



Teletín

a collage of texts, photographs and destinies.

Kapitoly z dějin židovského skautského hnutí

Jitka Radkovičová – Tiki

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English translation by Vojtech Pacner
Front page collage – Snapshots of Gan Eden



No need of a map

laws restricting freedom for Jews, with most fathers without any livelihood as the registration of Jews was beginning... And there are nine of us here, labourers at Bartoš Farm in the village of Teletín, all of us happy. We called our hachshara, which was farming preparation for emigration, "Gan Eden", Garden of Eden, as a notice above the door to our only bedroom stated with an error in Hebrew spelling as it was exactly what it looked to us. It was mainly thanks to the place itself: a hut in a glade, a plateau intersected by high rocks looming above the Vltava River. When sitting on the rocks on Sunday, our day of rest, we could see a deep slope below us."

This is what I could not fail to notice immediately: Gan Eden, the place that Ruth took so much to her heart, means "Garden of Eden" in Hebrew. Ramat Gan, the city where Ruth lived in Israel, means "Garden on a Hill". Two gardens...

When we were talking about Zionist scouting and we came across the abovementioned El Al movement, a photo album appeared on the table next to coffee and cakes. Taken from a drawer, its cover showed a drawing of a track leading across a field to a wood with an arrow pointing the way. And Ruth started talking... She spoke with such vigour, enthusiasm and zeal that I decided to find the Czech Gan Eden and see what the place looked like years, actually decades later.



Gan Eden in 1940... and today

No azimuth needed

“A trip to the village took twenty minutes and it was two hours to walk to the nearest railway station. Our status was that of labourers who were paid part of their wages in kind, in accommodation, bread, potatoes and milk, moreover with a tiny wage for work and an uncertain number of hours. Vašek was the oldest labourer at the Bartoš Farm who looked after horses. He had no single holiday in his life nor did he know what days of rest were. Franta, the youngest of labourers, upon hearing from us about life in kibbutz for which all of us were preparing begged us to take him to Palestine with us promising he would toil like a demon [...].”

Having got off the bus in Teletín I took a map out of my backpack to get my bearings. However, I found out that my map could stay where it was, in my backpack. Realizing I could as well march guided by the picture from the cover of the photo album acquired in Israel I set out. It was surprising to see how well the path leading across the field had been preserved. Exactly as Ruth said, twenty minutes later I found the house in the woods which the young Jewish farm labourers had once transformed into Gan Eden, Garden of Eden. All this at a time when any paradise for Jews in this part of the world was out of the question.

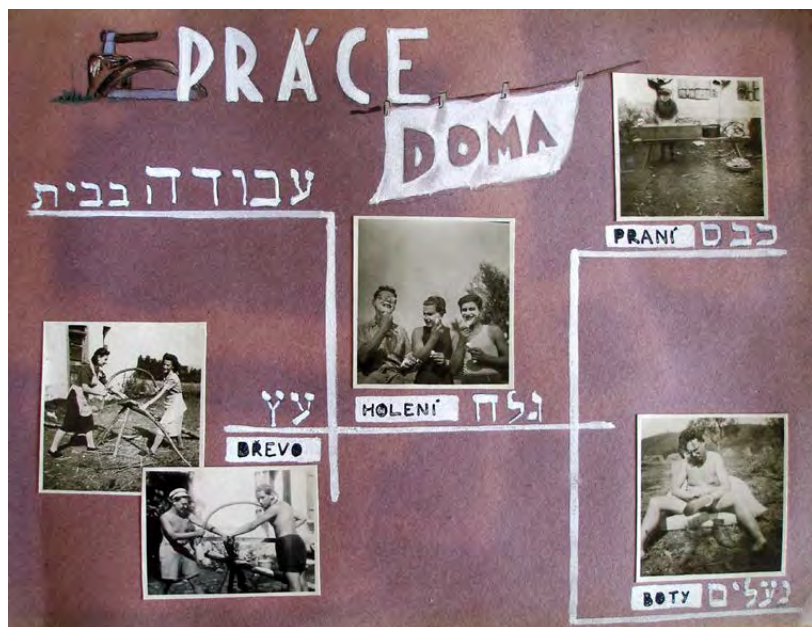


Open day and opening

"In the eyes of the youth from this village in the middle of nowhere we were these students from the big city, an object of adulation. The owner of the only shop in the village where we would get our margarine and other food for food stamps sold us something under the counter a couple of times. Once a disaster struck: we had to keep our weekly ration of margarine in a pot with cold water in the hall because there was no fridge. A cow came and devoured all the margarine. We drew water in buckets from a well. There was no toilet, boys would turn in the woods to the left and girls to the right until we built an earth-closet over a hole in the ground. We immortalized its beginning in a photograph.

I spent about three hours there. I placed the photographs from Ruth's photo album on the grass to compare with what I could see around me now. There was a well with a pump but I could not see any earth-closet any more. Also the woods got closer to the house, the large glade from the photographs was no longer there. Virtually, the house now stood in the middle of the woods. Otherwise, everything remained there in a very similar, almost preserved condition.

"There were nine of us there, five boys and four girls, all of us seventeen-year-olds, and our leader Honza who had managed to study law for two years before all universities were closed to the Jews. The young age explains our unique ability to take no account of what was happening in the world around us and not to think of tomorrow. We just rejoiced in what we had there and then. We worked very



Labour as well as non-labour activities

hard: potatoes and sugar beet were harvested by hand in autumn with dry and heavy soil sticking to our hands and feet. It was bitterly cold. There was a wood burning stove in the kitchen and the wood was wet sometimes. At times, lunch was not ready by the time labourers returned from the field and the two of us, the girls tasked with work in the kitchen were hysterical. At times the meal simply did not turn out well, despite our best efforts. None of us were used to manual work, yet, this was the most beautiful time in our lives. Girls slept on a plank-bed with a straw mattress in the kitchen while boys slept on a plank-bed in a bedroom. We loved with our bodies and souls, far away from our parents' eyes to guard us. Seven years older than I, our leader Honza was the first man of my life. At the end of each week our friends from the El Al youth movement came to visit, we went on trips and danced the "hora", a folk dance in the four-four time. We always found something to laugh about. We scattered after the first snowfall, at the beginning of November 1940."

Echo from the past

And then something happened there that I cannot explain until this day. Let me just say that I consider myself to be a pragmatic and rational person accepting logic (although I have also



Gan Eden in snow

heard words addressed to me saying something to the effect “what have you, logic is a weak force...”). There may be something in this as standing in the deep silence encompassing the hill above the hamlet of Teletín near the place once called Gan Eden I heard some voices as if coming from afar. These were very distinct voices impossible to miss although individual words could not be distinguished. Despite all my pragmatism I understood at once that this was echo of long lost times. These were voices of the people who had spent their youth, the most beautiful time of their lives here. This precious, hard-to-explain moment lasted only a couple of minutes but I shall never forget it.

“The mandatory government closed the Palestine border, there were no certificates and all of us remained trapped in the Protectorate. Baron grew fond of George Brod with slim legs nicknamed the Long One (to distinguish him from two other Georges in the group) and foretold him a shining future: He will be the only one to have his own kibbutz in Palestine. Lilka, Truda, Rudla, “short” George and “long” George, five of nine did not survive the Holocaust. Honza, an enthusiast photographer, prepared a photo album towards the end of the hachshara in Teletín ending with the words: “One does not forget Gan Eden.”



One does not forget Gan Eden

This is what I thought about in the autumn of 2017 at the cemetery in Givat Chaim Ichud just as Ruth Bondy was being laid to rest. None of the Gan Eden group was able to come to her grave surrounded by her family and friends as none of those who had survived the horrors of the war were no longer alive. I tried to hold back my tears but to no avail. I cried and the blue Israeli sky above the heads of all those paying their respects looked like the sky above Gan Eden in Bohemia. This was the last farewell...

I conclude my narration about the hachshara of the El Al movement in a somewhat immodest manner by quoting the words that Ruth wrote to me as her dedication in her book *More luck than sense* (published in Czech by Argo in 2003) as I have used excerpts from her book in this article.

“To Jitka who has taken on the hard task of describing the history of Jewish scouting movements in Czech Lands. Only few of their members remain and I am happy to know that the period shall not be forgotten.”

Standing by Ruth Bondy's grave I then made a promise to myself and to others that I would continue to pursue the topic. If for no other reason than that Ruth's dedication simply means a solemn obligation.

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