

## **A holocaust history**

I have in FF-blaðið, the former paper of the Faroese Fishermen's Union, brought a number of articles about Israel.

Among those are the stories of the two holocaust survivors Hanna and Menakhem Ben Yami. Ben Yami is an internationally known fishery expert, who has been working for FAO. We met in USA in 2000, and he came to the Faroes for a fishing conference in 2004. He and his wife came back in 2005. We became friends, and they told me their fantastic history, how they escaped the Nazis and could start their own life in Israel. Their history is translated to English and is now in the archive of the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

The original articles with photos can be found on the website

[www.olijacobsen.com](http://www.olijacobsen.com)

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FF blaðið

Numbers

348, pages 9,10, 15 and 16.

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Hanna Ben Yami – wife of a fisherman

By: Oli Jacobsen

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PART 1

One who experienced Nazism bodily!

FF-PAPER has interviewed a Jewish couple who in different ways were sentenced to death by the Nazi reign of terror. Last year we published a conversation with

Menakhem Ben Yami, and now we publish what Hanna, his wife, told us. This interview is in two parts and is not less interesting and shocking than her husband's story.

Last year Menakhem Ben-Yami from Israel participated in a FAREC (fishing) conference, which took place in the Faroe Islands. On that occasion we were heard the story of his life, which is as exciting as any novel. Ben-Yami is a Polish Jew, and his story began in 1939 when Germany occupied Poland. That was the beginning of the end of Polish Jewry, and Menakhem's saga is a part of that tragedy. It begins in the Warsaw Ghetto where he lives with his parents and a sister. At one point his mother and his sister are sent away from the Ghetto `to work`, but in fact to an extermination camp.

Nothing was ever heard from them again, but the father knew what had happened to them, so he told his son to get away from the Ghetto so that he would not suffer the same fate. Menakhem managed to escape, and that saved his life. Before long also the father is sent away `to work` to meet the same fate as his wife and daughter. Menakhem was now the only one left of the family. He joins the resistance against the Germans. Later – after the war – he immigrated illegally to Palestine where he has taken part in all the wars that have taken place since then. Later he became an internationally recognised fishing expert who “fished on Seven Seas”.

In that account, we also wrote a little about Hanna, Menakhem's wife, and her story was not less interesting, so we wanted to interview her in person. She is a German Jew and was subject to the Nazi experience right from the beginning. She was born in September 1930 and only two years old when in 1933 Hitler seized power in Germany. Another reason why we want to tell this story is that it is now 60 years since the fall of Nazism, and it is interesting to hear about it from a German Jew who experienced it and suffered from Nazism, body and soul.

In June this year we managed to make Hanna tell her own story. Menakhem was attending a fishing conference in Bergen and Hanna accompanied him. I was lucky to be able to go to Bergen while they were there. I made her tell me her story, and I must say that the encounter was both interesting and shocking.

It is important to remember that at the beginning Nazism was seen to be harmless. A lot of people took it to be a kind of Christian People's Party that protected the Christian values, especially against the Bolsheviks. Hanna's story is exceptional. Although we have heard such accounts before, but it is not the same as hearing it from a person who has been directly involved. And here we can tell the Holocaust-story of a couple for whom it is a miracle that they are alive today.

## **Hanna's narrative**

### **Parents Polish Jews.**

My parents emigrated from their native Poland to Germany in the early 1920s and lived in Berlin. They did not find it difficult to get accustomed to a new life in their new country. At home we spoke only German. Most Polish Jews spoke Yiddish, which is much like German. Although my parents spoke Yiddish, they haven't taught their four children to speak it, so we were not very different from other German children. My mother was a little more religious than my father, and there was a synagogue in the neighbourhood.

The reason why my parents left Poland was that my father did not want to be recruited in the Polish army. This, because during WW1 he had fought for 5 years in the Austrian army and was decorated for courage. At that time there was no independent Poland, which was divided between Russia, Germany and Austria, and my father was born in the southern part of Poland that was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Another reason for their move was that at that time Germany was a democracy.

My father had his own business, while my mother was a wig-maker and a housewife. We were four siblings. One sister, Yetta, was the eldest, then there were two brothers, Sali and Heini, and I was the youngest. There has always been some anti-Semitism, also in Germany. But under Nazism it became official policy to a shocking extent. Violence against Jews has grown gradually. But nobody had any idea that things would turn out the way they did.

### **We were bullied.**

I was only two years old when Hitler came into power. That was on January 30, 1933, so of course I don't remember anything from the beginning.

But already on February 27 it became clear what we might expect from this new government, even that the Nazis had only three ministers and no majority. On that day the Reichstag was set on fire. It was obvious that the Nazis were behind that, while it was blamed on the Communists. It was used as an excuse to set aside all democratic rules of law. A general election was called some days later, and even though the Nazis didn't gain absolute majority, they managed, more or less legally, to get all the power in Germany.

The first direct attack on the Jews happened already on April 1, 1933, when there was a boycott of all Jewish shops, and guards from SA, the Nazi storm detachment, were

sent out to prevent people from entering. But the guards were removed again, probably for fear of the German reputation abroad. It also turned out that many Germans did not like this; there might be anti-Semitism, but this was too extreme for them. Instead, the names of the customers of Jewish shops were blacklisted and made public, so maybe there was not so much of a difference.

At the same time an 'information campaign' was launched against the Jews. The Germans were told in various ways how they had been deceived when they thought that Jews were their equals, and it was explained that Jews were not at all their equals but rather sub-human, a kind of animals with devilish characteristics.

One result of this campaign was the rallying cry of 'Juda kreper', which even children in kindergarten shouted after the Jews they met on their outings. The man behind all this was Julius Streicher, until then rather unknown. He was the editor of the disgusting newspaper, 'Der Sturmer' which now became the daily paper of most Germans. In 1946 he was hanged along with other main war criminals.

Some years passed before I noticed the changes in our daily lives – says Hanna - as I was still only a child. The first thing I remember about the Nazis was around 1938 when we could hardly get out on the streets without being bullied by German children. Especially my brothers felt this, and Sali, the elder one and exceptionally strong, would not accept it and was very good at fighting back. My other brother was more cautious and perhaps more upset by it all. My sister Yetti often came home crying because she was often offended by young Germans. Unfortunately, we happened to live near a club of Hitlerjugend, who've been taught to hate Jews and see in them enemies. Almost all German children were forced to be members of Hitlerjugend. It was partly a political education, partly a scouts' organisation with all the usual recreation activities. They wore uniforms, which made them look more frightening to us. I was never allowed to walk alone; I always had to be accompanied by my father. I must say, though, that we were never harassed by grown-up people. But the behaviour of the children was of course a result of what their parents and teachers told them about us.

Because of all this we could not go to an ordinary school. Sali was the only one of us who went to an ordinary German school. But soon those schools were also influenced by Nazism and it became unbearable for Jewish children. Jewish teachers were no longer allowed to teach in the ordinary schools. So in the end we all went to Jewish schools, which we had to pay for ourselves; boys and girls in separate schools.

### **The Night of Broken Glass.**

On the night between November 9 and 10 one of the best known incidents in the campaign against Jews took place. This was the so-called Crystal Night, when the Nazis carried out a mass destruction of Jewish property.

The excuse was that a young Jew had shot an employee of the German embassy in Paris in revenge for his parents expulsion from Germany to Poland. Next night the Nazis started to destroy Jewish shops and synagogues. Everything was smashed to pieces and many Jews were killed and some killed themselves.

The official explanation was that it was the people who took revenge on the Jews, but there are clear indications that the 'Night of Broken Glass' had been carefully planned by the Nazi leaders. Even though, officially, Hitler had nothing to do with it, it seems clear that he had given the go-ahead.

As a punishment for all the destruction the Jews were made to pay a compensation of 1 billion Reichsmark, which was a lot of money at the time! This tells us something about Nazi logic: the Jews had to pay for the vandalism carried out by the Nazis! If it had not been clear to everyone before that the Jews were seen as trash in Germany, a people without any rights, then it became clear now.

The name of the Night of Broken Glass came from all the smashed glass in the streets. On that very day my brother was 13 and according to Jewish tradition he was to have his confirmation in the synagogue. That was impossible now, so he was confirmed at a Rabbi's house. Another reason why I remember the Night of Broken Glass so well is that we lived near the synagogue and I saw everything that happened. The Nazis went from one shop to another. At first some of them wrote Jew on the shop window, then some others came and smashed it all. That was what happened to our synagogue, whereas other synagogues were burnt down.

My father was terrified and had to hide somewhere else in order not to be arrested. This fear was not unfounded for in connection with the Night of Broken Glass about 30,000 Jews were sent to concentration camps. But he managed to escape for the time being.

### **My father arrested for the first and second time.**

Because of the persecution my father could no longer work in his business and his fate was as follows:

In October 1939 he was ordered to turn up at a police station. He still had so much confidence in the system that he thought it was something unimportant. On the other hand he also knew that if he did not turn up the authorities would take it out on his family. But at the police station he was arrested and sent to the concentration camp

Oranienburg, north of Berlin. From there he was sent to Lublin in occupied Poland to work on the construction of new concentration camps. The father managed to let Mother know where he was. At that time the Jewish community in Berlin was still functioning, so together with Mother they could point out that Father had fought for the Germans during the First World War and that he was a decorated soldier. Perhaps they also managed to bribe somebody. Anyway, he was released. He came back to Berlin in March 1940 – and those were bad times! Food was rationed, which was bad enough, but the coupons were marked with a J for Jew. This meant that Jews got fewer vital goods than other Germans. Also, Jews were not given coupons for clothes.

When Father was set free he was given the advice to get out of the country with his family. We wanted to go and Father wanted us to go to Shanghai in China, where there were many Jews already. Father got so far in his preparations that he had sold everything we owned and we had packed. But we were late! One thing was that German Jews could only leave the country by special permission, but the actual situation was that no countries would let Jewish refugees in. So it was hopeless. Even Denmark sent the Jews that had fled to Denmark in the 1930s back to Germany to certain death. While before Jews with money could go to America, that was no longer possible either.

### **A knock on the door!!**

Two months later there is a knock on the door. My younger brother Heini answers the door and outside there are two policemen who tell Father to go to the police station the next day. Father went and never came back. He was sent to the Dachau concentration camp, near Munich. Later, Mother received official information about his death on August 15, 1942. The cause of death is something we can only guess, but we have reasons to believe the worst. We do not know the reason why he was taken the second time, but it must have been part of a plan to take Jewish men first and send them to the concentration camps.

Dachau was Hitler's first concentration camp and was built in 1933. Dachau immediately got a bad reputation, so that the word itself made people tremble. Dachau became an SS school of killing, where they could kill anybody they wanted to. Jews who were thought to be 'dangerous' to the system were sent there. It was also in Dachau that many medical tests were carried out on the prisoners, and many died from the torture they suffered.

### **The brothers saved.**

Now we were alone with Mother. My brothers were 15 and 13 years old. Because of the war there was no school any more. Mother who have realised what might happen

wanted to save her family as well as she could. Those who were most in danger were sons, who could be sent to the camps and have the same fate as Father. At this time there were some foreign women who managed to have young Jewish boys aged 13-15 out of the country and on to Palestine. This was not officially accepted but money must have been involved and it worked.

My mother went to one of these women, Mrs Reha Fryer, who was American. She told her that she had two sons that she wanted get out of the country. The woman said that she could only send one of them. Mother said that her husband had disappeared so now her sons must be saved. She begged Ms.Fryer to take care of both boys and in the end she agreed. They went first to Austria, which was under German control, and then the boys had to steal their way through the mountains to Yugoslavia. Everything went well. There they stayed for a while in Yugoslavia with a Jewish family, and then they had to pass through Turkey and on to Palestine.

Mother also tried to save my sister Yetta in the same way, but in vain. She had already been shown more than a favour in connection with her sons. Actually there are many examples of Jewish children being saved because their parents, like my mother, sent their children to places where they would be more safe. Menakhem's father did the same thing. But all these parents must have realised that they would never see their children again, so it is easy to imagine how terrible it must have been for them.

### **My mother and sister disappear.**

We were now only the three of us at home, Mother and the two of us, and it was a very difficult time. The Allies were bombing Berlin, so we had to run down to the shelter in the cellar quite often. We did not go every time because it was like running from one enemy to another. We were afraid of bombs of course, but we were also afraid of Germans that harassed us in the shelter. Mother got work with Siemens, the business that is still well known, and so did my sister. But I stayed at home. The school had closed, so I could not attend. Then I got pneumonia and was sent to a Jewish hospital. Mother came to see me every day and she told me what happened to all the people we knew. Every night Germans were knocking on doors and when people opened they were taken by the Germans and were not seen again. There was a knock on our door as well but Mother did not open, and that gave her a little time.

One day Mother and Yetta did not come to the hospital to see me, but later that day my sister called the hospital and asked for me. I went to the telephone. She told me what had happened: While they were at work at Siemens, the Germans turned up and took away all the Jews. My sister had managed to escape. It was a very short conversation for she had to hide quickly. I cried and cried for I realised that I was

now all alone. This was the last I heard from my sister. I never heard from my mother either.

**Eichmann gave the answer.**

For a long time I had no idea what had happened to them. Not until 1961 when Adolf Eichmann was taken to court in Israel did I hear about it. Eichmann was the most important man behind the Holocaust deportation system. After the War he managed to get to Argentina but he was found by the Israeli secret service and abducted to Israel for prosecution, sentenced to death and hanged.

At that time we were living in Ethiopia and Menakhem was working as a fishing expert in Eritrea. We received the daily papers from Israel, which had daily reports from the prosecution against Eichmann's trial, and I understood that my mother and sister had both been sent to Auschwitz to be gassed.

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**FF-blaðið nr. 349.**

Pages 9,10, 15 and 16.

**Hanna Ben Yami – Part 2.**

**A ticket to Auschwitz.**

At the end of the first part of our account of Hanna Ben-Yami's life we heard that the Germans deported her mother and sister to Auschwitz, while she herself was at the hospital. She was now alone in the world. In this part Hanna continues her terrible and fascinating story.

**Theresienstadt.**

I stayed at the hospital for a while. But in March 1943 the Germans sent the whole hospital, patients and staff, to the concentration camp Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia, north of Prague.

Theresienstadt used to be an ordinary town in Czechoslovakia, with a military camp. The Germans added the concentration camp to the town and gave it the same name.



### **A model camp.**

Theresienstadt was seen to be a model camp, where everybody could feel well and safe in an organized community. In German propaganda it was called “The town that Hitler has given to the Jews”, and it was meant to prove to people abroad that the conditions in the camps were not so bad, and that all the talk about mass extermination was not true.

Therefore conditions in the camp were made to look as equal to conditions outside the camp as possible - at least on paper. All those who arrived there were to feel that this was their future home under reasonable conditions. Among other things everybody received some kind of make-believe money, but nobody could actually make use of it.

There were shops where it was said to be possible to buy everything on the coupons that we were given. But the truth was that there was little or nothing to get in the shops and the coupons were practically worthless.

The truth was very different from the official picture. The camp was a ‘waiting camp’ for the death camps, and the inhabitants only stayed there until there was ‘production capacity’ in one of the extermination camps to kill them.

### **Sent by cattle trucks.**

We were put onboard a train in cattle wagons. This was the usual kind of transport used by the Germans for this purpose. Many died on the way. But in our case it was not such a long way. It usually takes 3-4 hours, but for us it may have been a little longer. I carried nothing for I owned nothing. I was with other children who were taken to a special children’s house in the camp. But I couldn’t stay there because I was too ill. So I was sent to the camp hospital and stayed there for two years. I never got any treatment. I now had tuberculosis and at that time there was really very little they could do to cure it. I stayed in a big hospital ward, we were about 25 people, I think. I was very thin and didn’t eat much. Although there was very little food, I couldn’t eat my ration, so I gave the rest to my friend who was very ill. The food was terrible and many died of hunger. Children were given more food than adults, but it was still far too little to satisfy our hunger. The food we were given was a grey soup with a few bits of potatoes or some grains of barley and some flour made of ground bark. Only once in a while were there a few pieces of meat in it.

In the camp I met a Jewish couple who practically adopted me. They were very nice people and from them I met parental love again.

Right outside the hospital windows we could see the trains coming and leaving, and we saw how badly especially those who were leaving were treated. In the beginning the travellers did not know exactly what was going to happen to them. They were told that they would go 'somewhere' to work and that they would get much better conditions. But gradually there were rumours about what really happened to them, that is that they were killed by gassing. So in the end nobody doubted that being told to get on the next train was the same as being sent to certain death.

There was room for 53,000 people in the camp. But from 1941 to 1945 about 150,000 came to Theresienstadt. Of those about 120,000 were sent on to Auschwitz and other extermination camps.

### **Had to send their own to death.**

Nothing was spared in order to make things as scary as possible for the inhabitants. Although there was some kind of self government in the camp and there was a Jewish council of Elders, these were replaced very often, because as soon as the Elders were thought to know too much about the Nazi crimes, they were killed and another council was elected or appointed. One example of the terrible things that happened was that suddenly the Elders would be told that the next day 5,000 Jews (about one tenth of the inhabitants) would have to go on a "transport". But according to the system in the camp the Elders had to select those 5,000. It is difficult to imagine how terrible it must have been for the Elders, for they knew – at least better than the others – what was going to happen to those who had to leave.

On my website in the FF paper no. 321, you can find an account of all the terror that seized people when the orders for these transports came and how people tried – understandably enough in the circumstances – in every way to avoid being on the list. This

terrible story comes from the book "Theresienstadt" by M Friediger, who was a rabbi in Copenhagen. He had been sent to this camp together with other Danish Jews, and he wrote the book in 1946.

### **When the Red Cross were fooled.**

But Theresienstadt was also an example of how good the Germans were at fooling the rest of the world. Undoubtedly, the Allies heard about the way Germany treated the Jews. The Germans tried to deny such rumours and invited the international Red Cross to come and examine the camp. They were invited to come to Theresienstadt on June 23, 1944.

The visit had to be very well prepared. The first problem was that there were many more people in the camp than there was room for and that might destroy the good

impression they wanted the visitors to get of the camp. This problem was 'solved' by sending 20,000 Jews to the extermination camps, especially those who were old, ill or weak. In that way the Red Cross people could get the impression that the inhabitants of the camp were healthy and well!

And before the visit of the Red Cross – led by the Danish Red Cross – the whole camp was cleaned up as for a royal visit. The reason why the Danish Red Cross was involved was that Danish Jews who had not been able to get away from the Germans in 1943 had been sent to Theresienstadt. And now the Danes wanted to see for themselves how their countrymen were treated. The difference between the Danes and the others in the camp was that they were guaranteed not to be sent to the extermination camps.

Flowers were planted, streets were repaired, and playgrounds for the children laid out. Bathrooms were built but no water installed! Shops that used to be closed were opened and wares put on the shelves. Most of these were things taken from those who had just been sent to their death. They also fabricated a school, but it was never used. The Germans were extremely cunning. All the inhabitants of the camp had a 'transport number'. But as this might not sound good to the visitors, who had probably heard of the transports to Poland, the number was changed into an identity number.

In this way the Red Cross representatives saw a clean and well-kept camp, and happy well-dressed children. The Red Cross could go away and tell the world that there was nothing to complain about and the Jews were fine, all things considered.

A report from the Danish representatives shows point by point that things were not too bad in the camp. Among other things it tells about musical life in the camp:

*“There was much music in the camp: Chamber music, string orchestras, opera and choirs. During our visit there was a performance of ‘Requiem’ by Verdi with excellent soloists. There was also a town orchestra of about 30 musicians who every afternoon, also during our visit, played in the town square in a special pavilion. In the theatre they performed operas: Carmen, Tosca, the Magic Flute. A Jewish composer had written an opera for children. We visited the theatre for the performance of it. The children, who were dressed up in amusing costumes threw themselves wholeheartedly into the task, and the composer himself conducted the orchestra”.*

Only after the war that it became known that after the visit the musicians were sent to the gas chambers together with the happy children who had been shown to the visitors!

### **At the hospital too.**

Hanna also remembers this visit from the Red Cross. And she witnessed it all. Before the visit they were told to clean up the hospital. Everything must look nice and tidy, so that there would be nothing to complain about. In various ways the conditions of the patients were improved. Tables were set up outside the hospital, like a café, so that the patients could sit there with a cup of coffee while the Red Cross people passed by.

Also the hospital patients witnessed some music played to the visitors. The Germans loved music, so every day a group of Jewish musicians played music outside the hospital, and they did it also on that afternoon. These musicians were on a train bound for Auschwitz a few months later.

After the Red Cross visit things went back to normal again. This must've been the biggest swindle in history, but Menakhem thinks that maybe the Red Cross wanted to be fooled. They had their headquarters in Switzerland, which was surrounded by countries occupied by the Nazis. And it was difficult to know what might happen if the Red Cross told the truth. It was dangerous to make Hitler angry.

One might also say that the aim of the Danes was mainly to protect their own countrymen, which they certainly did.

### **The death sentence came**

One October day, Hanna and the others at the hospital get a letter which tells them that on October 20, 1944 they must leave Theresienstadt on a "transport". The letter, which we can quote, is so professional that it might have been a notice about participation in a scout camp. It spelled out clear directions about the luggage allowed to be taken by the deported, which would be collected before their departure. It is not difficult to imagine that this luggage might've not left the camp at all, for what could any luggage serve those doomed to die. It might've all ended up in the camp stores.

This was also very 'professional' for the transportation to the extermination camps was taken care of by Deutsche Reichsbahn. The authorities booked and paid for so and so many passengers and the German State Railways set in trains as needed. The authorities even got a reduction on group tickets!

### **An Angel came.**

On the appointed day I watched from my ward and saw the train that had come to fetch us. I had nothing to pack for I had nothing. I was just waiting for the time to go onboard.

Then an angel comes to me. I have to call him an angel. He was a doctor at the hospital and he was a Jew. He said, "You are going nowhere, you are too ill to travel. Come with me". But I knew that my adopting parents had to go too so I said that I wanted to go with them whatever happened. I just couldn't face having to lose again those I loved and who loved me. But he insisted, "Come with me". The friend that I mentioned before was given the same orders. We followed him. He took us to another house where we were told to stay. He probably did that because he knew that a medical certificate that stated that we were too ill to travel was the only thing that could save us. According to the German make-believe 'Ordnung', sick people are not supposed to travel.

Soon afterwards my friend wasted away and died, so I was very lonesome. I never saw that doctor again. He may have gone on the train himself and met the fate that he saved me from. He may also have managed to hide. But I was the only patient from my ward at the hospital and perhaps the whole hospital who survived.

The train I was supposed to be on was the last regular transport from Theresienstadt. In November 1944 the Germans had to stop gassing the Jews in Auschwitz. The battleground was approaching the extermination camps in Poland, which caused "supply" and "production" problem in Auschwitz and they could not continue. Therefore, myself and the rest of the inhabitants of the Theresienstadt could not be gassed in Auschwitz.

### **Finally saved.**

During September and October 1944, so many transports had left our camp that only one fourth of the usual number of people were left and it felt rather empty. But towards the end of the war the camp was suddenly filled up again. About 25-30,000 people came from other camps. As the Allies approached the various concentration camps, those who were still alive were moved to 'safer' places. Some were driven like cattle along the roads. Many died, some from exhaustion, some were shot by the Germans when they were too tired to move. These were so called "death marches". Some arrived at Theresienstadt by train. They had been on their way for days in cattle wagons under the worst possible conditions. One special transport had been more terrible than any other: 3,000 Jews from Hungary had been on their way for three whole weeks, 2 to 90 years of age. And I was shocked to see them. Surely we had had

little to eat, but these prisoners looked terribly famished. They looked like living corpses, and they were dying like flies. Many of them were so exhausted that they did not have the strength to eat when they got the chance. Epidemics also broke out in the camp and killed hundreds every day.

On April 29 the Red Cross took over the camp and on May 13 the Russians arrived, and the German period was over.

### **Saved at the last moment.**

It must be said that it was at the last moment that the rescue came. In the home of the camp commandant a document was found that showed a detailed plan for the destruction of Theresienstadt to be carried out on May 10, 1944. According to that plan the destruction was to take only a few hours, so the Germans were good at planning to the very last days of the war.

After the Russians, the Americans arrived to take care of us. Various Western relief organisations had got into Czechoslovakia to help those who had survived concentration camps. At first we were taken to Pilsen in Czechoslovakia by train, then we boarded big American lorries. And as if we had not had enough troubles, our lorry had an accident and went off the road. I was lucky to get only a few scratches. We arrived in Germany and everything had been prepared to give us first aid.

I was still ill. At first I was sent to a sanatorium and treated for tuberculosis. I wanted to go to Palestine but the British would not allow that. I was sent to a convent in Bavarian mountains. There was lots of fresh air and good conditions so gradually I recovered my health. In 1947 I was taken to a displaced persons camp for Jewish refugees..

### **To Israel.**

I tried to find out what had happened to my two brothers, and they turned out to have arrived safely in Palestine. Sali enlisted in a Jewish Brigade and fought Germans in Italy, where he was wounded. Actually he was too young to enlist but he had lied about his age in order to join up. After the war he had returned home.

Finally I went to Israel. It was now 1948, so it was possible to get almost legally into the country. But, before the State of Israel was proclaimed, it was not easy for a young person like me – without parents – to get to Palestine. I had, like so many other children in my situation, to get a false passport that showed the British authorities that I already lived in Palestine. And it worked.

### **Almost lost my brother after all.**

The first thing I did was to look for my brothers. They lived in a kibbutz near Rekhovot, not very far from Tel Aviv. When I got to Israel, as the country was now called, I stayed in an immigration camp on Mount Carmel. But soon, Sali took me to his kibbutz. My other brother Heini worked for a chemical factory near the Death Sea. He and some people from other kibbutzim had also to defend the factory from attacks by Arab marauders. When Heini heard that I had come to the kibbutz where the two of them lived, he took time off to come and meet me. But because of the Arab insurrection he could not go by land but had to go by aeroplane. The plane had engine trouble and had to make a crash landing south of Jaffa. There they were attacked by an Arab group, and those who survived the crash were shot by the Arabs.

### **Saved by one of the murderers.**

The only one who did not die was my brother Heini. Severely wounded, he pretended to be dead in order to avoid the final shot. But one of the murderous band realised that one of the 'dead' moves and the most improbable thing happens: instead of shooting, this man tells my brother to lie still. After some hours a message from him is delivered to a Jewish settlement in the area that one person had survived the shooting. Soon a rescue team came to pick him up on a stretcher. He was so badly wounded that I did not recognise him. He had extensive surgery and took him many months to recover.

It is surprising that this Arab suddenly became so compassionate. Maybe he thought that his solicitude might help him in a situation where he needed the same kind of compassion from Israelis.

It was certainly strange.

About that time my elder brother Sali was in the army and involved in fierce battles to break the Arab armies' siege of Jerusalem.

Sali became a fisherman, then a skipper-owner of a trawler fishing out of Haifa, and Heini became a teacher and a walking encyclopaedia of plants, birds, insects, and other animals.

Now they are both dead. They died of cancer. Both got married and had children, so life goes on after all.

### **Met Menakhem.**

Menakhem was in the same kibbutz as my brothers and that was how we met.

Menakhem says that after all the things that had happened I looked like a 14-year-old when I arrived, even though I was almost 18 and had recovered over the post-war two

years. I stayed in the kibbutz for some months as a visitor and to look after my brother until he got well.

Menakhem joined the navy and I along with other young immigrants moved to a kibbutz in the Jordan valley, and here I learned Hebrew and other subjects at high school level. About 1950, at the end of the War of Independence, our group settled in a new kibbutz, called Ha-on, near the Lake of Gennesaret. In 1953 I started at a college of education, and got a teacher's job in 1956.

While I was still a student, Menakhem, who was at that time a trawler skipper, and I decided to get married. We made our home in a kibbutz in Western Galilee and that is where our children were born. We lived there until 1960 when we went to Massawa in Eritrea, where Menakhem worked as a fishing expert. In 1963 we returned to Israel so that the children could go to school there. I kept on working as a teacher until I stopped in 1988, and Menakhem has been working in fishery research, and since 1975, for seven years in the fisheries department in Rome of the UN organisation, FAO.

### **Back in Berlin.**

In the 80s my brother Sali went back to Berlin, which was still a divided city. One of the first things he did was to try to find our house, which stood in the old part of East Berlin, but he could not find it. All the streets were so much changed that it was hopeless to find it. The whole area had been destroyed by bombs and had been built up again in a different way. Only the big avenues were still there. That was a great disappointment. In 1990 Menakhem, I, my brother Heini and his wife went to Berlin. We had been invited by Berlin's City Council. We were unable to locate our house, either.

But two years ago our son told us that he had seen the film "The Pianist" where Polanski, the film director, who is also a Polish Jew, tells the story of a Jew, a famous pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman and how he managed to survive the Holocaust., and shows the terrible things that Germans did in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Our son wanted us all to go to the places of Menakhem's childhood, and where also he had escaped the Nazis. He had been through some of the things as the main character in the film.

He organised the whole family to go with us. After Warsaw we went to Berlin. A woman who was our guide knew everything about Berlin's history, and knew every street. Before we left home our son had given her the name of our street. So when we arrived she took us to there and to the place where we used to live. We would never



have found the street for its name had been changed. It used to be Mendelsohn Strasse. That name must have sounded too Jewish, so the Nazis changed it into Romberger Strasse. Now the street got its old name back. Our guide also found the hospital where I stayed for so long.

### **My uncle came back in a bottle.**

My mother's brother, who also used to live in Berlin, was a hard-working shoemaker. He had the same fate as my father and was killed in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, north of Berlin, already in 1938. This was where the first test gassings of Jewish prisoners took place. It was done by taking them to an airtight room in a lorry and then use a length of tube from to feed them gas from the lorry's exhaust pipe. This worked well, but was not sufficient. So the next step in the 'development' were industrialised gas chambers.

At that time the Germans sent the ashes of those they had killed to their families in bottles, so that the families could perform a burial and have a grave to visit. But at the same time the families had to pay the expenses of it.

I did not know where the grave was, but our guide called the office of the graveyard, and again it became clear how well the Germans organise everything, even when it is a question of killing people. We were told the exact row where we would find my uncle's grave. So we all went to find the grave. It was a bit difficult to find because the stones were so overgrown with weeds that the names had disappeared. Our guide started to scrape a stone and it just happened to be the grave we were looking for. We now had the opportunity to commemorate this victim of the Nazis.

This uncle had a daughter who escaped to France with her family. Not far enough, for there her husband was killed by the Nazis. She and their son survived and later moved to the USA.

After the graveyard we went to the train station from where they had sent us and so many others to Theresienstadt and other concentration camps. We found inscriptions commemorating all the transports, their destinations and the number of passengers on each train. We found the exact transports where my mother and my sister had been sent to death, and I to Teresienstadt. These inscriptions are there to remind people of what has happened, and they have been taken from the original registers. Also here, everything was in order!

We visited the Jewish Museum in Berlin. We had sat down to rest a little when our grandson came running and said, "Granny, come down here, there is something you

must see". I ran after him and I could not believe my own eyes, for there was my mother's name registered in a list of the German Jews that had been killed. And we found my sister's name as well. Finally I had proof that they had been sent to Auschwitz and all the horrors that go with that name.

Rudolf Høss, Commandant of Auschwitz has written his memoirs. There can be no doubt that under other circumstances he might have been a competent business manager. He describes very carefully how he was asked to make the extermination of the Jews more efficient, for it took too long time. Filling up a lorry with Jews and gassing them with exhaust worked well, but it did not meet the requirements. Hess developed the plan for the gas chambers in Auschwitz, where they could kill hundreds or thousands at the same time. He did not feel sorry about this. He had performed the task he had been asked to perform. He was hanged in 1947.

We also went to Wannsee, near Berlin, where the Nazi government made the decision for the Final Solution, the killing of all Jews. But we are living proof that they did not succeed completely.

### **Interesting and emotional conversation.**

This was Hanna's story. I have had many interviews with people but this was the most touching story I have heard. Hanna is an unusual woman with an exceptional fate, and sometimes while she told me about her life she was deeply moved. It was also interesting to find that in spite of all the things Hanna has been through, she feels no bitterness. It is characteristic of both Hanna and Menakhem that you would not have known from their manner that they have been sent to their death by crazy fanatics. They themselves bear no trace of fanaticism.

Now they live in the town of Kiyat Tiv'on, between Haifa and Nazareth, where they have a garden, which is mostly Hanna's. They live in harmony with their Arab neighbours. Even though Menakhem is 78 years old, he is still active within the fisheries and travels abroad to give lectures.

Indeed an exceptional couple.

### **Captions to the articles about Hanna Ben Yami.**

***FF-Newspaper 348.***

**Frontpage.**

Hanna and Menakhem.

**Text:**

Hanna - German jew under the nazism:

First they took my father, then my mother, then my sister and finally me.

**page 9.**

*Top*

Hanna.

*Next*

Hanna's parents with the 3 older siblings (Hanna not yet born), the blond toddler is Heini, the one standing is Sali next to their elder sister Yeti.

*Next.*

The 4 Glaser siblings in Berlin about 1940. Left to right: Hanna, Heini, Yeti and Sali.

**page 10.**

The photo shows Hanna set up for her first day in school in 1937.

*next.*

"Blacklist" of those dealing with Jews.

*next.*

Appeal not to purchase from jews. Doing so you is a people's traitor.

*next.*

Illustration from a children's book. The message is clear!

**page 15.**

From a text book.

*next.*

In Hitlerjugend the children learnt to hate Jews.

*next.*

One of the most famous antijewish movies, The Eternal Jew.

*next.*

*Burning synagoge - Chrystal Night.*

**page 16.**

Der Stuermer was a pornograf paper based on the hate to jews. The editor Julius Streicher got what he deserved. He was hanged in Nurnberg in 1946.

*next*

The couple in the top have broken the racial legislation and will surely end in a kz-camp.

*next.*

Jews were forbidden to use the benches in Berlin.

*next.*

Even games for children had the message: Jewis out!

***Newspaper, issue nr. 349.***

**Front page**

Got transport order to Auschwitz.

Hanna was on the way to the death train. Then an angel came.....

**page 9.**

The top photo was taken in Berlin, on the railway station wherefrom Berlin Jews were sent in cattle wagons to Auschwitz, Theresienstadt, etc. Here Adam, a grandson, is photographed kneeling on the rail at a point bearing the inscription: **16.6.1943 / 428 JUDEN / BERLIN - THERESIENSTADT**. It describes the very "transport" which took Hanna to Theresienstadt. All transports are recorded on that quay as a memorial.

**page 10.**

*Top.*

Nice and well dressed children during the Red Cross inspection in Theresienstadt. After the visit they were sent to Auschwitz, where they were killed.

*Next.*

**The transport order.**

848 13185-I/96 Glaser Hanna 1930 Langesrt.11/168

**Summons.**

This is to inform you that you are assigned to a transport, and you must report on Sunday, 22.10.1944, on 06:00 to 10:00 at latest, at the concentration site at Langestrasse 3. Unable participants in the transport shall be picked up by the transport direction on Saturday 21.10.1944, at 15:00.

Upon receiving this order, you must immediately prepare your luggage. Maximum weight up to 30 kg; maximum 2 packs. (Vessels, as pots, bowls and water buckets are not to be taken). The luggage will be picked up by the transport direction on Saturday, 21-10-1944 starting 13:00, and till that moment it must be ready for taking. Only one hand pack, as small shoulder bag can be carried to the gate (*of the concentration site*). Bigger packs must be given over to the transport direction already at the gate, before loading in wagons. To maintain good order, reporting on time is absolutely necessary.

2697 L/O-44/f

*Next.*

**The food stamps.**

Explanation of the transportnumber:

The Roman number I indicates the country or town, where the transport came from, second 96 indicates the number of the transport and the third 13185 indicates the personal number. Just before the Red Cross visit the transportnumber was replaced by a kenn-nr.

**Page 15.**

*Top.*

One is of the whole Ben-Yami line, taken in Warsaw on the street of Menakhem's birth, in the year 2003. From right to left: Hanna, Adam Ben-Yami, our eldest grandson, now 18, myself, our daughter Tsofit Kirshner with her elder son Itay, behind her our son Roy and his daughter Mika. The boy in front of her is our youngest grandson, Tsofit's son Yotam. Adam is Roy's son. All the grandsons are much taller, now. Itay is taller than me, Yotam is Hanna's height, and Adam is a regular sixfooter, a bit taller than his father.

*Next.*

Clockwise, starting with Hanna and her two brothers, about 10 years ago: the white-haired Heini the teacher, and the elder Sali the skipper, already shrunk of the cancer of which he soon died.

*Next*

Hanna with Tsofit, 6, and Roy, 5, soon after our return from Africa in 1963.

*Next.*

Hanna soon after arrival in the Land, 1948-9.

**page 16.**

Hanna and Menakhem in 1961, in Asmara, Eritrea.

*next*

Hanna with the children about the same time

*next.*

The documentation at Jewish Museum in Berlin for the fate of Hanna's mother Bertha B Glaser.