

## **A Tree Grows in Rishpon**

In 1936 a group of families in Herzliya decided to join a new settlement project which was to be established by the Agricultural Cooperative Society, Ltd. of the Jewish Agency, at Rishpon a few kilometers north of Kfar Shmaryahu.

Rishpon was established as a moshav, that is, a collective farming village where each family received its own land allotment and a small house, but the major activities, the buying and selling of the products such as milk, vegetables, eggs, citrus etc., were conducted as a co-operative. Also, future development plans had to be approved by all the members.

There were about fifteen to eighteen families in the founding group, which included my aunt and uncle Zipora and Fishel Nomberg and their two sons Avraham and Pinhas. The plan allowed for a maximum of one hundred lots to accommodate one hundred families, and this goal was gradually realized. The land was distributed by lottery and Fishel drew a beautiful corner property. They didn't know at the time how fortunate they were, or how this land would influence the lives of their family

Fishel was one of my mother's seven brothers; she had been second of eight children, the only girl, and Fishel, which was a popular nickname or corruption of the name Ephraim, was next after her. Their family name was Shultz, originally spelt Schultz or Szulc, and they lived in Lodz, Poland. So, I of course asked, how did he come by the name Nomberg? It is a story of the aftermath of World War I. He had been conscripted into the Polish army during the war, but in 1920 was called back for another round, because the Russian communists attacked Poland and an army was needed to protect the homeland.

However, Fishel had other plans in mind, which did not include serving a second stint in the Polish army. He was anxious to leave Poland and make his way to Palestine. I had always known that my father's family were the keen Zionists, but it appears that part of my mother's family also had similar leanings. Fishel knew he would never get permission to leave Poland legally, and decided to take advantage of a black market where the papers and identities of dead soldiers could be bought. Apparently, my mother took an active part in this plan. She obtained the papers of a soldier named Josef Nomberg, and along with a girlfriend went to visit her brother in the army camp where Fishel was serving. She was already married and pregnant with my brother Alec, and presented herself as Josef's wife. The three strolled about the camp, the second girl going off in different directions in order to distract attention and at some auspicious moment, Fishel simply walked out of the camp and disappeared. My mother and her friend left a few minutes later.

Fishel passed through the borders legally and spent three years at a Hachshara agricultural training camp in Germany before going on to Palestine in 1924, where he met up with my parents. But the German papers were all he had, so he had no alternative but to Hebraize the Josef and so remained Yosef Nomberg.

He worked as an agricultural laborer in Herzliya and married his wife Zipora, née Rosenberg, in 1926. In 1936 they moved to Rishpon and started their own farm. When Avram the older boy, born in 1927, was old enough, his parents decided to send him to the prestigious Kadoorie Agricultural College near Mt. Tabor, to prepare him for working and managing the farm. At that time, they had a citrus orchard, grew vegetables, kept cows and chickens and sold the milk and eggs to Tnuva, the Histadrut dairy company.

In that same year, 1936, we had to return to Melbourne after an attempted *aliyah*, because of the difficult situation in the country. One day early in 1948, I came home to find my mother sitting on the sofa weeping, a foreign letter in her hand. “What’s wrong, what’s happened?” I asked, taking the letter. It announced that Avram was dead. A few weeks before, he had come in from the field complaining of a severe headache, “my head, my head,” he exclaimed and collapsed on the bed and in a few moments became unconscious. In the ensuing panic, Pinhas had to rush to the moshav office where the only telephone was, to call an ambulance, but it was too late. An autopsy revealed that Avram had a brain tumor. Whenever I read the story about Elijah and the son of the Shunamite widow (1 Kings 17:21), I am reminded of the story of Avram, but unfortunately there was no one to save him.

Those few moments changed the atmosphere surrounding the family. Zipora never overcame her grief and went about her work, forever mourning; Fishel stubbornly continued his demanding daily round and was less demonstrative; and Pinhas, at the age of 19, saw his whole life change. He had suddenly become the mainstay of the family. He couldn’t leave the farm and go to school and he was excused from army service because he was an only son and a farmer. He could never get away from the farm because the cows had to be milked on time, and so missed many of the experiences of a normal young man’s life. Whenever I invited him to come to Jerusalem, the cows always kept him back. When eventually they were able to install automatic milking, he finally had more free time.

Pinhas, born in 1929, had been a premature baby and in those pre-incubator days they cared for him by keeping him wrapped in cotton wool. He eventually grew up to be a fine healthy young man, married Meira Segal in 1954. All Zipora’s hopes for a grandson to carry Avram’s name were unfortunately disappointed. Pinhas and

Meira produced four daughters and among all the grandchildren, some sixteen girls, there was only one boy, Tal Avraham. Boys began to appear only in the next generation.

In 1949, my brother and I arrived in Israel and one of the first things we wanted to do was visit Zipora and Fishel. Because of our unsuccessful attempt at *aliyah* in 1936, we knew them well already and my mother was always in contact with Fishel. He was her favorite brother. We visited them often during 1936, in Herzliya. I recall being there during Purim and Avram taking me to the school celebrations, with little Pinhas trotting along behind. He was very attached to Avram, and always afraid of missing something. My aunt and uncle shared a house with another family, and had two rooms, and an outside toilet. I don't remember where we four slept when we visited there.

The house remained standing for many years, as if guarding my past, and I liked to see it whenever we were in that neighborhood. Eventually, it was torn down to make room for something new.

At this time, 1949, there was no coastal road and we took the bus from Tel Aviv through Herzliya to Rishpon. We had to walk some distance to their home, up an incline and down along the main road. From a distance we already saw Zipora and Fishel sitting under a large, shady tree sorting vegetables to be sent to market. As we neared, they looked up and after a moment recognized us. They had known from my mother's letters that we would be coming soon but as there was no phone connection, we couldn't announce ourselves. They were very happy to see us and immediately Zipora, with a very deep sigh, told me that this tree, called in Hebrew *ezdarehet*, a species of a Chinese berry-tree, had been planted by Avram years before. The living,

flourishing tree was now a source of comfort to her, and she liked to sit in its shade where she felt close to him.

We went in to the little house, two bedrooms, a kitchen and hall, which served as the dining area, and sat and talked. I think we stayed overnight but don't remember where we slept. This was just the first of many visits. When I wanted to introduce Alex, my husband to be, to them, we thought we could shorten the ride by making a short cut across a track in the fields, but we got bogged down in an expanse of mud. Fortunately, a fellow passing by in a tractor succeeded in extricating us. Fishel assured us that there were plans for building a coastal road, which would pass close to the moshav, but no one would vouch for it. After Alex and I married, with Zipora standing in for my mother as *unterfirer*, we continued our visits; and after our first child Asi was born, we used to bring him out to meet the family and see the cows and the chickens. During this period until 1954, we lived in Tel Aviv and were present at the wedding of Pinhas and Meira, for whom Fishel built a house next to his own. These were the closest relatives I had in Israel, and they really were good substitutes for my parents in Melbourne.

These were also the *tzenna* or austerity years in Israel, and food was strictly rationed. It was useful to have friends or family on a moshav, where one could go occasionally for an extra meal or a few more eggs. Once Zipora served us applesauce for dessert. "Where did you get apples from," I asked in astonishment. She laughed and said, "No apples, only green squash cooked as if, with sugar and cinnamon!" Chopped liver was made from fried onions and fried eggplant. In those days the police carried out very serious searches on the roads against black marketing, so one was not anxious to bring any produce back home for fear of being caught, which meant losing the produce and paying a fine.

Agricultural life and work underwent many changes as the years passed, becoming a less profitable business because of rising costs and water shortages. As the original settlers aged, and not all their children were interested in the demanding farming life, Pinhas too gradually gave up the cows and the chickens. For a while he kept turkeys and concentrated on his citrus orchard. Later still, he gave up these and leased out his land to be worked.

Meanwhile the family was increasing and the first two girls, Raya and Yaffa, turned out to be very musical, a talent which they had received from their grandfather, who had a pleasant voice and used to conduct religious services in this very unreligious moshav. The girls played the guitar and sang in choirs which traveled sometimes abroad. They both married boys from outside the moshav and moved to other communities not far away. Raya became a teacher, and produced in her second pregnancy the only grandson, Tal Avraham, among a collection of some sixteen or seventeen granddaughters. Yaffa and her husband cultivated flowers, which were becoming a lucrative export business. We attended the bar mitzvah of Tal, who was extremely self-conscious of being the only male among the tribe of females and at times refused to have his photo taken with them.

Vered and Dalit were the third and fourth daughters. Vered, when in her teens, had already decided she wanted to go into the flower business. While learning the basics, she began to grow flowers where the vegetable beds used to be. She made them up into bouquets and put them for sale on an unattended bench outside the house on the main road. Passersby could take their choice, and leave money in the cashbox. This business began to develop nicely and she became known as a convenient place to

stop for flowers. People traveling from Haifa to Tel Aviv or Jerusalem would detour through Rishpon to do so.

Zipora passed away in 1972 after a long illness, during which Fishel cared for her devotedly. Fishel followed her in 1982.

In 1985 Vered decided to open her florist shop, there on the premises. She built an attractive large room, right on the corner, around Avram's Tree, whose trunk and branches extended through the roof. No one even thought of cutting it down. There was still enough space so that nothing original had to be destroyed, and Zipora's old house was incorporated into the new addition, serving as office and storeroom. Now the beauty of their location became apparent.

Vered's shop, called "Prachim" (flowers), is situated on the main road of Rishpon, now suitably named Rehov HaPrachim, at the corner where it is intersected by the entrance road coming from the coastal road, Rehov HaKfar. Little did Fishel and Zipora dream in 1936 what a lovely and busy spot this would become, attracting people from the whole area. In fact, I was surprised to discover that many of my friends were good customers.

Besides the air-conditioned shop with two or three sales people on hand, an open air sales area displays the variety of flowers available. It is all so tastefully arranged that people come just to look and enjoy the colorful flower market.

In 1985 Vered marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of her business. She hung out an enormous reproduction of a photo she once took showing how things looked in the old days, with the flowers arranged in an abandoned bath tub, the inflated prices of that inflationary period, and the cash box alongside.

Vered has built up contacts for supplying hotels with floral decorations and displays, and constantly has new ideas for marketing. I am still surprised that a girl from a pioneering farming family and without higher education has such a shrewd head for business, but then her paternal grandfather in Lodz had been a Hassid of Ger, a manufacturer and businessman, and she seems to have inherited the relevant genes. For relaxation, she also enjoys choir singing.

Her father Pinhas, now retired, takes much pleasure in helping out on busy days, and chatting with the customers. He adds a touch of the authentic “old Israel” pioneering spirit, which is fast disappearing. Meanwhile, his wife Meira is kept busy looking after great great grandchildren. Now they need to employ several foreign workers, who work in the area where the cowsheds used to be. Vered and her husband, who have four girls including a set of twins, have built their home on the property, where the chickens used to roost. And Pinhas, true to his past, insists on keeping a few hens in some unobtrusive corner for the fresh eggs they supply.

The fourth girl, Dalit, who spent some time with her husband studying in Holland, was also able to receive a plot of land, as a descendant of a founding member, and they have made their home in Rishpon close to their parents’ home. Dalit has three daughters, including a set of twins and one of these girls has also settled with her husband and family in the moshav.

Rishpon has long forgotten its agricultural origins and has become an upscale shopping area. Only a few real farms still exist. Old houses have been re-modeled, and chicken coops and cowsheds have been turned into a variety of boutiques, gift shops, antique shops and restaurants. Rishpon also serves as a dormitory town for people working in Tel Aviv or nearby commercial and industrial centers, and the ambassador of South Korea has set up his embassy and his home there – opposite the

Nombergs. Some properties have even been sold to outsiders, in contradiction to one of the early rules of the moshav. In fact, Meira told me recently that she sees few familiar faces now when going about the moshav.

Pinhas and Meira still live in the old house Fishel built for them, and with the addition of a large patio playground, they are able to play host to the whole family on special occasions. Because of some health limitations, Meira has slowed down. Pinhas, the little premature baby who started life wrapped in cotton wool, grew to be a fine figure of a moshavnik, and celebrated his eightieth birthday in November 2009. Although I no longer travel so often out of Jerusalem, we keep in touch by phone and often talk of the good old days when they worked so hard, never considering the possibility of the prosperity and plenty which lay in store.

And so Avram's Tree continues to grow in Rishpon, and the spirits of Fishel and Zipora still hover over the family like guardian angels.

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After I had finished writing the above, I called Pinhas one day to check on some detail. He told me that a recent freak storm had passed over Rishpon and the violent wind had broken the exposed branches of Avram's Tree. Only the trunk inside the shop remained; opinions differed as to whether the tree could or would regenerate itself, or just die off. This news was a great shock – so many memories, emotions and history were associated with this tree, as if it were a living person. Certainly, its felling by the storm marked the end of an era.

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