

An Orchard in Israel:
A Tribute to My Parents Moishe and Clara Halparin
By Lillian R. Mostow (née Halparin)
(as told to her daughter, Morri H. Mostow)

I was eight years old when my parents took me to Palestine, in the spring of 1935. My father, Moishe Hirsh Halparin, had made a big score on the stock market, and decided to take my mother to Palestine to see the 75 *dunam* (18.5 acre) orange orchard in Ness Ziona that he'd bought in 1931. My mother, Clara, refused to leave me behind because I was so much younger than my four siblings.



Bill Halparin, Tel Aviv, 1935.

We also planned to see my eldest brother, Bill, whom my father had sent to manage the orchard following Bill's graduation from engineering at the University of Manitoba. Bill was fluent in Hebrew and would become quite competent in Arabic during his more than a year in Palestine.

More 75 years later, the trip is still vivid. We travelled from Winnipeg to New York by train, and then by Cunard line to Le Havre. As the only child on board, I was given free reign to explore the ship, from the lowest class deck to the captain's bridge. I loved being able to order whatever I wanted for dinner; my favourite was duck stuffed with apples.

We stayed in Paris for three days in a small hotel, where we got stuck in the elevator cage between floors. I crawled out and ran downstairs to alert management. I had to guide my parents to and from the kosher restaurant nearby because they got confused by Paris' spoke-and-wheel grid. From Paris, we took the train to Marseille, where we caught an Italian ship to Haifa.

When we arrived in Haifa, Bill was in quarantine with hepatitis so we were not allowed to see him for the first month. We rented an apartment for two months on Allenby Street in Tel Aviv. From there, we would take a *sherut* (a shared taxi) to the orchard. We took bus tours to different parts of the country: to the archeological digs in Caesarea; to the Dead Sea, where my father, in the classic pose, sat upright in the water reading a newspaper. I had cut my toe, and remember how much the mineralized water stung.



Lillian Halparin, 8 years old, June 1935, aboard the Galilia en route from Haifa to Marseille.

My parents wanted to celebrate *Pesach* in Jerusalem. Because of Arab attacks on the road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, we had to travel in an armed seven-bus convoy. We were in the sixth bus. At one point, the Arabs opened fire. The bus stopped and we all lay flat on the floor until the shooting stopped. When we eventually got to Jerusalem, I watched the men *daven* at the small patch of the Wailing Wall that the Arabs allowed Jews to visit twice a year, on *Pesach* and New Year's. I still remember the smell of Old Jerusalem with its covered stalls.

Our 1935 trip to Palestine was my father's third. In 1928, he and a friend had bought a large orchard near Jaffa. In 1931, in the wake of the 1929 stock-market crash, my father spent three months in Palestine trying to salvage what he could from his original investment. After liquidating the Jaffa orchard and disbanding the partnership, he bought a smaller orchard in Ness Ziona, near Rechovot.

My father was born in 1883 in what is now Belarus. At 21, with his father Wolfe and younger brother Archie (Yichesgel), he fled the pogroms and inevitable conscription to the Czar's army. They settled in Winnipeg in 1904, in a small house at 381 Dufferin Avenue, at the foot of what was then called the Salter Street Bridge.



The Halparin men went into the wholesale meat business. Wolfe died in 1906, and in 1909 my father decided to marry. He sent for his 24-year-old cousin Clara Fiskin, from Propoisk, a town of several thousand in Belarus. He met her off the boat in New York, where they were wed. (Clara's brother Isser Fiskin and sister-in-law Esther were living in New York at the time, but soon moved to Winnipeg.)

After Moishe and Clara settled into their house on Dufferin, my father undertook to get the family out of Russia to Winnipeg. He brought over his older brother Isser and wife Rachel, and their

seven children. After the First World War, he brought over two of his three sisters, Henia and Chaika, and his half sister Sara Choslovsky. He also brought over his wife's two sisters, Noonie Rosen and Bessie Raeve, along with Noonie's husband and son Isadore, and Bessie's husband Moishe. Bessie, a midwife, had been deafened in the war.

My four siblings and I were born in our Dufferin Avenue home: William Jack, known as Bill, in 1911; Archie (named for my father's brother who died from peritonitis following appendix surgery while my mother was pregnant), in 1913; Norman in 1915; Freda in 1919; and I, the baby, in 1926.

My father was a dandy, who travelled frequently to New York to buy his bespoke suits and shoes. He always wore white linen suits in summer. His car was equally flashy — a 1921 touring Packard, four-door convertible, with canvas roof and clip-on celluloid windows.

He was also a successful entrepreneur. In 1925, he sold his share in the wholesale meat business to his brother Isser. Figuring that in Canada's cold climate people would always need warm sweaters, he bought a small knitting business, built a factory next to our house, and moved in the knitting equipment. Called Standard Knitting Company, it comfortably supported our family, and employed all my siblings until they eventually sold the business in the 1960s. My father also owned an apartment building in St. Boniface, where he built the city's first cinema, the Paris Theatre, on Provencher, across from City Hall.

An ardent Zionist, my father gave a great deal of money to the Jewish National Fund. In the 1920s, his \$5,000 donation bought 100 *dunams* of land for Sede Zvi, a *moshav* (cooperative agricultural settlement) in the northwestern Negev that still exists today. After his death of a heart attack at 63, we discovered a special bequest in his will for a poor Jewish boy in Palestine whom he had been supporting for years.

My father had intended to retire to his orchard, an aspiration he never realized. He died in 1947, a year before Israel declared independence.

After his death, the orchard carried on under the care of an Israeli manager. Every fall, the orchard sent financial reports and a big box of Jaffa oranges to my brother Bill in Winnipeg. In 1973, an Israeli developer made an offer for the land, with the intention of building condos. My husband, Harold Mostow, my brother Archie, who was fluent in Hebrew, and I went to Israel, where my husband negotiated the sale on behalf of the family. The paperwork was finalized shortly after the Yom Kippur War, thus ending our family's 42-year land ownership in Israel — and our connection to my father's dream.

In an ironic twist, things didn't turn out quite as planned for the developer.

The authorities refused to rezone the land, and so the orchard remains, though derelict, surrounded by Rechovot's hi-tech park on one side and Ness Ziona on the other.

On a visit to Israel in early 2011, the younger son of my late brother Bill, Dr. Elliot Halparin, and his wife, Dr. Nancy Wigston, decided to try to find the orchard that had played such a prominent role in our family's history. By e-mail, I put them in touch with Karen Dankwerth (née Margolese), a cousin of my husband and a former Winnipegger who has been living on Kvutzat Shiller, not far from the orchard, since 1966. Although Karen had never visited the orchard, she knew where it was. Together, the three of them made a pilgrimage to the spot, where only a few neglected orange trees remained, along with a crumbling stone dwelling. They snapped a few photos to reacquaint us all with my father's legacy.



Dr. Elliott Halparin, February 2011, with the few trees left in our former orchard.