



1946 - 2009: Palestine / Israel, USA

by

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Susi, Daniel, Arnold and Ron Friedmann in 1978
(photo: private)

Blind Date

My friend Miriam in Tel Aviv had told me about an “Aron” (Aron has been called by all our American friends Arnold, but I, family and ex-Israelis still call him Aron) Friedmann in the British army. I think it was summer of 1946, when she told me that Aron is coming on furlough and she and Luxa (Gabriel), will arrange a blind date for Aron and me the Saturday after Arnold’s arrival. The four of us will go out.

I was in a swim club, Maccabi Zair. All the various sport clubs had a parade that Saturday morning. I was marching with the flag bearers in the front. The parade ended in the stadium, where I got rid of the flag and I and many other girls were given streamers and performed

with them. After the performance, I saw someone in the stands wave to me. It was Shoshanna Haas, a member of our crowd. Now, she is Susi Fessler and our son Dan's, mother in law. I climbed up to her and she introduced me to my blind date. When we met in the evening, we did not let on that we had already met. This established an immediate bond and we had a great time that evening. The rest is history. That was 62 ½ years ago!!!

My Adventures in the Israeli Army During the War of Independence

Sixty years have passed and it is quite possible that my mind plays tricks on me. But, that is how I remember the various incidents. I used Google to verify certain dates, such as when the second armistice took place, since I joined the army a few days before. Also when Count Bernadotte was assassinated by the Stern Gang (Jewish terrorists). Count Bernadotte worked for the United Nations in Jerusalem.

I joined the army, or rather was drafted, in early June 1948. At that time I worked in my father's and his two partners', also friends, cotton dress business. The wife of one partner and I were the cutters and pattern makers. My father didn't want me to be in the army. He was in the Austrian army in World War 1 and told me: "Don't ever volunteer for anything and always play stupid." I don't know whether he was afraid for me or didn't want to lose me in the workshop. My brother Gerhard, who also worked there had already joined the army.

One day while I worked, my father looked in my pocket book for my marching orders and took them. When I couldn't find them I got very upset. Father admitted then that he took the papers and claimed he only wanted to get an extension of my draft day. I was so angry that I went home to complain to mother. I had looked forward to my life as a soldier. Since uniforms were in short supply, I made my own khaki blouse and skirt of which I was very proud.

I forgot where I had to be for the bus that took me and other girls to camp Tel Litvinsky (now a Hebrew name). The camp was built by the U.S. armed forces for their troops in the Middle East as an R&R (Rest & Recreation) camp and was not far from Tel Aviv. It was much more luxurious than any British camp. It was divided into many sub camps, also a hospital and prison and very good sports facilities including a large pool. It had large tents, barracks for officers and mess halls in the various smaller camps.

There were very few girls on my bus, and of course, I was the only one in khaki. I remember very little of the first few days in camp. I was pleased to find that one of the officers I knew from swimming in Maccabi in whose house I stayed when we swam in Haifa.

I had to take an IQ test in Hebrew. Since my Hebrew skills were very poor, I missed most of the questions and didn't finish the test. Then I had an interview with an officer whom I told that although I speak Hebrew, I cannot read or write well, and should not be sent to work in an office. I also told him that I don't care where I am going to be sent, or what I would have to do, as long as I don't have to work in a hospital. The sight of blood makes me sick.

Soon after my group of draftees started basic training, the second general truce was declared, I think June 11, 1948, but collapsed a few weeks later (nothing has changed in the last 60 year).

During the truce the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) prepared for the resumption of hostilities in order to capture more land. My group was taken out of camp one morning to help camouflage the seven or eight tanks being prepared for attack. Our task was to weave earthen colored ribbons through netting to cover the tanks.

The reason why this episode continues to stick in my mind is, that almost each tank crew spoke a different language. I was puzzled by that fact and wondered how the crews could communicate with each other or understand the commands.

I just read the book "A lemon tree" by Sandy Toland and found out there never was a battle to conquer Ramleh, because "Glubb Pasha's" Arab Legion was not in Ramleh. King Abdullah of then Trans Jordan, thought he had not enough soldiers. The Israelis just expelled all the Arabs from Ramleh and Lydda (now Lud). Christians were allowed to stay and some still live there.

My basic training came to an abrupt end one day. After a day of training I went to the pool. Suddenly the officer whom I knew from Maccabi, came running to get me shouting: "Hurry back to your tent, you are being posted! I packed your kit bag because you have to leave in half an hour." I barely had time to get into my dry clothes and jump on the bus with my kit bag.

Typically of any army, my interview was ignored and a few of my unit and I were taken to a hospital in Jaffa to work. Once in Jaffa we were told to report for work early the next morning. I don't recall where we were supposed to sleep that night, but I received permission to go home.

I had the feeling, that those in charge of us at the hospital did not know what to do with us. I assume they asked for nurses or nurses' aides. The hospital was in the oldest part of Jaffa and looked pretty dilapidated. I was very happy to go home for the first time since I joined the army and my parents were happy to see me.

The next morning I duly reported to a physician in the hospital. I told him that at my initial interview in Tel Litvinsky, I had asked not to be sent to a hospital, since I might faint at the sight of blood. Some exaggerations can be useful. His reply was, that he has no use for me and that I should return to the camp I came from. Of course I knew that my papers went with me and no one in Tel Litvinsky will know what to do with me.

I don't remember whom I reported to in Tel Litvinsky, probably the officer in charge of the basic training camp from where I left. I was told that for them I don't exist anymore, since my papers are now at the hospital. She sent me to another part of the camp, a transit camp. The officer in charge of the transit camp assigned me to a tent and told me to start cleaning that camp of papers on the sand. Very boring and very hot, since it was summer.

During my short career as a soldier I decided I wanted to become a physical training instructor. During basic training I talked to our physical education instructors about it. They had told me that in the near future they will be send to Camp Dora in Natanya for a six weeks formal training course, since they had no formal training and I should apply for a future course.

In the summer of 1948 the IDF were not yet a real army. There was little of anything, weapons, uniforms and organization. Either one played stupid or took matters into one's own hand. I did both during my army career. While picking up papers, I thought of the advice of the two instructors. I asked for leave which was granted. I hitchhiked to Camp Dora where I talked to an officer in charge and was promised a spot in the next course.

Of course I had no intentions of spending any more time in the transit camp. When I returned, I visited Avraham Frank, a friend who worked in another part of Tel Litvinsky, where English speaking volunteers from all over the world were processed and assigned to units. I asked him whether he could find work for me for a few weeks. He knew my English was much better than my Hebrew. He was successful.

I don't remember when my military papers caught up with me, or where I was assigned to sleep, once my transfer to the camp for English speaking volunteers came through. I do remember that during that time I never spent a night there. I received a pass, a piece of paper about 5'' x 7'' which entitled me to leave camp after work. But, it was restricted to the village of Tel Litvinsky and had a curfew hour by which time I had to enter the camp again. Those restriction were written by hand exactly in the middle of the pass. I had a plastic envelope into which the pass barely fitted. Very carefully I made a small fold in its center so the handwritten restrictions disappeared from view. The next few weeks, as long as I worked with Avraham, I hitchhiked home every evening and back in the morning. I never had to wait for a ride

and some drove so fast that the ride took no time at all. I am proud to say I was never caught. After a few weeks my orders came to report to Camp Dora for the next physical education instructors' course arrived. I am sure that one or two years later no such shenanigans would have been possible.

While working with Avraham, three deserters from the British army appeared. They were Irish and I assume they were with a British unit under "Glubb Pasha", a British commander of the Jordanian Legion. Usually we had Jews and a few Gentiles from all over the English speaking world. We had to supply the Irish with Israeli military papers and give them Israeli names in case they were caught by the Jordanian Legion.

It was then that I first heard of the Irish people and that they hate the British. I had never heard of the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland under the British.

I enjoyed Camp Dora. The only part I didn't like was jogging in the morning and I usually dropped out, but no one seemed to mind. We did gymnastic, obstacle course crawling under barbed wire, climbing walls, jumping from heights, which some girls hated, and walking on ropes. We also had to learn to throw hand-grenades and learn to clean rifles. Once we were taken to a shooting range and I did OK. Since I was a good swimmer and swam in a club before joining the army, I loved that activity. In a race I came in first. During the course we were supposed to get leave, but the last minute it was canceled because Count Bernadotte was assassinated. I looked up the date, it was September 17, 1948.

After I finished the course I was posted back to Tel Litvinsky where my army career started. I became the physical education instructor for new recruits. I only remember two incidents from that period:

On the day before Yom Kippur the officer in charge of our camp announced in the mess hall, that all kitchens will be closed for Yom Kippur. She also announced that she feels she can not compel anyone who has to stay in camp to fast, and that we can help ourselves to food on the table in front of the mess hall, where upon a stampede to that table started. I made sandwiches which I stored under my cot in the tent. The following morning looking for my breakfast, I found that mice or rats got at it and I had nothing to eat. When I left my tent, I think I was the only one in the tent, I met two male soldiers whom I told my woes. They invited me to join them since they had eggs, bread and a small stove. So I didn't starve after all and had a good time. I probably went to the pool later.

One afternoon I was appointed duty officer of all of Tel Litvinsky, which I thought rather ridiculous, since I was only a private first class. Each night a different sub camp had to provide

a duty officer and it was the turn of the camp for female recruits. All the higher non-commissioned and commissioned officers must have had other plans. Anyhow, here I was with a jeep, driver and special armband indicating that I was the officer in charge that night. My duty was to inspect all the gates leading outside, the prison, hospital, and sub camps. I felt very important, especially when I was saluted. One day there was a swim meet and I came in first, just like in Camp Dora.

The rest of my undistinguished army career is in a haze. After I left the camp I lived at home. My duties were to keep female soldiers assigned to office work in various offices in Tel Aviv in shape. I most hated the hour they had to spend with me and I was not very good at commanding them around. My father tried to figure out how much each knee bend my soldiers and I performed cost the government (Ben Gurion was then the prime minister). Since my pay was all of six Israeli Pounds a month, probably a few dollars, it did not really matter.

Wedding and Ocean Crossing

Arnold had left for the U.S. in 1947 on a German immigration visa to be able to work and save money for college, so he could study interior design. He applied to Pratt Institute and was accepted for the fall of 1948, but returned to Israel to participate in the War of Independence in 1948. Neither one of us found someone better, so we got engaged while we were in the army. He was stationed in Jerusalem and I near Tel Aviv or already lived at home. Whenever he had furlough he came to Tel Aviv.

My brother Gerhard while still in the British army, had met one of my girlfriends, Susi Thaler, also from Vienna, when we were on vacation in Nahariah in 1945 or 1946.

In 1948, all four of us were in the Israeli army. Susi had the highest rank, second lieutenant. Arnold and I wanted to get married in the near future. Gerhard and Susi had decided to get married March 1, 1949 and told us if we want them to come to our wedding, we would have to get married during their two week furlough. So we went to see the rabbi of a German almost reform synagogue and told him the week we would like to have our wedding. He told us Tuesday is a good day for Jews to get married. That Tuesday was March 10 and my 23rd birthday.

All our parents were on very good terms. Susi's mother, Trude, was one of the best seamstresses in Jerusalem and made a beautiful white wedding gown for her. My father ordered from Trude a dark blue suit for my wedding and a suit for my future trip to the USA. Else, my

mother in law, told me she would love to see me married in a white dress and whether I would ask Susi to lend it to me should it fit. Well it did.

All our friends who had the time and my army colleagues came to the small wedding. After the ceremony we had some food in the small courtyard behind the synagogue. Later in the day we had a small dinner party for family and friends in a restaurant, for which I changed into the blue suit.

We went on a brief honeymoon to Mount Carmel. Then we returned to army duties. Our 'apartment' was the bedroom of my parents-in-law. We knew it would only be for a short time.

Shortly after our wedding I was released from the army, but stayed with my parents unless Arnold was in Tel Aviv. Arnold requested an early release from the army to be in time for the fall semester 1949, which was granted after some run around and paperwork. He had reentry visa for the USA. I had saved some money which paid for his flight to NY. I returned to my parents little house. I don't remember whether I returned to work for my father or what I did till I could leave.

I needed an affidavit to immigrate, which one of my mother's numerous cousins provided. Since I was the wife of a legal immigrant, I only waited five months for my visa. I left from Haifa on a converted hospital ship. We were seven in my cabin. The trip took two weeks, with a stop in Piraeus, from where I could take a tour of the Acropolis. We also stopped in Naples, where I joined an excursion to Pompeii. The two stops were very enjoyable but most of the time on board I did not feel too well in my stomach, especially once in the Atlantic.

Kew Gardens

Before my arrival in New York, on January 17, 1950, Arnold had rented a furnished room for \$9 a week in a big apartment in Kew Gardens. Kew Gardens at that time was full of refugees from Germany and Austria, "Jeckes", and one heard a lot of German on the street and in shops. Our landlady was from Russia, but a young "Jecke" couple and a single older "Jecke" woman lived in the apartment. In exchange for cheaper rent, Arnold cleaned one of the bathrooms.

Arnold's uncle and aunt and two small children lived in the same apartment complex. His aunt was very helpful showing me the various food stores in the area and how to shop. When I left Israel, there were no supermarkets. She also invited us for meals ever so often. After a

year or so, our landlady moved to a somewhat smaller apartment in the same building. We moved with her and now had a nicer room and our own small bathroom.

After two or three weeks in NY, I started to look for a job in the garment district. I had hoped to work as a cutter again, but was told the strong cutters union does not admit women. Every morning I bought "Women's Wear Daily" to look for available jobs in the garment district. After a few interviews, I was hired as a sample hand in a blouse wholesale house. I think, the manager who interviewed me, liked the idea that I came from Israel. He handed me a finished blouse and the same model cut and told me to sew it and bring it to him when finished. Upon seeing my finished product he offered to hire me at \$40 a week. I accepted.

Subway cost 10 cent, postage 3 and meat for us two about \$1. Soon I asked for an increase which was granted.

Three days after I started to work, Betty Fast, wife of Howard Fast who was in prison as un-American, was hired as a new designer and I was assigned to work for her. When fabric salesmen came, she chose a few designs of three yards, but never used all. The ones she did not use, she gave to me. She was a wonderful boss and we became friends. I worked for her till I was too pregnant.

When I left my wages were \$57. Soon after I started to work, I joined one of the garment unions and had their health insurance. I think I was fully covered for maternity expenses and in 1954 for a five day stay in hospital.

When Arnold was in his third or last year to get his certificate, Pratt changed to four years with a BA. He did not want to continue, but was offered a TA position and free tuition.

Our parents had written, should you come back you have to come with a fridge, washing machine etc., and also money to buy a co-up. We wanted a child, so we drifted into becoming immigrants but I had no problems adjusting as many new immigrants have upon their arrival, since I had lived here for three years and life did not change. As I mentioned, my mother had many cousins in NY, all very helpful. Our friends were "Jeckes" or ex-Israelis.

At that point we looked for an apartment in Kew Gardens and found a one bedroom apartment with a large entrance hall with room for Arnold's drawing table. Family gave us cast off furniture, which we slowly replaced when money was available. Toward the end of Arnold's TA year, our son Daniel was born May 7, 1954.

Arnold was asked to stay on as an assistant to the chair. The following year he became an assistant professor and in the late sixties became chair of the department. After Danny was

born, we voluntarily increased the rent from \$50 to \$55, to be on a waiting list for the first available two bedroom apartment. We were lucky and got the best possible within a few months.

Shortly before our son Ron was born, my parents-in-law immigrated from Israel and we found a one bedroom apartment for them one floor below our two bedroom one. My mother in law was a great help with the children.

After Danny was born, I started to take evening courses at Pratt, which were free for faculty spouses and staff. Over ten years, skipping some semesters, I had accumulated 16 credits and was informed that I have to matriculate. I applied to Queens College where my London Matriculation was accepted as a high school equivalency. It took five or six years to receive my BA sociology in 1970.

In 1959 we and my in-laws decided to look for a house to have more space. We found an old Victorian house, also in Kew Gardens. It had previously been converted into a “mother-daughter-house”. My in-laws had a three room apartment on the first floor, and we had about five to six on the upper two levels and two bathrooms. It also had a rather large backyard which we all used a lot. It was perfect for big parties for our children and Arnold’s students. Most of the neighborhood children came to play in our yard.

After I graduated, I looked for a job and was offered one by the “Association for the Help of retarded Children” to work in a day school. The teenagers were bussed from their homes. My day was finished at 2 pm, so I was home when my children came home from school.

Since Arnold did not want to stay the rest of his working life at Pratt, he decided to accept a job at UMASS in 1972, one of several he was offered. We wanted to stay on the East Coast to be near to his parents who were getting older.

Amherst

We arrived in Amherst in August 1972. Shortly after Arnold had accepted the job in March, we made an appointment with an Amherst real estate agent. She did not listen to our requirements, so we did not see any suitable houses. We made another appointment. Before that appointment, we received through UMASS housing an advertisement of a house which appealed to us very much, so we left Kew Gardens earlier to look at it before meeting the real estate agent. Again not liking anything, we went back and bought it.

I was worried moving to a small New England town, being Jewish and having an accent. After one week, we were invited for dinner by Dennis and Annick Porter, whom we had met the first week, he English, she French. The other guests were our new neighbor who moved in the same day, Chris Hurn, English, a New Zealander married to an Armenian from Baghdad and Shlomit Shajet, born in Israel. Of the eight not one was born in the U.S. Everyone had an accent. So I was not worried anymore.

I applied to UMASS to take my MA in education, since I couldn't find a job with mentally handicapped children. I was also told that there is a glut of masters and PhDs in the area but no one can sew. So I put an advertisement in the local paper and soon had customers. Some of my customers became friends and my new friends became customers. I took only 2 courses each semester and received my MA in 1975. Dan was a freshman at UMASS, but lived at home. Ron went to the Amherst high school, luckily in walking distance. In my 'old' age I did not want to have to drive my teenager. Dan had his own car.

We lived in Amherst close to the university and high school, surrounded by noisy fraternities. Once Ron finished high school in 1976 and went to Oberlin, we looked for a house in a quieter neighborhood and found an old, rather large, farmhouse built in 1826 in Hadley, less than 2 miles from the center of Amherst. After I received my MA, I audited classes at UMASS and Amherst College and continued to do alterations. Every so often I had part time jobs. I also had a large vegetable garden which gave me much pleasure. In 2002 Arnold decided the house and land was too much work. So we looked for a ranch house in Amherst and have lived in it happily ever since. We lived 26 years in the old farmhouse, longer than any other place.

Epilogue: My nonreligious background

My father's father, Alfred Kirsch born in Vienna in 1861, wanted to be able to go to a good *Gymnasium* (high school). I think Jews could not go, so he became a Roman Catholic after he had his Bar Mitzvah. He married a Jewish girl and she baptized. My father was born a Catholic and was an altar boy in the Catholic church. The *Gymnasium* he went to had lots of Jewish boys, including my mother's cousins. My mother went to a girls' school next to the *Gymnasium* and met my father at that time. Most of my father's friends were Jews. My parents married at city hall and my father left Catholicism but never became a Jew.

My mother's mother's family, knew little about Judaism. Her great-grandfather was born in 1800 to an ultra-orthodox Rabbi in Breslau and as soon as he was old enough fled west to Iserlohn, a town near the Rhine. He did not allow any religion in his house.

My mother's father was born 1869 in Vienna and died before I was born. I was told he fasted on Yom Kippur. In Vienna my mother had a big meal Erev Yom Kippur with friends which lasted till midnight. At 2 p.m. the next day she broke the fast.

I grew up with a large Christmas tree, and hunted for Easter eggs. Only when I started school and had to go once a week to learn about Jewish religion (state and church were not separated in Austria), did we have Hanukkah lights. We did not observe Jewish holidays. For Passover I was invited to the grandparents of one of my friends.

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