When I was ten years old I was taught to sail by an old Yankee Brahmin who set up a sailing club on the nearby Charles River for the kids of the neighborhood.

Later I learned to sail larger boats and spent some time sailing off the Atlantic coast, until I left to join the Military.

I volunteered for the Army Air Corps during WW II, and served from 1942 till 1946. For a short period during my service I was stationed at Chanute Field in Illinois. There, not too far away, at the University of Illinois, I met some young Jews who were studying agriculture with the intention of immigrating to Palestine when the war was over. In our many conversations they learned that I had sailing experience. We kept in touch.

After my discharge from the Army I received a call from New York asking if I would help Jews. A short time later I was on my way to Baltimore and the S.S. President Warfield/Exodus.

I worked on the ship until we shoved off for Europe. We were involved in a storm at sea, and returned for repairs that kept us from our mission for a while.

We arrived in France and moved to various ports

preparing the ship for our passengers. We loaded the ship in France, and shoved off. We were at sea and then were attacked in international waters by the British. After the battle, in which I received a head wound, some of the crew, myself included, were put on prison ships. I stayed with the passengers on the Ocean Vigor all the while that these prison ships were off the coast of France. This was in July and the weather was very hot and uncomfortable. After some weeks we were given an ultimatum, and sailed for Germany.

We were beaten off the ships, at Hamburg, where I was wounded again. I was prisoner in Poppendorf camp in Germany until our escape. Few people born in the United States have gone through the displaced person's experience. Twelve members of the Exodus crew did, and I'll try to tell about this little known part of the story. This is the odyssey seen mostly through my eyes, of twelve crew members who travelled through post war Germany carrying false papers and disguised as refugees. David Holly in his book titled Exodus 1947 mentions this incident but the book doesn't go into great detail.

David Millman, Dov Miller, Lennie Sklar, Reuven Margolis, Schmuel Schiller, Avie Siegal, David Staryck, Vevie Siegal, Myron Goldstein, Ben Foreman, Schmuel Baer and myself made up this group. At least one quarter of the crew hadn't been smuggled off the ship in Haifa. Some of us chose to stay with the refugees. Needless to say this was a definite morale builder for us as it was for the refugees. They had found it difficult to believe that any soft Americaner

The technique of getting us out was simple. The list of 750 refugees who were allowed to leave each month was made up on the priority of arrival. We were to assume the names of people on that list who were, therefore they were set back a month. The people supposed to leave had already waited about a year but it was understood that the sailors would leave first. There weren't enough places for all of us so four boys volunteered to stay behind until the next quota. Labal, the Greenwich village writer, was the first to volunteer. He was getting three square meals a day without working and was a hero to boot! One of our Gentile volunteers, Dave Blake, also wanted to stay behind. Dave was a graduate chemist who wanted to live as a farm worker on a communal settlement in Palestine, where he felt life would be more natural and just than in America. He was always a little distant from the rest of us. We couldn't understand a man who studied Hebrew when he could go ashore in France and chase women! Nor could we understand it, after we reached Palestine, when Dave took the \$100 the Haganah gave each of us and went straight to a settlement and gave the money to the communal treasury! When we visited him there, he was working hard in the fields and he was speaking a beautiful Hebrew. He seemed much happier than he'd ever been with us.

Seven weeks after our arrival on Cyprus, we again went through the British Control and boarded the ship chartered by the Jewish Agency to take us to Palestine. The other people were elated but we were downcast at the thought of still another month in the British quarantine at Athlet, near Haifa. Of course, we could take heroic measures like John, our commander, who

had gone the month before. He had slipped over the side of the ship outside Haifa harbor, and had been forced to stay in the water for nine hours before he could find a place where he could land unobserved by Arabs or the British! Otherwise, it looked as if we'd be stuck so I stuffed myself on the ship's biscuits, not knowing when I would get my next meal. As the ship pulled into the dock, we all began looking for methods of escape, but we all found ourselves on the buses going to Athlet. There were British tanks and motorcyclists guarding us, but there were no guards on the buses and the drivers were Jewish! We told the driver that we were sailors and wanted to make a break. He nodded his head and soon all the buses stopped, one bumping into the next. The door opened and, as I later learned, 16 of us streamed out. I still don't know whether I jumped or was pushed by "Action Jackson" behind me! We walked straight across the street into an Arab garage where we asked for parts for '38 Ford. When we saw the convoy had passed on, we walked down the street until a car stopped and asked us, in Hebrew, how to get to street. Instead of answering "I'm a stranger here, myself", we climbed into the back seat and asked him to take us to an address in the city.

He took us there and in a few more minutes we were safe in a room in the best hotel in Haifa. There we found eight of the other boys. The others had been captured and sent on to Athlet. Everything was new and wonderful to us in the hotel - warm water, clean linen, beds and finally, a huge roast beef dinner.

Everybody turned to me for I was swearing! I couldn't eat a thing, I was still stuffed with those damned biscuits!!!

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אסופת זכרונות
העפלה 1945-1948

מהדורה שניה - מתוקנת ומעודכנת

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