

## **Moshe Abes**

### **Kibbutz Ginosar resident**

In this interview, Abes discusses life at Kibbutz Ginosar. As one of the early residents, Moshe has seen the kibbutz transform from a socialist community into a market-oriented town.

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### **THIS TRANSCRIPT IS TRANSLATED FROM HEBREW**

#### **How old were you when you came to Ginosar?**

When I came to Ginosar I was twenty years old.

#### **Where did you come from?**

I was a member of the Aliyat HaNoar [a project instituted by the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Agency before WW2 for bringing Jewish youth to Israel and preparing them for pioneering, social and Zionist roles], and we were in various kibbutzes. I was in Kibbutz Afikim and in 1937 I came to Afikim. I was there as part of the Aliyat HaNoar for two years, and then we stayed another year for “preparation” [the process of preparing individuals or groups before coming to Israel or before settling the land as pioneers], and after that I came to Ginosar.

#### **What brought you to Ginosar?**

In the past, the Movement [i.e. the Kibbutz Movement] would send the people wherever they were needed - along the borders, etc. And we had been intended to go up to Susita, that's above Ein Gev, in order to cultivate the lands of the Ptecha Valley. If that had happened, all the shores of the Sea of Galilee would have been in ours. However, since there was a battle on the water here in the kibbutz, and the village mukhtar [Arab head of a village] was killed, eleven guys were put in jail. They were among the top-ranking – they were the management of the kibbutz. They were left with no management at all, and then the Kibbutz Movement decided that we would complete [the missing manpower in] Kibbutz Ginosar, so in that framework, in 1940, I came here.

#### **Can you describe what it was like living in Ginosar during the period preceding the founding of the State of Israel?**

Ginosar stood behind a wall. And if I should compare, for instance, between Afikim and Ginosar, it would be like comparing day and night, you could say. I really mean it. This was a very harsh place, because the members of Ginosar were terribly stubborn. The land belongs to the Pika Association, and they didn't want us to settle here, they insisted on religious Jews. And we decided we would stay here, although everyone offered us all kinds of tempting possibilities. And finally we stayed in Ginosar and we had to build everything all alone, alone, alone. To

build the tower, to raise the wall – and this, of course, with the help of the families, the parents. There were many Israelis here.

**Can you describe what changes took place in Ginosar after World War II and the founding of the State of Israel?**

Ginosar had one big change, which was very serious, and that was the fact that Yigal Alon, bless his memory, managed to contact the Pika Association, and Pika acknowledged us, which meant that we began to receive funding, and that was because the kibbutz farm had progressed very impressively at that time.

**How did it improve your life?**

For example, during all the early years – except in the Youth Movement, where they spoiled us, and we lived in houses. All those years I lived in a tent and then they started to build shacks, and gradually progressed from there.

**In what way was life in the kibbutz different from life outside the kibbutz?**

I can tell you in a nutshell what a kibbutz is: In the kibbutz, every person gives as much as he can and gets as much as he needs. Meaning that you trust the kibbutz member, the kibbutz member's conscience. Our whole life is our conscience. And every person deals with his own conscience, and tries to be better than the next man. That's the difference between life in the past and the kibbutz.

Ginosar used to be a miserable place, so very, very miserable. There was no road leading into the kibbutz, and there was horrible mud, and all these things created sub[human]-conditions, you could say. So at first, when I worked on outside-jobs, I went to various different places in the country and when I came back to Ginosar for the weekends, I had no place to sleep. I had neither a room, nor a shack nor a tent. So we got along on the grass. It was very hard to become accepted, acclimatized, in Ginosar. Really, our society, we were very spoiled, spoiled Yekkes [German Jews]. People gradually dropped out, and only the ones who really wanted to remained.

**Life in the kibbutz – how is it different?**

Our lives were very, very modest. Extremely modest. The bare minimum, only what you used. I mean that our standard of living was very low. I also told you, I think: we'd come to Tiberius and they would point fingers at us, "There go the kibbutzniks." Our clothes were absolutely... I'll give you an example. I'd go out to work in the morning. I didn't have shoes. I'd wear shorts, tie my undershirt on my head, and that's how I would work in the burning sun, from morning till evening. And the devil didn't take us.

Compared to Afikim, for example, it was like the difference between night and day. Here we were actually going hungry. Really. Breakfast - sometimes there was bread. Thank God there was bread - we had a bakery here - with a spoonful of oil,

and tea with saccharine. That was breakfast. We ate half a loaf, even more, of bread.

**Were you paid for this work?**

Paid? We are a Collective. The kibbutz belongs to all of us together, equally to each. There is no salary here. But the kibbutz, as I told you, gives as it can. Everything you need, the kibbutz gave you. It gave less than other kibbutzes, like Afikim for example, but it may have given more than another kibbutz that was in even worse shape. And each kibbutz lived according to its profits.

**Your house, did you own it?**

My house? Once there was a house? No, the houses belong to the kibbutz. Just as when I left the tent, I left it to the kibbutz. When I left the shack, I left it to the kibbutz. I moved to this house, I left [the former one] to the kibbutz, and now I live in a house, the house, on the seashore.

**Your children grew up differently compared to other places in Israel that aren't kibbutzes. Can you give some examples of these differences?**

OK, I'll begin with the communal sleeping arrangement. Communal sleeping, if an outsider hears about it – and I worked for many years in the hotel's public relations – they would hold their head in their hands, and say "What, the children don't sleep with their parents?" And we were convinced that the most important thing for the children was to be together. And we decided that the nannies, who all received training, would raise the children better than we would, the people; Of course, this isn't necessarily so, a nanny could have been much worse than parents, but that's how it was.

Children slept in Children's Houses, and it was a whole ceremony. They came at 4 o'clock in the afternoon with a little basket, and in the basket there was an egg because they had to eat dinner with us, and we didn't have anything – no dining hall, not anything, not even a kitchen. And at 8:30 – 9:00 o'clock we'd go put the children to bed. And if you had five children – and we had – it's a project. One after the other, it was almost like a military regime. A kiss and goodbye, good night. No stories, no nothing. Later we deviated a little. My wife would leave, I would stay behind, to tell some tale after all. But the watch woman would appear – "Lights out!" – and that's that.

**What other differences?**

What, for children? I wanted to tell you that the children weren't "born" kibbutzniks. Each of them had their own personality. I can give you an example that more or less explains the matter. We'd go out for recruitment in the cotton [fields]. At the time we used to pick cotton by hand and I would go out with my combine [agricultural farming machine, vehicle], and with all my children. And we had good output, good capacity, because we were many. The youngest, a girl, she had a

teeny basket, and we all spilled the cotton into a pile. She won't spill her cotton. I asked her, "why won't you spill it?" "It's mine. I picked it, and it's mine." That doesn't sound very kibbutz-like, does it? But that's how it is.

**How are your own children different from children who grew up in Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, for example?**

Look, they grew up in a certain kind of regime. And socially, they were extremely close to each other. And later too, when they left, this society of children continued to be like brothers and sisters, maybe even more within age-groups.

And one of the crises indeed concerned the matter of the nanny. My wife was a nanny. And when she'd come home, it wasn't enough that we had our own children, one of the other children tags along, he doesn't want to go to his own parents, he wants to stay with her. It would work itself out, more or less. But they were fully occupied, you could say. They didn't have any spare time or anything like that. At 4 o'clock they'd come to us. We were waiting for them and we'd go on strolls or we'd stay home. Then, of course there was no radio or television or anything and it was very crowded, the apartment was very small. There was only a double bed, and another bed that slid under and we were seven people. But we managed. Spirits were high. And the children, they remember the home very well, the kibbutz they remember less.

**Describe the housing?**

We found all kinds of alternatives for housing. Not just tents and shacks. Me, when I worked at fishing, I lived in a hut. They'd build us a kind of structure out of mats, and that's where we lived. There were others who also made all kinds of structures out of mats. And the most extreme example, my wife's "preparation group," they had no housing, so they took bales of hay and built walls out of them, covered the top with canvas, and they lived there, twentysomething people. Those were their quarters.

**Was the house you lived in your property?**

Neither the houses nor the shacks nor the tents were our own property. Yes, they were our property, the property of the whole kibbutz. For example, even the tents we lived in, there was a housing committee. They distributed the rooms. First of all, it made no difference whether it was a guy or a girl, we lived together. Already in 1939, I was in Afikim. We lived in a tent, a [male] friend of mine, and a [female] comrade, a girl. And later even more so, because we lived four of us in a tent. It could have been one guy with three girls, or three guys and one girl, that could happen. But as I said, everything belonged to the kibbutz, and the kibbutz controlled it. There was a committee that distributed the apartments.

**What jobs did you have in the kibbutz?**

I'll go back to the period abroad, a little bit. Before we came to Israel we were

ordered, each of us, to come with some kind of profession. Not just “intelligents,” students, but each with a skill. Since it was extremely difficult in Hitler’s time to find a place to learn a trade, I managed to learn, in a small village that was very far away from the city where I lived. I’d go there by train every day. I managed to learn upholstery, harness making, and decorating. But since we didn’t have curtains, there was no use for that.

So I came here with a trade. In Kibbutz Afikim, I specialized in construction. And to this day, I am very interested in construction. and in the outside work, I also worked in construction. For example, we built the Tsfat Police Station, Rosh Pina Police Station, Philon Camp, roads, all kinds of things. we worked doing that. And in Naharayim, I worked for almost two years, at first on behalf of Afikim, and then when I moved here, on behalf of Ginosar.

**Describe your jobs.**

My jobs. Let’s start with this: I like work, I liked to work in the past and I’ve always liked to work. And any job I did, I did it with all my heart. I told you, before, for example, that I really didn’t want to work in the cowshed, but you have to work the cowshed as well. So the Kibbutz assembly decided I would work the cowshed for two years. When I worked the cowshed for two years, we were a team, and we tried to change the cowshed’s image so that others would also come and work there.

For example, we held a party in the cowshed, we took the cows out, we cleaned. I mean, we really cleaned. We scrubbed the floors. I whitewashed the walls all round. We sprayed a little cologne that we had then, a little aftershave, and we invited everyone to a party in the cowshed. In order to glorify the cowshed. we even performed an opera, we sung it.

When I came to Ginosar, Ginosar was a wasteland. There were ten dunam [a measure of land, like acres] of bananas. How many people can work ten dunam of bananas? Three people. And we were nearly 200. Fishing – everyone wanted to work fishing. But there was seniority. I was a newcomer. I couldn’t get into fishing. We, the newcomers, had to do external jobs, all kinds, in order to make money and bring it in to the farm [kibbutz]. But the problem was the weekends. We didn’t have apartments waiting for us. We got along on the grass, or some other way.

I must tell a story. Since I came from Afikim to Ginosar, and Afikim was really house after house after house [i.e. prosperous], on Saturdays we’d go on foot from Ginosar to Afikim. It’s nearly thirty kilometers, to visit Afikim. [We’d go] almost every two weeks. And we weren’t lazy. We’d walk. That’s how attached we were. I already said, I tried to get into fishing, and by the time I got into fishing, and that was really my first workplace in Ginosar, and once I managed to get into fishing, they didn’t want to let me leave. In the meantime, I got married. And fishing was

only at night. And by then my eldest daughter was born. And it's at night. And I began to try to get out of it. That was difficult.

Well, after fishing, I worked in on-shore fishing, packing the fish and all that, and from there I went to work in a metal workshop. I was always very good with my hands. And there we mainly worked in laying down pipes. Very hard work. There's a picture here as well and it's not so simple because here we're putting pipes into the Kineret, into the sea, and it's a real project, laying pipes in the sea. But the Jewish brain never disappoints. We would take the pipe and stop up one end, and inflate another pipe and push it into the sea with a tractor very, very slowly. And since the end was stopped up, the pipe would float, a metal pipe would float. At the end of the pipe there was a fisherman, you can see it here, and he directed the pipe, so that God forbid it shouldn't deviate to the right or left. And when we wanted to sink it, then simply, you can see, between the two boats, we opened the cover, and we slowly lowered it into the sea. Very interesting work and we managed to do this. Except for one time. The fisherman who was supposed to keep it straight fell asleep, or whatever. I don't know. In any case, one pipeline is in the shape of a half-circle. The wind moved him.

#### **And after the metal workshop?**

After the metal workshop, I heard they wanted to build a hotel. I liked the idea. We were a team of three or four guys. This was in 1962. By 1964, within two years, we had built a hotel with everything in it. Except that the architect was a woman kibbutznik. And a kibbutz and a hotel don't go together very well. And another problem was that she was short. And later we suffered a lot, the measurements weren't right, the height wasn't right, the reception wasn't impressive. What is this, a low reception area? Hotel reception areas were usually like a palace, with crystal chandeliers. But our reputation went before us. We really were known to be very nice. We had no problem filling all forty rooms, so that after three years we added another 16 rooms. And after another three years we added another 40-50 rooms. And we slowly grew until we were a hotel of 120 rooms, including when we added zimmers. In the end, we had 250 rooms. All this from the forty rooms we started with.

At first I was the technical expert, in charge of maintenance. Then, growing older, you can no longer bend over to fit into the air-conditioning shafts, and I switched to public relations. Our public relations man unfortunately died and to step into his shoes was a very difficult task. And yet, I worked there for twenty years. All together, I worked in the hotel for 35 years from the beginning when we built it and until the intifadah [Palestinian uprising]. And then the hotel stood empty. I remember, there was no tourism. I was the public relations person for tourism. I spoke languages – German. There was no shortage of German tourists – and that's it, we had a livelihood. But afterwards, I was almost eighty years old, and I looked to find myself a hobby. I would have paid the hotel to let me go on working

there, but that didn't work out. There simply were no tourists. Now I have a hobby, all kinds of pretty things.

**Looking back, do you have any regrets about the way of life you chose?**

I don't believe there is anyone in the Kibbutz Movement who didn't have some crisis at some time or another. It could have concerned family, children, the wife and also relations at work, friends, etc. People are people, and when people meet, it's not so simple. I had a crisis. In Ginosar, anyone who felt he was having a crisis was given the opportunity to leave the kibbutz for half a year. But I wanted to cope. What I did was simple greediness. I said I wanted seven months out of spite. They gave me seven months. But don't you worry, after six months, a truck came and took me home. And that was that. It would have been in 1948, something like that.

**In 1948 you left for half a year?**

I wasn't the only one, there were many members who left and returned; and there are also those who dropped out completely.

**But looking back generally, in principal, at the way of life you chose, what do you feel?**

I am always trying to explain to people and to myself and to tourists and to the whole world, that life in the kibbutz, no other life is better. No other life can be better. Because you are really covered, good or bad, you are covered. You have nothing to worry about. When they started talking about [old age] pensions, we said, "what pensions? What for?" The kibbutz will take care of us to the last day of our lives. That's what we thought. We were very innocent. We thought it would end the way it began. But you grow up [and become wiser]. The first generation followed in our footsteps, the second generation – less. And the third generation, who are now running the kibbutz, they are completely different. But if you are conservative, you have a problem. I was always liberal. I always went with the changes, any change that was ever considered. I'm ashamed to say, I had the first radio, the first fan, the first television set. I simply wanted to pull ahead, and it helped.