



Roots of a Forest

The Masaryk Forest and Kibbutz Sarid

An Historical Perspective

Abstract

This article revisits the efforts of the early Czech “Bibracha” founders of Kibbutz Sarid to honor their revered first President Tomas Masaryk through the planting of the Masaryk Forest (1928-1930).

The history of the forest reflects the life and times of the Czech pioneers who established it.

The Masaryk Forest has led to renewed ties between Kibbutz Sarid and the Czech Republic: Czech KKL and other Czech colleagues.

Kibbutz Sarid is positioning itself as the Masaryk Czech Hub in Israel.

See details at the end of the article

Our best efforts have been made to convey material in a truthful and accurate manner. Due to the fact that historical content at times relies on memoirs, journals and interviews, errors can occur. If any reader has a comment or correction, or can validate a photograph or the photographer who took it, we would be more than happy to know about it. Please contact us with the information.

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Third Edition

Roots of a Forest
The Masaryk Forest and Kibbutz Sarid

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Introduction: Historical Perspective

Two groups of young Zionist pioneers founded Kibbutz Sarid. The first group (1926), "Achva" (brotherhood in Hebrew) was from Lithuania. The second group (1927), "Bibracha" was Czech and Slovak, named after the German village Biebrach (and which, coincidentally, means "a blessing"), on the Rhine River, where some of the members did their agricultural training and forged their goals. Over the next few years, other groups of young pioneers joined to supplement and strengthen the new collective, each with their own national background and their own talents and contributions.

While exploring the Czech connection to Kibbutz Sarid, interviewing Bibracha descendants and looking into family documents, it has become clear that the political and socio-economic environment of Czechoslovakia in the early 20th century was in general receptive to its Jewish minority, which was not always the case in other countries.

Czechoslovakia developed and maintained a political atmosphere that encouraged the Jewish people to take an active role in economic and academic life. As a result, one finds an impressive Jewish contribution to the richness of the social and cultural life in Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, the religious atmosphere was generally one of tolerance, especially as intermarriage increased in frequency. This, coupled with the leadership of President Masaryk who made clear his liberal-democratic values, created a unique bedrock for the Jewish people to flourish in Czechoslovakia: through pursuing education, and seeking to acquire new skills through academic learning. It should come as no surprise that the Jewish contribution to the economy and cultural life during that time far outweighed its percentage of the Czech population.

Most of the members of 'Bibracha' came from well-educated families whose Czech/Slovak values were deeply embedded in them. Reading the following pages, one can feel the echo of those influences on the idealistic youth who decided to forgo, in some cases, very comfortable lives to build new and often uncertain lives in an unknown desert environment.

It is said that the Czech influence on Kibbutz Sarid throughout the decades has been an enlightened one. Most of these Czechoslovakian founders hailed from Moravia and Bohemia, where a proud people held the Russian revolution from the east, and the stiff authoritarianism of German culture from the west at a distance. The saying went: "Between the obstinate 'justice' of the Revolution and the draconian (German) laws live real people, who must also be considered¹."

¹ Gadi Masarek, son of Bibracha founders Trude (Steiner) and Haim Masarek.

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Were these early Bibracha members aware of how well this spirit of accommodation and understanding would serve them in their new land? Not only were they well educated and talented; the young Czechoslovakians were also congenial in temperament, and less ideologically rigid – all qualities which contributed positively to communal life.

The young Bibracha founders greatly admired President Masaryk. Likewise, the State of Israel has always shared in the deep respect and admiration for Tomas Masaryk, a brave man, a great humanist, an advocate of justice and democracy, a true friend of the Jewish people who fought anti-Semitism, and a supporter of the Zionist cause.

The Role of Czechoslovakia in Israel's Struggle for Independence

"The Czechoslovak arms saved the State of Israel, really, absolutely, and without these weapons we wouldn't have survived".

Ben Gurion, during a 1968 radio broadcast marking the 20th anniversary of the famed arms shipment boat "Nora", which brought crucial arms to Israel on the eve of the War of Independence of 1948. These arms unequivocally turned the tide of the war for Israel.

Following the end of the British Mandate in Palestine and the historical UN Declaration of Partition on November 29, 1947 allowing for the Jewish state of Israel, Arab rejectionism swiftly led to growing attacks. Invasion by the surrounding countries immediately threatened the survival of the nascent state. Frantic efforts by Ben Gurion and Haganah members were stepped up in order to acquire larger amounts of much needed arms. Greatly adding to the desperation was the fact that the US and Britain, anxious about their interests in the Arab world, decided to block arms shipments. In addition, the UN issued an embargo on any shipment of arms to Israel.

However, the USSR, which had supported the UN declaration of independence for Israel continued to stand by it, in hopes of countering British/US influence in the Middle East, and cultivating Israel as a pro Soviet ally. Thus, a green light was given to crucial arms deals between Czechoslovakia and the new state of Israel.

During WW2 under Nazi occupation, the Skoda Works plants in Czechoslovakia had been turned into German weapons plants. Towards the end of the war, under Soviet control, large numbers of arms factories continued to flourish. Therein lay the only available opportunities for the new Jewish state to purchase crucially needed armaments, made possible by Czech cooperation along with secret and illegal donations from American Jewry.

There are many lesser known but fascinating stories related to the "Procurement Enterprise"- the umbrella term for the massive operations which enabled arms from

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Czechoslovakia to reach Israel. Jan Masaryk, then Czech foreign minister, was noticeably involved in the efforts to transmit weapons, including hundreds of thousands of machine guns and rifles to the newborn state.

US and European WW2 pilots belonging to the legendary MACHAL (Overseas Volunteers to Israel in the 1948 War of Independence) brigade aided in the training of pilots and crews and the acquisition and delivery of airplanes. Such planes included the Czech Avia S-199, Messerschmitts, Spitfires C54 Skymasters, C-46 Commandos, Dragon Rapids, Miles Aerovan, Mosquito, Bristol Beaufighter bombers, Norsman light cargo planes, B-17's, Mustangs and Dakotas. The "Etzion" airbase in Zatec, Czechoslovakia became the central base for the airlift of illicit arms from Czechoslovakia and other parts of the world, to Israel. Yugoslavian air and sea bases were also made available. Czechoslovakian personnel and efforts, along with the MACHAL pilots, laid the foundations for the establishment of Israel's air force.

Czechoslovakian technicians were even on the ground in Israel to help assemble transported fighter plane parts when they arrived at Tel Nof Airforce Base. Courageous flights from Czechoslovakia without stopovers or refueling (some of which did not make it) took place, narrowly avoiding detection by enemy Egyptian forces. These combat planes (especially the Messerschmitt) ultimately allowed Israel to route the Egyptian forces in the Negev and stop their advance on Tel Aviv, leading to the final defeat of Egypt in the 1948 war.

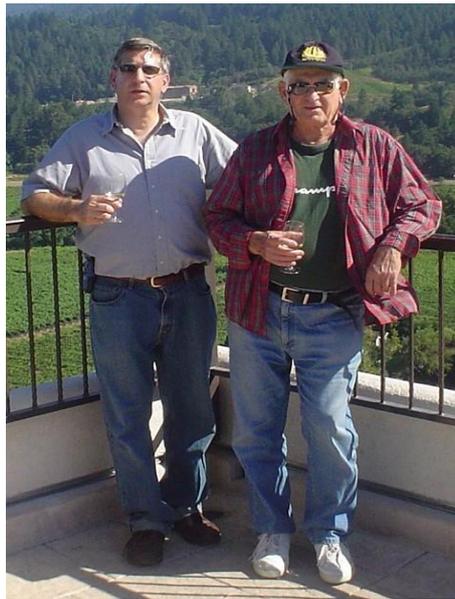
Intensive arms shipments by air, land and sea required a wireless communication infrastructure, which was established at the Israeli mission in Prague, with the approval of the local city authorities. It utilized the most sophisticated equipment encountered to that point by the Hagana. Post 1948, the communication station in Prague became the first network connecting all Israeli diplomatic and embassy missions abroad, servicing both its foreign and defense ministries.

This massive airlifting of a wide variety of arms from Czechoslovakia to Israel operated from March until August 1948, when the US threatened Czechoslovakia, forcing its end. Though these extraordinary activities were carried out during a short period of time, it proved just long enough to ensure the survival of the State of Israel².

² Information in this report taken from Tzvi Ben-tzur, "The Czechoslovakian Arms Deal During the War of Independence", Palyam and Aliyah Bet Website, <http://www.palyam.org/indexEn.php>

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*Photo: Tzvi Ben-Tzur (left) – webmaster & editor-in-chief,
Commander (Ret'd) Yehuda Ben-Tzur – in charge of historical research*

“Necessity is the Mother of Invention”

The rebirth of the modern state of Israel, one of the few redeeming acts of a bloody and shameful 20th century, owed its success to the struggle and planning which had begun decades before 1947. These early efforts, known as “the state in the making”, focused on strengthening defense and security, developing health care, agriculture, education, economic structures, cultural life, and air and sea links to the outside world, among other things.

The ingathering of an exiled people, proclaiming their independence and self-government, reviving the Hebrew language, and rebuilding their ancient homeland required all the talent, creativity, and perseverance that could be mustered. Here, one can already discern the ‘start up nation’ in the works. **Necessity** dictated innovation and invention, fostered by tenacity and grit. Among the Bibracha members were many who possessed such gifts. They managed to solve problems through new inventions, and created novel ways of doing things. They contributed to the progress and development of pre state Israel, and as we shall see, even left their imprint on the world at large.

The Kibbutz Movement Contribution

The kibbutz movement proved vital to the development of the state of Israel in many ways and has traditionally contributed way beyond its numbers statistically in the areas of political and military leadership, economic development and cultural and artistic life. The kibbutzim fulfilled a truly

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heroic role in guarding and strengthening the country's borders, in absorbing immigrants to the new state and in educating and rehabilitating young people in need of homes and new lives. Many kibbutz representatives played a prominent role in organizing the movement of Jewish refugees from Europe into Israel.

The sacred mission of providing a home for refugees was also taken on by Kibbutz Sarid, which opened its doors to young immigrants and refugees (Aliyat HaNoar) as well as to children from disadvantaged homes in Israel (Hevrat HaNoar). Several groups of young people (some as young as 5 years old) found homes on Sarid, from the mid 1930's to the early 1940's. They learned Hebrew, benefited from the widely admired humanist educational values of kibbutz schools, and contributed through work to kibbutz life. Some went on as a group to complete the establishment of kibbutzim elsewhere, others moved on to build lives and families outside the kibbutz and still others stayed on and became members of Sarid.

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History: The Early Czech “Bibracha” Founders

The Masaryk Forest of Kibbutz Sarid was planted in three stages during the years 1928-30, by early kibbutz founders from Lithuania (the “Achva” group) and from Czechoslovakia (the “Bibracha” group).

The young Czech “Bibracha” members who took part in the planting of the Masaryk Forest were Zionist youth nurtured by the “Tchelet Lavan” (Hebraization of “Blau Weiss”) youth movement of Europe, which united young Czechoslovakian Zionist Jews whose dream was to build a new, socialist agricultural movement in the land of their forefathers.

Towards this goal, many of these young members underwent training in agriculture and essential trades in preparation for immigration to Eretz Yisrael. Nearly all members emigrated during the years 1922-1926. Some had already completed university studies, while others left in the middle in order to fulfill their dream. Leaving their studies (let alone leaving their families) to acquire new training and skills to fit early pioneer life constituted a momentous revolution undertaken by these young idealists, and is a common theme in their biographies.



Young Bibracha pioneers of Kibbutz Sarid, late 1920's. Photographer unknown.

Upon arriving to pre-state Israel, the Bibracha members lived and worked under difficult conditions. Initially, they set up camp working in Ein Ganim (near Petach Tikvah). Others toiled to build the future city of Afula, planned as the “capital” of the agricultural valleys surrounding it. Later, in search of more work, the group moved to Haifa, earning wages building houses, paving roads, draining swamps, and helping to renovate the sea port, among other types of physical labor.

“Conditions were primitive, and there was an acute housing problem...couples frequently had to share their tent with a third member of the collective, called

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a “primus ... (Note: While the exact nature of this expression isn't completely certain it may be symbolic of the three legs that typified the small stove of the day, which was called “primus”.) Everyone was poor and sometimes went to bed hungry, but the atmosphere was one of optimism, of being part of a great and growing movement, engaging in a major social project such as had never been tried before³ ...”

One cannot underestimate the challenges faced by these young pioneers. Resources were scarce, as was food. In the winter, many fell sick with dysentery and other illnesses, and some were forced to return to Czechoslovakia to get medical treatment. But despite all this, new Czech and Slovak immigrants continued to join them, bringing inspiration and hope.

In the early days when one could be expelled over ideological disagreements, as happened on many a kibbutz, Bibracha members embraced a more tolerant attitude: they vowed to live together and solve problems by compromise, not by arguments and never by sending someone away. The Czechoslovakian pioneers also brought with them their Jewish-Czech connections whose aid played a crucial role in helping the early kibbutz collective survive.

In 1926, the smaller Achva group invited the Bibracha group to meet them with the goal of joining forces to build Sarid. The energetic spirit of the 40 strong Bibracha group was evident as they set out on foot from Haifa to Sarid to meet the Achva members. The women had baked Czech cakes, the men had hoisted a casket of wine onto their wagon, and they sang accompanied by harmonica and guitar, as they had done in their earlier days in the Tchelet Lavan Movement. Upon meeting the more experienced Achva members, heated ideological discussions ensued, but politics was put aside for the time being in order to focus on uniting the two groups⁴.

Daily life and holidays took on new meaning. Friday evening shabbat dinners in the communal dining room became a time for sing alongs, dancing the hora along with Czech and Slovak dances, and humorous/satirical skits written by the members. As a result of their growing solidarity, the longing for a permanent home of their own grew stronger⁵.

The first love story between the Achva and Bibracha group involved **Moshe Tzipor (Irvin Fogel, 1903-1997, Pilsen)** from Bibracha, and **Tovah "Gittel" Shtyer** from Achva. The Achva members were anxious as to how they would be able to feed and house such a large new group of 40. It is said that Tovah

³ *The Kibbutz, Post Eutopia*, by Walter Laqueur, Winter, Jewish Review of Books, 2012.

⁴ *The Czech Group “Bibracha”, the Masaryk Forest and the Early Days of Kibbutz Sarid, A Brief History*, by Ayelet Rosen Karu, 2020.

⁵ *The Czech Group “Bibracha”, the Masaryk Forest and the Early Days of Kibbutz Sarid, A Brief History*, by Ayelet Rosen Karu, 2020.

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insisted on the merger, having caught Moshe Tzipor in her sights. They were married soon after.

“**Tzipor**” was intellectual and idealistic. He had prepared himself for Aliyah by studying agriculture in Berlin after WW1, but his real love was for political affairs and writing. He was the official representative of the Jezreel Valley at two Zionist Congresses, established Givat Haviva, the Kibbutz movement’s educational, archival and research institute, in 1949 and the “*Al Hamishmar*” daily Hebrew newspaper in Israel.

Moshe Tzipor became a leading journalist who loved languages. His daughter Esther remembers him working late into the night, translating articles from various international newspapers and journals to be printed daily in “*Al Hamishmar*”.



Bibracha member Moshe Tzipor, photographer unknown

One of the Bibracha **founders, Gora Schlisser (1903-1961, Pilsen)** played a role in the procurement of weapons via Czechoslovakia. At one point, Gora worked for Keren Hayesod, and Kibbutz Sarid documents allude to his going abroad in 1947 in order to acquire arms for the Hagana (Israel’s pre-state army, before the IDF) as well as to save Jewish lives and property by bringing them to pre-state Israel.

Gora, a young Czech intellectual, was known by all as an energetic, charismatic and passionate Zionist youth organizer. Between the world wars, Gora honed his vision of Aliyah and building a life of socialist equality on kibbutz while training with the Bibracha group that he helped to found in Germany. He took part in Zionist conventions in Carlsbad and Vienna. He held a variety of leadership positions in the Tchelet Lavan and He’halutz organizations, and worked tirelessly to increase immigration from Europe to Israel.

Gora remained faithful to his socialist ideals and proud of the kibbutz movement’s unique and unparalleled success in implementing them. Always

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attentive to the ideas of collective life, Gora devoted essays on topics such as democratization within kibbutz society, liberation of women in kibbutz life, values and education of children. He is remembered for his enthusiastic participation in kibbutz cultural and theater events. His educational vision bestowed upon Sarid its first “Day of the Child” which incorporated forward thinking educational activities on many fronts to the benefit of parents and children alike. Gora was the first to head a regional kibbutz school, located across the Jezreel Valley at Kibbutz Mishmar Ha’emek. In addition, he continued to be sent abroad on various missions for the kibbutz movement and the Israeli government, never tiring of serving his people.

Fridel Schlisser (Rizel), (1904-1975, Irbianitza, Ruthenia), was one of six children, and joined the Tchelet Lavan youth movement already at age 10. She was active in the group discussions, summer camps and trips. By age 20, Fridel left home for kibbutz farm training (“hachshara”), and two years later made Aliyah. Fridel joined the other Czechoslovakian Bibracha members in founding Sarid in 1927 and worked as a caretaker of infants. Her calm and reassuring touch won her the trust and love of her peers.



Fridel and Gora Schlisser, from Sarid archives

The kibbutz movement is well known for its advanced thinking in all aspects of collective childhood education, from the time a baby is born until the draft into the IDF. In the early years of Sarid, kibbutz childrearing ideology was still in the process of being formed, and Fridel contributed greatly by personal example. She possessed a love of the individual child, fostered personal development and was always a sensitive listener and comforter. Fridel’s daughter, **Timna Livne**, exhibits many of her mother’s qualities, and has herself fulfilled roles working lovingly with both the newborn and the elderly on Sarid. Timna perhaps put it best, when asked to describe the effect that the Bibracha group has had on the atmosphere of Kibbutz Sarid: she stated that she remembered her parents’ home as always open, warm, accepting – a

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philosophy of “live and let live” which they brought from their homeland of Czechoslovakia.

Despite losing two of her three children and her husband Gora, all prematurely, Fridel was a woman of great strength who refused to burden others with her own sorrows.

We often forget how many tragedies befell the builders of our country, and how resilient their spirits were in dealing with the great difficulties and challenges facing them at all times.

Fridel’s childhood friend from Czechoslovakia, Menachem Tzentner (who appears later in this article) eulogized her in these words:

“Fridel radiated a human warmth which affected the entire social climate of our kibbutz. She was a jewel within the diverse human mosaic that comprises Sarid. With the passing of time, and against the test of time, she will remain within us the same (beloved) Fridel.”

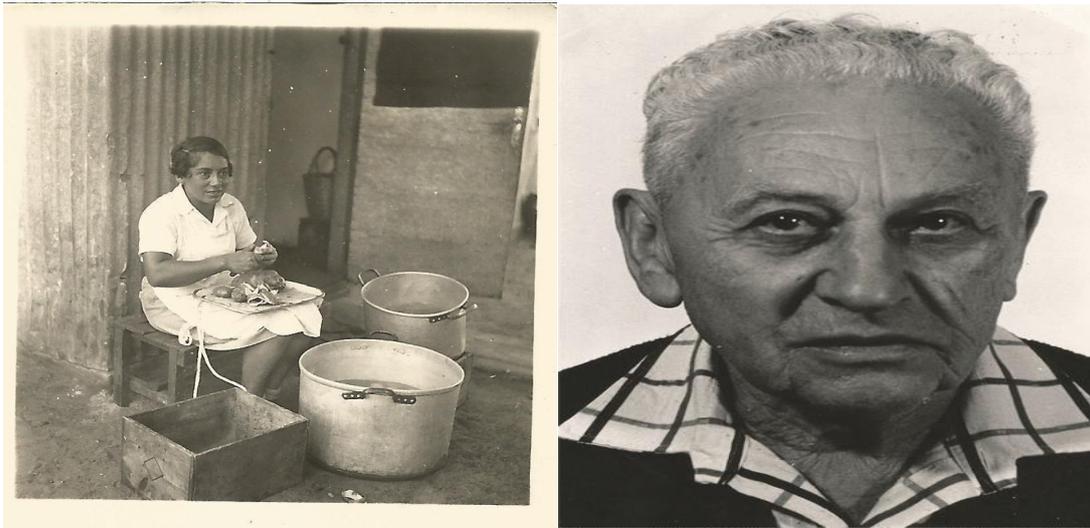
The Czechoslovakian Bibracha influence was the energetic catalyst for securing the foundations of the young kibbutz collective. Branches of labor were strengthened and organized, as well as the other aspects of life (educational, economic, cultural). The founders believed that all branches of work were of equal importance. Since kibbutzim strived and succeeded for the most part in being self-sufficient, the service branches were crucial. Finding one’s laundry neatly folded on the shelf in the ‘communa’ at the end of the week was never taken for granted. Talented seamstresses provided the kibbutz with work clothes, children’s clothing, sheets, towels, tablecloths, holiday costumes, bathing suits, even underwear for both men and women. Preparing the food, educating and caring for children, providing clothes and laundry services meant that others could do their part in the fields.

Two kitchens operated efficiently: a children’s kitchen prioritized providing the best food first to the group’s growing children, and a separate kitchen feeding the adult population.

Trude Masarek (Steiner,1903-1996, Pilsen) is remembered until today as the cook and baker who managed to create tasty meals from what little there was in the early years. Members always received their three meals a day, though they were often hungry in between. Children foraged for berries and edible weeds in the afternoon on their way home to see their parents, who did not have refrigerators or food at home (all meals were eaten in the communal dining room). Trude’s “kneydelach” served in goulash sauce, was a supreme treat. Every scrap of food was put to use – from the fields and dairy, and everything in between.

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Trude Karpa Masarek and Haim Masarek, Sarid Archives

Trude and her husband Oscar Karpa made aliya with the Bibracha group in 1925. Because of Oscar's deteriorating health, they were forced to return to Czechoslovakia in 1927 to receive treatment, and in 1939 managed by the skin of their teeth to leave Europe back to Palestine, with young daughter Leah who had been born in the meantime. Tragically, Oscar passed away soon after their ship docked in Haifa and Trude, upon returning to Sarid, then found her place taking responsibility for feeding the kibbutz. On Sarid she met and married **Haim Masarek (1904-1992, Horcise, Bohemia)**, bringing their son Gadi into the world. Haim himself had barely managed to escape the claws of Nazi Europe in 1939. He, like other Bibracha members, lost almost all his family in the Holocaust. Despite living through two world wars and then several in Israel, Haim always lifted spirits through his musical talent on the guitar, playing and singing Czech and German songs, Gypsy dances, classical music and Israeli songs he learned singing in the Sarid choir. Haim worked as a mechanical engineer in the Skoda plant in Czechoslovakia and for 48 years in Israel he worked as a mechanic in the Sarid-Mizra auto repair branch, and as a vehicle damage assessor for the entire region.

Hard Work Valued Above All Else

Kibbutz movement ideology promoted the value of "Hebrew labor" and dedication to areas of work essential to kibbutz development. Members were sent to study subjects which directly answered the needs of the community. One was subsequently judged by his / her industriousness, by the ability to work hard for the betterment of the community rather than for the sole development of the individual and his/her aspirations. A certain level of altruism and self-sacrifice was required. One's artistic gifts were appreciated, though relegated to after work hours, where music, dance, theater and art blossomed even after a tiring day of physical labor.

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Bibracha member **Ernst Plaschkes (1905-1993, Olomouc)** was one of the many talented and outstanding workers, who during his lifetime applied his energy and many abilities to nurturing the struggling rural community. He was considered handsome, unassuming, industrious and big hearted.

Ernst was the fifth and last son born to owners of a sports equipment business in Olomouc. Five sons and a sports store guaranteed a family of excellent athletes. Ernst met members of the Bibracha youth while on a stop he made in his travels through Europe as a young man. After then completing his obligatory service in the Czechoslovakian army, he turned to pre-Aliyah training, learning how to develop vegetable farms. This area of study took him to France, where he learned how such farms could be adapted to a more Mediterranean based climate.

Upon his immigration to Eretz Yisrael in 1925 by way of Alexandria, Egypt, Ernst first worked on Moshav Migdal in forestry, house construction and the planting of banana fields. Afterwards, he joined the Bibracha group on Sarid, helping plant **the Masaryk Forest**. He also worked in the agricultural fields, in the dairy, and honed his skills in mechanics. In addition to all of this, he proved an essential construction worker, responsible for among other things, new buildings on Sarid, including the water tower, and the kibbutz silo. When the first road outside the kibbutz was laid, leading from Kibbutz Ginnegar to Moshav Nahalal, Ernst labored to quarry the nearby hills. He helped pave the new road below, which ran between the Masaryk Forest and Sarid, and was nicknamed "the Dardanelles".

Ernst's wife, **Gisa (Grunberg, 1907-1970, Brno)** joined the Tchelet Lavan youth movement at a young age, following several early life hardships. Gisa's parents had owned a liquor shop, but when her father was drafted into the army during WW1, the family was left impoverished and suffered from hunger. Gisa's mother died when she was still a child of 11, and eventually Gisa went to live with her aunt, finishing her education quickly and successfully. After completing pre-Aliyah agricultural training, Gisa immigrated to Palestine in 1929 with her good friend Grete (later Grete Arieli) and joined the Bibracha members at Sarid. Gisa worked for many years in the dairy, later with the children, as well as in both kitchens of the kibbutz.

It was during Gisa's stint in the dairy branch, that Ernst's innovative spirit was piqued once again (having already invented mechanical tools which contributed greatly to a more effective running of the kibbutz). Watching Gisa milk cows by hand, and learning that the first milking machine (Alpha Laval, from Sweden) had arrived to Sarid but was limited in its efficiency, Ernst invented a central vacuum-based pipeline running the length of the building, connected to each cow. This allowed for the milking of several cows simultaneously, and considerably shortened the amount of time it took for the milkings. This innovation was greatly praised by the engineers of Alpha

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Laval, who returned home and proceeded to develop new milking machinery based on the model built by Ernst Plaschkes, from Israel. Ernst was an idealistic socialist, a pioneer with great curiosity whose creative and innovative thinking contributed to the progress of Sarid.



Ernst Plaschkes, and the Plaschkes family: Ernst, Nurit, Arnon, Micha, Gisa, courtesy of Sarid archives

Ernst and Gisa built a warm home on Sarid for their three children, Micha, Nurit and Arnon. They were well educated and enjoyed conversing with visitors in their home which was open to all, especially to young people.

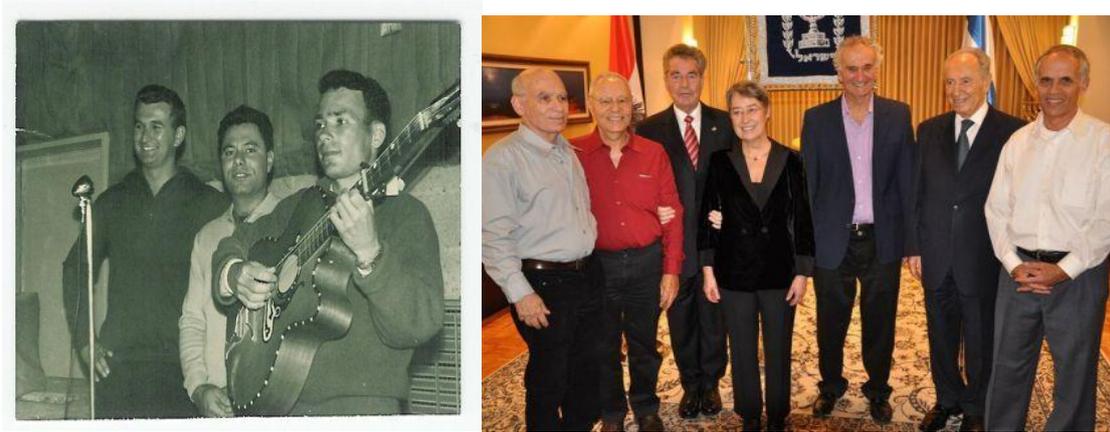
Ernst and **Gisa** (along with other kibbutz families) were known for the love and comfort they provided to such youth. The simple life and small living quarters of kibbutz members, devoid of luxury or even surplus food, didn't matter to children in need of a sympathetic friend, a loving and interested adult who made them feel secure, and a place to feel at home.

Of the many young children that shared in the Plaschkes family life was Menachem Reuveni (Poplak) who went on, after his army service, to create the popular "Sarid Trio" along with Sarid members Shlomo Vebner and Natan Milo (Natan also arrived on Aliyat HaNoar at age 17). The trio enjoyed international success, and until this day is known for the exquisite harmonies they perfected in their beloved repertoire of Israeli songs.

The Plaschkes family maintained close ties with many of their "adopted" children and their families. Arnon, the youngest of the three Plaschkes children, has continued until this day to be in touch with some of the children his family took in, visiting and celebrating family life events together in Europe, where he lives with his own family.

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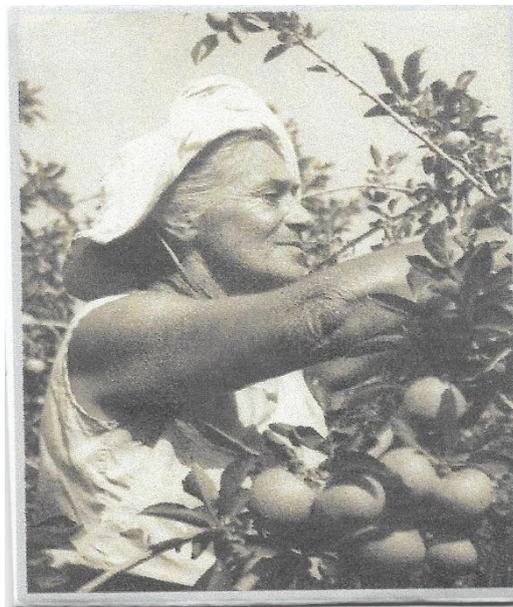


From left: Natan Milo, Menachem Reuveni, Shlomo Verbner as the young "Sarid Trio".

Picture on right: Shlomo Verbner, Menachem Reuveni, President Heintz Fischer of Austria and his wife, Natan Milo, President Shimon Peres and Sarid archivist Danny Nimri. The Austrian president spent time in 1963 at age 25 as a volunteer on Sarid, where he heard the trio perform in their early years.

Source: <https://www.news1.co.il/Archive/0024-D-100014-00.html>

Making the Orchards Bloom



Emma ("Emolda") Tzentner, photographer Yosef Dranger

Emma Tzentner (1902-1970, Pilsen) lost both her parents at a young age. Emma's step mother cared for her, and at age 12 Emma enthusiastically joined the Tchelet Lavan movement (where she was given the nickname

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“Emolda” by her friends). By 1924, she was already in Eretz Yisrael, having worked very hard at agricultural training before immigrating.

Emolda was strong, independent and hardworking. She loved developing the orchards and accumulated a vast and professional knowledge of the field. Until today she is known as a pillar in the formation of the orchards of Sarid. Life in the early days of the kibbutz was difficult. She and husband, Menachem, shared a small kibbutz style room that had little heat in the winter and little air in the hot summer. But it is said that they created a warm home that other kibbutz children besides their own three offspring, enjoyed spending time in. Emolda never regretted her idealism and maintained an optimism and ability to be grateful for the life she had made for herself.

Grete Arieli (1908-1988, Caslav, Bohemia)



Grete Arieli, photo from Sarid Archives Memorial Pages

Following her impressive contribution to the Tchelet Lavan group she organized as a young girl in Caslav, Grete arrived to Sarid in 1930. She was a well-educated young woman who spoke several languages, loved literature, and was steeped in the early 20th century values of humanism. Grete soon found her place working in the orchards of Sarid, deepening her knowledge of the growth stages of fruit, to the point where her reputation preceded her and her advice and instruction were sought from others outside the kibbutz.

Grete and Emolda are remembered for their hard work and contribution to the fruit orchards of Sarid. Both women reflected the Czech founders’ talent in redirecting their intellectual skills to new areas of learning which would help build the economic and agricultural base of their kibbutz. In turn, this generation of founders was directly helping to build a young nation. Of this mission they were constantly cognizant, and their individual sacrifices were seen as worthy in light of their goal: to push the new country forward.

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The Masaryk Forest and Kibbutz Sarid

The Forest

The entire landscape around Sarid was arid with no trees or shade at all. Hence, the forest played a major role in improving the surroundings and quality of life for the kibbutz members.

The first pine tree forest was planted on the western slope of the hill of Kibbutz Sarid in 1928, and funded by the Czechoslovakian Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael in honor of the ten-year anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovakian Republic (1918). Important Czechoslovakian guests were in attendance, among them the author Max Brod.



Sarid, April 1928.

The kibbutz founders and children with the writer Max Brod and the journalist Felix Waltesch.

Further fundraising efforts by KKL in both Czechoslovakia and in Israel made possible the planting of two more forests (around 40 acres). In 1930, a forest was planted northwest of the kibbutz, in honor of the 80th birthday of the first Czechoslovakian president, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk.

A third forest was planted commemorating the Jewish Czech soldiers who lost their lives fighting in World War One. These events were reported on 1.12.1930 in the Hebrew newspaper "Haaretz".

For kibbutz members, forestry work was an important source of income. Work in the forests was considered "outside labor" and thus brought winter wages into the struggling community. During the rainy season, mushrooms appeared around the trees, and were picked and sold to the agricultural cooperative "Tnuva". It was the sale of these mushrooms that enabled the purchase of the first radio on Sarid.

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Picture 22.04.1930: Planting ceremony of the Masaryk Forest. From left to right, front row - Czech consul and his wife (sitting, left), Colonel Kish, Menahem Ussishkin. Kibbutz Sarid members in the back. Photograph by: Yosef Ben Dov. (Courtesy of the JNF Photo Archives)



Circa 1937-38/ Photo: Arieh Arieli. Grete Arieli and their two daughters, Yael and Edna, in front of the forest sign memorializing Jewish Czech victims of WWI. According to the sign, the forest was planted in the Hebrew year corresponding to 1929-30. Picture from Sarid Archives.

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The Masaryk Forest and Kibbutz Sarid

The Interim Years

WW2, difficult conditions in pre-State Israel and subsequent Soviet domination of Eastern and Central Europe all led to a weakening of connections between Israel (including Czech Israelis) and their counterparts in Czechoslovakia.

However, thanks to **Chanan Rozen (1918 - 2013, Ostrava, born Rozensweig)**, almost continuous contact was maintained between Israel and Czechoslovakia during these difficult decades. Chanan, who arrived in Israel in 1939, was one of the most significant members of the Czech movement in Israel.

(Chanan's older brother, **Shlomo Rozen**, was a founding Bibracha member of Kibbutz Sarid who provided an example of leadership to Chanan. Shlomo was a leader in the kibbutz movement and served in the Knesset.)

Chanan's son, **Giora Rozen**, doesn't remember one day in which the Czech presence was not felt in his childhood home. Despite their Israeli patriotism, Chanan and his wife, Rivka, remained nostalgic for the land of their birth. Their home was alive with Czech food, Czech born friends, and Czech-German culture. According to Giora, Chanan spoke a fluent and rich Czech whenever he could, and much enjoyed the special sense of humor inherent in the language.

In his early years in Ostrava, Chanan had studied and worked in the field of metallurgy, and his expertise enabled him to help establish the mechanics industry in Israel, including production of underground weapons in pre-state Israel.

Chanan headed the League of Friendship between Israel and Czechoslovakia for over 50 years, keeping up important contacts with leading Czechoslovakian figures, and making visits to Czechoslovakia before and after the "Prague Spring" of 1968.

Chanan became a leading figure in public service and the arts, establishing various museums, galleries and artistic events. He served as deputy mayor of the city of Ramat Gan for over 5 years, and was made Honorary Citizen of Ostrava. In 1992, he was appointed Honorary Consul of Czechoslovakia in Israel. In 1998, Chanan was awarded the highest honor of the Czech Republic, the White Lion award, bestowed upon him by President Vaclav Havel.

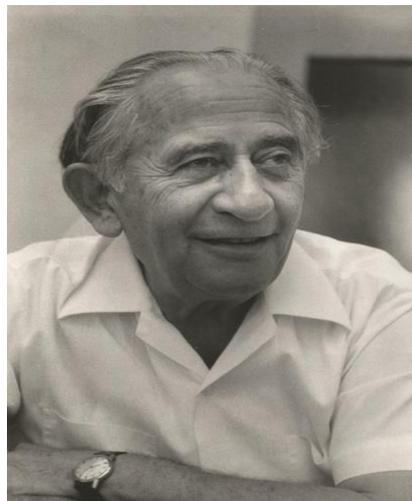
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Chanan Rozen, center, walking next to President Havel at the unveiling of the Holocaust monument in Ostrava. Photographer unknown.

Shlomo Rozen (1905-1985, Ostrava), a Sarid Bibracha founder and Chanan's brother, distinguished himself both locally and nationally. He served in various crucial leadership roles within the kibbutz movement and was elected to the Israeli Knesset for two terms (1965-69, 1969-74). In 1974 Shlomo was appointed Minister of Aliya and Immigrant Absorption during the historic struggle to free Soviet Jewry, which resulted in a large wave of Russian aliya to Israel. He worked alongside Prime Minister Golda Meir, and in 1977 he became temporary Minister of Housing.



Shlomo Rozen, early Bibracha pioneer, Member of Knesset, Minister of Aliya and Absorption, Minister of Housing, picture from Sarid Archives Memorial Pages

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Shlomo Rozen, among fellow government members, 2nd from left, standing. Prime Minister Golda Meir bottom right. 1974. Photographer unknown.

Legendary Nurse

Shlomo Rozen and his wife **Tzila (Hirsch) Rozen (1903-1972, Vizhnitz, Bukovina)** arrived to Sarid together. Tzila, from a religious family of eight children, remembered how she enjoyed the outdoors and the family farm, until the outbreak of WW1 forced them to flee temporarily to Prague. After the war, she joined the Tchelet Lavan (Blau Weiss) Youth group, participated in agricultural training in Bratislava, where she met Shlomo, and together they immigrated to Palestine in 1926, joining the Bibracha group.

Soon after her arrival to Sarid, Tzila was sent to a Hadassah/WIZO course in Jerusalem to train as a pediatric nurse. She then returned to Sarid, caring for babies and older children at the kibbutz boarding school.



Tzila Rozen, picture from Sarid Archives Memorial Pages

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What made kibbutz education unique was the belief that children would truly blossom when given freedom to live and develop together in their own society. All aspects of their lives, including education and health, became the priority of the entire kibbutz, not of the individual families. Since children's lives revolved around the children's houses (organized by age) where they lived, studied and slept, the role of nurse took on additional meaning. It was thus a given that Tzila would concern herself with health, child raising and educational issues simultaneously, down to every minute detail. Example: should children use silverware or only a spoon at meals? Ideologically, the kibbutz viewed silverware as 'bourgeoisie' and unnecessary, whereas the spoon was a modest instrument which could be used for all purposes. On the other hand, children needed to know how to eat properly when they became older, so the decision was made to use forks, knives and spoons at meals.

In 1943, Tzila was recruited by Henrietta Szold to oversee the care of the "Tehran Children" upon their arrival to Eretz Yisrael. These children comprised a group of approximately 1,000 Polish Jewish orphans of WW2 who had lived through horrendous trauma. Upon Germany's conquest of Poland in 1939, they were allowed, after desperate negotiations, to flee on what became a four year 13,000- mile journey: first, from Poland to Russia, then on to the Middle East (Iran) and finally by way of Egypt, to pre-State Israel. Those children who survived the heat, disease, starvation and abuse were welcomed, cared for and given new lives as they were taken in by various kibbutzim, moshavim and educational institutions.

In 1946, Tzila was appointed to oversee the care of infants of "illegal" refugee immigrants being held in the British Mandate refugee camp "Atlit" near Haifa. There she was responsible for 80 babies in the camp, aged 1 week to 4 months old. Tzila's writings attest to the desperate effort by young survivors to have children immediately as an affirmation of life and as compensation for the loss of entire families.

In 1947, the Jewish Agency sent Tzila, along with another nurse and 48 teachers, to various displaced persons camps in Germany, where she cared for Jewish refugees and established mother-baby clinics. In her letters, one appreciates how Tzila was able to grasp the "big picture": she knew what needed to be done, how to meet their desperate needs. She provided aid and sustenance to babies, children and mothers in all ways. The neglect, disease, overcrowded quarters and trauma of a people she cared for and nursed back to health so admirably is heartbreaking and inspiring. She was there when the news of the UN vote to establish the State of Israel was approved, whereupon a joyous celebration broke out among the refugees and staff.

Upon returning to work in Israel, Tzila fulfilled administrative health positions in the kibbutz movement and created a mobile nursing school in

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answer to the need for more nurses in the rural sector, a challenge she most enjoyed.

Tzila was a talented and well -loved nurse, remembered with nostalgia and great affection. In her lifetime she served in many roles, both local and national, reflecting her talent for education and organization within the newly developing health care branches of the country.

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Renewal of Czech KKL - Sarid Friendship

Though Kibbutz Sarid continued to maintain the forest, it had been mostly forgotten elsewhere, until the visit of Michaela Vidlakova to Sarid in 2016. Michaela's father, Eliahu Lauscher, had been one of the Bibracha Czechoslovakian founders of Kibbutz Sarid. Michaela was shown around the kibbutz and visited the forest with Sarid archivist Ayelet Rosen- Karu (Shlomo Rozen's granddaughter). Upon returning home to the Czech Republic, Michaela reported enthusiastically on the existence of the forest to current KKL President Michael Pacovsky.



President of JNF -KKL Czechia, Mr. Michael Pacovsky (second from right), meeting with Israeli KKL in the Masaryk Forest, 2018. Sarid archives.

Since then, connections have again grown warm and strong between KKL Czech Republic and Kibbutz Sarid. The Masaryk Forest is being revitalized, including an open museum commemorating President Tomas Masaryk and Kibbutz Sarid. Czech and Israel KKL support has also included the paving of new roads, and upkeep of historical areas like the "ancient fig tree" location. Four groups of Czech forestry students have thus far come to Sarid to volunteer their expertise and work in the forest. Cultural events have taken place alongside visits from the Czech Ambassador, his wife, and his staff.

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Memorial Stone dedicated to President Tomas Masaryk, Masaryk Forest, photographer Laurie Sapir



Czech embassy staff and families visiting the Masaryk Forest, 2018. Sarid archives.

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The Ambassador Martin Stropnický and his wife, Veronika Žilková planting a carob tree (Charub) in the Masaryk Forest, Kibbutz Sarid, 18.11.2019. Sarid archives.



After the ceremony, a warm welcome is given to the Ambassador, his wife and their entourage in the kibbutz clubhouse where the Sarid girls' choir sings them a Czech folksong in Czech and Hebrew. Sarid archives.

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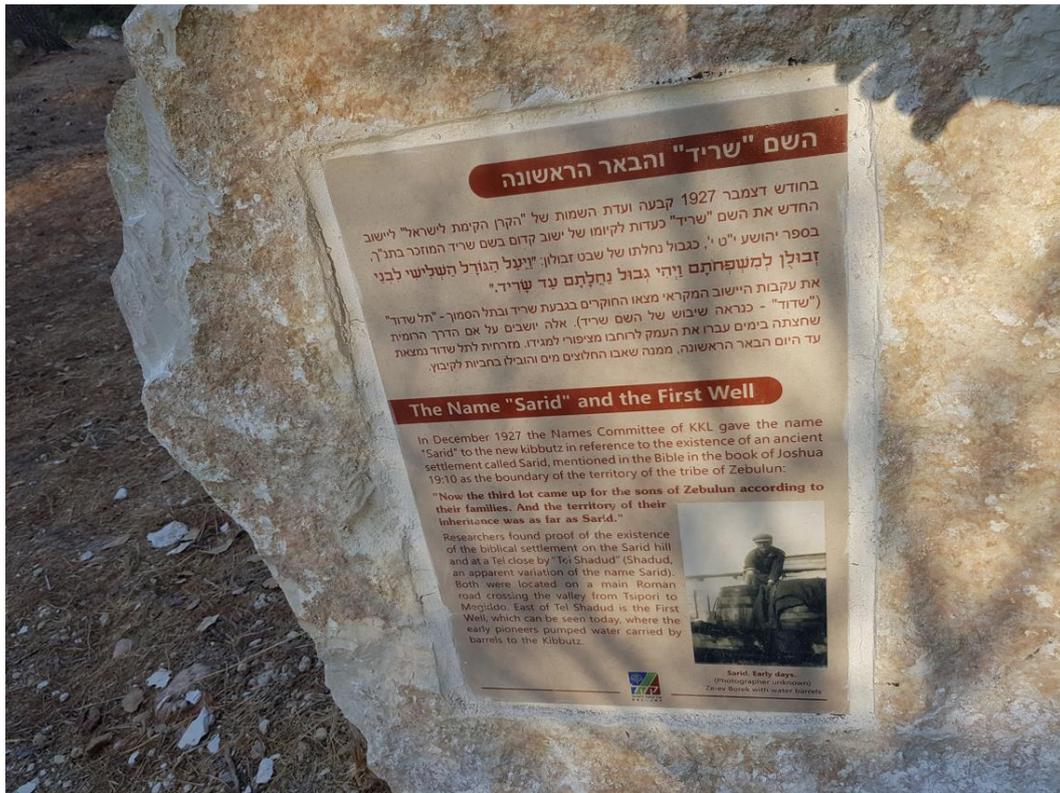


Donor Columns, Masaryk Forest 2021



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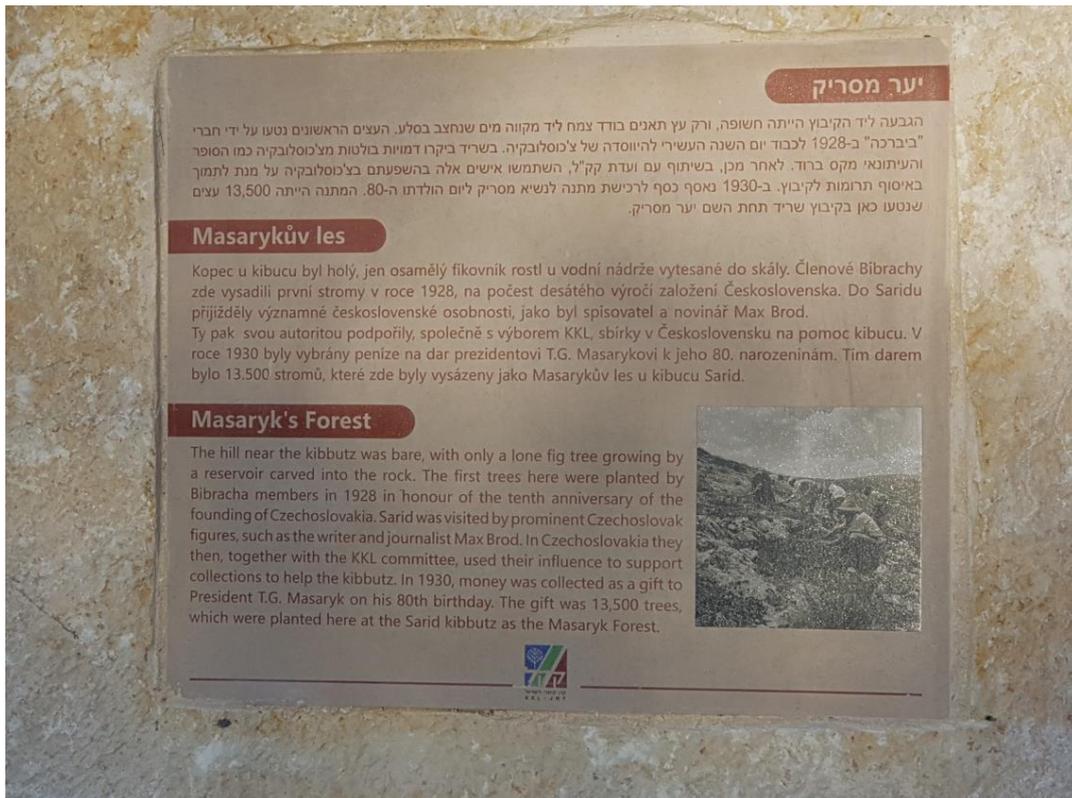
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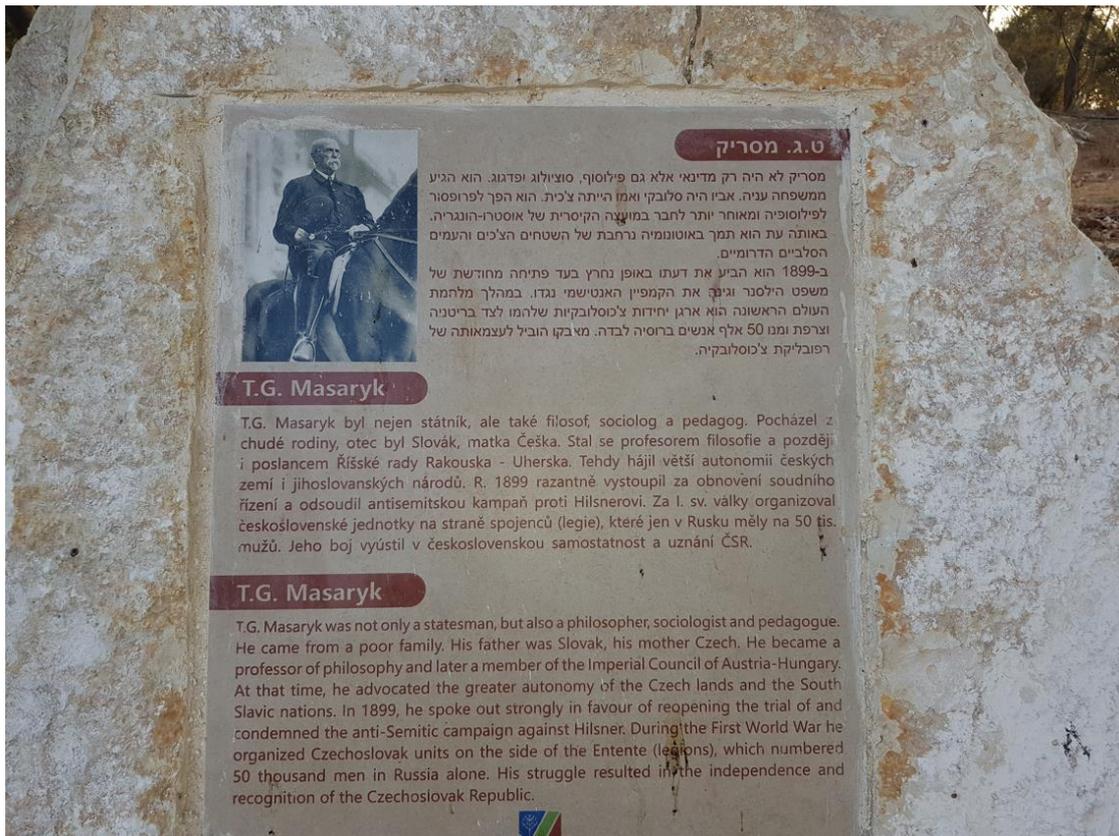
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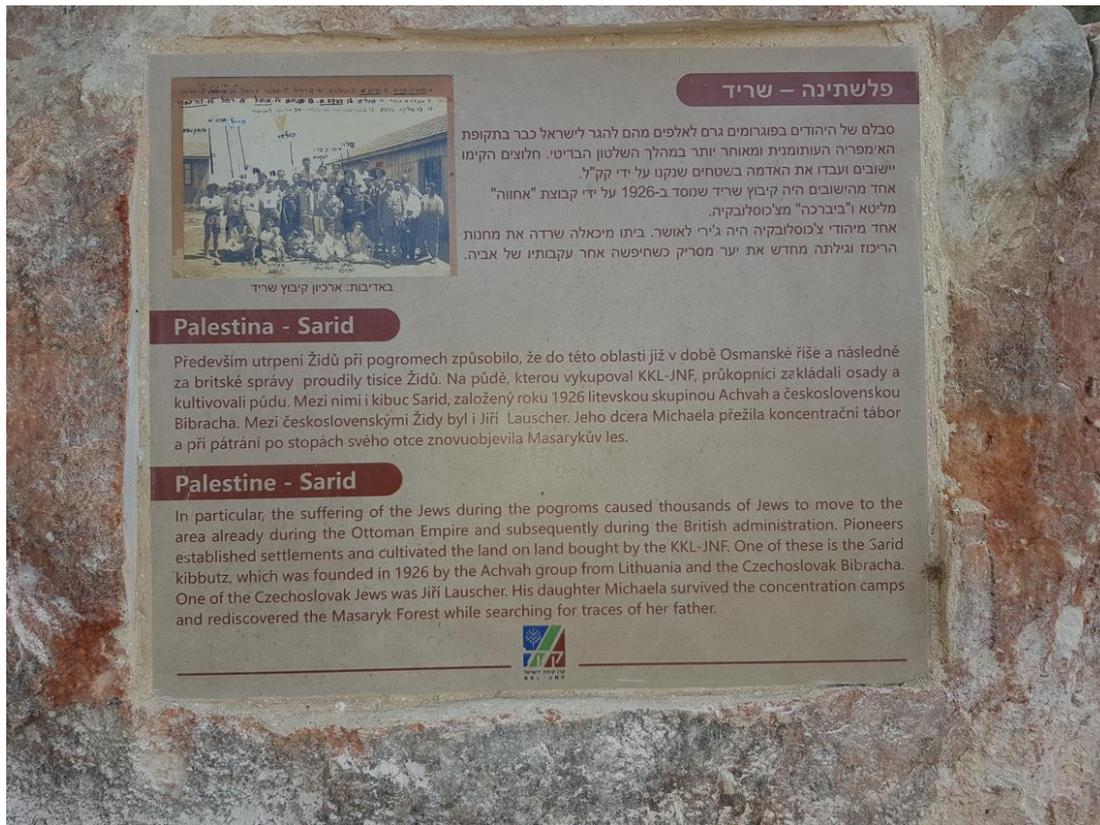
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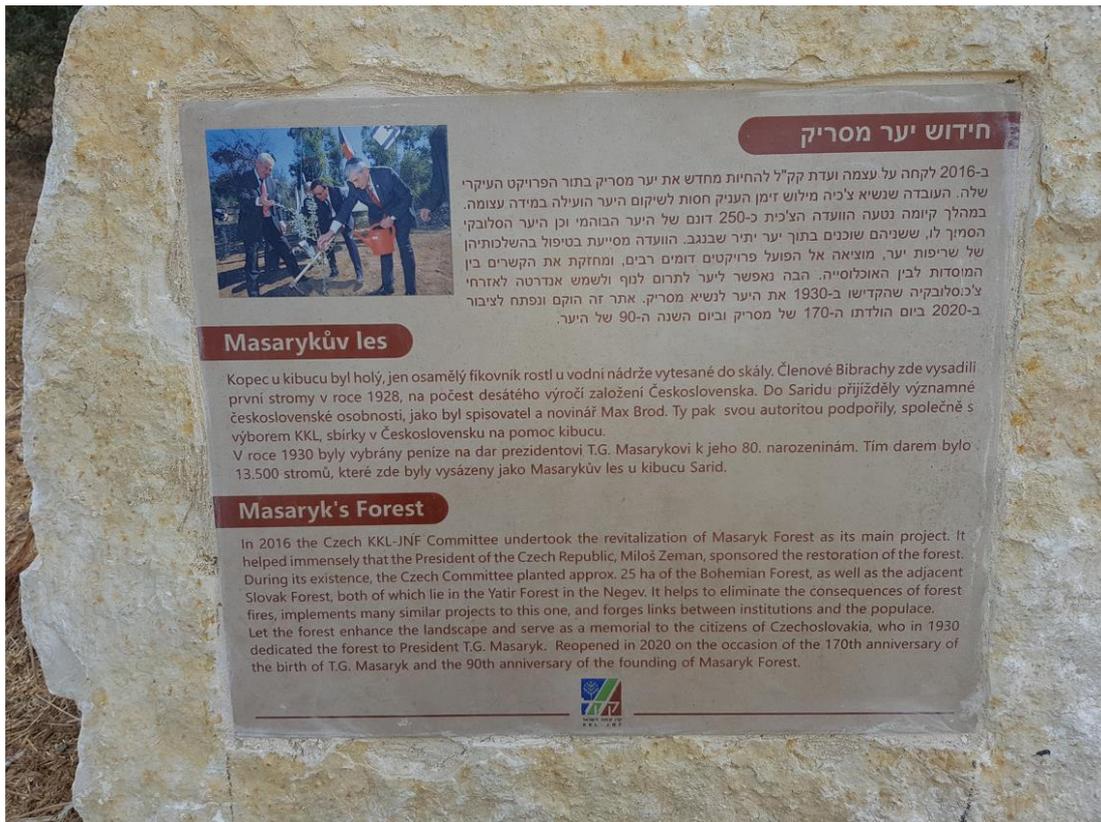
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Forest Restoration and Stories of the Past



Gidi Tzur, caretaker of the Masaryk Forest, photographer Laurie Sapir

For the past 25 years, **Gidi Tzur (Zuker)** has made it his mission to help KKL Israel and KKL Czech Republic rehabilitate and care for the Masaryk Forest, located across the main road from Kibbutz Sarid. In his words:

"I decided to rehabilitate the forest by planting new trees in place of the original pine trees, whose life spans were nearing their end after 90 years. The forest soil is difficult to cultivate, since it consists of mainly limestone and rocks. Each new sapling thus requires extra care during the first years – extra water in the summer, and pruning and weeding. The main tree we plant now is the Tabor oak tree, which grows slowly but which, after 40 years, will provide a beautiful landscape that will last for hundreds of years. This oak was also endemic to the area; however, the oaks that were here were logged during the Ottoman era to supply steam power for the train running from Haifa to Damascus.

In addition to the oak trees, I also plant other trees native to Eretz Yisrael. For example, almond, olive, fig, carob and Judas (redbud) trees. After 25 years of restoration work, one can already sit in the shade of beautiful, mature trees. My hope is that the forest won't be overwhelmed by the projects underway, and that it will be preserved as a natural landscape for hiking and recreation for all the residents of the area."

Gidi inherited his love of nature, trees and agriculture from his parents, early Bibracha members **Avraham** and **Leah (Kotie) Zuker**. Like many of the

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Czechoslovakian pioneers, the Zuker contribution to building the Jewish homeland went far beyond the kibbutz itself.

Gidi's father, **Avraham Zuker (1898-1967, Prague)** studied mechanics at a technical high school in his hometown of Prague. By age 18, he was an officer in the army of the Kaiser, experiencing the horrors of WW1, and immediately afterwards served in the Czech army. Following the end of the war, Avraham joined the Zionist movement and found the pull of Bibracha idealism strong and exciting; as a result, he quit his engineering studies at the university and retrained as a shoemaker in order to join his people in Eretz Yisrael.



Avraham Zuker, picture from Sarid Archives Memorial Pages

Avraham was a talented pianist, and an autodidact who studied late into the nights after work teaching himself engineering, math, Russian and English (Avraham knew 7 languages). He soon put his engineering talents to work. He helped to procure water for the settlement, initiated purchase of the first tractor and combine, and was considered the expert in building on the kibbutz. Avraham developed an innovative approach to central heating so that the new communal house for infants could be warmed sufficiently. This building generated great interest among other kibbutz settlements which had not yet succeeded in designing such an infant center.

In addition, as head of mechanized agriculture on Sarid, he became known around the country as an expert in agricultural machinery, and was employed by the national economic cooperative "Hamashbir" in its agricultural machinery section.

The Hamashbir Cooperative was established in 1916 to collect food surplus from farmers in the Galilee. The name "Hamashbir" was suggested by Berl Katznelson, one of the intellectual founders of Labor Zionism, inspired by the Biblical story of Joseph (Genesis 42:6). As Minister to Pharaoh in Egypt, Joseph's symbolic dream of seven fat cows and seven thin cows was seen as a warning to gather and save surplus food in the "fat years" to distribute in the lean years. (Joseph being "hamashbir - distributor to all the people".) Hamashbir, founded in the early years of Labor-Zionist

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leadership, aimed initially to purchase and distribute food collectively to the hungry and starving around the country during the years of WW1 for little or no profit. Hamashbir later expanded into purchase and distribution of equipment – and Avraham became Director of the Department of Agricultural Machinery. It's worthwhile to remember that during the early years before the State, much of the economy was driven by agriculture, and procuring parts often was a long and complicated process as it involved importing from abroad.

Despite not having a formal academic degree, Avraham's grasp of physics and math combined with experience in the field was impressive, and eventually, he was given a post as lecturer at the Technion Institute (the Israeli MIT). There, taking younger students under his wing he carried out research in many areas which would directly contribute to the advancement of science and agriculture in Israel.

Moshe Dayan, as Minister of Agriculture (1959-64), appointed Avraham to direct the Department of Agricultural Machinery at the then new Center for Agricultural Research and Instruction, located outside Beit Dagan, near Rishon L'Tzion. Earlier, as part of a mission to the USA after WW2 to learn how to adapt American and European agricultural machinery to fit Israeli needs, Avraham was awarded American research money to study wind patterns and other factors influencing the efficacy of pesticides. He continued to do research at the Center for Agricultural Research and Instruction for the rest of his life. Israel has led the world in agricultural and irrigational techniques for decades, thanks to the ingenuity of early pioneers like Avraham Zuker.

Leah (Kotie) Zuker (Cohen, 1909-1984, Olomouc) was born into a wealthy family, and decided at age 20 to immigrate alone to Palestine. Kotie was adventurous, and had always been interested in trees and plant life. Though Kotie was the only young woman in Olomouc to leave on Aliyah to pre-state Israel, the entire community turned out to bid her farewell. Upon her arrival, she joined the early women's agricultural training school *Meshek Ha'Poalot* near Givatim. On one of her adventures touring the country, Kotie traveled north to Kibbutz Beit Alpha, which also had Czechoslovakian founders. Then she made her way to Sarid, also looking for landmen to connect with. When asked why she chose to live on Sarid and not Beit Alpha, she compared the two, saying that on Beit Alpha things were well run and disciplined. On Sarid, they were less so, but the people were easy going, the atmosphere friendly and vibrant. On Sarid she met her husband to be, Avraham Zuker, whose beautiful piano playing attracted her attention.

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Leah (Kotie) Zuker, Sarid Archives

Avraham is remembered sitting with a red-haired cat perched on his shoulder, playing on the kibbutz piano. **The piano** had been sent by one of the member's Czechoslovakian parents who also immigrated to Israel and came to visit the kibbutz. They suggested unscrewing one of the piano legs. Out spilled valuables and cash which had been sent to help the group!

Kotie worked for several years in agriculture, and planted some of the first trees of the **Masaryk Forest**. Later, she took responsibility for landscaping the kibbutz grounds with trees and flowers, managing on little available water. Kotie taught herself English and acquired books on botany to continue to educate herself. The majestic trees she planted on the kibbutz grounds continue to beautify them to this day.

Ami Pomerantz, son of **Zosa (Herman, 1904-1985, Galicia)** and **Zvi Pomerantz (1902-1960, Horodenka - the only Bibracha member from Poland)**, remembers the **Masaryk Forest** as a child. He recalls excellent relationships between early Sarid members and neighboring Arab families. In the Arab village of Dar Tawil, uphill from where the Masaryk Forest stands today, lived 5 extended families who often lent their camels and horses to help move things.

Ami remembers peaceful and cooperative relations with these 5 Arab families. At age 7 or 8, Ami and his friends often walked alone to Dar Tawil to visit the Arab families. Once Israel declared its independence in 1948, Sarid members urged the neighboring families to stay in their homes, promising to protect them when war broke out. However, the religious leader in Nazareth impelled them to leave, claiming they were obstacles to the conquest of Sarid,

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vowing that with the defeat of the Jews, they would return and take over the entire area.



Zvi and Zosa Pomerantz with their son Ami, in the Masaryk Forest, 1932, picture from Sarid Archives

Ami's father, Zvi, was known as a talented mechanic and problem solver. Later, due to health issues which made hard physical labor difficult, he began to manage the kibbutz library and there he found his calling. Zvi taught himself librarianship, even writing a book on the subject (a copy of which now exists in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem). He became an expert on cataloguing, and instructed other kibbutz librarians on how to organize their libraries. Zvi continued to work with the National Library, making a major contribution to library science in the early days of the State. Zvi was an example of the resourcefulness of the Czech pioneers, young intellectuals who left Europe and found themselves working in agriculture and hard labor. When their health became an obstacle, they quickly studied new subjects and found new horizons for their talents.

The First Tractor of Kibbutz Sarid Arrives from Czechoslovakia

"...In 1928, Sarid's first tractor, an Avance tractor, acquired in Czechoslovakia by Moshe Tzipor, entered the kibbutz. It is hard to imagine the joy experienced when the awkward vehicle with steel wheels arrived after a long and noisy drive from the port of Haifa all the way to Sarid. Only the next day, did they discover they had forgotten to bring the plow..."⁶

⁶ *The Czech Group "Bibracha", the Masaryk Forest and the Early Days of Kibbutz Sarid, A Brief History*, by Ayelet Rosen Karu, 2020.

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Poldy Urbach examines the Avance tractor, Sarid, 1928. Picture from Sarid Archives, photographer unknown

Bibracha member **Avner Abeles (1905-1996, Brno)**, worked day and night on the new tractor.



Avner Abeles, picture from Sarid Archives Memorial Pages

Avner grew up in an assimilated home of German culture in Brno. His mother was an opera singer, and Avner himself learned to play the violin at age 5. Soon afterwards he was drawn to the Tchelet- Lavan Czech Zionist youth group. By age 13 he was leading its activities, most importantly, caring for refugee Jewish children of WW1, whose shocking experiences helped solidify his desire to move to Palestine against his parents' wishes.

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He did, however, honor their request that he at least learn a useful profession. Avner thus studied mechanical engineering for 4 years, which served him well when he immigrated. He specialized in maintenance and repair of agricultural equipment, instructing other farmers around the region. In 1967, Avner was awarded the Kishon Regional Prize for his book, “**The Tractor**”, which was the first ever self- help book on tractors to appear in Hebrew.

In a documentary looking back on his life at age 90, Avner recounts some lively stories of free love between the revolutionary Bibracha pioneers of the time, including his own escape from a gun toting husband whose wife he had become involved with when sharing a tent with them as a “primus”.

From Klatovy to Sarid

Reuven (Karel) Bruml (1902-1956)



Reuven Bruml (Bartov), with son Gidon, picture from Sarid Archives Memorial Pages

Born into a successful industrial family whose vast enterprises (wood, steel and chemical plants) provided employment to many of the residents of Klatovy, Reuven’s future was to be the family lawyer. During his university studies in Prague however, Reuven too was drawn to the Zionist movement, and he also decided to tailor his education towards contributing to the building of the state of Israel. He left his law studies and began to study agriculture, first in Czechoslovakia, afterwards for 4 years at the Sorbonne in Paris, and then in Algeria, where the agricultural climate was similar to that of Eretz Yisrael.

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Upon making Aliyah with the Bibracha group in 1927 Reuven succeeded in establishing the orchards of Kibbutz Sarid, and became known far and wide as an expert on planting orchards suitable to the local climate and growing conditions.

Reuven Bruml was an intelligent, modest and well-loved figure. He stands as yet another example of the idealistic Czech Zionist pioneer who left a well-established, warm and loving family for the rigors and hardships of life in pre-state Israel. Like his fellow Bibracha colleagues, he retrained himself, studying agriculture in order to make an important contribution to his new homeland.

A Sense of Humor Never Hurts with Cows

Menachem Tzentner (1905-1990, Brux/Most) from northwest Bohemia, an area of industry and coal mining, learned from a young age about cows. His father was in the business of selling large animals, and in 1924 when Menachem reached university age, he began to study veterinary medicine in Brno. However, drawn to Zionism and the Bibracha group, he left his studies, and emigrated quickly to Palestine in 1925. There, Menachem studied at the Mikveh Yisrael Agricultural School where he acquired his knowledge of dairy farming. This was to be his lifelong occupation.

Menachem established the “refet” (dairy branch) of Kibbutz Sarid, which began with eight cows, and he quickly became a source for other kibbutzim to consult with as they established their own dairy farms. In 1938 he was sent by Sarid and other kibbutzim to buy Damascus cows in Syria. These cows were considered one of the best cow breeds in the Middle East, large in size and dark in color, acclimated to the hot climate and resistant to malaria. Thanks to a Syrian Jewish friend in Palestine, Menachem had a connection when he arrived in Syria, which helped him to carry out his cow dealings. As a special treat, he was invited to the family Passover seder, recited in Hebrew and Arabic, enjoying the customs and hospitality of his hosts. Learning he had two days free before he could get his purchased cows back to Palestine, he took advantage of the time to visit Beirut, which impressed him as hyper modern, with the potential to become a major center of finance outside of Europe.

Years later, Menachem was sent to purchase 450 cows in Holland. The early research he and others carried out on cross breeding of cows (leading to higher milk output) paved the way for the development of the Israel Holstein cow, which has led the world in milk production.

After 20 years of devotion to the dairy farm on Sarid, working at all hours and honing his expertise on cows and bulls, Menachem helped establish the first bull farms for artificial insemination. He loved to tell jokes and stories about

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his work and his sense of humor charmed and entertained those who knew him. (Each time before inseminating a cow, Menachem was known to utter a fertility blessing in Yiddish). He was a popular master of ceremonies at events and gatherings, often preparing humorous speeches to the amusement of the audiences.



Menachem enjoying a special moment with his herd .Photographer unknown

*“In Israel there is only one dairy breed, the Israeli Holstein, which was developed from **the early thirties on by crossing local & Damascus cows with Friesian bulls and later with Holsteins.** Today, the last trace of the Damascus cow has disappeared and after 60 years of breeding in a hot climate, the Israeli Holstein cows have adapted to the hot climate. In Israel, for more than four decades now, 100 % of the dairy population, cows and heifers, have been bred exclusively by artificial insemination, carried out mainly by the “Sion”(the meaning of the word is “the peak of potency”) Co-operative Artificial Insemination company. “Sion” currently houses 250 bulls located in three different sites...*

The annual production is approximately 1,455 million liters of cow milk, and the annual value of products being processed is about US\$ 2.6 billion. The Israeli supermarket shelves are bursting with a variety of healthy, innovative and tasty dairy products which can be compared with the state-of-the-art dairy industries worldwide 7”.

⁷<https://www.israeldairy.com/israeli-holstein-cow-become-world-leader-milk-yields-3/>, How did the Israeli Holstein Cow become a world leader in Milk yields? Ralph Ginsberg, Israeli Dairy Board, 2018

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The Individual Vs. the Collective

Before the advent of kibbutz privatization (beginning of 21st century), kibbutz ideology exercised control over almost every aspect of the lives of its members. Most significantly, this included who would work where, for how long (rotation of duties was the norm), who would be sent to study and what he/she would study. (For an overview of kibbutzim then and now, see <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-kibbutz-movement>)

The demand to sublimate the yearnings of the individual for the good of the collective became a crisis for some. And it is no secret that more than a few talented and ambitious kibbutz members would leave the fold in order to realize their potentials.

Yosef Velner's family was no exception to this painful dilemma. **Yosef (1900-1953, Ostrava)** served in the Austro-Hungarian army during WW1. Afterwards, he helped found the Tchelet Lavan Zionist Youth Movement in Ostrava, as a response to the refusal of the Blau Weiss Youth Movement to admit Jews into its ranks, according to eldest daughter Era. Yosef's roots were in the lower middle class of Czechoslovakia. His father was a burial worker, while his mother hailed from a "more educated/cultured background" which at the same time was also less connected to the burgeoning Zionist movement.

Yosef participated in "hachshara" (training for kibbutz life) in Germany, and already by 1920 had made Aliya. In pre-state Israel he did agricultural work and helped to drain swamps before joining the Bibracha group on Kibbutz Sarid in 1926-7. On Sarid, Yosef met his first wife, **Margit Cohen (also from Czechoslovakia)** who "had been sent" (as she saw it) to join her fellow pioneers. Margit was less than enthusiastic about embracing the extreme hardships of early rural pioneer life. She tried to convince Yosef to join her in moving to Jerusalem, in hopes of living a more "bohemian" lifestyle that appealed to her talents.

One can sympathize with Margit's desire to "make something more of herself" as she stood on the endlessly barren and wasted landscape around Sarid, asking herself what in the world she was doing there. Her decision to leave Yosef and their four year-old daughter Era in order to return to Czechoslovakia was a painful one. Upon her return to Prague, Margit remarried and became an actress. In Era's words, a mother's decision to leave her child was an unusual occurrence among kibbutz women, and it left Era bereft.

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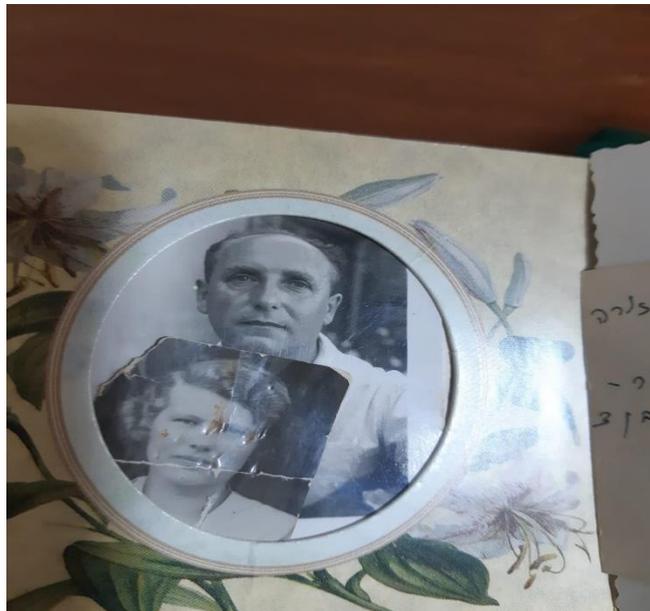
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Era, today in her 90's, still recounts with articulate and impressive clarity, how growing up on Sarid, she was warmly cared for and loved by her father's Czech friends. She recalls late afternoon coffees typified by humor and jokes, embedded in an atmosphere of warmth and softness. Until today she remembers these adults tenderly as "the heroes of my childhood, even if time has forgotten them."

Era has fond memories of trips to the **Masaryk Forest** with her children's group. For her, it was a treasure trove of wild flowers, young trees, fresh air and natural woodsy scents. A place of childhood games, and occasional visits to the Arab families of Dar Tawil nearby where they were warmly received. Relations were friendly; members of Sarid were often invited to weddings in the Arab village. During WW2 Dar Tawil would send one of its men to Sarid to listen to radio broadcasts.

Yosef remarried **Tova (Gusta) Baumhohl (1908-2003, Kolomyja, Poland/Ukraine)** when Era was still a young child. Tova was a beloved mother to Era. Yosef and Tova had two daughters, Ziva and Ora, who were also beloved younger sisters to Era, despite the 13 and 16 year age differences.

Yosef and Tovah, married in 1937, courtesy of Ora Bar



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Yosef Velner with daughters Ziva (left) and Ora (right). Courtesy of Ora Bar.

Yosef worked in the fields, and helped to build the kibbutz water system from a nearby well. In addition, he drove the Sarid donkey wagon regularly through the valley to pick up Sarid mail from nearby Moshav Nahalal (est. 1921). This task became the source of funny anecdotes according to daughter Ora, such as when the donkey chewed up the much-awaited kibbutz mail. Yosef, with his usual humor, reassured his disappointed comrades that there was nothing to worry about – all the letters said the same thing: “Please come home, we miss you!”

Upon being drafted into the newly formed IDF, Era was trained as an army nurse and served in the army medical corps. In 1951, upon finishing her service, she wanted to complete her studies and begin a civilian career as a certified nurse. However, the kibbutz leadership on Sarid rejected her request. Era decided to fight for her right to finish her nursing studies. The topic was to be addressed and voted on at the weekly public kibbutz meeting. Yosef, heartbroken over the controversy and emotional difficulty this was causing his daughter, could not bring himself to attend the meeting. Though he and Tovah had imbued their daughters with the value of pursuing a profession, the conflict with kibbutz priorities was clear.

Predictably, Era’s request was formally rejected by the collective. She and her parents had been ahead of their time in asking for the right of an individual member to choose his/her field of work. But Era had seen how army training was opening doors to the future for young soldiers. In fact, by the time Ora and Ziva finished the army, the kibbutz movement had instituted tracks allowing for individual study, providing that the young person gave a year of

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work beforehand to the kibbutz immediately after the army. Studies still had to be relevant to kibbutz needs. Ora was given permission to study art, provided she would become an art teacher in the kibbutz elementary school.

This option had not existed for Era, and sadly it led to a life crisis for her. Leaving the collective, the warm home she had come to know and love after the trauma of her mother's departure constituted another emotional blow. The peer group she had grown up with from infancy did not advocate for her, and their silence as she braved the rejection and criticisms haunts her until today. So much so that at the group's 80th birthday celebration, she could not bring herself to attend.

While pursuing her nursing studies Era occasionally returned to visit her family on Sarid, but would go straight to her parents' room. She didn't care to face the looks and talk. Henya, a fellow member, remembered the occasion when she did once see Era enter the dining room with her family for dinner. (Decades later, Henya confided to Era that she had wanted badly to run up and hug her, but was paralyzed by the social pressure and could not bring herself to leave her seat.)

Yosef, whose health began to deteriorate, turned his love of stamp collecting into an impressive contribution to Sarid and the state of Israel. Following Moshe Tsipor's founding of the national kibbutz daily newspaper "Al Ha'Mishmar", the children's edition soon appeared in 1945, called "Mishmar L'Yeladim" (Mishmar for Children). Yosef was given a permanent corner in the newspaper for educating youth on the many virtues of collecting stamps. Children and parents fondly remembered the columns written by Yosef the philatelist, whose stamps took them on adventures throughout history, into the world of politics, geography, science and art.

Yosef also established the first post office on Sarid. Ora, who lives on Sarid, followed in his footsteps and also worked there at a later age.

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"Mishmar L'Yeladim", kibbutz children's newspaper, in print from 1945-1985, which published Yosef Velner's popular stamp collection columns.

Yosef passed away from kidney failure at the age of only 53, when Ora was 6 years old. Her mother Tova remained devoted to the 3 daughters, often defying accepted norms by checking in on her two younger daughters at night in the children's houses. A parent skeptical of kibbutz norms, however, created conflicts. Ora remembers feeling guilty and being ostracized by children in her group for having a "protective mother".

Ora later learned that Yosef and Tova's first child together actually had been a son, Rafael (Rafi). Era (born earlier to Yosef and his first wife Margit) loved Rafi and played with him during his first years. Rafi suffered from autism, and the kibbutz collective was ill suited to care for such children. One day, Era recalls, at age 5 Rafi simply disappeared. He lived out his years in foster care in an institution in Jerusalem. Despite the hardship of travel in those days, Yosef continued to visit him there.

"Our family story is a sad one, and in going against the grain, one pays a price", says Ora, "but it has also kept the three of us close as sisters".

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The Velnor sisters: Ora Bar, Era Engleprat and Ziva Nitzan, courtesy of Ora Bar

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Sources:

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- ✓ **Special thanks to Amnon Danzig**, born to Sarid founders, who contributed his insights, and lively stories. He is the inspiration behind this work.
- ✓ **Special thanks to the children of Bibracha members** who so graciously and enthusiastically agreed to be interviewed. They supplied much information and many interesting stories about their parents:
 1. Ami Pomerantz (son of Zvi Pomerantz and Zosa Herman Pomerantz)
 2. Esther Tzuk (daughter of Moshe Tsipor and Tovah Gittel Tsipor)
 3. Gidon Bartal (son of Reuven Bruml and Haika Vilner Bruml)
 4. Gidi Tzur and Yossi Zuker (sons of Avraham Zuker and Kotie Cohen Zuker)
 5. Timna Livne (daughter of Frida Reizel Schlisser and Gora Schlisser)
 6. Gadi Masarek (son of Trude Steiner Masarek and Haim Masarek)
 7. Giora Rozen (son of Chanan Rozen and Rivka Rosenbaum Rozen)
 8. Adi Rosen, Ayelet Rosen Karu, Tal Shacham (grandchildren of Shlomo Rozen and Tzila Hirsch Halevy Rozen)
 9. Arnon Plaschkes (son of Ernst Plaschkes and Gisa Grunberg Plaschkes)
 10. Era Engleprat, Ora Bar and Ziva Nitzan (daughters of Yosef Velner and Tova Baumhohl Velner)
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- ✓ **Thanks to Sarid friend Dr. Helen Paloge for the idea of the title ("Roots of a Forest")**

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Appendix

Czech Founders of Kibbutz Sarid – Bibracha and Tchelet Lavan Pioneers

(* - lived on Sarid till their death)

1. Abeles, Avner and Shifra (Parsy) Abeles *
2. Urbach, Poldi and Hilda (Fischel – sister of Franci and Pavel) Urbach
3. Arieli, Arieh and Grete (Kaler) Arieli *
4. Barak, Ze'ev and Olga "Ollie" (Cohen) Barak *
5. Bruml, Reuven (Karel) and Haika (Vilner) Bruml *
6. Golumbik, Franci (Fischel – sister of Hilda and Pavel) *
7. Drenger, Yosef and Miriam (Bek) Drenger *
8. Hirsch, Ya'akov (brother of Tzila Rozen) and Ahinoam (Yigolinzer)
Hirsch
9. Heller, Otto/Otel
10. Vinterberger, Shlomik and Mila Vinterberger *
11. Velner, Yossel and Tovah (Boimel) Velner *
12. Velner, Margit (Cohen)
13. Hiel, Margit (Barker) *
14. Lauscher, Eliahu "Jore"
15. Samish, Rudolph and Zedenka (Cohen) Samish
16. Pomerantz, Zvi and Zosa (Pomerantz) Pomerantz (cousins) *
17. Fischel, Pavel (brother of Franci and Grete) and Olga Fischel
18. Felix, Yosef "Pepe" *
19. Plaschkes, Ernst and Gisa (Grunberg) Plaschkes *
20. Plaschkes, Bertel (brother of Ernst and Hugo)
21. Plaschkes, Hugo (brother of Bertel and Ernst)
22. Zuker, Marta (Kolman)
23. Zuker, Avraham / Bertel and Leah "Kotie" (Cohen) Zuker *
24. Tzentner, Menachem and Emma "Emolda" (Libshtein) Tzentner *
25. Karpa, Oscar
26. Karpa Masarek, Trude (Shteiner) and Haim Masarek *

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27. Krauss, Berta (Rozenzweig - sister to Shlomo and Hanan Rozen) and
Yohanan Krauss
28. Kreindeler, Philip and Rosa (Pollack) Kreindeler
29. Rozen (Rozenzweig), Shlomo and Tzila (Hirsch) Rozen *
30. Strausser, Benjamin "Bona"
31. Schlisser, Gora and Fridl (Reizer) Schlisser *
32. Tzipor, Moshe *

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Final Words and Going Forward

We have journeyed back 100 years to the era of the return of the Jewish people to its ancient homeland in which pioneers like these, our “modern forefathers”, played a major role. An extraordinary period in modern Jewish history, and an extraordinary generation of Israelis.

There is more to document about the Bibracha group of Kibbutz Sarid; we have just begun.

We hope to be able to bring the stories of all the members to print in the future. Unfortunately, limited by time and space, we have written about only some of them.

Our small- scale research for this article began when Mr. Igal Yasinov (KKL Israel) and Mr. Michael Pacovsky (KKL Czech President) suggested that Kibbutz Sarid contribute a short chapter to this upcoming book. We are thankful to them both for the invitation. Revisiting the Czech roots of the Masaryk Forest and Kibbutz Sarid has offered an opportunity to honor and remember those early pioneers who were young, idealistic and inspiring.

We had planned that the entire work would not exceed four pages (as requested) based on interviews with Bibracha descendants, and that the process would last not more than two weeks.

Each interview began with the question: “What do you remember from your parents?” The answer was, without exception: “My parents did not talk much, so I don’t remember, but...”. And then, a sea of memories, names, and insights would pour forth. This article is just the beginning. Much work remains to be done. Thus, we urge anyone who has documents or other information to contact us.

Kibbutz Sarid is in the process of building an **archive** reflecting the unique triangle made up of the Czech Republic, Czech Jewry, and the State of Israel. It will also serve all those who are interested in further developing historical, social and cultural ties between our countries.

In that spirit, the **Kibbutz Sarid-Czech Republic Cooperation** has also been gaining momentum. Czech forestry students have come on eight visits thus far to share their expertise, volunteering to work in the Masaryk Forest. Cultural visits have taken place, among them visits by the Czech Ambassador, his wife, and their staff. Czech KKL leaders and others in the Czech Republic have become good friends and ties have strengthened. Kibbutz Sarid has exciting plans to expand and deepen these ties in the future as well.

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We on Kibbutz Sarid are proud of our Czechoslovakian legacy, and we value our ties to the Czech KKL, the Czech Embassy and the Czech Republic. We feel a responsibility to promote the spirit and beliefs of Czechoslovakian President Tomas Garrigue Masaryk through these joint efforts, for the benefit of humanity. We hope our article will contribute in some small way to this goal.

Sincerely,
The Kibbutz Sarid-Czech Project Team

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The Plan Forward - Executive Summary

Establish the Masaryk Czech HUB in Kibbutz Sarid that will serve the needs of Czechs, Israelis (Jewish and Arab), and Kibbutz Sarid.

- ✓ The HUB will provide accommodation at a reasonable price for visitors from the Czech Republic.
- ✓ The HUB programs will reflect the values described beautifully by Dr. Robert Rehak in his book: "Mysterious Bond." These values are part of the legacy of President Tomas Masaryk.
- ✓ The HUB will initiate and operate a series of programs, grouped in clusters, to position Kibbutz Sarid as the center for activities that will serve the Czech people.
- ✓ Additionally, the programs will enhance the leadership role of Kibbutz Sarid in the Israel Czech Republic Friendship Association.
- ✓ Participants may choose a cluster or combination (mix and match). The clusters listed below are for the sake of examples.
- ✓ These programs can start right away. We don't need to wait until the Masaryk Czech Hub is physically built.
- ✓ A few programs can be run in the Czech Republic and Israel in parallel to benefit Czech and Israeli participants.

Note:

Programs can be adapted to various groups:

Ordinary tourists, religious tourists, executives, managers, professionals, research scholars and students

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The Clusters:

1. The Tour Cluster:

- a. Touring and understanding the areas of:
 - i. Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, The Dead Sea and the Negev, and other unique places in Israel.
 - ii. Unusual and hidden places in the northern part of Israel: diverse cultural attractions, nature parks, geo-strategic sites, ancient archeological finds

2. The Innovation Cluster

- a. Invention, Innovation, and Creativity:
 - i. The fast lane.
 - ii. The slow lane.
 - iii. Cultural aspects and dimensions.
- b. The Creativity environment:
 - i. Managing innovation: The similarities to music: Symphonic music, Pop music and Jazz.
 - 1. Unique seminars with outstanding musicians.
- c. Hackathon:
 - i. Principles.
 - ii. Methodology.
 - iii. Practicing the Hackathon in the “real work world”

3. Hi-Tech Industry Cluster: Meeting Entrepreneurs

- a. Early-stage.
- b. Mid-stage.
- c. SME (Small Medium Enterprise).
- d. Understanding the dilemmas and the ecosystem.
- e. “How to start”.
- f. What is required.

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4. Precision Agriculture Cluster

- a. What we can learn from ancient agriculture (such as the ancient Nabataean civilization of southern Israel).
- b. Forestry challenges, constraints and solutions.
- c. Sensors, Big Data, and AI methodologies and solutions.
- d. Adopting applications from various domains.

5. The R&D and Engineering Cluster

- a. The ultimate human environment:
 - i. Human Capital.
 - ii. Social Capital.
- b. Fast-tracking R&D Projects:
 - i. The use of DOE (Design of Experiments) methodology:
 1. Improve TTM (Time to Market) and reduce costs.

6. The Data Cluster:

- a. Big Data.
- b. AI (Artificial Intelligence) and HI (Human Intelligence):
 - i. How to obtain maximum advantages from these two unique sources of expertise.
 - ii. How to practically start an AI project.
 - iii. What to expect.
 - iv. Gaining the competitive edge.
- c. Quantum Computing:
 - i. Basic explanation.
 - ii. The benefits.
 - iii. Significant trends and their influence on governments, academia, and businesses.

7. The Managerial Aspects Cluster:

- a. How to manage during an era of uncertainty.
- b. Assessing environments: internal and external.
- c. The hidden ingredients for creativity.

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8. The Gourmet Cluster

- a. Learning and tasting the Israeli wine scene.
- b. Learning and tasting the Arab food scene.
- c. Meetings and live workshops with Arab chefs .
- d. Experiencing the ethnic landscape of Israeli food fusion.

Written by Amnon Danzig, November 2021

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