קשר רב דורי – נחושים לעלות ארצה – סיפורה של טובה מולדובן (באנגלית)

By: Tova Moldovan
Country of Birth: Italy

The story of the family of Tova Moldovan, who insisted on immigrating to Israel despite many difficulties:

My name is Tova Moldovan (Leibowitz), I am married to Yosef Moldovan, mother to Ofer and Lilach, Grandma to Niran, Leadar, Dvir and Dolev. I have a brother, Dr. Simcha Leibowitz, who is currently a Jewish Agency emissary in New York. His job is to bring American youth to Israel.

My story begins in 1947 or actually at the end of World War II, in the city of Iași, Romania. There were many Jews in the city, and Yiddish was a dominant language. Only schools and authorities spoke Romanian. When my mother was 17 years old, a group of soldiers passed through the street and noticed my mother and one of the soldiers kicked her in the head (just because he felt like it…) she fell, bleeding, and meanwhile the soldiers continued on their way. At that moment my mother decided that on the first opportunity she gets she will leave everything behind and go to Eretz Israel, which was then called Palestine.
Two years later, emissaries from the Jewish Agency arrived in Palestine and began gathering young men and women to immigrate to then Palestine. My mother, Rachel Feller, who was then 19 years old, decided to join the young people willing to immigrate, but her parents did not agree that a young girl like herself would go out on her own for such a journey.
The Leibowitz family that lived in the area had a son called Leib (later Aryeh), a 20 year old, that also wanted to immigrate, but his parents also refused to let him go alone. When they heard about Leib they came to him with a proposal to meet my mother Rachel, who is a good and beautiful girl, very talented, diligent, who learned sewing, while my mother was offered to meet my father, who is a good guy who knows how to make his way in life .He would bake pretzels and drive to the villages to distribute them.
He also had a large shepherd dog who was very loyal to my father and would join him on his trips to the villages. More than once the villagers asked him to sell them the dog, my father agreed, and suddenly the next day the dog returned home. My father liked the idea, and so he would sell the dog over and over again, and the dog would come back the next day, over and over again.
My mother's parents noticed the connection between the two sides and decided to match them, thus my parents entered into marriage. Leib Leibowitz and Rachel Feller married, and on June 11, 1947 and immigrated to Israel, but the gates of the country were locked to the immigrants. Thus the journey of hardship began on foot or in trucks, they often sneaked across the borders day and night and hid in various hiding places.
From Romania they moved to Hungary and from there to Austria. Meanwhile, my mother was in trucks covered with tarpaulin when she was 7-8 months pregnant with a big belly, squeezed among the other members and she often choked because of the lack of air inside the trucks.
They reached northern Italy, where they were housed in a refugee camp in the city of Terni in Barletta, the city where I was born on 9.8.1948 in a nuns' hospital. My mother did not understand them and they did not understand her, and in order to communicate they used their hands.
My parents waited in Italy for aliyah, and my father took all kinds of odd jobs in order to provide my mother with luxuries like fresh bread, chocolate, ice cream and pastries. So he baked a pretzel, helped a tailor, made ice cream, ironed for people, and all for a few pennies. When the state was declared, the gates of the country were opened and aliyah began, when the Red Cross came and offered my parents to immigrate to Canada instead of to Israel. My mother did not agree under any circumstances to go to Canada and wanted to immigrate to Israel only! Trains began to arrive in order to take refugees and so my parents immigrated with a three-week-old baby. At every stop, my father would jump off the train and ran to the water tap in order to wash diapers. More than once my mother was certain that the train would leave without him at one of the stations, but he would always run just in time after the train, hang on the last car and reach my mother.
They boarded a very shaky ship with hundreds of passengers. On our way I was constantly sick with ear and throat infections. When the ship arrived in Israel on September 11, 1948, we were taken to an immigrant camp in Beit Lid near Pardes Hanna. At night they took all the children and babies to the children's home. My mother was worried and she asked my father to go to there and get me. She hid me in a tub under the bed, to make sure that no one would steal me away.
One evening my mother and another friend decided to take a walk and left me with my father for a while. She was, of course, young, handsome, wearing white shorts and a beautiful shirt, and so she was enjoying herself with her friend. Suddenly, soldiers from the military police approached them, arrested them and took them to enlist them in the IDF. My mother began to cry and tried to explain with hand gestures that she had a baby and that she was nursing her. At first they did not believe her and sent her to a room with a female soldier to prove her claim and only then released her.
Then my parents came to Haifa, and they stayed in Haifa in an Arab family's house for which they paid 3 pounds, without windows or doors. My father was drafted immediately into the army without speaking Hebrew at all. My mother remained alone without a relative or anyone she knew, and without knowing Hebrew, with a sick baby to take care of. Fortunately for my mother, in the apartment upstairs, above the apartment where my parents lived, lived a Kurdish family with eight children. The mother of the family, Ruhama, took my young mother and me in, and with the help of hand gestures she managed to heal me.
My father was recruited in the War of Independence and since he had a natural talent for cooking, he took a course and became a military cook (until his release from the IDF).
So my father took care of my mother for two years so she would not starve. The Jewish Agency bed in which she slept stood on tin cans ... This was the period of austerity and everything was received through coupons.
When I was 3 years old, they distributed porcelain glass plates and each family received a plate according to the number of persons in the family. My mother was in the last months of her pregnancy with my brother in her belly, and one morning she took me by the hand and we went to get 3 plates .... It was on Herzl Street in Haifa in a certain basement, and there were so many people who almost crushed me to get these plates.
In the meantime, my father was released from the army and many potential work places were seized ... My parents' war of survival began, until finally my father managed to get into a "Dagon" - a silo house in Haifa. From that moment a better period began for all of us!