

A Short Story about two generations of one family and two memorials

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Half a dozen is six; a dozen is twelve; half-a-dozen-dozens is 72.

Half a dozen dozens years ago, on this day, at this hour, Friday afternoon, May 14, 1948, my late father went to an important meeting, refusing to tell my mother and us, his children, where he was going. He came back, a couple of hours later, with a little Israeli blue and white flag, which was distributed to all in the meeting. He attended the declaration of independence of the State of Israel and the flag was an old blue and white Zionist flag, but now the flag of a thirty-minute-old nation. I was in bed with measles, a “red child” receiving from his father a blue and white flag, which I still keep, half a dozen dozens years later. Thanks to the flag, I remember this moment, as if it were yesterday. I was actually spread over my father’s bed, when I heard him walking in, and saw his excited face and the little flag in his hand.

The plan for the ceremony was kept in secret because we were in the middle of a bloody war, our war of independence, and there were concerns about an attack or some other disruption of the declaration. The participants were asked to keep silent about the plan for the meeting, even within their families. It took place on a Friday afternoon, because the date for the end of the British mandate was arbitrarily fixed as May 15th, but May 15th, 1948 was a Saturday and, to avoid a violation of the Sabbath, the ceremony was moved to the nearest possible moment, Friday afternoon, May 14th.

Obviously, the non-existing State did not yet have a parliament, but it had a self-appointed interim council of state, consisting of 37 members of all parties, from the ultra-orthodox and the far right to the communist party, and everybody in between, in the best Jewish tradition: 37 people representing at least 10 political parties. Each member of the council had a deputy, who would be asked to attend a meeting, if the member could not do so. Several members were in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was under siege, no one could come or leave, all roads to the city were blocked by the Arabs, and, needless to say, there were no electronic means of attending from a distance. As a result, in all meetings of the council, some of the deputies had to attend.

My father, a prominent lawyer, active in the Hagana, and later a member of the Knesset from 1949 until 1973, was the deputy member of Yitzhak Gruenbaum, who later became the minister of the interior. But Mr. Gruenbaum was in Jerusalem, hence his deputy was called to attend the historic declaration. Today, in the Rothschild Boulevard in Tel-Aviv, in the small building, in which the event had been held, there is a small museum commemorating the historic declaration.

By an amusing coincidence, in front of the same building, one may now find an unrelated small memorial for the 66 families who founded the city of Tel-Aviv in 1909. Two of these families, were my paternal grandparents, the Harari family and my maternal grandparents the Ne’eman family. It seems that only my sister and I have two pairs of grandparents among the founders of Tel-Aviv. So two generations of our family are linked with these two amazing historic events, commemorated a few meters from each other.

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