

## Tommy Berman – Kibbutz Amiad

### (21.4.2013. Read by Alon Sadeh –General Secretary Kibbutz Amiad)

Tommy was born in Czechoslovakia on February 25<sup>th</sup> 1934 – the first and only son of his parents. His father managed a textile factory and his mother, who had studied English and French, worked as a secretary. His family, who were well-off, gave his schooling and education top priority.

At the age of 5, when the horrors of World War 2 became inevitable, his parents decided to send him to England together with other Jewish children via the “Kindertransport” and there he was adopted by a Jewish family in Scotland.

Tommy’s adoptive family kept contact with his family in Czechoslovakia throughout the war, as well as with his Aunt Isa (his mother’s sister), who was the only other member of the family to survive. When she died, Tommy buried her here in Amiad. When the war ended, Tommy remained with his adoptive family in Scotland.

In 1952, at the age of 18, after a year on Hachshara (pioneer training farm) in England Tommy made aliya with the rest of Gar’in Gimmel who were bound for Kibbutz Gal-Ed for further training in Israel. He served in the Nachal Units of the army (Israel Defence Forces). At the end of their army service, the members of the Gar’in had to decide where they wanted to settle; Tommy and Cyril Reuben opted for Kibbutz Gonen, but the majority voted for Kibbutz Amiad – and the rest is history.....

Tommy, who was a close friend of Celia and Geoff Berkovitz, travelled one day to visit them at the Machon Lemadrichei Chutz La’Aretz (Training Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad) in Jerusalem. There he met Debby, a representative of Zionist Youth in the U.S.A. By a happy coincidence, several members of Garin Gimmel had decided to go to the YMCA to hear a concert. Apparently it wasn’t just the music that interested them – Tommy and Cyril staved off boredom by throwing pumpkin seeds at Debby who was sitting below them.

Aunt Isa, who had meanwhile emigrated to America, managed to arrange a Reparation Scholarship from Germany for Tommy, so that he could complete his studies which had been disrupted by the war. Before he left for foreign shores, he made a list of contacts and relatives of people in Amiad, with whom he might make social contact. From Aunt Isa’s home in Brooklyn, he contacted Debby. Debby picked up the phone and was unable to answer the question: “Do you remember me?” (She just couldn’t tell if it was Cyril or Tommy....)

Tommy, who had certainly benefited from Amiad’s “Bachelor Study Scheme”, returned to Israel in 1964, complete with wife and two daughters (and a third on the way....). Not only that, but he had managed to earn a B.Sc in Agriculture, and a Doctorate of Microbiology from the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

He asked the Kibbutz to enable him to carry on his research work, and became the first member of Amiad to work “outside”. In 1964 he was researching cotton production at the famous laboratory of Dr Mehr in Rosh Pina. As a result some of the early cotton crops were actually grown in the family’s back yard (garden) in Amiad!

During his search for funding the research project, he was asked whether he would be interested in managing the new Kinneret Limnological Laboratory part of the Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research organization, which was in the process of being set up. Tommy, who knew nothing about aquatic research, agreed to take up the position, and was sent to Europe for further studies.

From 1967 until 2000 Tommy managed the Kinneret Research Laboratory, interspersed with short periods as Amiad's Managing Secretary. In all his years as a scientist, he managed to fit in commitments of a kibbutz member – guard duties, sending chickens to market, washing up in the kitchen.....

He took an active part in kibbutz life, sitting on various committees which organized Amiad's day-to-day life.

After his official retirement, he served the laboratory in an advisory capacity, wrote scientific articles, tutored university students and did his best to foster Scientific Studies for High-School students via Tel Hai College. In later years, he published scientific papers in collaboration with his daughter Ilana. It was Tommy who urged Kibbutz Amiad to join the MAGNET Project promoted by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce for the development of water filtration systems and desalination of salt-water.

In Amiad Tommy was well-known for his ability to deal with complex social problems in the most diplomatic manner. His objectivity enabled him to deal with these situations without getting emotionally involved. He had no enemies. Everyone knew that he could be trusted, because he never took sides.

Modest, self-effacing, motivated by strong principles and with a great sense of ethics and morality – these were the guiding lights of Tommy's life. He had a great many friends, and kept contact with them all his life. He placed a great value on true friendship.

Tommy was a great actor with a creative sense of humour. He loved to fool around on the stage. His Scottish Kilt became part of Amiad folklore, starting from the days of Nachal (his army unit) when the boys in his unit dared him to appear on Morning Parade in his "skirt". And.....Tommy won the dare!

Everyone burst out laughing, and then the entire unit got a collective punishment and had to run to the top of the mountain and back. Since then, Tommy wore his kilt every year for the Purim Party!

As Kibbutz Secretary - everyone knew that if Tommy had to make a speech, the first 60 seconds would be taken up by Tommy groping in his pockets for the appropriate scrap of paper – that's why instead of the official speech for the Kibbutz Birthday, we were treated to the detailed, weekly shopping list for the Berman family.

Like Peter Pan, Tommy seemed to enjoy childhood forever; when he attained the awesome rank of "Grampa" he found instant rapport with his grandchildren. He was always ready for a story, a trip, a show, comic songs from nights round the HABONIM campfire, any question which he was delighted to answer..... His granddaughters were allowed to use their extensive artistic talents on his face and hair, and he loved to go treasure-hunting with his grandson Ben in the Wadi behind the kibbutz.

Tommy was incorrigibly curious, always busy researching something he had become interested in. He was always active in our own community. A week before he left on his last trip, he gave a lecture on "The Universe" to the retirees of Amiad. A few days later, he spoke to the schoolchildren of Rosh Pina about his childhood experiences in the Holocaust, how his life was saved by the "Kindertransport", and

the close friendship he built with Sir Nicholas Winton, who was the driving force in the rescue of 669 Czech children – including Tommy.

Despite his many commitments, Tommy found time to write and published two volumes of poems. He was active in “VOICES ISRAEL” and also ran a local poetry-writing circle.

PEACE was the most important aim in his life, and led to his active work in the “Meretz” party for the past few years. A person’s status or rank was immaterial to him, for Tommy the person within was what counted. What really bothered him was HATRED. Although he had a traditional Jewish upbringing, he was opposed to religious coercion.

Dear Tommy – Kibbutz Amiad is proud to have been your home for the greater part of your life.

We want to thank you for everything you have done for Amiad over the years.

Your departure has left us bereft.

We in Kibbutz Amiad bow our heads in sorrow; we will miss you greatly and remember you always with love.

Since you are a practical man who is always looking for something useful to do – would you please research the Life Hereafter for us? Don’t forget to tell the souls you meet there all about the Russian Revolution (in Russian of course!)