

FROM PALESTINE TO THE PINZGAU

by
Ernst Löschner

Uzi Talit is a cardiologist, he was born in Israel and lives in Florida, USA. At the end of June he will once again come to Krimml to take part in the Alpine Peace Crossing events. It is going to be his ninth visit; once again he will bring a lemon which his father sends as a greeting from his garden in Israel.



Uzi Talit (left) brings a lemon as a present for Ernst Löschner from Israel

A lemon as a present? Isn't that rather an affront? Not if Uzi brings it: it symbolizes a story which draws our attention to the Austrian district of the Pinzgau in the years 1946-48 and connects that rural area with Lithuania and the infamous concentration camp in Stutthof, and further with Palestine, Genoa and the Ahrntal (Aurina Valley) in South Tyrol (Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy), with Marseille and Haifa and Tel Aviv and, today, with Israel, the USA and the whole world. This story manifests itself in the fates of Uzi's parents, his mother's, Bella (Bilha), née Klein, and his father's Moshe whose original second name was Talisman or Talitman or Talithman, who is nearly 90 today and still lives in Tel Aviv, growing lemons in his garden.

We know all that now and, indeed, a lot more; e. g. that these two people got married in 1948 in what is the Saalfelden army barracks today and then was the Jewish reception center *Givat Avoda*. Their honeymoon trip took them to the *Krimmler Tauernhaus* which played a key role for the Jewish refugees. I did not have the faintest idea of these things when I was preparing the first Alpine Peace Crossing in the spring of 2007, when I suddenly received a phonecall from the Austrian embassy in Tel Aviv: surprisingly, many contemporary witnesses had come forward and were eager to take part in the event because their personal fates

were intimately tied in with Givat Avoda and the historic escape route across the Krimml Tauern Pass.

“It is, above all, Moshe and Bella Talit who want to come, both worked together with the Bricha (the Jewish escape organization) in Saalfelden. Mr. Löschner, do you have a budget to invite them all?” This was embassy attaché Arad Benkö’s core question. I had expected to find one or two contemporary witnesses at the most, considering the long period of 60 years that had gone by since the Jewish exodus of over 5,000 men, women and children across the Krimml Tauern Pass in the summer of 1947. (n.b.: this escape route was discovered by Marko Feingold, who, at the age of almost 102(!), still leads the Jewish religious community of Salzburg.) I was perplexed and delighted at the same time since I did not want to refuse anyone. Finally, a very generous donation by my employer, the big French bank BNP Paribas, enabled APC to invite 10 contemporary witnesses.



l - r: Ernst Löschner, mayor Erich Rohrmoser, Moshe Talit, govt.off. Doraja Eberle, Marko Feingold

It was an unforgettable moment for everyone present when Moshe Talit, who was 82 years old then, spoke on the occasion of the unveiling of the Givat Avoda Memorial Stone on June 28, 2007. He spoke about his activities in the reception center and how the refugees had had to learn Hebrew and gain new manual skills for their future life in Palestine. His powerful voice in a small, fragile body, the old Zionist passion shining from his eyes, the blissful expression on his face when he pointed at the beauty of the *Steinernes Meer* (the mountain range in the background) ... everyone was deeply impressed.



Moshe Talit during his impressive speech at the Givat Avoda Memorial Stone in Saalfelden

More contemporary witnesses came forward in Krimml: Yaffa Levy showed her birth certificate, issued at the Farmach clinic (today a retirement home): "I am a refugee child from Saalfelden", she said with apparent pride. Artist Moshe Frumin gave us a little lyre as a present: his group was sent back by the carabinieri six times before they finally managed to cross the Italian border. Yaacov Shwartz was carried across the Krimml Tauern Pass on his father's shoulders at the age of 6. Avraham Weiss, who was one year older, was carried by other, mostly younger and stronger Jewish refugees. His and his parents' group was nearly caught by the Italian police. Margarita Fried-Weinberg was 14 months old in October 1946, when her parents managed to escape across the Brenner Pass to a reception camp in Torino where the family had to hold out until 1948. Shoshona, Yaacov Shwartz's mother, was pregnant when she crossed the Krimml Tauern Pass on March 23, 1947, when the pass was still snow-covered. A few months later her daughter Ahuva (Shamir) was born in Milano and named after her two grandmothers who had been murdered in the Shoa. It was only in August 1948 that the family managed to get to Israel on a ship called "Avionya". Lili Segal, too, was carried across the pass in her mother's womb during the 15(!)-hour-crossing; she was born in Merano only one day later.

Bella Talit stayed modestly in the background. Only later did it dawn on me what an important part she played in the Krimml exodus. She was the treasurer of the local Bricha and thus involved in all illegal border crossings to Italy: in 1946 from Saalfelden via Tyrol, in 1947 from Krimml to Kasern (Casere) and later mostly again across the Brenner Pass. Due to a spell of sudden faintness, she almost did not make it to the first APC but she was determined to join. It was as if it had been her last wish because she passed away only a few weeks after her visit to Austria. She was so happy that her daughter Gal had managed to cross the Krimml Tauern Pass on the occasion of the first Alpine Peace Crossing.



I-r.: Gal Talit, Yaffa Levy, Yacov Shwartz, mountain guide Paul Rieder † and Ahuva Shamir

In the following, we will trace the amazing story of these two extraordinary people, Bella and Moshe Talit whose positive impact can still be felt in our region for all of us.

Let us start with Bella (Klein) who was born in Kaunas/Lithuania in 1927 and came to the DP-camp Givat Avoda in 1946. In between there were traumatizing events hardly conceivable for us. When Lithuania was overrun by the Nazis in 1941, Bella was deported to the Kaunas Ghetto (later a concentration camp) at the age of fourteen. Three years later she was transferred to the death camp of Stutthof which she survived almost miraculously. After the liberation by the Red Army she returned to Kaunas to look for her family. Her mother and two siblings had survived, her father and her elder brother had been murdered. The persistent anti-Semitism in her former homeland forced Bella to flee. She could speak Hebrew well and wanted to go to Palestine with her mother. Via Poland they came to Austria where the Bricha eventually offered her a job as a Hebrew teacher and translator (she had also learned German and mastered 6 languages!) as well as a function in the organization of the escape routes to Italy.



Bella Talit – a quiet but efficient organizer



Givat Avoda camp school in Saalfelden, 1947



Bella in Saalfelden



in front of Gerlingwirt (an inn)



children in front of camp barracks

Bella mostly took care of the many children in the camp. She must have kept close contact with Viktor Knopf, the Jewish mountain guide who led refugees across the Krimml Tauern Pass almost every second day. The latter, in turn, worked closely together with Liesl Geisler-Scharfetter, the innkeeper of the Tauernhaus who devotedly catered to the needs of the refugees when they arrived from Saalfelden at Krimml on overloaded trucks; she was rightfully called "mother of the refugees"



Viktor Knopf with refugees in front of the Krimml Tauernhaus

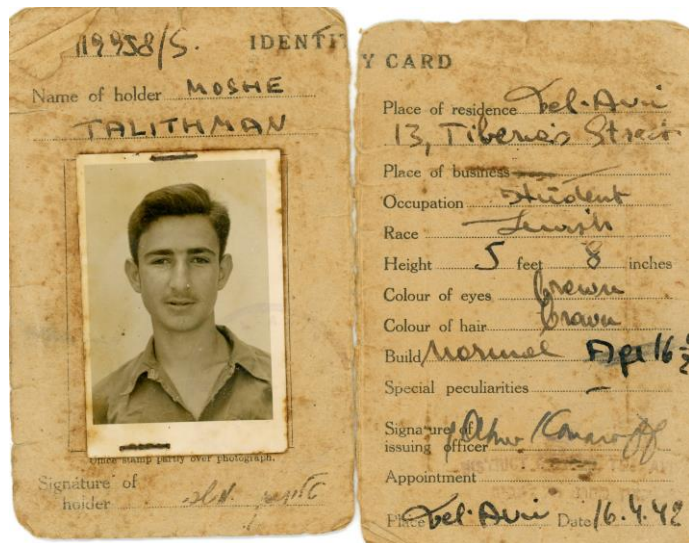
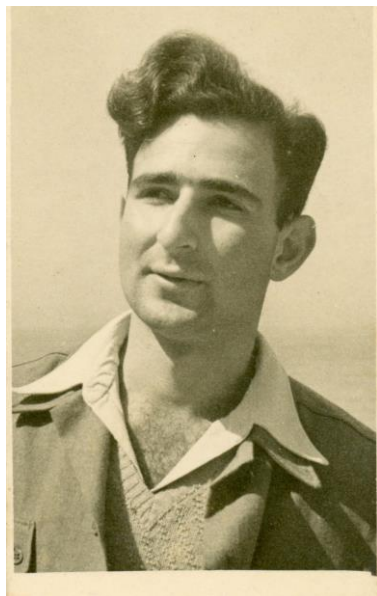


from Saalfelden to Krimml on overloaded trucks



In the meantime, Moshe had arrived at Salzburg from Palestine (from Haifa via Genova to Innsbruck) and came to Saalfelden in 1947 to work as an "Education Officer and Advisor on Hebrew and other Cultural Work" at the "Displaced Persons" Camp Givat Avoda. He was travelling with a British passport as a Palestinian citizen. (n.b.: The British mandate over Palestine, which had belonged to the Ottoman empire before, lasted from the end of World War I till 1948. Considering the unresolved conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, this fact seems

relevant in connection with the question of a Palestinian state today).



Moshe Talit(man) 1947

With great zeal Moshe set to work: he organized Hebrew classes – not an easy task since neither the teachers nor most of the so-called Eastern Jews knew that language. With 3,500 refugees the camp was jam-packed (n.B. Givat Avoda was like a city within a city since Saalfelden then had about 5,500 inhabitants). It was also important for the refugees to be prepared for their new life in Palestine. Training workshops for joinery and other professions were set up as well as vegetable gardens for self supply.



The large photo documentation about those days, which Uzi found at his father's house, is a great gift and of invaluable historic value for Saalfelden and the whole province of Salzburg. In this way we may be able to get an idea of some Jewish celebrations in the camp and of how many small children there were in the camp. Excursions to the lake at Zell am See and to Salzburg were organized to relieve the refugees from the monotony of the long delays until they could leave for their new homeland.



Jewish celebrations in the camp



families with prams in the camp, the Steinernes Meer mountains in the background



excursion to lake Zell ...



... and to Salzburg

Moshe also photographed air-raid damages in Salzburg-Mülln and the supply trips to Saalfelden from Salzburg via the "German triangle". He documented interesting impressions at the Saalfelden train station, among others the sign that welcomed homecoming soldiers (*"Wir grüßen unsere Heimkehrer"*) as well as the Repatriation and Resettlement Train which carried many refugees to Italian harbours, especially after the foundation of the state of Israel in May 1948.

His photograph album also contains a number of Professional group pictures, photographed by the Saalfelden *Foto-Atelier Karl Bauer* which still exists today.



damages from air raids in Salzburg / Mülln



Saalfelden train station 1947



supplies come on trucks via the "German Triangle"



Repatriation and Resettlement Train



professional photographs by local photographer's shop (see group picture)



There were contacts with the local population on the occasion of sports events such as ski jumping or soccer games.



The relationship between Bella and Moshe which started in the Pinzgau eventually found its highlight in the wedding ceremony in the dining hall of Givat Avoda on April 29, 1948 and their ensuing honeymoon to the Krimmler Tauernhaus, of all places.



There was, however, no time for an extended honeymoon since both wanted to get to Israel as fast as possible to help build up the new state. Thanks to their good contacts with the Bricha, Bella and her mother managed to get across the border to France. With the help of a French military rabbi, Moshe made it via Switzerland to France where he joined Bella in Marseille. On July 22 they went aboard the rusty cargo ship



"Kedma". They had to board separately, though, because Bella had to travel with false papers under the name of "Dolly Landau". Within two days after his arrival at Haifa on July 29 Moshe joined the Israeli navy.

Bella, too, joined the Israeli army after her arrival in Israel. Her eldest son Uzi was born in 1949. As of November in the same year, Moshe returned to his original profession of history and geography teacher, mostly in Tel Aviv. Two more children (Benjamin in 1951 and Gal in 1956) were born later while Bella was working as a medical secretary at Israel's biggest health insurance company where she worked for 30 years.

It was only in 2007 that Bella's and Moshe's desire to visit Austria once again was fulfilled. Ever since then Moshe has been sending his lemons ... and his son Uzi comes to the APC events in Krimml all the way from the USA year after year.



Bella and Moshe Talit in Saalfelden on the occasion of the first Alpine Peace Crossing in 2007

This monograph is an extended version of Ernst Löschner's article in the Pinzgau magazine "Platzhirsch" of June 2014 (pp. 78). The editor added a beautiful caption: "Bella Talit's last wish: to take part in the first APC event."



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