

Chapter II

The Holocaust Years

The Balfour Declaration in 1918 was a watershed event in the history of Zionism. Through the efforts of the scientist Chaim Weitzman, and pressures from Zionist leaders throughout the world, the British were persuaded by Lord Balfour to accept the position that the Zionist dream of returning Jews to their ancient land was a legitimate goal for the Jews. It was a limited concession, but Zionist hopes soared, and more of the Jewish people began to think sympathetically in terms of a return to Zion. Until this time, being a Zionist was considered a mental aberration by many of the Jews who believed that the Messiah must come and serve as their leader into the Promised Land.



It was around this time that I married “the boy next door.” We had continued to go to Hebrew School, even after Confirmation in Grade 10, so that we could continue to walk home together. Our first real date was when we went to see the movie *Ben Hur* one Saturday afternoon. I had received my Bachelor of Arts degree from Barnard College in 1932, and Sidney received his Law degree from Boston University in 1935. We planned to marry, but the Depression was still a threat and a deterrent. If a woman teacher married, she lost her job. This was based on the thinking that a husband would earn her living, and meanwhile another open job would be created. Many couples married and kept it secret, but we were not willing to base our marriage on such a deceit, and we waited until 1937, before we married. While Sidney began to try to build a law practice, I did odd jobs, such as renting a room in one of the downtown buildings and conducting elocution classes, typing in the offices of Rabinow

My wedding photo,
taken in January 1938.



and Raschkow Insurance Company, and proof-reading for the Fagin sisters, who ran a print shop.

We were married on December 26, 1937, in the living room of my parents' home. Rabbi Harry Zwelling conducted the service under a portable chuppah which was used again for our daughter Rebecca's wedding in our home many years later. The plan was to have only the immediate families to witness the service, but my father acted in keeping with his character, and walked up and down the street in the morning before the ceremony and invited all of the neighbors to come in to see the ceremony. He did not actually invite them, he merely told them that the door would be open, so we had several witnesses from amongst our Jewish neighbors.

After the ceremony, we went to the Stanley Hotel on Burritt Street for a dinner to which aunts and uncles and cousins had been invited. It was not until after the dinner that I realized that I had not known that a band would only



My in-laws, Max and Pauline Zucker; me, Sidney, and his sister Evelyn; and my parents, Morris and Rosa Dunn, circa 1940.

appear if they had been hired separately, so to my chagrin, there was no dancing at the wedding dinner!

For a time, we lived with my family, but since they had only two bedrooms, accommodations were very tight whenever Naomi came home from the University of Maryland Dental School for the holidays. Finally, we moved next door where the Zuckers had two rooms and a bath on the third floor. We used one room as a bedroom, the other as a living and dining room. We bought a one-burner electric plate and managed breakfasts in a nook off the bedroom. We took the other two meals downstairs with the family, which at the time consisted of Evelyn and her parents.

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The entire family, both the Dunns and the Zuckers, sat together evening after evening, listening to the ravings of Hitler as his boots crossed Europe. The “Sieg Heil” reverberated through our lives; we all pursued the newspaper stories and the magazine articles trying to make sense out of the utter chaos. I remember our fears, but none of us could dream of

the extent of the danger to the Jewish people. We somehow knew that things “were not good” for the Jews, but it was a long time before we learned of the extermination camps.

It was not until Hitler’s soldiers marched to embrace the Russian Bear that we had a little lift from anxiety, for even then we sensed that Adolf Hitler’s attempt to overcome Russia was a portentous error on his part.



On the other hand, because of his role in the Zionist movement, but unknown to us, Maishlele was receiving reports which shook him to the core. He doubled and redoubled his attempts to help the refugees who were lucky enough to get out of Germany-dominated Europe. He worked constantly to raise funds for the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and Youth Aliyah. At one point, it was possible to “buy” a few doomed Jews over the border out of Germany, and Maishe walked from one Jewish merchant to another, begging for funds.

Meanwhile, the British sat in Palestine, refusing entry to boatloads of Jews fleeing from Germany. They had made it to the shores, but not to the Promised Land itself. The Balfour Declaration may have been a watershed in the history of the Jews, but here were British soldiers pointing guns at the refugees. Father’s sympathies were with the underground fighters, the Irgun, those gallant men and women who risked their own lives to pull the would-be immigrants off the ships and help them disappear into the kibbutzim during the dark of night. However, the necessity some of them saw, to answer the British violently and to fight against the Haganah, reached into the very core of his personality. The dilemma of Jews fighting Jews tore into his heart and soul.



There was a point in American history when President Franklin Roosevelt was trying to nudge the Congress into joining Great Britain’s fight against Hitler’s blitz of its coun-

try. At that time, leading Zionists attempted to speak with political figures and urge them to contact the President and ask him to bomb the rail lines which were carrying thousands of Jews to the death camps. Rabbi Stephen Wise of New York led a delegation which visited President Roosevelt and reported his reply: "My dear friends, the best thing I can do for the Jewish people is to win this war."

Beside the group which approached the president, other Zionists were assigned to meet with their contacts who might have some political clout in Washington, asking for help for the Jews of Europe. One evening, Father left his office at the end of the day, picked up Meyer Goldsmith, and the two men made the arduous and indeed dangerous trip by car to Washington, where they appeared at the home of Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, with whom Father had a longtime friendship. They had an appointment to arrive at 10 p.m., but the roads were bad and they had left later than they expected.

Mrs. Brandeis welcomed them in her robe and slippers, put food on the table and made coffee. The men talked for over an hour, and Brandeis explained that he could do nothing overt, because of his position, but that he knew the situation and had been discreetly discussing it in important places. Mrs. Brandeis made up beds for the two visitors, and they left for Connecticut the next morning.



On the evening of May 14, 1948, our two families sat together, listening to the proceedings in Israel as reported over the radio. The government was meeting in the Tel Aviv Museum, to make decisions for the future. When it was reported that David Ben Gurion had declared a Jewish State, we all stood up and kissed each other, with tears flowing. When the first excitement subsided, Father began trying out names for the new State—was it to be called the Jewish State? the Palestinian State?—and then he began to speculate as to whether the State would be recognized by the United

States. We suggested, argued, and discussed both matters, speculating as to what would happen. Then we heard that the group assembled in Tel Aviv had named the new State. It was the State of Israel! When we heard that, we had another round of hugs and kisses, Sidney's mother brought out coffee and some of her wonderful *milchigs*—dairy deserts—and we sat around again, waiting to hear what Harry Truman would do. There was a considerable passage of time, and we began to worry, but then, suddenly, the announcement came: President Truman recognized the newly founded State of Israel.

That same evening, Father began to form his thoughts about the new relationship between the Zionist movement and the newly formed State of Israel. He brought into sharp focus for all of us the question of the role of the Zionist Organization, now that its great purpose had been realized.

Maishe had a great ability to deal with the practical aspects of his dreams. He came to the conclusion that the State of Israel and its governing body had to make the decisions for the country. We Zionists who live outside the Land could help, but we must not dictate the policies of the new State. As soon as Israel became a state, rifts appeared in the Zionist Organization over the question of control between Jews living in Israel and those living elsewhere. Maishe thought it through and went with his first reactions: "We can help, but we must not dictate" became his watchword.