

Prologue

When Lily, my older sister and I would get for bed at night in our bedroom in the tiny apartment on the second floor of the block located in the Mifdeh housing unit, my father would stay awake in the kitchen. Sometimes when I would wake up in the middle of the night from a nightmare and go get a glass of water, he would still be sitting there, with his back to me and he would be engaged in doing something. He would attach some wheel or piston, he would be writing something down. He would try, he was so immersed that he did not even hear anything except for what he was engaged in. I would sneak up behind him, drink something, eat something and go back to bed. In the morning when I would awake, only my mother would be in the kitchen. There was no sign of anything he worked on the night before. It was as though it was a clandestine deliberation, something which could not be seen. Everything was put back into the crawlspace and quiet was restored. The small kitchen with the four person table, the sink and narrow marble counter tops, my mother in a moment of anger would say to my father, “will anything be produced from this junk?”.

He would dismiss my mother and proceed and continue as if though there was nothing stopping him. He would sit there, write down, jot down and play with his devices and the parts that he gathered. Sometimes he would sit on the couch in the living room after it was folded and the bedroom was restored to the living room in our small two room, apartment on the second story of the Mifdeh housing unit, where most of the neighbors, which at least the sense that I usually had, were Holocaust survivors, just like my father, who endured everything and came out alive, because “there” he was a “jack of all trades”. The man with the golden hands. When I began investigating my past, I discovered that his technical abilities is what truly saved him from the Nazis. Could there be any better reason for trusting your own hands?

As a young girl and teenager, and later with my affluent friends who did not work and who could not understand why I would bother to work in the office, my answer would always be: “**If you have a profession, they tell you go right, you live, if not, you go left, a sign of death.**” It was engraved in our skin like burn marks, like tattoos.

My father would always take things and disassemble them. Then he would assemble it, wheels and the sort. He would fix everything at home. With his own two hands he would build, repair, renovate and improve. He was a person who was completely immersed in his technical goal. He was as stubborn as a mule. Sometimes, he was so stubborn, like the time he had the legal dispute with his partner in their café which was located on Dizzengoff St. He was determined to complete his goal and he would not give up. Later, I saw that this trait was common amongst many inventors, patent makers. Lacking this trait of stubbornness would make it virtually impossible for any true believer. This can be linked to the known quote: “At the times when you reach despair, surrender, cease some continuous effort, then you don’t realize that you are so close to the goal.”

My father did not stop. He made his own seltzer, juices, and ice creams and was always searching for ways to improve it. Producing and being technical suited him. He was not good with money. Business management was by no means his forte. The notion of servicing the community was also not for him. I recall from my childhood, lawsuits that he conducted furiously and how he was always fighting with someone: windmills, courts, a partner, a technical problem. He was a very strong man and did not compromise. He was a raging Don Quixote. He was not a man of plea bargains or compromises.

I am telling this story now also because of all my years in the field of intellectual property, I constantly encountered characters who were like him.

He would never openly speak about the invention. It was as though he would continue to act clandestinely from there, from his dark past. He would act from a place where you concealed in order to live. If he was

interested, this was the mantra. I could not move him from any other place. I think that he was calm when he was working on the invention itself. He was so immersed in his own private world, the world which he controlled, without anyone else, where he could strive to reach that goal.

Later, when I saw what he toiled over for so many nights, the designs which were sent to the Reinhold patent office, to whom he paid from every hard earned penny, I understood that he invented the Sipholux, the home making seltzer machine, before anyone else. The thing that saved his life became something that almost anyone can do on their own. A machine for home use and later he also invented the electric juicer, a machine for crushing and squeezing fruits and vegetables. All for home –use.

I remember that everything was in the crawl space and he would bring it down, because there was no room in the apartment and he did not even have his own work space. He used to get a ladder and climb up.

But he never succeeded. He never marketed or sold anything.

Others succeeded where he failed.

Others were able to successfully create a thriving home making seltzer business. He did not. The designs remained in the crawl space. The same goes for the prototype that he built from all types of bits and pieces that he found. There was no one to market his wisdom, someone to protect him.

Maybe that is why I became who I am today. Protecting people who are similar to him as well as different. Learning tragically at a later point in time how to protect the man that raised and protected me. A strong and vivid memory that I have from so many years ago are the envelopes from the Reinhold – Cohen patent offices. Something very preliminary. They were the protection for my father, which did not succeed.

“The war started on Friday morning”, my father told me. “The first of September, 1939. We thought that it would only last for a few days. We thought that these were only attempts. Even when we were informed that this is really a war, people were optimistic, however, the great, shiny and secured Polish army collapsed very quickly and even Rydz-Śmigły, the Polish Marshall, and his vainglory could not stand up. He would say that ‘even one, single button can’t,’ but he and his soldiers, officers, wives and children, all ceded and ran to Romania. The Germans invaded Krakow with no resistance.”

When the Nazis invaded Krakow, the Lazars began fighting for their lives, however in March 1943, the liquidation of the Krakow Ghetto was underway. Some of the Jews, my father included, were deported to the Płaszów concentration camp, on the slopes of the Krzemionki Mountains.

At the onset, it was already recorded that my father’s profession was related to the seltzer making industry, but his profession was changed to that of a mechanic. He worked with his older brother, Shulem, in the locksmith’s workshop in the concentration camp. His brother, Boaz, worked as a maintenance electrician and his father worked in the shop for sewing machine repairs which were designated for the workshop for the production of German army uniforms, owned by the industrialist, Julius Mideritz.

“Near the locksmith’s workshop”, as my father told me, “there was a gathering point for equipment – machines and tools that belonged to the Jews and were confiscated by the Germans. One time when I passed by, all of a sudden I saw all of the equipment and machines from the seltzer and soda factory that belonged to my brother, Joseph Maternov, and all of a sudden, I had this idea of how to connect the equipment with my work and quit the locksmith workshop. The director and manager of the prisoners’ kitchen and security of the S.S. also handled bringing seltzer and soda to the commanders. He was a German Jew named Meir. I suggested to him that I would make the seltzer which I would provide to him, on my own. He was happy to take care of this from a managerial perspective and obtain approval since, “everything must constantly move in order to reach victory”. This is how I set up a seltzer factory in the concentration camp.

“The place that I set up for my mini factory was in the cooling cabin, next to the kitchen, the place that was designated to make ice blocks. My brother, Shulem and I were transferred from the status of locksmith workshop employees to kitchen employees, and we were responsible for supplying ice, seltzer and siphons to the canteen, the small villas in the residential area for the officers and obviously to the special villa of the commandant of the concentration camp, Amon Goeth. We also supplied a special seltzer siphon to the sentry cabin and we earned freedom of movement throughout the entire camp. The “marketing” was most of the work. The factor for producing ice and maintaining the compressors, worked in three shifts and therefore, Meir, the Jew arranged authorization for us an authorization which made us permanent absentees from the lineups.

The professional symbol of this special status we earned as the “soda water men” was a balloon or siphon. “We held this symbol in our own hands. We passed between the gates of the different areas, and we would also present them in the sentry cabin. We could even exit up until the station of the horse drivers and trade with them with the contraband they brought. The bottom of the balloon was hermetically closed with tin casting. We would remove the tin, screw in the cover to the sides in a sophisticated manner, and this is how we used the copper balloon to smuggle sugar, peas, etc.”