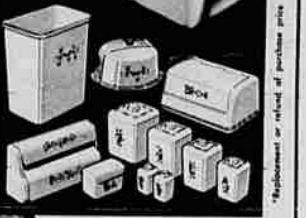


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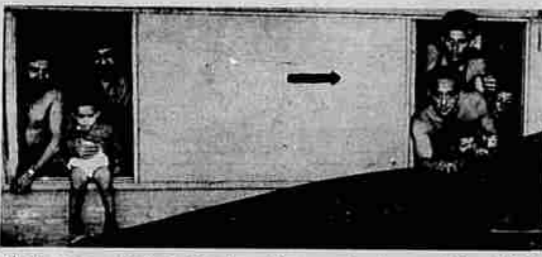
Here's what artist-educator ANN DAVIDOW says about her book, "Let's Draw Animals"

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I WAS ABOARD THE

A young woman who lived through it describes the unbelievable days aboard the ill-fated refugee ship on its harrowing voyage to freedom



Their voyage halted, Exodus refugees glumly await the British.

(In 1927 Exodus was the S.S. President Warfield, an excursion boat. During World War II she was an expendable decoy for German submarine attacks. In 1947 she carried 4,500 displaced persons who unsuccessfully tried to break the British blockade of Palestine. After a three-month pilgrimage that included mass hunger strikes, the passengers were sent back to Germany. The young woman who wrote this account now lives in Israel and prefers to remain anonymous, but as a child she was one of the 4,500 refugees aboard the ship. This is her true story of the heartbreaking voyage that Leon Uris fictionalized in the best-selling novel, "Exodus.")

REMEMBER a dozen searchlights sweeping over Exodus' deck and blinding us. Then from the destroyers only a few feet away, the British threw strings of firecrackers at us that sounded like pistol shots. Tear-gas bombs kept exploding, making us choke and cry.

Suddenly Exodus shuddered and seemed to stop. A British destroyer had rammed us. We began to sink on the starboard side. Our last desperate hopes of eluding the blockade began to sink, too. The goal we were so close to seemed lost.

Nothing I ever hoped for, or ever will hope for, was so important to me as getting to Palestine at that time. I was a 14-year-old girl then, who for eight years had known only Soviet labor camps, displaced-persons compounds in Germany, and shacks along too many roads as a fleeing refugee. The German invaders had driven us from Warsaw to Russia, and I was always the alien, the stranger, the illegal visitor crossing borders with illegal passports and false names.

Most of the other passengers aboard Exodus had been in even more horrible concentration camps. Small wonder, then, why all our hopes and dreams centered on getting to Palestine. Palestine—where we would have secure homes, where we would not have to worry that tomorrow we might be driven again onto the roads and into camps.

But just 25 miles from the shores of our promised land, those strings of firecrackers came, and the British soldiers stormed aboard Exodus on nets thrown over from their ships. Desperate, we fought them with anything we had at hand—potatoes, fire hoses, water bottles. My weapon was a hammer.

Soldiers with their arms locked pushed me and about 30 other refugees into a tiny cabin on the main deck. I was the last one in, and after me came a British soldier who bolted the door. I looked at him, and I saw an enemy. I wanted to hit him with my hammer. But I didn't. Partly because I knew he might shoot my friends and me, but also because I saw his pale blue eyes and adolescent face, not much older than

mine, and I realized that he was a human being, too.

And so I began to cry because I could not hit him, and because we would not get to Palestine.

We were in the cabin for several hours. At first the people around me were quiet. But one girl became hysterical. She screamed: "Let us out! We're sinking! We'll drown!"

Then the people began to sing "Hatikvah" (our anthem) and other songs, partly to drown out the girl's screaming and partly because singing always made us feel better. Exhausted, the girl finally stopped screaming. The melancholy songs brought from Europe and from the concentration camps continued, but I didn't sing. I couldn't stop crying.

I was still crying when the British soldier let us out of the cabin. The British, now in command of the crippled ship, were towing us into port. The strain had made me ill, so I sat down on a wooden box with my head between my knees.

A minute later a door opened just a crack behind me, and somebody whispered in Yiddish: "Any British out there?"

I turned around and through the crack in the door I could see the face of one of our leaders. I told him there were no soldiers. "Turn around and stay there," he said, "and if the British come, close the door with your back."

A little later a British sailor started down the deck, and I leaned against the door to close it.

A few minutes later the door inched open again, and the man whispered that inside was a radio transmitter the British had not found, and it was broadcasting to Palestine. As an obviously sick girl, I was perfect camouflage for them.

All morning long I kept watch. The sun beat down on the steel roof of the cabin, making it unbearably hot inside, and the men would come to the door to get fresh air. Despite the heat, I was wearing two blouses and two skirts, one of them woolen. I had put on the extra clothes before the attack in case our bundles were lost.

About noon, a British soldier came by and offered me water from his canteen. I was terribly thirsty, but refused him defiantly. I think now that I was foolish.

Later in the afternoon the men came wearily out of the cabin; the radio was no longer working. I drank some of the scarce water and crawled into the shade to sleep.

How the Exodus Was Named

During the nightmarish hours that followed, I know that we landed at Haifa and were herded aboard three British ships. We were questioned and searched and prodded.

The last glimpse I caught of Exodus was her name in white paint on her side. I had helped paint that name just the previous day after seeing a friend of mine, a Belgian, struggling with a long piece of board and some paint. He had explained he was going to paint "Haganah Ship Exodus 1947" on the board and hang it over the side. Until then our ship was officially the S.S. President Warfield.

I wanted to help him, so I picked up the paintbrush that was next to him. I put the brush in the cooking pot full of paint that he had, and then I stopped. He laughed because he knew what was troubling me. I did not know how to write "Exodus" in English.

He taught me, and together we painted the board. We alternated, first he took the brush, then I, and after a while the job was done. That is how our ship became Exodus.

During the transfer, the British had passed out leaflets

EXODUS!

ANONYMOUS

proclaiming that we would be taken to Cyprus aboard hospital ships. When I awakened next day in the hold of the H.M.S. Empire Rival, I looked around me and knew that it was no hospital ship. We were behind bars again.

All too soon, however, we learned that we were headed not for Cyprus, but back to France where we had boarded Exodus, back to the Europe that for us meant only misery and horrible memories. After being within an inch of scaling the wall, we were going back to prison and a life sentence.

That fact and the prospect of a voyage aboard a hellship like Empire Rival seemed too much to bear. On the tiny Exodus, the 4,500 of us at least had wooden shelves on which we slept, five to a shelf. But aboard Empire Rival we slept on the steel deck of a cargo hold. There was not even enough room for everyone to lie down at once.

Somehow, we managed to arrange ourselves so that each group and family had some square feet they could call their own. Next to the group of boys and girls that I was with, a man and wife and their one-year-old daughter had spread their one blanket. The baby had heat rash and cried a lot.

I Once Sang for Larry Adler

For a month I hushed the baby by playing soft melodies to her on a tiny harmonica that was a prize possession. Larry Adler, the famous harmonica player, had made a concert tour of the DP camps. After his concert at my camp, our group leader told him about me, and Mr. Adler asked me to sing for him. I did and he gave me the tiny harmonica with his name on it for a souvenir. One night the baby grabbed it from me and dropped it into a bowl of soup. After that the harmonica wouldn't play any more.

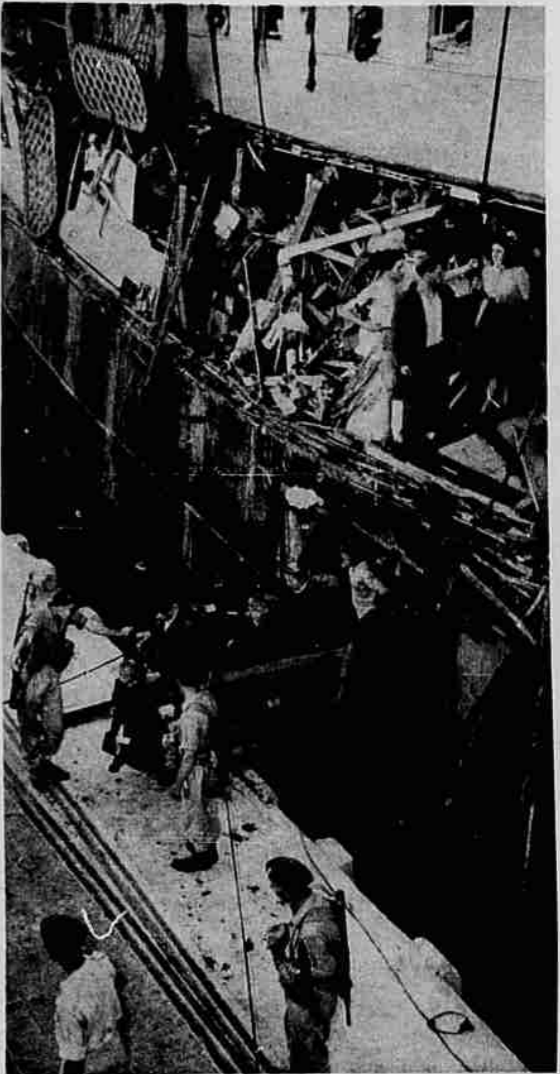
A steel ship in the summer sun of the Mediterranean never cools off. We had no ventilation system, of course, and the people could not bear to wear more than their undergarments. That offended my sense of propriety, since men and women, boys and girls, were all crowded together. But everyone behaved very well, and it did help our morale not to have families broken up.

The British took us to Port du Bouc, France, and ordered us to leave the ships, but we would not. In the weeks since we had boarded Exodus, our spirit had stiffened. We had been frightened before. But for now, at least, we were fiercely brave, even the old people who had wanted to get to Palestine only to be buried there. We struck and refused to eat, hoping that world opinion would force the British to take us to Palestine. Instead, they only threatened to ship us to Germany. But we could not believe the British would do that.

During the hunger strike, our group decided to make a sign of protest to hang over the side of the ship. But we had nothing with which to make it. Finally one of the boys hit on the idea of sewing together some of their white undershirts, and painting the letters with lipsticks. I said I would ask the women aboard if they had any lipsticks, although I did not think we would find any.

Surprisingly, two of the first three women I asked gave me lipsticks. We appreciated their help, but I was disgusted with them for carrying such useless articles around a troubled world. I have long since changed my mind. I think it wonderful that in the midst of privation and death, they could find it so important to save that last shred of their femininity.

I don't think I'll ever forget the night that followed. I



British troops herd the defeated refugees off the Exodus at Haifa, where they were put onto ships bound for the unknown.

awoke to screaming all around me. Children, old men, everyone screaming in the dark. My reaction was to scream, too. Nothing had happened. But after so many weeks of tenacious, disappointment, hunger, and poor sleep, we had erupted all at once. The screams just had to burst out of us, it seemed, or we would have burst. A few minutes and it was over, leaving us drained of emotion.

The hunger strikes failed, but the British also failed; they could not get us to leave the ship. So they announced our departure for Germany. We still refused to believe it.

But we sailed west, and through Gibraltar. We prayed that they would turn around, but they did not. Food was in short supply. I was in charge of distributing the rations. The hardest part was having to deny mothers who wanted more for their infants to eat.

When we were put ashore on German soil, we went berserk in a strange way. We danced madly, and sang at the top of our lungs. We sang at the British that we would get to Palestine. Food was plentiful now. We stuffed our starved bodies. We could not stop eating. I gained 30 pounds in two weeks and was fat for the first time in my life.

That was how the voyage of the Exodus ended. Once again we were a beaten people, or so it seemed. But in my heart, I knew we would try again to make a home in our own land. And try still again should we fail. I promised I would remember the Exodus only as a brave beginning, not a final failure.

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