

YISKOR / by Rivka Sokolik – (Rita Migdal)

I have learned that written words are the most powerful tools. They can make war, they can make peace. they can ignite hate or love. I have forgotten most of Russian, but right now I remember the Russian expression: "Once Written With A Pen , You Can't Erase it With A sledge hammer". So here I am. to share with you what has been written with a pen by our Uncle Israel Sokolik. Our father's only brother, from seven brothers, who survived as a partisan from the Slonim Ghetto.

Uncle Israel trusted to me the most important document that I possess. When I look at it , I consider it to be my "Power Of Attorney". This was written, and given to me. Not once but twice. First time in 1945-46 after the end of the war and I am only age eleven. My uncle, discovered that two orphan children by the names:Yosef , and me Rivka Sokolik the children of his older brother Yitzchak are among the living. Uncle immediately surprised us with a visit in a DP camp in Rosenheim Germany. When he left, he gave us a little souvenir; It was an album with family photos that was taken before the war. At first Yosef and I could not recognise even our father on the photo.

On the first page inside the album he wrote in Yiddish This is the translation: Dear Rivka and Yosef I give this album to you, and to my dear and loving family. The only remnants from the family Sokolik. Let this album serve you. As a Sefer- Hazikaron. As a memorial book. For you Rivka, and Yosef and your children, and their children. And for the future generations.

Happily, that album was my most treasured and precious gift that I ever received. Whenever I had a moment, I always looked on the

photos, I even used to keep it under my blanket at night. I never had enough to look at each and everyone's face, and read what uncle wrote. I haven't seen my father from age about five- six. And here he is, on a flat page in this album. I felt as they were near me, and all alive. Unfortunately my gladness didn't last long. The next year, July 1947, our group of children, got a message from our leaders that we are going somewhere with a track for a ride. Pack your clothes quickly and be ready. My album was always on top of my clothes. The album was my most important treasure in my possession. therefore, I packed it first in my bag, and again made sure it is on top of my little belongings.

Soon, we climbed on a huge military track, covered with a dark green canvas material roof and walls enclosed. We settled inside on hard wooden long benches, parallel on both sides. This was our departure from the DP CAMP, called also displaced persons camps in Rosenheim, where we lived for almost two years. After the driver started the engine, we felt the movement of the track, then taking on speed. Only then we were told by our leaders that we are on a secret mission.

The most important message was to be shush, and some more orders and advice. After a long journey, through dark forests, and mountains, and with our lips tightly closed, mostly it was Shoosh. Other moments we were singing "ARTZA ALINU". The most patriotic Israeli Hebrew song, which linked us spiritually to our homeland, Israel, as well we sang "Shalom Aleichem". Peace On You. Then back to Shush. Fear, and panic felt in our silenced bodies when crossing the borders control. Because it was a clandestine mission. The risk to be caught was always with us. After each successful border crossing, our breathing came back to life.

Finally we arrived to France, at port S'ete. A big ship was tighten up at the port. We were told we will be soon on it. Almost immediately the ship was crammed with 4515 refugees from four corners off the world. Before the war, that luxury Crouse ship was once designed for four or five hundred passengers to have fun, for honeymooners, the rich and famous who could afford the best of luxury that money can buy was there. That ship was called The President Warfield.

Once we left the shores of France, on the way to Palestine. The Ship leaders and crew, proudly named her: The EXSODUS 1947. With a big sign on the ship's mast.

With 4515 heartbreaking stories behind them. (This was the ship The Exodus 1947. Now Known as The Ship That Launched A Nation. By the famous Author Ruth Gruber. At whom I had the privilege to have a glimpse, while stretching out my little neck, over other stretched necks before me. As Rut's camera kept clicking nonstop. This took place about two or three weeks later on the prison ship The Runnymede Park at Port Debuk in France.) With 1.500 passengers. After we have been taken off, and transferred on to the three British destroyer ships, fully equipped for prisoners. They, the British Royal navy, the police waited for our welcome in Haifa.

A tragic and brutal battle with the Royal British navy at sea, on the way from France to Palestine with deaths , and wounded, the ship was almost to sink, after being rammed from all sides, by her three four destroyers. We arrived to Haifa port, then still under the British Mandate and called Palestine. The British police were very strict controlling the Jewish immigration, thus they treated us as prisoners. At Haifa port. While, from a short distance, the beautiful view of the Carmel mountain kept us spellbound, and the fresh air off Haifa's

Blue sky above, the calm sea beneath, felt like being in Gods Paradise, and free of worries. Then came the sea change. From optimism, to disappointment.

We have been forced to leave the crushed, wrecked Exodus. and transferred on to the Three British prison ships which were already waiting for our arrival nearby in Haifa. And back to sea. Here the police took away all our bags, suit cases, any item we had.

It was here that I pleaded with tears from the British police guards to let me keep only the photo album. They just through my bag together with all the thousands other bags on a big pile. They considered every item as a dangerous weapon. They promised me I will get my album back in Cyprus

We never went to Cyprus. instead they took all the three prison ships back to sea not telling us the next destination. The "Ocean Vigour" The "Empire Rival", and the "Runnymede Park". On which I with my brother and some of my group were on it.

Our Exodus leader: Mordechai Rosman was our main speaker. After about two weeks cruising at the Mediterranean sea in July heat. The three battle prison ships made of steel. Inside no beds, or chairs, the slippery floor in the hold. We shared between 1500 passengers, it was our bedroom, sitting, dining room. study room and more. All I had was a military blanket, spread out on the hard slippery floor to be shared with two more girls. We used to feel other peoples feet invading our space at night, when they stretched them out in their sleep. We were dressed with the minimal. The boiling heat, the swathing, the thirst, was the hardest thing to live with. No air-condition, sea water for showers and washing our cloths by hand. Only 6 toilets to share for 1,500 passengers. We had to walk between the bodies at night to go up to the deck. Many times we

trained our bladders to wait till morning, not to wake up other people. and we stayed a wake for respecting others needs before ours.

The three ships brought us back to France. This time to Port Debuk Since we didn't want to disembark in France. We kept repeating; "Our destination is only Palestine". A delegation from the French government came up on our Runnymede ship, with international journalists. Among them was the American Rut Gruber.

The French government offered us the passengers in good faith to come down, and we will be granted French citizenship. Our guide Mordechi Rosmont, thanked the French delegation for their kind offer. The answer back was: The only place we will disembark willingly will be only in Palestine. In our homeland.

Mordechi continued in his very touching emotional speech: What He said I will never forget; "Whom you see here are mainly orphans who lost their parents in the concentration camps. Women, men, who lost their children and families in the gas chambers. Starvation, and cruel beating.

This Exodus passengers have witnessed their loved families turned into burning smoke, coming out from the tall chimneys in the concentration camps. Many showed their arms tattooed, and more heart breaking was to see it on the little babies just next to me. It was the first time I have ever understood; Where and how I lost all my family.

It was at this point when the visitors, the French delegation. The journalists. The crew together with us the prisoners on this ship "The

Runnymede Park" There was not one eye without tears. The heartbreaking sounds from quietly weeping adults standing near me.

Only a few, people excepted the invitation and came down. Some pregnant and frail passengers. Then after a week or more at the port, The three ships The Ocean Vigour, The Empire Rival, and The Runnymede Park, took us back to the sea, without us knowing the new destination. We were boiling hot down below, hungry and thirsty most of the times. Babies crying, many sleepless nights. On the tightly crowded space floor, we shared with strangers

After about a week at sea. The Three ships came to a full stop. This time in Hamburg Germany. The Place we wanted to forget. Next the British police and army used their mighty force to get us off from the ship. They used tear gas. strong pressure from sea water hoses. sticks, while the soldiers were protected with helmets.

from here they took us to prison camps in Emden, and Poperndorf. Back under strict police guards from high polls watch towers, and wired fences.

We came here empty handed. The promised British police gave me at Haifa port that we will get our luggage back in Cyprus. We never went to Cyprus. And we never got our luggages back. My tears got lost, together with my treasured family photo Album. Most probably somewhere in the Ocean.

This few lines I am dedicating to our Uncle Israel. Who asked me to pass on the family history to my children, to their children, and to the coming generations. Who brutally murdered, and perished innocently. His Seven brothers, their wife's and babies. by the hands off Hitler's Nazi regime. By shooting, beating, and buried a life in the open ditches in the city called Slonim.

Uncle Israel was a life witness, like many others like him in Slonim Ghetto. Uncle Israel, with a few inmates managed to organise a small group of friends, and obtain some ammunition, and join a group of partisans in the nearby forest. Now the Partisans had the biggest satisfaction to take revenge for their loved families who have been silenced by Hitler's Ideology to wipe out the Jewish people. Now thanks to heroes, like our Uncle and others. We can hear their voices coming out from their graves. Wherever they fell victims. from the second world war. From starvation In the ghettos, or gas chambers In the concentration camps. The six millions pure innocent souls. Are Saying Loudly Now. THANK YOU, THANK YOU, FOR REMEMBERING US. T.N.C.B.H.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SLONIM JEWRY. BY NACHUM ALPERT

Forty five years later. My uncle Israel sent to me this book: The Destruction of Slonim Jewry, Written by Nachum Alpert. from New York where uncle lived, to Melbourne Australia where I live. Again, when I opened the cover, looking at the opposite page. Uncle's very first sentence in Yiddish. Reminded me immediately the lost album. Here is the translation:

Date- 6.10.91.

Dear Rivka. I give this book a present to my dear, and loving family. The only remnant from my family Sokolik who survived. Make this book serve as a Sefer Zikaron. As a Memorial. Not to forget, but to pass it on to your children, and their children, and for the future generations. Here is why? "Among the tens of thousands Jews, who perished in Slonim, through the Hitler's murder machine. Were also my loving brothers with their wives and children. This are the dates when they were massacred:

Brother Baruch, and Zalman; date 7.17.41.-- Brother Shmilke, and Bryne, Zalman's wife and children: murdered : date -11.14.41.-- Rivka Baruch's wife and child massacred on date - 6.29.42. On this same day, I was fortunate, with the help of an Engineer by the name Wolfshtein to run away from the prison, from where the Germans led out hundreds of Jews to the open ditches and they shot them. Therefore I lived to tell the tragic history tale. Your Israel Sokolik.

Now I feel, I am fulfilling our uncles wishes. For which I willingly excepted as my duty to my Uncle Israel's wishes. In behalf of all our family Sokolik who got murdered so innocently by a one world madman murderer called Hitler. Who incited hatred toward all the Jewish people.

Hitler's Nazi party with his crazy Ideology. Silenced all my family by killing them with his sophisticated murder machines. Some of our family perished in the Ghettos and concentration camps, others we got no trace whereabouts. Thanks to our uncle Israel Sokolik. Who was so wise, brave and heroic, with a few of his friends to organize a group of partisans, also smuggle out some ammunition from the Slonim Ghetto, and escape to the nearest thick, dark, forests.

As Partisans.They got very active in fighting the Germans.

Their biggest satisfaction was "TAKING REVENGE" for the many thousands innocent victims. Their parents, their children, the old and the babies. That could not defend themselves. Thanks to the few. Who risked their own life's. We can hear now the loud sounds coming out from their mass deep ditches. The gas chambers, Starvation and more.

SAYING; THANK YOU FOR REMEMBERING US... Let them all rest in peace. RITA MIGDAL, 12.JULY. 2017