

# The Beginning

By Hadassah Bat Haim

One thing I told my husband I wanted to make perfectly clear. I was not a Zionist and I never would be. It was desirable, even necessary, I conceded, that there should be a homeland for Jews, refugees from countries where they were not wanted, but the Manchester suburb we lived in was comfortable and convenient and I had no intention of changing it for a sandy desert.

This was the day in May 1948, when the State of Israel was declared. In spite of my avowed detachment I joined the others hovering around the radio. Later, moved by some inexplicable emotion I sacrificed a sheet and a blue linen dress and before evening the Jewish flag was pinned to a broom handle and protruded from an upstairs window. The lines were not straight and the emblem was rather lopsided but it was blue and white and it displayed an unmistakable Shield of David.

### Incongruous Militarists

In our mainly non-Jewish neighborhood, people came in from all along the street to

### LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE

congratulate us on our courage and wish us well. I tried to explain to everyone that I was not a Zionist and that personally I was not especially involved, but my voice sounded thin and unconvincing. My husband, a life-long Zionist, told everyone we would soon be starting to pack in readiness for our new life. I knew of course that he was joking he knew my views, but I felt curiously uneasy.

One odd result of the armed struggle that was taking place so far away was that the mildest of my friends and acquaintances suddenly became extreme militarists. Even the old ladies at the grocer's and in the kosher butcher shops were incongruously talking about "Israel's fighting capacity," "desert fighting" and "guerilla tactics." It was a strain to defend my theory that Jews should stay in their country of origin and fight for better conditions there -- for everyone.

Our Lady Help said she wouldn't have thought that "your people" could hold out so long. I felt foolishly proud and had to remind myself that violence solves nothing and that I didn't approve of fighting.

There was a strange absence of Jewish young men, some of them members of my family. Names like Ramle, Lydda and Hartuv which I would previously have had difficulty in placing geographically became part of our daily conversation. Out of a vague feeling of solidarity I joined a Hebrew class. My brother was there too and some of his friends. It was a mixed class to begin with, all ages from fifteen to sixty, but as the war drew out only the older ones and the very young amongst the males were left. On the evening that my brother's place was empty and his friend's place was vacant too, our teacher said he hoped their martial prowess would be better than their Hebrew, as if it were only on a par with it, the new State would be wise to let them enlist with the enemy. Becoming a Majority

After the first truce and the shooting of

### HAPPY PASSOVER

Count Bernadotte, our popularity rating dropped to its previous level. Nothing serious. A few shop windows broken, stones thrown at a Jewish school; nothing more than we had lived with all our lives but all at once - it was too much. I still did not endorse yet another small state, but I could not shake the feeling that perhaps, if it were ours, it would be different. We started to discuss the advantages of a warm climate, the abundance of oranges for children who in those days of austerity had seldom seen a real orange, and the bizzare new concept of living in a country where we would be a majority.

The children, who were three and four, were hard to interest in our plans. On the whole they were against it on the grounds that anything recommended by parents was bound to be no good. Their real opposition only came when we explained that we would not be able to take their rocking horse. Their own children now know its description by heart.

### We've Decided to Stay

It was not what we expected. Oranges there were but no work and nowhere to live. Plenty of sunshine but the four of us crowded into one room of what had been a British Army barracks. When we finally found a piece of land to put up our prefab on we couldn't find anyone to handle it. It took five months instead of the promised thirty - six man hours. We found that in Hahariya, where we had settled, our few words of Hebrew were of no use as everyone spoke German! But, the day we started building, the family from the nearest house a 1/4 mile away came up and said, "We are the Cohens. That's our house. The door is always open so if you need anything go in and help yourselves." And the Mizrachi family took in our children till we had a place for them to sleep, and people came from far and wide to see the house (and to ask how much it cost and what we earned).

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Mrs. James, who fled Hitler's bunker in Berlin on May 1, 1945, revealed her identity.

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