



MACCABI WORLD UNION

Department of Education

KFAR HAMACCABIAH RAMAT GAN 52105, ISRAEL

TEL: 03-671-5731 FAX: 03-574-6565

Email: carlos@maccabiworld.org Website: www.maccabiworld.org

Maccabi Heroism during the Shoah

The long journey from death to life:

Annaliese Borinski to Ora Aloni

Dear Friends,

Though "**From Death to Life**" is the reverse of the usual and natural "**Life to Death**" order we know in our world, there is no mistake in the title of this *Message*. The Holocaust reversed the natural order of civilization, discarded the values of the enlightened world and overturned the humanity of Humankind. For those in the grip of Nazi bestiality, death was a constant, ever-present and daily reality, grasping for its victims in every corner. In the Hungarian countryside, for instance, 400,000 Jews were murdered in 57 days through the hideously zealous efficiency of that country's Nazi collaborators.

Some – pitifully few – escaped the realm of death, like **Annaliese Borinski**, a young Maccabi Tzair madricha from Germany (our) who managed to make Aliyah and rebuild her life at **Maayan Zvi** (one of the kibbutzim founded by Maccabi's Youth Movement), where she adopted the Hebrew name **Ora Aloni** by which she became known as an educator in the many years in which she progressed *from death to life*, a story as deeply inspiring as the Maccabi Tzair flag which she adopted as her own.



Maccabi Tzair youth from the Ahrens Dorf farm who fulfilled the Movement's aspiration of aliyah to the Land of Israel (R to L): Mordecai Milan, Dola Schmidt, Eli Heiman, Chana Angel, Chanan Ansbacher, Benjamin Feingosh

Born in 1914 to a Jewish family with little Jewish or Zionist affiliation, Anneliese-Ora found her Jewish national identity in Maccabi's youth movement. Like other Zionist youth movements after Hitler's rise to power, Maccabi Tzair accelerated efforts to speed departure of Jewish youth for the Land of Israel. To prepare them for life on kibbutzim, agricultural training farms (*Hachsharot*) were established. Maccabi Tzair set up one of these farms near



MACCABI WORLD UNION

Department of Education

KFAR HAMACCABIAH RAMAT GAN 52105, ISRAEL

TEL: 03-671-5731 FAX: 03-574-6565

Email: carlos@maccabiworld.org Website: www.maccabiworld.org

Ahrens Dorf, a town close to Berlin, that became home for youths aged 15–17, and Annaliese was a counselor there. Activities focused on farm work, lessons in Zionism and identification with the Land of Israel. They worked in the fields until late afternoon, when lessons began in such subjects such as Jewish History, Bible and Hebrew language, with debates and cultural activities in the evening. When they reached 18, they sought ways to emigrate to the Land of Israel.

23 years old, she came to Ahrens Dorf as a youth leader in 1937, her task being to prepare other young people for aliyah. She continued her leadership even during 1939-1941, when living conditions on the farm were rapidly and deliberately deteriorated under control of the Gestapo, who finally closed the farm and deported all the young people to the Neuendorf hard labor camp where they concentrated various Jewish groups. Even there, Anneliese fulfilled her responsibility as a leader, maintaining the values and discipline of the hachshara group from Ahrens Dorf.

One of Maccabi Tzair's primary symbols was its flag, which at that time had a lily flower at its center, identifying its nature as a scouting movement¹. Sensing that their already terrible situation would become even worse, while still at the Ahrens Dorf farm, Maccabi Tzair leaders, Anneliese included, decided to transform their symbol of unity and action – the flag – into one of hope: they cut out the lily from the center of the flag and sent it to Movement members already in Israel with two youth leaders from Eretz Yisrael interned in Germany who were allowed to leave. Anneliese-Ora related in her testimony:

"What could we send with these two young women who were returning to the homeland – to the Land of Israel? What could we send as a clear symbol that would express to our chaverim there that we hadn't forgotten them, and so we would know that we hadn't been forgotten? We didn't hesitate at all. The answer was obvious. As we stood in formation with the flags before us, Herbert cut out the Scout lily from the heart of the flag and presented it to Chana as a memento from us for the Chaverim in Israel. We sang "Hatikvah"² and "Seu Tziona"³ and paraded off. It arrived with them in Israel. Together with the flag's heart they brought our story directly to the "Gordonia – Maccabi HaTzair" Movement in Israel."

At the end of 1942 the Jewish situation in Germany deteriorated yet further. Rumors circulated daily about people who were abducted or deported. Many of the youths' parents were deported to Poland or to prisons in Germany. After the murder of Alfred Selbiger⁴ (head of Maccabi Tzair in Germany), despair set in, as well as the fear that counselors might be separated from their chanichim. Lists with the names of youth members slated for deportation started to arrive in the camps. Finally a list came bearing the names of everyone remaining in the camp, including the Maccabi Tzair leaders. On their final night in

¹ The *Maccabi Hatzair* flag played an important educational part in the ceremonies of the *Hachshara*. The flag symbolized the essence of all the ideals in which they believed.

² The song which became the anthem of the State of Israel.

³ Song shared by many Zionist Youth Movements, written especially for the Zionist Congresses.

⁴ Alfred Selbiger was responsible for Aliyat HaNoar - Youth Aliyah programs, and in regular contact with Zionist youth groups. On November 9, 1942, he was taken "hostage" by the Nazis together with 20 other Jewish community leaders as punishment for Jews who had not obeyed deportation orders. Selbiger and seven others were executed in November 1942.



MACCABI WORLD UNION

Department of Education

KFAR HAMACCABIAH RAMAT GAN 52105, ISRAEL

TEL: 03-671-5731 FAX: 03-574-6565

Email: carlos@maccabiworld.org Website: www.maccabiworld.org

Neuendorf, they held a ceremony, cutting into 12 pieces "the flag whose heart was in the Land of Israel", each leader taking one or more pieces of the flag. The idea was that the group would meet again in the Land of Israel and reconstruct the flag, thus symbolically maintaining their ideal of aliyah to build the Jewish State. Anneliese wrote in her testimony: *April 7th, 1943: The Gestapo guards are outside. We are forbidden to go out into the yard. We commence with our final assembly. Once again, everyone is dressed in blue and white. We sing. Flags are brought. One flag is missing its center. Herbert takes this "broken-hearted flag" and cuts it into 12 pieces. These he distributes between the 3 female and 4 male youth group members who will be responsible for each group and the one who will be responsible for the "mixed race" group remaining in Germany, and 1 piece to each of the 4 leaders! We promised each other that we would each take care of the pieces, and that we would join the pieces together once we reunited in the Land of Israel.*

That torn piece of flag I carry with me until today... I must continue to carry it with me because I promised, and that promise is what drives me..."

In mid-1943, the last youths and their leaders were deported, first to a prison in Berlin, and from there to Auschwitz. Later, they learned that their deportation was part of a massive round-up of German Jews carried out "in honor" of Hitler's birthday. In Auschwitz, they were divided into different groups, but the determination of their youth leaders maintained contact and passed information between them. Anneliese, tried to care for them, even made them small gifts for their birthdays:

"We realized that it was important to stay together – the Maccabi Tzair group with our ideals and our aim of eventually reaching the Land of Israel and to bring the pieces of the flag with us. In our naiveté, we thought this was the most important thing. Certainly in our early days in Auschwitz, we didn't realize that it was a matter of life and death, and maybe it was good that we didn't know. On the first day, we endured one torture after another in Birkenau, so much that I think it would have broken us if we hadn't been so concerned with these ideals that we held on to and that gave us strength...we were so focused on them, that nothing else seemed important to us – in spite of all that happened to us."

Throughout her imprisonment in Auschwitz, Anneliese kept her piece of the flag, despite the difficulty of hiding personal items:

"...The only personal belongings we were allowed to keep were our shoes. That was very important, for instance, as I realized immediately when we had to undress - so I hid the piece of flag under the sole of my shoe - it was terribly important to me to hide it somewhere safe. It was there for a long time until later -- sometimes there were what was called "visitations," i.e. very thorough body searches – and then I hid it in different places, because the S.S. knew of course that it was possible to hide all sorts of things in our shoes."

The Maccabi Tzair youth - boys and girls - were imprisoned in Auschwitz for nearly two years. They were slave labor, starved, cold, and humiliated. Many succumbed to the harsh conditions. Anneliese Borinski departed Auschwitz together with her remaining chanichim on the death march of January 1945; they escaped from the convoy in the area of Leipzig and eventually reached areas liberated by American forces.



MACCABI WORLD UNION

Department of Education

KFAR HAMACCABIAH RAMAT GAN 52105, ISRAEL

TEL: 03-671-5731 FAX: 03-574-6565

Email: carlos@maccabiworld.org Website: www.maccabiworld.org

Annaliese immigrated to Israel in 1945, settling on Kibbutz Maayan Tzvi. Her married name was Ora Aloni, working as an educator until she passed on. Trying to explain her survival, she said: "...and if today I want to "audit" myself... or someone asks me – and of course they asked – how did we survive the camp, a concentration camp, a death camp! How did we manage to come out of there? I think I can explain it this way: I think that there are three main factors:



Annaliese Borinski/Ora Aloni after the war

The first, I think, is the strongest: the mutual support we received from each other, though we were split up, in any case we were among companions. We were always one for all and we felt that the others were for us. Even when we weren't all together, we always felt connected and never completely alone. At least three or four or five were together. That helped a lot, practically as well as emotionally. It gave us a lot of strength and for me, there was also the sense of responsibility, the feeling that I had to do everything to get to somewhere where I would be able to see who had remained alive and to try to get everyone together again and if possible try to reach the land of Israel.

The second was definitely the hope and expectation that was impossible to erode, that one day things would be better and we would arrive in the Land of Israel, that we must get there! This was manifest in each small party, each Oneg Shabbat, on Yom Kippur, I don't know, in promises that we made and expressed in symbolic items that we so carefully preserved, in the flag, the piece of flag that I continued to carry with me.

The third factor: maybe more complex, I would say: a particular personality trait is part of it and the power to adapt quickly was sometimes absolutely necessary - as well as luck!"



MACCABI WORLD UNION

Department of Education

KFAR HAMACCABIAH RAMAT GAN 52105, ISRAEL

TEL: 03-671-5731 FAX: 03-574-6565

Email: carlos@maccabiworld.org Website: www.maccabiworld.org



Annaliese's piece of the flag

Annaliese /Ora carried her piece of the Maccabi Tzair flag to its destination in the Land of Israel. Her son donated it in 2007 to the Holocaust Museum at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, where it is displayed today. The other pieces were lost with the lives of those who carried them, as were most of those given hope on the Ahrens Dorf farm.⁵

So there it is: a story of survival with a happy ending in the ocean of sadness after the desolation and slaughter that Nazi Germany and its all-too-many followers visited upon our People, a shining example of the Maccabi spirit of solidarity, resistance, mutual support, Ahavat Israel, Ahavat Eretz Yisrael and Zionism, an episode progressing *from Death to Life* – precisely the ethos upon which the State of Israel was itself founded.

May God grant that we learn to sew together the fragments of our Maccabi flags, like those torn apart during the Shoah by the Nazi murderers, rebuilding in our time the same ideals that our youth held onto even in the death camps: Jewish Continuity and Zionism.

May God grant that we shall be worthy successors of the message of life and action bequeathed to us by the murdered victims and the survivors, multiplying Jewish life everywhere through our decisive action in all the Jewish communities in the world, and in our magnificent center, the State of Israel.

May God grant that we shall remember the extraordinary content, flowering creativity and productivity of the individual lives and Jewish communities so brutally uprooted – together with those small anecdotes which help us to gauge the immeasurable tragedy of the Holocaust.

May we always remember, bless, honor and

⁵ We thank Yad Vashem for the invaluable information received. Photos and more details: http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/bearing_witness/children_holocaust_borinski.asp

Thanks also to **Jonathan (Jony) Gioia**, for sharing this Maccabi story with me, a story he taught to madrichim of our Movement at the Fourth Continental Seminar of Maccabi Tzair CLAM.



MACCABI WORLD UNION

Department of Education

KFAR HAMACCABIAH RAMAT GAN 52105, ISRAEL

TEL: 03-671-5731 FAX: 03-574-6565

Email: carlos@maccabiworld.org Website: www.maccabiworld.org

*perpetuate by our deeds the lives of the Six Million,
for we are their Living Memorial.*

Chazak ve'Ematz!

Rabbi Carlos A. Tapiero

**Deputy Director-General & Director of Education
Maccabi World Union**