

Passover Feature

Selma Mayer

BY JULIUS BRILLER

Selma Mayer arrived at Shaare Zedek (Gates of Righteousness) Hospital on Jerusalem's yet unpaved Jaffa Street over 50 years ago. Dr. Moshe Wallach, the hospital's founding director, was there to welcome the first qualified registered nurse to reach Jerusalem, a primitive Middle East city without electricity or piped water, a city plagued with disease and epidemics. "I have come to work, not to rest!" she said on arrival. These words have symbolized Selma Mayer's personality -- her absolute and untiring devotion which has earned her the reputation of "Schwester Selma," Jerusalem's Florence Nightingale. Now, at the age of 88, she has delegated nearly all her responsibilities to younger women, but continues to display an awesome quality of absolute dedication.

Selma Mayer was born February 3, 1884, in a small German town of Hanau. Her parents, Alexander and Emma Mayer, led a simple life, working hard to feed, clothe and educate their five children.

Her mother died when she was five and from her early childhood Selma had to face the harsh realities of life. Today she says that it was probably during this crucial period of exposure to

extreme hardship that she developed her unusual sense of duty and eagerness to help.

There and then Selma decided she too would dedicate her life to the sick and ailing.

Selma applied for admission as a student nurse at the "Solomon Heine" Hospital in Hamburg. Intelligent and alert, she was quick to learn. During intervals, whilst the other students would chat and joke, Selma could be seen pacing the gardens with her notebook and pencil. At night she would read her textbooks over and over again, working hard to ensure her success.

At the age of 22 Selma was ready for her graduation examinations. For three days she was questioned, observed and tested by a panel of strict authoritarian doctors. She passed with distinction. And for ten years she served at the Solomon Heine Hospital.

During the first world war Selma met the legendary medical pioneer, Dr. Moshe Wallach, who had left Germany in 1892 to build a hospital in Jerusalem.

When she arrived in 1916, a terrible Typhoid epidemic raged in Jerusalem. Schwester Selma remembers that there were only 50 beds in the hospital's special isolation facilities and that over 2,000 patients passed through this ward during the epidemic which lasted well over a year. Together with a group of volunteers she worked day and night to save their lives.

At night the symbolic lantern became reality, as Schwester Selma accompanied Dr. Wallach on visits to those patients who were too sick to be moved to the examining room. Even surgery was performed by the light of paraffin lamps and Selma, the only qualified nurse in the hospital, assisted the surgeons in their work. Only poor persons were admitted and as the number of pa-

tients grew from year to year, Schwester Selma selected from her helpers one or two of the most devoted and talented girls and taught them to bandage and give injections.

Her unique moral and physical endurance was put to its severest test during the infantile paralysis epidemic which swept through the Middle East in the 1950's. Jerusalem's only polio isolation centre was set up at Selma's hospital and a team of volunteer nurses followed her fearless example. The dramatic battle to save as many precious young lives as humanly possible went on unabated day and night. Iron lung machines were flown in from England.

Schwester Selma's complete disregard of "working hours" - round the clock and round the year - and her unmatched devotion to the patients has kept her so entirely involved that she did not have time to marry and raise her own family. Among the photographs in her room are those of her adopted daughters - three girls orphaned or abandoned after birth at Shaare Zedek. She brought them up as her own, arranged for their basic schooling and provided all their needs. One of them is now herself a grandmother and her family treats Schwester Selma as head of the home.



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ANTI-SEMITISM IN SO. AFRICA

JOHANNESBURG -- (WNS) The Transvaal Head Committee of the United Party, South Africa's chief opposition party, is to investigate complaints that Jack Dormehl, a well-

known Committee member, has been conducting an anti-Semitic campaign against the Party's Transvaal leader.

This follows a newspaper report that Dormehl vigorously opposed Schwartz's nomination at the meeting which elected him as the new Transvaal leader some time ago, and that in a heated scene later in the washroom, Dormehl, in the presence of a Party leader, called on Schwartz to withdraw, saying "a Jew could not be chairman of the United Party in the Transvaal."

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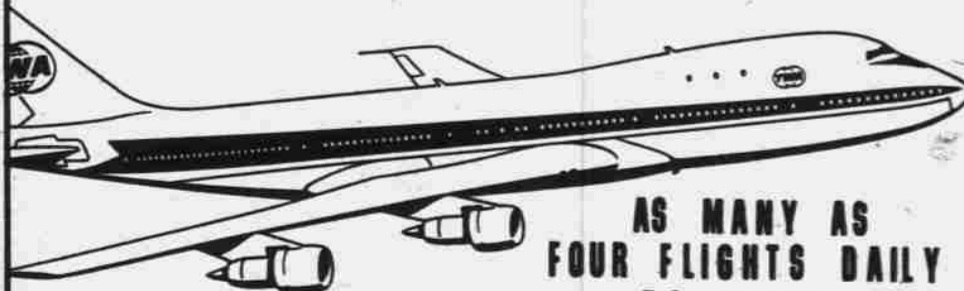


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