

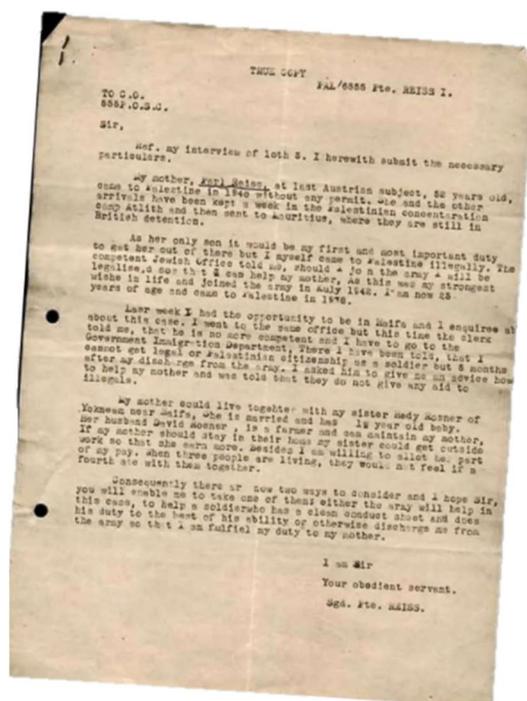
Private Reiss's Request

During days when we commemorate the Exodus from Egypt, Holocaust Remembrance Day and Independence Day, a little family story.

The modern Egyptian Exodus occurred in the first part of the 20th century. Egypt of modern times, which was none other than Nazi Germany headed by 'Tiny-Mustache' Pharaoh, was not content with eliminating only the eldest sons as was done in Egypt, but aimed to exterminate all the Jews, young and old. My father and his family who lived in Vienna, the Austrian capital, dispersed, fleeing for their lives from the terror of the new oppressor.

Like many children in Israel in the 1950s who were second generation Holocaust survivors, I was not interested in family history. Names and stories floated by me but never landed. Our parents also did not make an effort to elaborate on their tales from the war. Only about 25 years ago, following a family event (and also because I grew up a bit) I became interested in my family's history. I followed the stories of family members as they escaped on the eve of and during the war, each relative with his or her own tale. The only relative whose journey remained a mystery to me was my grandmother Perl.

My grandmother and I were very close. She lived in a small apartment in Yad Eliyahu in Tel Aviv. I used to visit her every Friday afternoon, right after school, and we would prepare lunch together. In fact, I had learned my famous expertise in making Latkas (potato pancakes) from her. After our meal, we would play cards – Rummy or War. I usually won, because this



was her way of giving me some coins for pocket money from her small pension. She only spoke German and I only spoke Hebrew, but we managed to talk and understand each other perfectly. She died when I was a college student in Haifa.

She never told me about her time during the war. I did know that she had boarded an illegal immigrant ship that was captured by the British, and that she was imprisoned in Atlit and sent to Mauritius. Otherwise, the story of her life during this time remained unknown to me.

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And thus, about a year and a half ago, a message came to me via email from a person who identified himself as a collector of memorabilia. He referred me to a column that I had published in this paper about eight years ago in

memory of my father ("Viennese Kreamschnitt", A-La-Kfar issue 222 June 2013), and a post he had written on Facebook regarding two documents that had come his way. The collector wrote the following on Facebook (with some abbreviation):

Who are you, Private Reiss?

A letter in the Hebrew language from 1944, written during World War II in the British Army. The letter was sent to the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency and was written to assist soldiers' relatives to make Aliya (i.e., a permanent relocation to Israel). The letter was written in the Sarfand (Zrifin) camp, which was established in 1917 as a base for the British Army. The letter is a request to help the private's family to make Aliya, and even discharge the private from the army. His mother was apparently ill.

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The request was written by Yehuda Nadivi, a Jewish liaison office. It stated the following:

*Regarding: Bringing soldiers' relatives to Palestine
Navy / 6555 Private I. Reiss*

*To the Immigration Department of Jewish Agency,
I enclose herewith a copy of a request which was submitted by the aforesaid soldier to his commander, and which transferred me to take action. Of course, there is no cause at all for discussing his release from the*

army in connection with the situation in which his mother finds herself. We would appreciate if you could let me know what can be done to help the above achieve his desire. Normally we would send this request to the Immigration Department of the Government however, I do not believe that we will find assistance there, as he himself stated is illegal. I would be very grateful for any assistance you can offer this man and for your prompt reply.

Yehuda Nadivi, Captain, Jewish Liaison Officer.

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I wonder, continued the collector, if the soldier's family indeed made Aliya. I wonder who this Jewish soldier was and what was his life story in the country. I believe he was part of the founding of the State of Israel. I also wonder who Yehuda Nadivi, the person who wrote the letter on behalf of private Reiss, was.

I know that the soldier's name began with the letter I. The soldier's family name was Reiss. His mother was Mrs. Perl Reiss. The soldier's sister was Mrs. Hedy Rosner, who was married to David Rosner, who worked in agriculture. Hedy and David had a daughter. I understand that the mother, Perl, was in a detention camp in Mauritius.

The collector concluded his post with a request to share and help search for the Reiss family.

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Excited, I immediately responded to the request:

All the people mentioned are family members. The writer Kurt Yitzhak is my father. Perl is my grandmother, and Hedy my aunt.

Regards, Tuvia Erez (Reiss).

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The second document attached to the post was a letter my father wrote in English in 1944. Below is a copy of the letter:

*TRUE COPY
PAL/6555 Pte. REISS I.
TO C.O.
555P.O.S.C.*

Sir,

Ref. my interview of loth 5. I herewith submit the necessary particulars.

My mother, Perl Reiss, at last Austrian subject, 52 years old, came to Palestine in 1940 without any permit. She and the other arrivals have been kept a week in the Palestinian concentration camp Atlith and then sent to Mauritius, where they are still in British detention.

As her only son it would be my first and most important duty to get her out of there but I myself came to Palestine illegally. The competent Jewish Office told me, should I join the army I will be legalized, so that I can help my mother. As this was my strongest wish in life and joined the army in July 1942. I'm now 25 years of age and came to Palestine in 1938.

Last week I had the opportunity to be in Haifa and I enquired about this case. I went to the same office but this time the

clerk told me, that he is no more competent, and I have to go to the Government Immigration Department. There I have been told that I cannot get legal or Palestinian citizenship as a soldier but 6 months after my discharge from the army. I asked him to give me an advice how to help my mother and was told that they do not give any aid to illegals.

My mother could live together with my sister Hedy Rosner of Yokneam near Haifa. She is married and has 1 year old baby. Her husband David Rosner is a farmer and can maintain my mother. If my mother should stay in their home my sister could get outside work so that she can earn more. Besides I am willing to allot her part of my pay. When three people are living, they would not feel if a fourth ate with them together.

Consequently, there are now two ways to consider and I hope Sir, you will enable me to take one of them: either the army will help in this case, to help a soldier who has a clean conduct sheet and does his duty to the best of his ability or otherwise discharge me from the army so that I am fulfill my duty to my mother.

*Your obedient servant.
Sgd. Pte. REISS.*

My father's emotional appeal probably didn't help. The Jews deported to Mauritius remained there until the end of World War II. Only then were they allowed to immigrate to Israel, and in 1947 my grandmother arrived in Israel and as mentioned earlier, lived in Yad Eliyahu in an apartment in the city until the day she died.



My father Isaac Kurt Reiss with his mother, grandma Perl and my cousin Hannah.