

## **EVENTS WITH COUSIN KATZ & FAMILY (1946-48)**

When I arrived at Sabena that fall of 1946 cousin Katz no longer farmed, but still did chores on the field surrounding his home. He did ask me to help him and one morning we did, what chalutzim have done relentlessly since their earliest return to the soil of Israel, remove rocks from its fields. We labored together and as the sun rose high, sweat flowed freely and I asked if he wanted to rest. "Oh no," he said, "I'll have plenty of time to rest when life is over, so let's get on with it." This seemed odd to me, for he was so vigorous, sinewy and with a little gray in short cropped hair, I could not quite comprehend this statement. He also kept geese, and together in the heavy morning dews would gather up land snails which these large waddlers would consume with relish.

This work reminded me of my first agrarian pursuits in the Borscht Belt where the family vacationed each summer at the Esther Manor near Monticello, New York. Dad has us pick blueberries which grew in the gill back of the hotel, for he wanted to convert them to brandy. I know we picked enough for him to make gallon jugs of the brew, corked, then sealed with red wax and brought back to age in the little cold room in the basement of our house on Inwood Terrace. Those jugs I believe were only opened and consumed at Jack's Bar Mitzvah.

Before returning to the Katz family, let me describe how I was indelibly imprinted to become a dairy nutritionist. At the Esther Manor, cows were kept to supply milk for the guests and cared for by the father of the owner. I was always there helping to bring in the cows from pasture and to close gates as we passed from meadow to meadow. One morning after milking, this old Jewish farmer asked me to help him with some posts he had to secure. I held the wood post and he drove them with a sledgehammer. The next thing I knew was my intimacy with the ground and a warm sticky feeling of blood on my forehead for that hammer had mistook my head for the post. Moments later I saw the farmer's 1935 Dodge sedan alongside and in a moment he was rushing me down to the doctor in Monticello. I remember the stitches going in, the tetanus shot in my bottom, and the ice cream cone to assuage my pains. We came back to the hotel, my head swathed in bandages and Dad very upset--Momma was minding the store in West New York--forbid me ever to practice dairy husbandry with the old man. When Mother came up that weekend she wanted to sue, but Dad put the whole incident in humane context. So, the only visible scar on my body, high on the left forehead was my initiation into the profession later followed.

But back to the Katz family: Living at the home was Ephraim's second wife and three children that I can remember, though I believe there were other grown children beyond the household. Previously mentioned was a married daughter with two children and their father, the Skoda agent for that region. He had been in his business in Beirut, but with the escalating tensions in the region came to stay with the family in Palestine. The melodious flow of French filled the air whenever they came over from their adjacent apartment and with two girls under ten joining in, there was this soprano patina which made their fluid words even more engaging. All the Romanian, Yiddish, Hebrew and Italian, remember Dad mastered this for the linoleum business, I had heard in twenty-two years seemed harsh, perhaps a bit uncouth, compared to this first sweet seamless flow of French mastered by a branch of our own family.

The grown son, his name not remembered, didn't divulge his occupation, but through innuendo and scraps of conversation around the table understood that he had some role in naval intelligence with the Haganah. He took me to my first steak dinner in Palestine, at the Zion Hotel in Haifa, and he did speak disparagingly of the disruptive role the Arabs pursued with Jewish settlement. He, at that time, introduced me to the term "WOG" for wily oriental gentleman, and on occasions that evening would toss his had over in the direction of those fitting his definition.

But his blond urbane daughter Mady galvanized and monopolized my attention. This was the daughter of a Chalutz in Palestine? My concept of pioneer women in Palestine had been plugged into my brain over the summers I spent at Zionist camps in the Catskills. They had to be robust, thick torsoed, clear of decadent make-up, single minded in desire to work the land and, at first meeting, would immediately begin to teach you Hebrew. No, Mady had all the trappings of bourgeois Jewry in the Diaspora with no link, or so it seemed to me, to the purpose of or to the impending struggle for our place in the sun in Palestine.

Mady was of medium height with the blond hair and pale fine complexion, which has always been linked to Jewish women from Romania. She always wore make up and dressed in fashions a bit grand for the time, day or occasion. She had grown up the daughter of a private and capitalist landowner, and had been educated at the American University in Beirut. While I was already anglophobic, she would speak sympathetically of the British role in Palestine and do so, in what seemed to me, a pronounced attempt to speak the King's English in context and accent. Even her brother would contest her political leanings. Never once did she mention or show interest in the "kibbutz" movement, and quite distinctly told me

that she had never visited one, though the closest one was within ten kilometers of Sabena.

For all her charms and as much as I wanted to add her to the armory of beautiful women of the bloom family, I had to hold her aloof from this honor. Somehow she just couldn't fit in to the scheme of idealistic living I had, with Dad's help, chosen for myself in Israel. Mady was my only disappointment in the Katz family.

Now I have to take you to the following year and the period between Passover and Lag B'omer to continue these events. Helen had of course arrived, I had been training at Kibbutz Gvat where I had worked in its wheat and cornfields, in its vegetable gardens, harvested plums and apples and mucked out under the poultry house and in the cattle pens. Our wedding took place, of course, under the chupah at Cousin Katz's place. The rabbi was busy with such affairs, because of the time of year, and we had already made reservations for our honeymoon at the Lev HaCarmel Hotel which stood proudly on the top of the promontory overlooking Haifa harbor. The rabbi came late because of his busy schedule that day, and got us joined by Mosaic Law just with enough time to reach the hotel before curfew.

Well why curfew? Days and nights in Palestine then were often violent with Jews, Arabs and the governing British giving and receiving punishment. Just a few days before our wedding, Menachem Begin, then the young Irgunist, had blown up the Haifa refinery, so the British had clamped down a sunset curfew on the whole area. So with the rabbi late, and the sun declining there wasn't much time to enjoy this unique family occasion at the Katz home. So the blessings and "mazeltovs" were given in haste, the taxi was waiting and we just made it to Lev HaCarmel before the wailing sirens tore the evening atmosphere.