

## THE BLOOMS AT KIBBUTZ GVAT - NEWLYWED IDEALISTS

Once married at the Katz home, I took Helen with me to continue my agricultural training at Gvat. Up to that time, I roomed with other young people in small concrete structures erected to handle the "illegals" from Europe. I remember standing with Helen beneath the palm trees fronting the communal dining hall and discussing couple housing with the "chaver" in charge of this activity. He was one of the original settlers and looking us over, this soft idealistic couple from rich America, he said "You know, we went through our period of the romantica many years ago, and it is only right that you have this privilege now. Follow me and we'll get you settled properly."

This we did and he led us down the concrete pathway, where between rooms housing veteran members, he stopped before a large tent and said; "You'll live here." I wasn't quite ready for this for I had had a regular roof over my head to this point, and had not imagined that my bride and I would have canvas over our heads. At least, the tent was fairly roomy, had a concrete base with ceramic tiles and for furnishings a dresser, a small table with lamp, and a bare double metal bedstead with paltry springing and no mattress in sight. Objections would belay idealistic motives and we accepted this taste of the romantica.

"But where is the mattress," I asked? "No problem," replied the housing director, "just go over to the warehouse and they'll get you a mattress." So it was and after we had moved our belongings into the tent I started off to get that essential part of married life.

Once settled in with the exception of that mattress, I went over to the warehouse and explained my need to the man in charge. In a moment he comes out with a large double sized mattress cover, and I thought this considerate, for Mother had always protected our mattresses at home in this way, and asked again for the mattress itself. "You don't understand", was the reply, "this is the mattress." You just go over to the straw storage shed and fill it with straw to you liking." Now this was a blow for young Americans, for we had always slept on innerspring mattresses in a family which sold them from their store on Bergenline Ave. But we were to be treated equally with all the many newcomers, stretching the ability of the kibbutz to absorb its quota of "olim".

Without telling Helen I go over to the huge pile of golden wheat straw and start stuffing the furthest seam of the mattress cover. The work went slow as I punched in the brightest straw into the furthest recesses of that coarse poplin sack. It

seemed to go on forever for it sure takes a lot of straw, and you have to try getting it even and that meant building up the volume with great care. As I was doing this, kibbutzniks on their barnyard duties came by and graced me with smiles and snickering as I stuffed away to fulfill my potential conjugal aspirations.

Finally, the bag was fully stuffed but despite my newly acquired skills in mattress-making, I could not get it flat and even across its surface. Somehow, the straw down the middle length of the bag was much higher than at the sides, and despite my blows to correct the bulge, it would not level itself. I was ready for the final step, to sew it shut. I go again to the warehouse for a big needle and coarse thread, and on the way think out how to transport my creation from the straw pile to our tent. We had two teams of horses and their wagons for transport needs, but they were too big and certainly unclean for my needs. But then I remembered Nannele, the jackass which pulled the small cart used for taking rocks from the fields, carrying sacks of feed or the milk cans from the dairy. With permission I brought Nannele and cart to my site of production, and by this time Helen knew of what I was doing for mutual future pleasure and brought our Brownie camera to record the event. Lost these many years was the photo describing my artful sewing motions, Helen urging me on with resigned good humor, and Nannele standing munching straw waiting for us to finish.

Finish we did. Together we hoisted the mattress onto the cart and steadying this load, overspreading the confines of the cart, I clucked Nannele into motion. It seemed that all of Kibbutz Gvat was enjoying this spectacle as we made our way to our tent, and manhandled this monstrosity of a mattress onto the bare metal bed frame. With our curiosity and mild trepidation we looked forward to our first night together on that oddly ridged mattress that Bloom made.

The straw mattress served the purpose but brought other problems. Both Helen and I had hay fever, so we slept on a vast bed of innoculum with constant sneezing mixed with itching and running noses. Human pressure finally leveled our mattress, and in a few weeks the center was much lower than the sides. So we survived this period of "romantica" and managed enough rest to carry out our daily work, and in a small way through our efforts, contributed to the future realization of the State of Israel.