

Gefen Benny

Born in 1926 in Magdiel

Joined the Palmach in 1944

Joined the Palyam in 1946

This is the Way it Was**Personal memories**

I joined the Palmach on 23rd July 1944 and served at Kibbutz Kiryat Anavim and Kibbutz Bet Haarava. Zaki Keiny (of blessed memory) joined the same day and we served more or less in the same units until my reserve duty in the paratroops. After the course for Gideonim (radio operators) at Shefayim I left for Italy in 1946. While I was active in the camps of the survivors waiting to go on Aliya I heard many terrible personal stories which taught me that it is wrong for a man to hurt a fellow man. Under the influence of those stories I have tried to act according to that rule all my life.

I was active in the "Bricha" (helping move survivors of the Holocaust from country to country until they arrived at an immigrant camp near a port on the Mediterranean) in Austria for two months, and after that boarded the ship "Barak" at La Spezia on 18th October 1946. This was a small vessel that had previously failed to qualify because of various technical problems. Our aim was to load Olim at Algiers but while going through the Straits of Bonifacio between Sardinia and Corsica we ran into a terrible storm. Our engine broke down and the mast broke and we managed with difficulty to find haven in a small bay. As a result of my violent vomiting I lost the use of my arms for a while, but with the help of another seaman and a doctor I managed to send out a cry for help in Morse code.

The vessel "Hechalutz" under the command of Nimrod Eshel reached us and we transferred over to her, abandoning the "Barak". When we started loading the Olim at Algiers we were disturbed in the process by the French army. We returned to Europe with only 50 Olim. In an attempt to buy fuel in Sardinia we were arrested by the Italian navy and incarcerated at Santa Magdalena, in the northern part of the island. After being held for one week we escaped and ran off without the ship's Italian captain and first mate. A short time later, with the aid of a small auxiliary engine we left the island and hid in a small bay in French Corsica.

On the 23rd of November a small vessel arrived, "Haportzim", and she carried 122 Olim. Shalom Dolitzki (of blessed memory), Marga and Tosca accompanied her. We transferred our Olim to their ship and I switched places with their radioman and we headed for Palestine. With the aid of Shalom's very clever maneuvering we were able to trick the British and we arrived at Tel Aviv on the 3-4th of December 1947. When I recall today what we did then, I reach the conclusion that alongside of our what may be called 'irresponsible daring', we had a sizable amount of good luck. We should also keep in mind that tough

situations called for unusual reactions and it would be best not to get caught in tough situations if it is not absolutely necessary.

I was born in Magdiel in 1926 to parents who had come to Palestine with the wave of the 2nd Aliya (prior to WW I). I studied at a school which was run by Mizrachi but I lost religion when I saw boys from a Yeshiva beating a doctor because he was driving on the Sabbath. I then went to study at a secondary school in Pardes Chana and I finished my studies at secondary school in Tel Aviv. My brother Uri enlisted in the Palmach and served with the 3rd Battalion.

After my discharge I joined Kibbutz Cabri as I had good relations with many of the members from the time I had been at Bet Haarava. I built the orchard branch of work in the kibbutz and was among the first to grow avocados and sugar apples in Israel.

I have three children; Nimrod, who lives in Moshav Ein Eiron and is raising three children with the help of his wife, Nurit; Eliav, who fell in action in 1975 on the border of Lebanon while serving in the Golani scouting forces; and Chavale, who is married to Gil and lives with their two children in Zichron Yaakov.

In 1955 I transferred to the paratroops while I was in the reserves, as Zaki had also done. We met there by chance... I served until 1982 and tried to prevent aberrations in the moral code of Tzahal. In 1960 I left Cabri and started to work in the Department of Agriculture as an advisor in the orchard branch and in 1962 I was loaned to the Fruit Orchard Board for two days per week, during which time I coordinated the export marketing of avocados on a national level.

In 1970 I bought a farm in Moshav Ben Ami and planted a large grove of avocados which I took care of by myself until 1995. From then on I have hired help. Since 1977 I do much traveling in our beautiful and interesting world, mostly in third world countries. Because of all the blood that I have seen spilled in my lifetime I am active in trying to achieve an end to the bloodshed. I had hoped that during my lifetime my children would not have to go to war, but that has not been realized. Now my second grandson is in the service and I hope that he will come out of this alive and that my great grandsons will not know the horrors of war.