

PASSOVER SEDER IN A DP CAMP

I.F. STONE CELEBRATED PASSOVER IN 1947 IN A DETENTION CAMP ON CYPRUS

By RAFAEL MEDOFF

I.F. Stone, the famed investigative journalist, probably took part in some interesting Passover seders in his time, but he never spent one with Jews who felt personally connected to the events in ancient Egypt--until 1947, when he was a guest at a remarkable seder with Holocaust survivors in a detention camp on the island of Cyprus.

"This is being written 3,000 feet up over the blue Mediterranean," began Stone's dramatic account in the pages of the New York City daily newspaper PM. "I am in a tiny four-passenger two-motored mosquito plane bound for Haifa from

(Dr. Medoff is director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, in Washington DC, and author of more than 20 books about the Holocaust, Zionism, and American Jewish history.) - The Editor

Nicosia in Cyprus, where I have just spent the first two days of Passover in camps established by the British to intern 'illegal' Jewish immigrants seized in Palestine."

Those were turbulent times. Hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors crowded the Displaced Persons camps in Allied-occupied Europe, waiting for British permission to immigrate to Palestine. The British, bowing to Arab opposition, had almost completely shut the

gates to the Holy Land. Palestine itself was in flames, as Jewish underground forces waged guerrilla warfare against the British authorities. Meanwhile, in Washington, the Truman administration wobbled back and forth on Jewish immigration and statehood.

In a desperate race for the promised land, survivors were boarding *aliya bet* (unauthorized immigration) ships bound for Palestine. More often than

not, they were intercepted by British naval patrols and taken to Cyprus. That's where I.F. Stone's story began.

"There are two sets of camps on the sweet-smelling ancient Greek Isle of Cyprus for 11,300 refugees now held there," Stone explained. "Both are being enlarged to meet the expected Spring rush of Aliyah Beth boats which will probably boost the Jewish population to 20,000 before the end of June."

The detainees were living in Nissen huts, which Stone described as "the ugliest architecture known *(Please turn to page 10)*"

Have a joyous Passover!

Dear friends,

As nature starts to bloom and you honour your Jewish heritage with your loved ones, I hope that Passover brings you much joy and new beginnings.

Laval's City Council and myself would like to extend our warmest wishes for a happy, peaceful and uplifting holiday.

Chag Pesach samekh!



Marc Demers
Mayor of Laval

Laval. Une île d'exceptions.



by the warmth and religious devotion of the family, especially in the midst of such difficult surroundings. "The mother looked on as if she didn't know how one man could be so bright," he wrote, "and the daughter was fascinated while the son's eyes shone."

What struck Stone the most was the connection between past and present. "The Passover has a

deep personal meaning for these Jews...For them the ancient cruel taskmasters were no fable: they had been in slave labor camps under German occupation. For them, the God who smote the Egyptians was the same God who brought the Third Reich low."

As he strolled around the camp the next day, Stone was impressed by the vibrant life he encountered among the Cyprus exiles. "Life flows on strong, and vigorous babies are being born at the rate of 30 to 40 monthly," he reported. "There have been almost 600 weddings since the camps were established last August, and there were 135 nuptials during the two weeks before Passover."

"There are schools and synagogues, camp newspapers, an art exhibition, and workshops," not to mention "several soccer teams which often play the British guards and boast they have never been beaten."

What did the future hold? The seder with the Efratis offered a clue. "Were [the DPs in Cyprus] not like the Jews under Moses?" Stone asked. "Moses went through one kind of wilderness or another to the promised land. And as Efrati explained in his own running commentary to the service comfortingly, 'We had to go down into Egypt for 400 years, but we need only be six months or so in Cyprus.'"

Stone thought Efrati's prediction too optimistic. Given the severe British restrictions on Jewish immigration, "it will take 18 months before the latest arrivals get their chance to go to Palestine."

"But British rule in Palestine did not last another 18 months. That autumn, in the face of the Jewish underground's military assaults and sharply escalating international

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