

Chapter 7: The enchanted summer (1973)

It was the summer of 1973. With the great examination in *anatomia* behind me, and a few more *trentas* in my *libretto*, a grand tour of Europe was something that I believed I was entitled to. To join me I invited from Israel my best buddy Amikam. Amikam was a big and strong *kibbutznik* from the Izrael Valley, who had served with me, in the same “*Golani*” infantry battalion, company and platoon— throughout basic and advanced training, NCO course and in the “rifle company”. After discharge Amikam had returned to his kibbutz, using his huge hands in the cattle barn, and hunting for Scandinavian girls in the kibbutz’s swimming pool. When I picked him up at Modena’s railway station, Amikam looked like a kibbutz poster boy: tall, muscular, suntanned, in old shorts, T shirt, open toe brown sandals and a hundred pound military kitbag on his shoulder. His eyes were opened in awe: the farm boy encountering the marvels of Europe.

We had my “new” VW, a military tent, two old sleeping bags, a tiny portable gas cooker, a pan and pot, a Swiss army knives and two mess tins— but almost no money. Our destination was Scandinavia and the plan was to live off the land: to sleep in forests or open fields or wherever a free bed would be offered. Food? We knew how to survive on 2-3 dollars a day: hot soup, boiled eggs, fresh bread, basic cheese and fruits, and whatever we could “borrow” from the farms on the way. We were warned that Scandinavia is extremely expensive but we had a few addresses of Danish girls and this fact filled us with optimism.

So on a sunny late afternoon in June we drove north, crossing the Dolomites into Austria. In Tyrol, we crawled for the night into a vacant pig stall but were chased away by barking dogs and an angry farmer. In the German forests we were attacked by masses of nasty, anti-Semitic biting flies. North to Hanover a German farmer aimed a hunting gun at us when we helped ourselves to his apple tree. “You stingy Nazi, what’s wrong in taking a few of your rotten apples?” we shouted at him. We headed northbound towards Flensburg at the Danish border. After a week on our Journey, when

we crossed the border into Jutland, we realized that Europe is not exactly the Sinai desert, or the Galilee, where you can fall asleep anywhere, and hospitable Bedouins would invite you into their tent for a cup of black-bitter coffee, a piece of *pitta* bread smeared with olive oil and fresh *zaatar* (thyme), and a few olives. We recognized that Europe is more civilized; and hence you had to have some money and pay for everything, even for erecting your tent in a camping site.

Denmark proved to be a paradise—offering us one of the best summers in our lives. For me, the most fascinating aspect of traveling is the realization of the marked differences between national characteristics. We crossed the border, drove a few miles through the same fields but already the first Danish town was so different from the last German one: cozier, cleaner, smaller, more homely and relaxed. Suspicious and arrogant faces of “leave me alone” changed into inviting and sincere, and, yes, naïve, smiles. We entered— disheveled, dirty, unwashed—into a small *kro* (pub) and asked for a cup of coffee and some bread and butter. The blonde barmaid smiled and served us a large porcelain pot of freshly brewed coffee, bread, butter and jam. When we wanted to pay she refused our money: “This is a bar and we sell only beer and liquor...”. We looked at each other: so these are the Danes, no wonder they were the only Europeans who managed to save almost *all* their Jews during the War.

We continued north: narrow lanes sheltered by trees, winding across flat and intensely green landscape. Well fed cows, blonde kids, clean villages; cool wind blowing from the North Sea—like a postcard. We arrived at S., a serene little lakeside town south to Aarhus. I still remember the address: Louisenlund 3 —a large wooden house nestled on a lush garden, leading to a boat landing. Wide Danish windows, on all sides of the house, letting in as much sun as possible. It smelled of flowers, freshly cut grass and rotting lake plants. We found A. sitting on the open porch: a book on her lap, a *Carlsberg* beer in her hand and a filterless cigarette — she smoked

Prince, a Danish equivalent to *Gauloise*— between her lips. This is how I remember her best.

A's parents' received us warmly. Their house and A.'s separate lake cottage became our base for the entire summer—our last care-free summer of 1973. Imagine: blue cool lake under clear sunny sky, Danish pastries, cheese and herring for breakfast, and if A.'s father was around *Alborg* kummel schnapps was served along in frozen thumb glasses. For dinner: fried baby eel from the bottom of the lake, and rice pudding. Throughout the days *Carlsbergs* and *Tuborgs* which the Danes drink like water and French or Spanish table wines with dinner, and into the night; Janis Joplin screaming in the background; barbecues on the beach and dinner parties in open air, swimming under the moon— until the wee hour. On weekends we would explore the disco clubs in the neighboring towns of Horsens or Kolding: dark rooms packed with the most beautiful and friendly blonde girls who knew how to move their bodies. Days, weeks, and months of sun, water, nature, food, drink, books—no worries—and a bed with A.'s warm body next to mine—this was paradise.

At the end of the summer we explored Sweden and Norway and returned to Jutland. It was time to say goodbye. Being young and naïve and penniless it did not occur to me then that A.'s father— not a wealthy man but a humble home builder—was supporting us for many weeks. I wonder what makes some people so generous and hospitable?

Often in memoirs, characters appear or disappear and the narrator fails to divulge what their fate was. So let me tell you what became of the main characters in this episode. Amikam returned to Israel, left the kibbutz, studied medicine and specialized in neurology. You can see him today in the corridors of his hospital in Afula, dressed in a long black coat and a derby hat, his face covered by a thick black beard — the *kibbutz*nik has become an orthodox-Chassidic Jew. And A.? At some stage we became quite fond of each other. Then she married, had a son, divorced, studied, and now she lives happily, remarried to X in northern Jutland. In 1987, when on a study

"exile" in Leeds, UK, I took a night ferry to Jutland. Her husband—he was her boyfriend then—was lecturing out of town. How nice it was to re-unite with an old flame—particularly if the separation had been natural and entirely benign. We had a few days to engage in the charming illusion, as if we were an old married couple, realizing however that at the end of the week our "reunion" would cease forever. On Monday she drove me in her old black Volvo to the railway station; we sat silently holding hands at the station buffet; a freezing ocean wind blew outside.

"I hope I'm not pregnant", she said.

"You can't be, I was careful."

"But I'm worried."

I had a beer, she cried, we held hands. I have not see A. since.

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Back to 1973. From Jutland we drove south, through Germany, and entered the Netherlands. Our plan was to return to Germany and take the route through Munich towards the Brenner Pass and Italy. However, the German policeman at the border looked at the car, examined the license plates and exclaimed: "*Nein, nein, your Zoll plates have expired. Zollnummer ist gültig* only for a year. This car is no longer legal. You can't enter Germany".

We turned around and attempted another border crossing, a few miles to the south. But here the border *Polizist* was even more pedantic. He opened the hood and inspected the car's body number. "Oh, this is illegal...criminal...you have to leave the car here."

"And what about our luggage?" we pleaded.

He shrugged: "Take whatever you wish and go; however, this car stays here and you won't be entering Germany. Be happy that we let you go. This is a crime that deserves a jail sentence". He continued cursing and mumbling something about gypsies, *beatniks* and foreigners in general.

The car was all we had and the money on us wouldn't even buy a train ticket to Amsterdam; in desperation we demanded to see the "*commandant*". The latter— older, fatter and more human, listened to our laments about

being “poor medical students, somebody sold us this car, we didn’t know...”. He melted: “*Ja, gut*, OK, take your *Scheisswagen* and go wherever you want but stay away from *Deutschland, oder—*”. We jumped into the blue white car and sped away. But where to go?

Amikam consulted his address book. “There is one Carl in Schaffhausen—”

“Where on earth is this? It sounds German; we’re not allowed there.”

“No, this is somewhere in Switzerland. Carl had been a volunteer in our kibbutz a few years ago, he befriended my father, they are still corresponding and exchanging stamps. Why don’t we cross through Switzerland and drop in on him?”

Why not? We consulted the map and selected a route through Belgium, Luxembourg and France. Two days later we crossed the border to the western, French speaking, part of Switzerland and continued eastwards toward the German-speaking region. On a hot August morning we crossed an old bridge on the Rhein River and saw the Munot—Schaffhausen’s medieval castle high on our left, nestled among long rows of wine grapes. We located Carl’s address: it was a rustic three-story house. We opened the wooden gate and entered a well-groomed garden: flowers, strawberries, and a plum tree. It smelled of vegetation and butterflies hovered around. Amikam knocked on the door: it opened.

What I saw was a young girl, around seventeen years old. I immediately noticed her slim but muscular, tanned legs, below a short, yellow summer dress. She wore high-heeled sandals and her toes were painted red. I liked it. I also noted her long dark blond hair tied around at the back. Her face was pleasant enough but, when she smiled and said, in accented English, “I’m sorry but Carl and his wife are not at home, they left for the weekend, perhaps you can come back on Monday,” I noticed that her right canine tooth was a little bit askew. Before she closed the door in our face I rushed forward, “And who are you?”

“I’m Heidi, Carl’s sister.”

Five days later we were driving again in the blue white VW, now from Schaffhausen to Zurich. But this time Amikam was in the back seat. In the front sat Heidi—actually not in the passenger seat but almost sharing the driver’s seat with me—her body melting lovingly into mine. I dropped them off in Zurich: Amikam was to catch a train to Paris, then a flight to Israel; the teenaged girl was to enroll into a nursing school in Zurich. I continued south, towards the snowy Alps, which glittered faraway, basking in the glorious summer sun. I liked that young Swiss, I enjoyed her yielding, unconditional surrender, her innocent and instant devotion but my head was congested with the events of that enchanting summer and I felt that all that would remain of her would be a few images: dancing in a dim, wood-paneled Swiss tavern and a night picnic under a full moon reflecting in the Rhein River. As I climbed the Alps and descended into Italy my body continued to long for her softness but my mind planned forward— sell the car, ship the books, organize a flight ticket and return *home*. My entry to the third year in Haifa’s medical school has been finally secured. I could not predict then that three month later, just after the “surprise” Yom Kippur War, Heidi would appear, in a yellow oilskin raincoat and matching yellow rubber boots —like a good Swiss girl hiking across the border into the Black Forest— at our front door in Haifa.

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Modena in August was a deserted steaming inferno. I rented a small attic room from a *signora* where the unendurable heat and aggressive mosquitoes made sleep impossible. I started packing and driving boxes to the post office. Then, on the third day in town I was stopped by the *Carabinieri*: tall policemen, mounted on shiny, powerful *Motorguzzi* motorbikes—knee level shiny black boots, black leather jackets, matching helmets—I always wondered why the *Carabinieri* should look like Mussolini’s Black Shirts?

“*Documenti per favore!*” I immediately realized that my car was doomed but what about me?

Interrogation: the room full of smoke and unbearably hot, the air static below the noisy ceiling fans. For hours I had to endure observing the thick index finger of the “black shirt” interrogator, hammering on his old typewriter at a rate of a word per minute: M...O...S...H E S C... The cell at the transient city jail was clean and my partners, probably minor *criminali*, friendly and cheerful. For dinner we were served a hearty *minestrone* soup and a large plate of steaming spaghetti; alas—there was no wine. In the morning I was made to sign a bunch of documents: “*Dottore* (in Italy even a first year medical student was addressed so), you can go home but on no account you can leave town. You will be summoned to court in a few weeks. Until then please present every week, with your passport, at the office of the *Questura*. Your car has been confiscated.”. A policeman drove me to my room with everything I could salvage from my car. A few days later: a train to Milan, *Alitalia* flight to Rome, *El Al* to Tel Aviv. Advice: if you wish to engage in criminal dealings with the police —do it in Italy!

My Italian chapter was over.

See pictures below



Summer 1973:

With Amikam in Copenhagen. With the "new VW" in Norway



With A., her sister and parents, in S., Jutland, Denmark

[More pictures below](#)



Schaffhausen, August 1973

The day I met Heidi (in yellow dress), with her brother Carl and his wife Eva.



Heidi, 1973



The Rhein River and Munot, Schaffhausen