Chapter Three

**Building on a Dream**

Mordechai Mark

My name is Mordechai Mark. I was born on November 6, 1927, in the town of Iara de Mureș in northern Transylvania. My first name while living in Europe was Elemer. It was changed to Mordechai when I immigrated to Israel in 1961.

My mother, Helen, was born in 1905. In Hungarian, her name was Elomoka Taisman. She was born and raised in the village of Târnăveni, some sixty kilometers from our village. My mother had one sister and two brothers, all of whom perished during the Holocaust. During World War II, Târnăveni was decimated, including the synagogue.

My father, Isadore, was born in 1897. He was the youngest of five brothers. His four brothers perished during the Holocaust. My father was born and raised in the village of Iara de Mureș. He married my mother when he was 30 years old. My parents were married through the introduction of a matchmaker. In those days, a matchmaker was a professional who was paid a fee. Transylvania used the dowry system for newlyweds. The usual marital custom required the bride’s family to give the groom and/or his family cash, jewelry, electrical appliances, furniture, bedding, crockery, utensils, property or other household items to help the newlyweds set up their home. My parents’ wedding took place in a private home with a small gathering of family and friends. The ceremony was officiated by a rabbi.

My grandparents were married under very unusual circumstances. My grandfather attended a wedding, but the groom did not show up, so the rabbi selected my grandfather to step up in his place to be the groom. That is how he married my grandmother. They were happily married until their deaths in WWII.

I had one brother, Alexander, who later changed his name to Shlomo. He was two years older than me. In those days, we did not have hospitals. I was delivered by a midwife in a private home in Iara de Mureș (part of the municipality of Comuna Gornesti and Judetul Mureș province in the central part of Romania, 270 kilometers north of Bucharest). We were one of two Jewish families living in the village, which had a population of not more than twenty. At home we spoke Hungarian and Romanian, but I could speak Yiddish as well.

We lived in Iara de Mureș for one year, then moved to the agricultural village of Sărățeni, which had a population of about 500 people, twenty of whom were Jews. Sărățeni became an independent commune after, in 2004, it split from the town of Sovata, some five kilometers from Iara de Mureș. We lived there until the advent of WWII.

My grandfather owned large tracts of land used for agriculture, which were handed down to my father. My father was a passionate farmer who also owned and operated a store on the property. That was our main source of income. We had horses, cows, chickens, and other livestock. We made our own butter with a handmade machine and had fresh milk daily from our cows. During my holidays from school and on the weekends when I was home, I worked on the farm and in the store. Nearby, there was one other store owned by a gentile. The only transportation was by horse and buggy. It was only four or five months before the war that I had a bicycle. We had good relationships with the gentiles. When the events of WWII began, our relationship with the gentiles soured.

Sovata was a popular health resort at the end of the nineteenth and twentieth century because of its salty lakes and warm water. There was a synagogue, a Jewish school, and a kosher butcher. The demographic makeup was Hungarian and Romanian. I went to school in Sovata from kindergarten until fourth grade (1938). Although it was only five kilometers away from our home, my father preferred that I live in Sovata, so he arranged for me to rent a room in a home owned by a Jewish family he knew. Most of the Jews in Sovata were traditional. They observed Shabbat and kept kosher. Rarely did I see Hassidic Jews there.

When I was eleven, I moved to Târgu Mureș, some fifty kilometers from my home. I studied there from fifth grade until high school at a technical school. Because of the war, I was unable to complete my high school education. My father rented a room for me in the home of a Jewish family, so I had a place to sleep close to my school. I went to my family home as often as possible on the weekends and during vacations. It was when I was in middle school that I started to hear words of antisemitism.

When I was growing up in Transylvania, parents taught their children to respect their elders. This was a significant element in the community. It is worth noting that my parents never argued nor did my friends and neighbors. The atmosphere was serene and calm.

By the summer of 1941, some 18,000 Jews were evicted from their homes and deported to Kamenets-Podolsk in Ukraine, where most of them were murdered. In early 1942, another 1,000 Jews in the part of Yugoslavia newly acquired by Hungary were murdered by Hungarian soldiers and police in their pursuit of partisans.

From 1937 to 1944, the government in Transylvania was under Hungarian rule. The party in power from October 15, 1944, until March 28, 1945, was the Nyilaskeresztes Párt, or Arrow Cross Party, otherwise known as the Government of National Unity, led by Frederic Szálasi. During its rule, 10,000 to 15,000 civilians (many of whom were Jews and Romanians) were murdered, and 80,000 people were deported from Hungary to various concentration camps in Austria. The party was inspired by the Nazis: in fact, their Arrow Cross emblem was taken from an ancient Hungarian tribe that believed in racial purity of the Hungarians just as did the Nazis of the Aryan race. After the war, Szálasi and other Arrow Cross leaders were tried as war criminals by Hungarian courts.

On March 19, 1944, Hungarian soldiers started to enter our town. Up until that date, we had not been subjected to the atrocities, annihilation, and murder of Jews across Europe by the Nazis. We didn’t have any radios or phones, so we fashioned a radio from a battery and percolator. Still, we didn’t know what was happening around us.

On May 3, 1944, at 7 a.m., the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie rounded up the Jews from all the villages in the Mureș region, totaling some 8,000— all within twenty-four hours. We didn’t know why or where we were going. If we had known that they were planning to kill us, everyone would have run away.

The soldiers told us, “You have one hour to take your things.” They said we couldn’t take more than seventy kilos, two suitcases, and not to worry about our properties. My father was forty-seven years old. He took one suitcase by hand, and the other one he carried on his back. We put everything on a wagon and began to walk behind the carts. Our family numbered ten people. When the non-Jews witnessed the roundup, they gave us food.

We walked four kilometers to Sovata. Then from Târgu Mureș, we took a truck. We were taken to an abandoned factory that made construction blocks, which had a lake nearby. When we arrived, the Hungarian soldiers began stealing jewelry from us. They even got some

people to confess where they lived, and later robbed their houses. People who had jewelry and other items of value threw them into the lake so the soldiers wouldn’t find them.

As we were ascending the ramp to the train that was destined for Auschwitz, the soldiers told my father that he could not take the suitcases aboard the train. That was a big turning point in my life—to see the pain and suffering that my father had gone through, having carried two suitcases four kilometers, and then not being allowed to take our belongings with us. All of us (more than seventy people) entered the train car (used for transporting goods and livestock), where we stood packed in like sardines. The car had two windows and two buckets. One bucket was for water, and the other was a urinal. We covered the urinal bucket with a coat. We traveled for three days on the train, thinking that we were going to work in a better place. Having my family nearby gave me strength and hope. I remember seeing my uncle, who lived in Sovata and was a devout Orthodox Jew, praying against the wall with two pairs of tefillin.

When we arrived at the border, I heard the conductor use the hammer to hit the steel wheels. That gave me hope that the train was going to continue. The train finally stopped in Auschwitz, Poland. It was about 5 a.m. on Monday, the first day of Shavuot. The guards opened the doors of all the rail cars and began ordering everyone to get off the train.

When we arrived at Auschwitz, the Sonderkommandos, who had already been working there for three years, told us to leave all our belongings on the train. Sonderkommandos were special units made up of German Nazi death camp prisoners. They were composed of prisoners, usually Jews, who were forced, on threat of their own deaths, to assist the Nazis in killing Jews in the gas chambers. The death camp Sonderkommandos, who were always inmates, were unrelated to the SS Sonderkommandos, which were *ad hoc* units formed from various SS officers between 1938 and 1945.

When I saw the fire and smokestack, I asked the Sonderkommando what this was. He said those pass a certain line end up in smoke. I was in shock that I was facing my potential death. I never heard any noises, I only know through others telling me that Jews were being killed in gas chambers.

There were two lines—left and right. That was when I saw Josef Mengele (known as the Angel of Death for his lethal genetic experiments on prisoners) using his finger to point the Jews to go either to the right or to the left. Those on the right went to the labor camp; those on the left went straight to the crematorium. People who were over forty or fifty years of age went to the crematorium. Because my aunt and grandmother were elderly, the Nazis ordered them to stand in line for the crematorium, and that was the last I saw of them. My mother didn’t want to be separated from her mother, so she joined her. Out of love and compassion for my grandmother who was 65 years old, my mother, 39-years-old, gave up her life, joined her in the line for the crematorium, to die together.

My grandfather had died long before in Iara de Mureș. Even at this point, we didn’t know for sure what was going on.

My brother, uncle, father, cousin, and I were told to go to the right to work in the labor camp. The Sonderkommandos told us to remember our clothes and our numbers. After the prisoners died in the showers, the Sonderkommandos removed their gold teeth, eyeglasses and other things of value. Luckily, my family remained intact. We received our identity numbers, which were stitched on our striped work clothes. The numbers were not inscribed on our forearms like a tattoo as was common for most Jews. The guards took all our personal belongings. They shaved all the hair on our heads except for a strip down the middle of the head to identify us as prisoners. It was a security measure to deter us from escaping. We could keep only our shoes and belts.

The Sonderkommandos took us to our barracks, which included all the Jews that were on our train. Our family stayed together in one barrack— my father and brother, my two uncles, cousin, and I. The barracks had double and triple wooden bunk beds. After two days, the Germans gave us a postcard on which to write to our relatives. Later, we discovered that they threw the postcards away. In the coming days, we were sent in different groups to work in the forest.

We were asked about our work experience and professions. Being sixteen and a half years old, I was strong both mentally and physically, and the guards knew this. The guards were called kapos. A kapo prisoner functionary was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp who was assigned by the SS guards to supervise forced labor or carry out administrative tasks. If they were derelict in their job, they would be returned to the status of ordinary prisoners and be subjected to other kapos. Many prisoner functionaries were recruited from the ranks of violent criminal gangs rather than from the more numerous political, religious, and racial prisoners. Such criminal convicts were known for their brutality toward other prisoners. This brutality was tolerated by the SS and was an integral part of the camp system.

We were malnourished and incredibly weak, facing imminent death. Our lack of food coupled with hard labor led to many deaths including that of my uncle.

Between the barracks there was an electric fence. Those who lost hope and were in utter despair threw themselves onto the electric fence and died instantly. Every day after work, we were exhausted, malnourished, and barely hanging on. The kapos took the weak out of the barracks and beat them to death to reduce the population of Jews. They had personal goals to kill a certain quota of Jews in order to meet the demands of the Nazis and the overcrowded conditions. We wrote our names on a piece of wood with the hope that other prisoners from neighboring barracks would let others know we were alive.

After two days in Auschwitz, we were put on another train. We underwent a grueling seven-day journey, traveling 554 kilometers to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. Again, there were 70 of us standing on our feet, with almost no sleep. Even with everything that I had witnessed, we were like stones, little lambs being herded to the slaughter.

After traveling almost 300 kilometers, we arrived in Vienna. The guards opened the doors to give us some air and to change the urinal and water buckets. I saw how elegantly dressed the Viennese people were and just didn’t understand why this was happening to us. It was apparent to me from the Austrians who opened the train doors that there was a thick stench of antisemitism.

We continued our journey for another 165 kilometers to Mauthausen. When we got off the train, the first thing we saw was a sign in German that read “Arbeit macht frei” (Work sets you free).

There were three Gusen contraction camps (Gusen 1-3) in and around the village of St. Georgen/Gusen, just five kilometers from Mauthausen. Gusen 1 was the first. The newest one was Gusen 2.

The inmates of Mauthausen and its subcamps were forced to work as slave labor, under conditions that caused many deaths. Mauthausen and its subcamps included quarries, munitions factories, mines, arms factories and plants that assembled fighter aircrafts. In January 1945, the camps contained roughly 85,000 inmates. The death toll remains unknown. Out of approximately 320,000 prisoners throughout the war, approximately 80,000 survived.

Mauthausen had the largest labor camp complexes in the German-controlled part of Europe and was the last to be liberated by the Allies.

These were the toughest camps, mostly used for extermination through labor of the educated people and members of the higher social classes. Many large German companies used laborers from Mauthausen. Prisoners were rented out to work on local farms, road construction, reinforcing and repairing the banks of the Danube, and the construction of large residential areas. They were also forced to excavate archeological sites. Mauthausen was one of the few camps to use a mobilized improvised gas chamber on a regular basis.

Other groups of people to be persecuted solely on religious grounds were Bible students, or as they are called today, Jehovah’s Witnesses, as well as many Poles (non-Jews) including artists, scientists, Boy Scouts, teachers, and university professors.

In Mauthausen, prisoners worked in the quarries in unbearable temperatures, as low as −30 °C (−22 °F), which led to exceptionally high mortality rates. The food rations were so limited that an average inmate weighed 40 kilograms. Food rations dropped from about 1,750 calories a day to 1,460 to 1,150. By 1945, the rations dropped from 1,000 to 600 calories per day, which led to the starvation of thousands of inmates.

Prisoners were forced to carry blocks of stone often weighing as much as 50 kilos up 186 stairs, one prisoner behind the other. They called this the “Stairs of Death.” Many of the prisoners collapsed in front of the other prisoners in the line, and then fell on top of the others, creating a domino effect all the way down the stairs. The SS guards would often force prisoners to race up the stairs carrying the stone blocks. Those who survived the ordeal would often be placed in a line-up at the edge of a cliff known as “The Parachutists Wall.” At gunpoint, each prisoner would have the option of being shot or pushing the prisoner in front of him off the cliff.

Other means they used to kill prisoners included death in bunkers, hangings, and mass shootings. At times, the guards would throw the prisoners onto the 380-volt electric barbed wire fence or force them outside the boundaries of the camp and then shoot them on the pretext that they were attempting to escape. Some 3,000 inmates died of hypothermia, having been forced to take an icy cold shower and then be left outside in the cold weather. Many inmates were drowned in barrels of water.

Within two or three weeks, our family was separated. The guards created groups to allocate us according to our previous working skills. There were 200 to 300 people in each group, in groups of five in each line. I was in the first line. My brother was transferred to the Ebensee concentration

camp in Austria. Its main focus was to build tunnels for armaments storage. My father and cousin were transferred to other work camps as well.

From Mauthausen, I walked five kilometers in the rain to Gusen 1. It was the oldest and had everything, with a crematorium including showers. However, Gusen 2 was new, so there was nothing but stones and barracks. It was one of the worst work camps. Two days after my arrival in Gusen 2, I was assigned to work in the Knalbo—a water treatment plant. The prisoners had belts and shoes made from trees. My father had given me shoes. I exchanged them for food with the guards. I was starving and had no other choice—my calorie intake was far below the needs of a functioning human being. The guards wanted my shoes, so in exchange they gave me food, as the amount of calorie intake was far below the needs of any functioning human being.

The kapos were assigned to kill at least twenty prisoners per day. The victims were those who were weak and totally fatigued. The Nazis took the weak and beat them to death with a stick. The guards took the dead bodies by horse trailer to the crematorium in Gusen 1.

The SS officer who was German/Hungarian saw that I was strong both mentally and physically. For that reason, he gave me a better job than the others. My job in Gusen was to remove the plates after the prisoners were fed. I arrived in Gusen 2 on June 18, 1944, and stayed until April 1945, doing the same work. It was an ideal job because I was able to take leftover food from the kitchen, so I was never malnourished.

One of the most emotional moments of my stay in Gusen was when other prisoners approached me and offered me their gold teeth in exchange for food. It was heart-wrenching. Of course, I never accepted anything from my fellow prisoners.

One day, I went to visit a friend in the hospital at the camp and saw a doctor who was from Sovata. He recognized me and asked me if I remembered him. I did not, but it turns out that he had been in love with my mother and they had intended to get married. He said, “Do you know that I was supposed to be your father?”

I worked in airplane factories underneath bunkers, working day and night. One day, standing between two industrial buildings, I fell asleep on the road. An SS officer asked me what I was doing. I was so scared, that I wet my pants. I was afraid that he was going to kill me. Fortunately, the officer walked away and left me alone.

By March 1945, I saw that the Germans were retreating. Suddenly, we didn’t work for two days because there was a revolt within Hitler’s regime to remove him and replace him with new leadership. They didn’t succeed, and all the rebels were killed.

I remember climbing to the top of a mound of dirt collected between the two barracks. I saw the Germans retreating, and the Americans marching toward our camp. I was so excited that I jumped up and hit the electric wire. Luckily, the 220 volts flung me away from the wire and saved me from being electrocuted. Others from my camp came to my rescue and took me to the camp for the “appel.” It was the periodic head count the Germans took to keep track of the prisoners to ensure that nobody escaped or had died. When I was standing in the line, one of the prisoners told me to put my hand in the dirt to eliminate the static electricity.

Two days later, the Germans gave an order to gather all the Jews and transport them to the crematorium. There were prisoners from all over Europe, but the order was for the Jews only to be sent back to Mauthausen. They organized us in groups of five. The Germans saw the end of the war and were in a hurry to kill the remaining Jews, otherwise known as the “Final Solution.”

When I arrived in Mauthausen, I was placed in an open field with other people. Then I heard a voice say, “Does anyone know Elmer Mark?” The man speaking was my father. He was very thin but functioning. I had taken a piece of meat from the kitchen from Gusen, and I gave it to him. At that point, I saw other arrivals wearing nice clothes who were staying in tents until being transported to work camps. This was their first stop. Instead of eating the meat, my father found his cousin and traded the meat for clothes without stripes and a coat so I could have a good night’s sleep. The Germans gathered us in an area, enclosed by a metal fence.

In groups of five, we walked more than fifty kilometers from Mauthausen to the Gunskirchen labor camp. That trek took three days. Along the way, we found potatoes in the fields. Luckily, we had brought a pot in which to cook them over a fire. We slept in the open fields. An SS officer asked my father if he had stolen the potatoes, but he said that others had given them to him. The officer would have killed my father if he had admitted to stealing the potatoes.

My father was forty-eight years old, and I was seventeen. Two days after leaving the fields, we arrived at Gunskirchen. When we got there, an SS officer told me that the Germans had lost the war and were leaving. It was Friday night, May 5, 1945, when we were liberated.

Within one or two weeks after we were liberated, thousands of Jews died. Their bodies were skin and bones, too weak to function. When we were released, nobody was happy. We were like stones from everything that we had experienced. By May 6, 1945, the war was declared over.

After being released from Gunskirchen, we came upon a sugar and coffee storage building. The other prisoners, who were famished, ran to the building and devoured the sugar. I took a sack and filled it with coffee and sugar and knew not to eat it. Most of us were so thin and malnourished that the consumption of too much sugar in our system would make our bodies collapse. That caused many of my fellow prisoners to die. My cousin was one of those victims.

We walked in the direction of Wels, Austria, which was twelve kilometers away. On the way, we stopped at a large abandoned house and slept outside in the chicken coop. We killed a chicken and cooked it over a fire. I was with my father and a cousin. A few of the prisoners stayed in the house.

Two days later, we arrived in Wels. The Americans who were occupying the German army base in Wels found us. They gave us food, rooms, clothes, and medical treatment. It was like being in a five-star hotel. We were so hungry that we ate the leftovers on the plates. After we settled in, the Americans sprayed us with DDT to remove infections and diseases. The soldiers asked us where we wanted to go. They were ready to give us cash and a new life wherever we wanted, including the US. I remained in the camp for a few months. Others who had been released from other camps came to our camp as well.

We were trying to find friends and family. I heard that my brother was alive. My uncle and aunt had died after being released from Gunskirchen. We had to be careful because the Russians were taking Jews to Siberia. One of my friends was taken to Siberia for three years.

My father and I told the Americans that we wanted to go back home to Transylvania. We passed through Czechoslovakia along the Danube River. In Slovakia, we started to see Russian soldiers in Bratislava on trucks and horses with trailers. The Russians told us we couldn’t take anything—this was communist Eastern Europe. They took us to nearest train station to return to our home in Târgu Mureș.

My father had tefillin and a tallit. A Russian soldier stole it from him, thinking it was something of monetary value. My father ran after him and retrieved it, risking his life. He could have been sent to Siberia.

We took a transport train, where we sat on the top of the caboose. It was very dangerous, as we could have fallen off. We traveled through Budapest to Oradea in Romania, which had previously been part of Hungary. On August 23, 1945, the Russians gave Transylvania back to Romania.

When we arrived in Oradea, we were taken to a hospital for Jews. Before we went to sleep, Dr. Miklós Nyiszl came to see us. He was a Jewish Sonderkommando who had worked for Mengele and lived in Oradea. For half the night, he talked about what he had seen in Auschwitz and Birkenau. We never knew anything. In 1946, he wrote a book about the experiments he performed. He had been Mengele’s right-hand man.

After spending two days in Oradea, we took the train 200 kilometers to Târgu Mureș. We stayed for one night and went to a Jewish hospital. Then we took a bus to our house, which was 40 kilometers from Sovata. We heard that my brother had been living in the house for two months. When we arrived, it was sad to be home without our family. The Russians had taken all our possessions.

In 1945, the communists were in power, and “democracy” and “capitalism” were words of the past. The government owned everything.

Initially, my father and brother returned to work on our farm and in the store. However, we soon learned that this was a futile attempt to make a living because the communists owned everything. Working on the farm and in the store didn’t make economic sense, so the only way to earn a living was to work in a state-owned factory.

My aunt and uncle had owned and operated a gas station about twenty kilometers away. They had been killed in the war, so the business was abandoned, and their cars and gas tanks were stolen. My brother decided to take over the business and began importing gas from Bucharest.

I was only seventeen years old. Because of the war, I was unable to finish high school. I returned to the technical school in Târgu Mureș. After two years, I obtained my high school diploma.

Once we realized that living in Romania was a dead end, we began to hear that Jews were immigrating to Israel. I became a member of a Zionist organization, and for the next year and a half I started to learn more about agriculture so I could immigrate in Israel and live on a kibbutz.

By 1948, the Romanian government closed the Zionist organization, thus forcing us to work in government-owned factories. This led many Jews to move to Israel.

I left Sovata in 1945 and moved to Târnăveni (Turnevin). I worked in a factory for several years, then went to work in a chemical factory in a managerial position.

My brother made aliya in 1948. With the money he earned importing gas, he paid a man in Varna, Bulgaria, to get him a permit to travel to Israel, which never came to fruition. Eventually, however, he obtained his travel permit and took the last ship from Varna to Haifa, Israel.

My father made aliya in 1950. From the Romanian city of Constanza near the Black Sea, he took a ship to Haifa. He was fifty years old. Around that time, the Romanian government stopped issuing permits to Israel. One of my cousins went directly to Israel after being released from a concentration camp.

I met Yehudit Mandel in Târnăveni. She was a bookkeeper in the factory where I worked. We were married in 1952. Our wedding took place in the garden of a private home in Reghin (twenty-nine kilometers northeast of Târgu Mureș), a community that had about 6,000 Jews before the war. Our wedding was a small and intimate affair, officiated by a rabbi. My cousin and my wife’s sister arranged the event. One memorable moment was taking pictures of our wedding. In communist Romania, which was just an extension of communist Russia, there was no modern equipment—everything was antiquated. Our photographer had worked in Africa as a cameraman. His equipment was obsolete compared to Western civilization, but functional. He placed a black drape over his head to take a still photograph. He had only one slide (film). Fortunately, the picture turned out well. It was the only picture of our wedding.

After getting married, I applied for a travel permit to Israel. Through self-determination, after ten years (1961), I finally obtained my travel permit, overcoming endless red tape imposed by communist bureaucrats. The Romanian government required me to certify that our apartment was clean and ready for the next person to move in. In the interim, our son Zeev was born, in 1955.

My wife, Zeev and I took a train from Târnăveni to Vienna, where we were met by the Jewish Agency. In Vienna, I telephoned my father to let him know that we were coming to Israel. During the time away from my father and brother, we communicated by letters. A few days later, we took a train to Naples, Italy, and then took a ship to Haifa. Zeev was five years old. It was Yom Kippur, and I remember a religious Jew taking away my son’s bread.

We could not take money with us, only jewelry and other small personal items that could fit into a pocket. The Jewish Agency allowed each person a maximum of seventy kilos of luggage. The Agency gave us some money.

My brother Shlomo had arrived in Haifa before Israel was a state. It was then under British-controlled Palestine (1918-1948). The British did not allow my brother to disembark in Haifa and forced his ship to sail to Cyprus. For the next year and a half, Shlomo lived in a Cyprus internment camp, along with some 52,000 Jews from all parts of Europe. They had been taken off thirty-nine ships in their attempt to get to Palestine. During all that time, I did not know where my brother was.

Shlomo left Cyprus and sailed to Israel. Once he arrived in Israel, he chose to start his life in Petach Tikva and established a business transporting construction material. My father lived in Tel Aviv and worked as a messenger at a private bank.

My in-laws lived in Bat Yam in a government housing for new immigrants. Prior to making aliya, my father-in-law worked in the US in a factory that made explosive materials. There was an accident and he became blind. He was compensated with a lifetime pension from the company, paid in US dollars. This allowed his family to live a comfortable life in Romania and Israel.

When our ship docked in Haifa, the Jewish Agency directed us to live in an immigration housing compound in Netanya. Zeev laughed with delight when he saw how much sand there was in Israel for him to play. When we arrived in Netanya, I went to the post office to call my father, and out of nowhere I saw my brother.

We left Netanya with Shlomo in his car. We went to live with my in-laws, who resided in a two-story housing absorption center in Bat Yam. Our first objective was to learn Hebrew. For the next six months, we took three buses to get to Petach Tikva to learn Hebrew at an ulpan for eight hours a day. We only knew Hungarian, Romanian, and Yiddish. We didn’t have much money. I remember paying one shekel to buy two eggs and a piece of bread at the corner store. Other new immigrants in my class were from South Africa, and were financially well off.

We left Bat Yam and moved to an apartment in Givat Shmuel, which was given to us by the Jewish Agency. We lived there for a year. Then in 1964, we moved to Petach Tikva, where we purchased our first apartment from the Rasco Construction Company. During that period, Israel was in a recession. We benefited from the situation and received a 20% discount on the price of the apartment. Not only that, but the contractor agreed to allow us to pay in installments. Our apartment was on the seventh floor of a twelve-story luxury high-rise apartment building with an elevator.

In 1967, I began working with Shlomo’s construction company in Petach Tikva, called Shimshon, which transported construction materials. This was my first foray into working as an independent person. Yehudit worked as our bookkeeper. My central role was to coordinate the logistics of moving the construction materials from each job site. Our office was in the same building as our apartment. We didn’t have a phone in the office, so we had to pull telephone wire from our apartment, through the window, to the office.

After the Six-Day War of 1967, we signed a purchase and sale agreement to buy a piece of undeveloped agriculture land. The owner agreed to extend the payments over a long period of time. Since we were a young company, we lacked capital resources. Thinking out of the box, I contacted Azorim, one of Israel’s largest and oldest real estate development and construction companies, and managed to sell our purchase contract rights to them. We sold the land for a profit and became the general contractors that built their project of sixty-four apartments.

In 1967, I formed a company called A. Mark and made my brother a partner. Shlomo became ill, so I was faced with the challenge of managing the company on my own. I continued to focus our activities on transporting construction materials and found new business opportunities in Beersheba and Dimona. In Dimona, we found a project to build an asphalt factory. I developed close relationships with Israel’s largest contractors. I believed in taking small steps rather than shooting for the stars for quick short-term growth. Many other construction companies that took on huge projects and created massive debt soon failed and went bankrupt.

From the income I earned under A. Mark, I created a tax scheme, approved by the Supreme Court of Israel, which allowed me to offset the income earned under my company with the losses from the Shimshon Company. Over a period of four years, all the debts accumulated under Shimshon were paid in full, and the company was formally closed.

In 1978, I formed a company called Bonei Binyan Upituach Ltd. with Eliezer Meidanek, whom I knew from before as head of construction for the Ramet Company. We were equal partners. Ramet was one of the top-ranked construction firms in Israel. Eliezer was born and raised in Romania and had made aliya before me. Our activities were focused on the construction and transportation of construction materials. Shlomo was a partner, even though he was incapacitated due to health issues. I ran the finance and commercial side of the business, while Eliezer handled construction. Our priorities were focused solely on participating in third-party tenders through the State of Israel for construction projects in public works.

Over a period of ten years, we continued to participate in government tenders. Construction companies were ranked on a scale of one to five, five meaning the biggest and the ones with the strongest balance sheet. We, of course, started at the number one level, taking on projects relative to that size. As time went by, we won more tenders and gradually took on larger projects, ultimately reaching level five. Our company remained a solid, stable construction firm. To date, we have built around 400 projects throughout Israel in public works (such as schools, municipal buildings, hospitals). My brother Shlomo died in 1981.

In 1995, we moved from our office in Petach Tikva to Ra’anana, where we purchased an office unit on Levi Eshkol Street. Zeev graduated from the Technion in Haifa in civil engineering and started to work for me in 1983.

My partner Eliezer died in 2008. We had a successful partnership for thirty years, never having a significant disagreement. In 2014, we sold our ownership interest to Eliezer’s son, Haim Median (Meidanik), and started a new construction company. I worked with Zeev until I was 88 years old.

In 1989, Eliezer and I bought a parcel of land in Ra’anana on Hashirion Street and built two private homes next to each other. We moved to our current home in the Kiryat Ganim neighborhood twenty-four years ago. Zeev and his wife, Yafit, live next door. Their two daughters live in Ra’anana, and their son lives in the nearby community of Tel Mond. I have three grandchildren and I am blessed with six great-grandchildren.