

# The Port of Haifa

## The story of Mordecai Varsano's Journey to Israel from Bulgaria

My family was optimistic about starting a new life in Israel and anxious to start working diligently to secure a peaceful and prosperous home. They hoped that the evils of fascism and communism in their life were vanquished forever. However, there was a new evil that would terrorize them in the Middle East. Fascism and communism were replaced by a shaky socialist society encircled by hostile Arab neighbors.

The problems of Palestine intensified when the UN voted to partition the country with a small portion for the Israeli Jews and the remainder for the Palestinian Arabs. After the Partition Plan became official, Britain offered little help to make a smooth transition for the UN commission. The British mostly despised the Israelis because Jewish “terrorist” groups had been harassing them for years. The Irgun Zvi Leumi, (National Military Organization) attacked British police stations, offices, and headquarters. They seized weapons and replenished their arsenals. The Irgun and later the Stern Gang—led by Avraham Stern—employed paramilitary tactics against the Arabs, which provided relief for the settlers, but also hampered the political creditability of the Jewish Agency. The British responded by making mass arrests and many Irgun fighters were driven into hiding. The Hagannah kidnapped several of the Irgun's members and handed them over to the British.

After the tragedy of the Holocaust, Jewish unity was strengthened as the Irgun, the Hagannah, and the Stern Group combined to fight the British who were unwilling to

combat Arab terrorism against Jews—which is a support that Israelis still lack today. The Irgun in a sensational attack blew up the wing of the King David hotel in Jerusalem which housed the British Palestine Command. Warnings went unheeded and ninety-one lives were lost. The British carried out mass arrests and the fighting intensified with the British authorities resorting to public floggings, deportations, arrests and hangings. When the British hung three Irgun members, the Irgun captured three British soldiers and hung them in retaliation.

Despite the bloodshed, the British authorities were trying to posture themselves as neutral. However, they did not want to appear publicly sympathetic to the Jews in any way and thus anger the Arab nations. The British believed that the Arabs would be victorious in a military confrontation with the Jews because of a superior number of soldiers. If the Arabs did win, the British believed that the former colonial power would still play an important role in Palestine. To achieve this goal, the British aided the Arab militaries and restricted the Jews in every legal way possible with intentional bureaucratic delays and totally ignoring the necessities of the new settlers. When news of the British treatment of the Jewish immigrants spread to Bulgaria, my father began to develop a certain level of resentment towards the British, even though they weren't officially enemies.

Arab nations responded to the Partition Plan by persecuting Jewish citizens within their own borders and voting for a military intervention with an Arab Liberation Army. On May 14, 1948, the nation of Israel declared its independence and was invaded by Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. A cycle of violence began in Palestine that still exists today. The country became divided into war fronts and battle zones. While the

battles raged, my family was trying to liquidate what little possessions they still had in Bulgaria in order to afford the uncertain Aliyah to the troubled land of Israel.

During the British mandate, the various Jewish military factions were independently operated with often conflicting agendas. The Irgun were determined to use military force to clear the Arabs and the British out of Israel while the Jewish Agency tried to appeal to the world's political forces to be sympathetic towards the Zionist cause. For the War of Independence to be successful, it was crucial that the separate military factions unify into a cohesive and powerful unit. Two weeks after independence was declared, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), or Zvah Haganah Le Yisrael (Zahal) in Hebrew, was formed by Ben Gurion. The Jewish opposition group Irgun—led by Menachim Begin who had been follower of Jabotinsky and Revisionist Zionism that stressed the need for a strong military—challenged Ben Gurion's proclamation. Although there was a brief confrontation between the two military units, the common cause of establishing a viable Jewish state trumped any other opposing philosophies and the IDF became the only military power representing the Jewish people. Rather than resort to violent resistance, Begin eventually turned his opposition into the political realm with the formation of the Herut Party, or Freedom Movement while most of the Irgun leaders eventually ended up in the Likud party The Jewish Agency and its followers splinter into other groups that ultimately morphed into the Labor Party. Unfortunately, the Palestinian leaders have yet been unable to make the transition from freedom fighter to legitimate political rulers.

The Haganah, the underground military organization of pre-state Israel and the Palmach, an elite Jewish army unit of post WWII Palestine, were replaced by the IDF.

By July of 1948, Israel had set up an Air Force, Navy, and Tank Battalion. A couple of years later, my father would be conscripted into their recently formed ranks. The newly unified IDF acquired most of the weapons from Czechoslovakia and the US black market. Israel received WWII surplus weapons broken down into pieces and shipped separately disguised as official import products such as textile and agricultural machinery.

After several months of warfare, Israel defeated the invading Arab nations and expanded its borders beyond the UN partition plan. Israel had lost 6,000 lives representing 1% of the total Jewish population. The Arabs suffered far more casualties, but they represented a much smaller percentage of the total Arab population. In February of 1949, Egypt signed an armistice with Israel but refused to recognize it as a nation. Similar agreements followed with Lebanon in March, Transjordan in April, and Syria in July. Iraqi forces simply withdrew and did not sign any agreement.

Well before the peace accords were agreed upon, the displaced Jews were flooding into Israel. Once a military victory appeared imminent, the top priority of the Israeli government shifted to emptying the Displaced Persons Camps in Europe, as well as the Cyprus and Atlit Detention Camps. During this initial period of massive European immigration, the Bulgarians along with the Yugoslavians and Turks, were swept onto Israel's shores in the first wave of nation building.

Once immigration became legal, 45,000 of Bulgaria's 50,000 Jews relocated to Israel within two years. The 5,000 that remained were mostly high ranking communists or persons married to non-Jews. My grandfather, with a strong conviction to establish a secure Jewish homeland, joined the Zionist Liberal Party that would later merge with the

Likud Political Party in Israel. As my father and my aunt learned more about the political dynamics in Israel, they considered themselves idealists. They didn't pledge allegiance to one party or another because their main objective was to survive in a hostile land. The political platforms were untested in a new country, so it was hard to find a basis to form a strong opinion either way. They agreed with the party whose system was effective and ensured them the best quality of life in a secure homeland.

On November 5, 1948, my father, grandfather, grandmother, and aunt, boarded a freight train in Sofia and embarked on the long journey to Israel. After an almost 500 year presence in Bulgaria, the Varsano family left the region in as unorthodox manner as they had arrived there so many years ago. They came as victims of the Spanish Inquisition and departed as survivors of fascism and unwilling subjects of communism. From all of their days on the Iberian Peninsula to their last moment in Sofia, they were always outsiders, the Jewish minority. Finally, they were going to live in a country that would fully accept them as a mainstream member of society, but it would be no easy task.

Although the Bulgarian government allowed Jews to go to Israel, a brewing civil war in Greece and antagonistic Arab neighbors accounted for the circuitous route my family dared to venture. The train was not designed for passenger travel, but it would get them where they needed to go. The train had no facilities and was reminiscent of the cattle trains that transported concentration camp victims. Shortly after the beginning of the journey, my family stopped in Pirot, where just five years earlier Jews under the control of the Bulgarian authorities were sent to the death camps in Poland.

For nine long days, my family suffered through an uncomfortable exodus through almost the entire country of Yugoslavia. Finally, they arrived at the port of Bakar in

northwestern Yugoslavia, near Rijeka. Unfortunately, the accommodations would get even worse when they boarded the ship to Israel. An old Greek boat named “Kefalos” would be their home for another nine days. The boat, like the train, was not built to carry passengers. The desperate Jews—eager to immigrate to Israel—improvised to create makeshift seating. My family sat on wooden stools on the lowest level. The boat was rickety and the seas were choppy, which resulted in rampant sea sickness amongst the travelers. For nine days, they bathed with salt water and drank strictly rationed purified water. They were constantly nauseous from the choppy waters and terribly nervous about what to expect once they landed in the unstable environment of Israel, but they possessed a war-hardened resolve that gave them the strength to manage a situation that I would have found unbearable.

On November 23, 1948, the Varsano family arrived in Haifa, Israel where it was cold and raining. With queasy stomachs and cold wet heads, the Promised Land was not what they had imagined in their Zionist dreams, but their goal had been achieved. Their fantasy was almost always better than their reality because their vivid imagination as hopeful immigrants constructed an image of their destination that was wishful rather than plausible. The staff of the Jewish Agency, or Sochnout, that orchestrated the journey with the consent of the Bulgarian authorities, took them to the immigrant’s camp in “Pardess-Hana”, and placed them in a big tent with a few more families. The first night they heard what they thought was a baby crying, but in reality it was jackals around the tent looking for food.

The next day, my grandfather took a trip to Jaffa, where he had relatives that helped him look for a house. Jaffa—a largely Arab-inhabited port town—was considered

disputed land under the UN Partition Agreement of 1947. The Arabs had protested that they wanted Jaffa under a Palestine Committee. After the War of Independence started, most of the Arab families fled the town and the ancient port became the new capital for Bulgarian immigrants. The new bright eyed settlers lived in abandoned Arab dwellings, primitive shacks, and tents.

When the new immigrants arrived in Jaffa, the Israeli authorities told them to inhabit any dwelling they found vacant. Officially, the Tel Aviv Absorption Department and IDF army units were in charge of accounting for the goods confiscated and apartments acquired from the Arab homes. Housing in Jaffa was supposed to be selected by a committee determining the qualifications for residents.

However, the reality was that the massive influx of Israeli Jews caused the displacement of many Arab families. It was an unfortunate byproduct of the political reshuffling that occurred around the globe in the aftermath of WWII. There were millions of people displaced around the globe during the 1940s. Many were Jews and many were Arabs. If a Jewish family could occupy an apartment by having their bed in a room it was considered to be in their possession. Some Arabs were removed at gun point to accommodate the tens of thousands of new immigrants that settled in Jaffa. Some Israelis looted abandoned Arab homes and boarded up shops in Jaffa.

Although in today's context the treatment of the Arab families seemed cruel, I think that every group of people looks out for their own good, especially when they have been recently oppressed and forcibly impoverished. If achieving a better life for my family means that someone else was going to be demoralized, then it should be recognized as unfair and an effort should be made to compromise. However, human

nature was such that every man does what's in their best interests. If the shoe were on the other foot, how would my family have been treated? Perhaps they would be treated in the same ghastly manner that the Jews in Arab countries were when the UN Partition plan was implemented.

The first Israelis were not Saints on a humanitarian mission; they were pioneers and refugees fighting for the survival of an experimental nation. Many Arab families living in Palestine were victims of unfair treatment and illegal confiscation of property, but this was a case of unfortunate circumstances and not a threat to the existence of the Arab people or the survival of Arab nations. Oil rich Arab nations with tens of millions of citizens could have easily absorbed their displaced Palestinian Arab brethren into their friendly confines and sought to negotiate a political solution with Israel under the auspices of the UN. Instead, the 1.3 million Palestinian Arabs supplemented by armies of five great Arab nations chose to engage the 650,000 Jews in a prolonged military confrontation starting in 1948. Rather than seeking an immediate post-conflict solution the Arab forces retreated and left their fellow Palestinian Arabs in refugee camps as sacrificial lamb for decades. After the initial round of fighting ceased and borders were established, you would have thought there would have been a negotiated settlement involving restitution to the victims and a lasting peace for all. However, as the years passed without resolution, the conflict became bloodier and the extremists on both sides became more vindictive which made the early actions of the conflict seem moderate compared with the inhumanity that ensued. The political leaders allowed the wounds to stay open and the animosity to fester, while average families on both sides just yearned for a normal peaceful life.



My grandfather did not have to force anyone out and felt lucky to quickly find a vacant Arab house near the Jaffa harbor. When the rest of the Varsano family arrived at their newly claimed home, they found it to be so recently vacated that the cupboards were still filled with food and Turkish coffee was recently brewed on the stove.

My family was certainly not thieves. The property that they occupied was abandoned because of the circumstances beyond their control. They certainly did not want the Arab family's forsaken possessions and probably would have returned their belongings if it were possible, but that was simply not logistically viable under those volatile circumstances. It was extremely difficult to understand their actions without putting myself in the context of those times. They didn't have the luxury to contemplate moral dilemmas; they just acted out of instinct and a survival of the fittest mentality. By today's standards, some of the things the first Israelis did were abhorrent and downright criminal, but in a war zone if property was abandoned and you were homeless, it was an understandable breach of peace time etiquette.

Trying to rationalize the situation, I would certainly feel the need to reconcile with the particular Arab family that my family displaced. I would also feel a general guilt about all the displaced Arab families, but unfortunately war has many victims and those who instigated the fighting weren't the ones who usually suffered the most. Once the dust settled there was always a lot of blame to go around but ultimately to the victor goes the spoils. What would have happened to the Jews if Arabs had won the war? Based on the way Jewish citizens of Arab countries were treated following the Israeli Declaration of Independence and the persecution of other minority groups within most Arab nations, I believe the surviving Jews in an Arab-governed Palestine would have

been treated far worse than the Arabs who chose to live in the Jewish state of Israel. I am sure that many of the Jews could empathize with the Arabs that remained in Israel and were now legally considered a minority group.

It was quite ironic that my family was forced out of their apartment in Sofia just a few years earlier, and now they were doing the same to an unknown Arab family. The minority group that was once oppressed by the European Christian majority was now oppressing—albeit in a much different way—the former Moslem majority in a small corner of the Middle East. On a slightly positive note, I saw it as a testament to the strength of the Jewish people that they were able to politically and militarily turn the tables on their own predicament in such a short time period.

Following the urban-centric pattern of Jews throughout the world, two thirds of Israelis lived in cities, including my family. The Jews living in Israel were considered a community of people calling themselves Edot, while the non-Jews were the minority groups consisting of Christians, Moslem, Druze Arabs, Circassians, Armenians, and smaller groups known as Mi'utim. While the Edot did maintain distinct cultural traditions from their place of origin, there was a much greater degree of commonality and unity among the various sections of the Israeli Jewish population than in other immigrant societies. A unique Israeli ethnicity was primarily associated with immigrant groups from the Middle East and North Africa, but native-born Israelis of European parents expanded the notion of the typical Israeli. The generation of my parents and grandparents that originated from Europe formed various organizations, but these were usually designed to provide mutual aid and memorialize particular European

communities, especially during the difficult early stages of integration into Israeli society.

At this time in Israel's history, the average Bulgarian's life was much more difficult than even the post war years in their previous country. Temporary government settlements, known as ma'abarot, housed the most destitute. The Bulgarian value system that stressed self reliance and hard work made it difficult for any of them to accept welfare or live in ma'aborot for very long.

After the War of Independence ended, the new nation faced several major hurdles to overcome. The absorption of immigrants, a refugee problem at the borders, defense against the hostile Arab neighbors, an economy ravaged by war, and managing foreign policy were the most predominant obstacles to improving the quality of life.

To cope with the myriad of problems, David Ben Gurion and the leaders of the Zionist movement announced the formation of the Provisional Council of State with Ben Gurion as Prime Minister. The first statute the Provisional Council of State made legal was the Law of Administrative Ordinance of 1948 which allowed for the free immigration of all Jewish people. The new citizens of Israel quickly elected a Constituent Assembly (CA) to draft a formal constitution. On February 16, 1949, the CA became Israel's first parliament with 120 members elected for four year terms.

A short time later, the Knesset—which was the single-chamber parliament of Israel—passed the Law of Return for every Jew as an olah, or new immigrant. The Nationality Law of 1952 granted Israeli citizenship to people (including non-Jews) who lived in the country prior to 1948. The population of the infant nation tripled in the first three years of existence with immigrants from over seventy countries. Some say that the

liberal immigration policies exacerbated the domestic stress within Israel, while others say that it was necessary for the Jewish state to form its identity. Generally, the Ashkenazi's held most of the political offices and tended to support the left wing secular socialist parties, while the Sephardic, particularly the Orientals (Jews who lived in the Middle East and North Africa, but later spread to Central Asia and South Asia), held less power and sided with the right wing parties. My grandfather was more conservative than the average Ashkenazi which was a political tendency that was passed down to my father. Conservative or liberal were relative terms in Israeli politics, and could not be compared with the two party system in the US. There were many political factions with overlapping and conflicting agendas that had a substantial say in national policy. Despite their differences on some issues, there were universal values that became the cornerstones of the Jewish state.

The basic ideologies of the Israeli immigrants were *Kibbutz Galuyot* meaning "ingathering of the exiles" from the lands of Diaspora and *Mizug Galuyot* meaning a "merging of the exiles." The new immigrants from Europe or Northern Africa/Middle East arrived in Israel terribly impoverished and psychologically traumatized. The Bulgarian Jews, although impoverished, were fairly well suited to cope with the challenges of a new nation compared to other European Jews.

The Jews from Bulgaria did not neatly fit into a typical Israeli ethnic category. My family was Sephardic like many of the Middle Eastern Jews but they were of European descent. The Varsanos truly had more in common with the bulk of the Ashkenazi community being that they were urban, educated, and westernized. Over half of the Bulgarian immigrants came from Sofia where they had a long history of Zionist

activism. After hundreds of years of prospering under the multi-ethnic Ottoman system, the Bulgarian people had a unique ability to fit into many groups within the diverse population of immigrants. Although my family lived in a predominately Bulgarian community, they had friends and colleagues from Eastern and Western Europe, as well as North Africa and the Middle East. My father would eat an Iraqi sandwich for lunch and have Hungarian Goulash for dinner then top it off with a Turkish coffee and a Bavarian chocolate dessert. His eating habits mimicked the multi-ethnic way he lived his daily life in a country full of new immigrants. The Bulgarians were well adjusted and very adaptive compared to the more severely persecuted immigrants.

Many of the Bulgarian immigrants did not harbor much animosity to their former homeland of Bulgaria despite their maltreatment. Compared to the other European Jews, they suffered far less during the war. Time and the enthusiasm over the success of establishing Israel healed their wounds much quicker than most. My family placed more blame on the Germans because they forced fascism upon the opportunistic Bulgarians.

The Jews of Eastern Europe, including the Bulgarians, were the largest group of immigrants during the first years of the nation. From 1948 to 1952, the immigration of 300,000 Sephardic immigrants changed the ethnic make up of the mostly European and Ashkenazi Israeli populace. The small country was inundated with a significant amount of well educated Iraqis and Egyptians, as well as impoverished Iranians, Yemenites, Turks, Moroccans, and other Jews from Moslem nations.

The main concerns of Northern African and Middle Eastern Jews were securing food and shelter upon arrival to Israel. Many lived in abandoned Arab settlements because there was a lack of investment capital in the new country to build housing units.

Most of these new immigrants arrived a few years later than the European immigrants and had little knowledge of the Zionist movement. Their countries of origin lagged behind the European nations in regards to technological advances and cultural progression. The rise of Arab Nationalism and the Declaration of Independence in Israel made living conditions for these Jews unbearable. After escaping the tyranny of their homelands, they sought the most basic needs of proper housing, running water, electricity, and a decent supply of food. Immigrants from cosmopolitan areas like Baghdad or Cairo already were accustomed to most modern conveniences and quite educated while the refugees from the poorer areas of the Arab World were practically illiterate and had lots of trouble assimilating into the European-dominated culture of Israel.

About one-third of the new immigrants went to Moshavim and Kibbutzim. Moshavim were small cooperative agricultural settlements consisting of individual ownership of land combined with communal services and mutual aid. Unlike the Kibbutz, the basic social unit was the nuclear family which resulted in a cultural continuity with the new inhabitant's original country of origin. The Kibbutz was a diverse collective farming organization. My urban centric family steered well clear of agricultural settlements, just like their parents had rejected the concept of making an Aliyah in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century to Palestine to work the land and establish a Zionist foothold in the region. Communal farming was necessary to help start the fledgling state of Israel and it was better to work with fellow Jews than non-Jews, but both my father and my grandfather sought to become independent businessmen. My father viewed the "kibbutzniks" as idealistic farmers, and he was a life-long city dwelling merchant and

shop owner. My family continued to live adjacent to the large city of Tel Aviv, and patiently waited for the administrative chaos to subside.

The fate of all immigrants depended largely on the policies of the national authorities. Family connections and other personal resources helped improve certain people's lives, but fundamentally, people were at the mercy of the new government, the Jewish Agency, and the donations of Diaspora Jews. Despite how hard my family worked, they were vulnerable to the fluctuations of the shaky economy and the uncertainty of insecure borders. After unsuccessfully attempting a military takeover of Israel, Arab nations resorted to terrorist tactics and international political pressure to achieve their goal of overthrowing their Zionist enemies. Foreign investment was muted by the economic leverage of the hostile oil-rich Arab neighbors, while domestic tranquility was constantly disrupted by their violent attacks. Under these conditions, there were thousands of Arabs who were Israeli citizens that just wanted a normal life. Inevitably, there were problems with maintaining equal rights for the Arabs living in the Jewish state.

A primary argument since the establishment of the modern Jewish state had been the interpretation of how and why the Arabs were displaced. Israel contends that at the outbreak of fighting in 1948, most Arabs fled Palestine to avoid the perils of war. The Arabs insisted that the Israeli military and Jewish "terrorist" groups forced them out. In 1947, there were 1.3 million Arabs in Palestine, but by 1949 the Arab population of Israel had dropped to 170,000.

The remaining Arabs were legally granted equal voting rights and social status. However, in practice they had their freedom of movement restricted and their lands were

confiscated for the influx of Jewish immigrants. The Islamic faith and the Arabic language were overshadowed by the predominance of the Jewish religion and the Hebrew dialect. The regions in which Arab families dwelled were ruled by military governors whose decisions were not subject to civil court review and had the power to seal the Arab neighborhoods whenever they deemed it necessary.

The Arabic community was further hindered by Israeli land sale policies. During the second Aliyah of 1904-1914, a policy was adopted that land acquired by a Jew could never be sold, leased, or rented to a non-Jew. The old policy was carried forward to the new state of Israel which resulted in 95% of Israeli land being off limits to non-Jews.

From an American perspective, I feel this was clearly a discriminatory policy for a purely pluralistic society, but Israel was officially a Jewish state. Since a relatively small numbers of Jews lived in a fairly undersized area and were surrounded by millions of Arabs who would have quickly purchased and moved into vast amounts of Israeli land, the Jews would have rapidly become a minority and lost control over the democratic country that they started. Some safeguard measures—unfair as they may appear—had to be instituted for the ever-present reason of survival.

The idea that Zionism was the equivalent of racism was a theory pushed forward by many UN General Assembly nations including Moslem, Arab, and even some European countries. I believe that in any society, certain groups of people will have preferential treatment over others based on a variety of issues such as religion, race, educational background, wealth, sex, sexual orientation, political affiliations, and a whole slew of potentially discriminatory characteristics. I am not excusing these prejudices as acceptable, but being a Jewish state implies that there will be preferential treatment for



Jews. How to minimize discrimination and produce a harmonious society were challenges that all nations faced, and Israel was no exception. If Israel was such a racist state then why have so many non-Jews from Eastern Europe and Asia immigrated there recently?

The concept of a Zionist nation was founded on socialist and somewhat idealistic principles, but in reality Israel was not a classless society even for Jews. Sephardim did not enjoy all the power and privilege of the Ashkenazi community. Most of the government officials were Ashkenazi who typically originated from the “cultured” European nations, while Sephardim were the darker skinned inhabitants of mostly “less sophisticated” Arab countries. Even within the Sephardic community, Northern African immigrants from countries like Morocco were looked down upon socially by the fairer skinned Eastern European Sephardim like my Bulgarian family.

Arabs legally had many of the same rights as Jews and realistically had a chance to prosper like never before in a peaceful Jewish state. If they were unhappy with their predicament and sought more human rights, the Israeli government allowed them to mount valid legal challenges within the court system and political campaigns to gain elected representation in the Knesset. In the same way the oppressed peoples of the US such as women, people of color, and gays took the opportunity to wage a civil rights struggle, the oppressed minorities of Israel were allowed to struggle for their rights within the established framework of the Zionist government. Compared to the rights of ordinary Arabs within Arab countries both secular and religious, Israeli Arabs enjoyed more civil liberties, despite their inherit discrimination as a minority group.

The Israeli system and the principles of Zionism were not perfect and continued to evolve, but the Zionists most certainly did not aspire to be “Jewish Nazis,” as some extremist ideology contends. For the most part, Zionists sought a fair and pluralistic society that was subject to change based on the will of people. Unlike most Arab and Moslem nations, all the policies of Israel were subjected to open and honest public debate, which was a unique concept in the Middle East. Being a democratic society with a market based economy was a key reason Israel gained relative prosperity, as well as an enduring international legitimacy with the US and many other Western nations.

The people of Israel had few skills and meager financing, while the land that inhabited had virtually no natural resources. Funds were raised by a high level of domestic savings, capital imports such as foreign loans or grants, and foreign private sector financing such as State of Israel Bonds. Many American Jews—including my mother’s family—purchased these bonds through their temple congregations. The bonds were sold in a variety of denominations ranging from as little as eighteen dollars up into the thousands, and were marketed as a financial investment, as well as support for the Israeli cause. Domestic infrastructure projects in agriculture and housing were funded by public funds. Regardless of the help of Diaspora Jews and the hard work of Israelis, the economy was terribly in need of regulation and substantial foreign assistance. To combat an unstable economy and unforeseen shortages, the Israeli government imposed strict price controls and rationing. Obtaining foreign assistance would take more time and a bit of savvy in the world of international politics. While every Israeli struggled, my grandfather tried to adapt his job skills as a proprietor of a hardware store to an economy

where adequate supplies and tidy shops were at a premium. He would most likely have to find a new career in this land of uncertainty.

The triumph of Zionism did not produce paradise in Israel for the Jewish immigrants that hoped a new homeland was a recompense for all their suffering. A military victory did not ensure security for the Israeli people. The tenuous peace allowed the infant nation to crawl out of the womb but it was born into an unfriendly world surrounded by enemies. The battle weary people of Israel, including the Varsano family, were excited to start a new life despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The Varsanos were overjoyed at the achievement of the Zionist objective and content to live in Jaffa. In a few short years, my family had gone from a luxury apartment in frigid European city to forced relocation in the Bulgarian countryside to an abandoned Arab stone house on the balmy shores of the Mediterranean. My family was indeed able to adapt to their surroundings, no matter what the circumstances.