

# Volunteers for a Dream

RACHEL SCHLESINGER

---

In the 1960's the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, focused attention on a new wave of feminists. Women were better educated, worked outside the home for pay, and fewer women became involved in volunteer organizations. Several years ago, this writer, armed with an audio-tape recorder, visited women who had been active in Canadian Hadassah-WIZO, on the local and national level, during the years 1937-1947. At the time of the interviews in 1983 all were still active in the organization and in the Jewish community.

I wish to thank Toronto Hadassah WIZO for making available their archives of the *Reporter Magazine* for the years 1937-1945. The women with whom I spoke, (Gert Kronick, Mattie Rotenberg, Lil Levy) spent hours with me, and I appreciate their willingness to share their reminiscences with me, and allow me to understand how they joined together to mold an organization that gave women a strong voice, a feeling of sisterhood, and a sense of accomplishment. It goes without saying that there are many such women, and a variety of organizations in Canada that record a parallel history. I chose to interview these women as part of this organization because I had a special bond with them, I admired them, and I count myself as a member of this organization.

All the excerpts from the *Reporter Magazine* were written by the editor, Mattie Rotenberg, during the years 1937-1947.

The women in my generation, post 1960's, did not invent concepts such as "sisterhood", or "support groups". We learned these ways of working together for a cause from our mothers and their organization. They fought for causes, not only in labour unions or in conflict situations, but also within the establishment.

## **Background**

"The healing of the Daughter of my People" is both the masthead of the magazine published by Hadassah-WIZO in Toronto, and the slogan of the Hadassah organization, founded in 1917 by Henrietta Szold. This paper will

look at the organization, the women, and the articles printed by the organization in the *Reporter* in the years 1937-1945.

How did it all begin? Hadassah-WIZO (H.W.) officially began in Toronto in 1917. In 1921 the organization became a Federation in World WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization). Zionist organizations began in Toronto much earlier, as did women's involvement in Zionism.

“Zionism was one ideology which fostered relative unity as early as the turn of the century, drawing together not only the generations and the various groups of Eastern Europeans, but to a degree the recent arrivals and the old community as well . . . It was Zionism which provided the first organizational link between Jewish communities across Canada.”<sup>1</sup>

The first women's Zionist organization in Canada was the *Daughters of Zion* club formed in Toronto, in September, 1900. The members were about fifteen years old at the time, and held the first meeting at the home of Ida Lewis (Siegel)<sup>2</sup> It was remarkable that a Zionist group met in Toronto as early as 1900 since the first World Zionist Congress had been held in Basel only three years earlier. The very term 'Zionism' was new to the vocabulary of the Jews of the world.

At the turn of this century many agreed that the only place for Jews was in their own state, and that this State must be Palestine. So, amidst the pogroms of Eastern Europe, the idea, and the process, Zionism, began.

An early step was raising money to buy tracts of land in Palestine, and the Daughters of Zion concentrated their fundraising on this. They went from door to door to sell *shekels*.<sup>3</sup> The money that was raised was sent to the Jewish National Fund, to buy land in Palestine.

The girls in the Daughters of Zion soon found that they had more in common than fund-raising, and their next step was to get a club room in which to meet on a regular basis. Friendships grew, and they broadened their range of activities. Other Zionist girls' and women's groups that formed at the turn of the century were *The Herzl Girls*, which grew out of a Sunday school class at the West End Sunday School led by Ida Lewis Siegel, and the *Bnot Zion Kadimah*. The latter group was the first organization in Toronto to institute the practice of collecting for the National Fund (J.N.F.) at Jewish weddings and other celebrations. The methods were varied, but all of these groups devoted their energies towards raising money to buy land in Palestine. When Hadassah was formally organized in 1917, these groups joined the larger organization, either retaining their own name, or joined the *Central Chapter* of Hadassah in Toronto.

In March, 1917, there was great excitement in the circles of Women's

Zionist groups; they were to receive a visit from Henrietta Szold, the founder of American Hadassah. G. K. recalls:

“The meeting was held at the home of my mother, and I know exactly how many attended — 65, because I was sent to buy 65 new cups and saucers for the meeting.”<sup>5</sup>

After hearing Miss Szold speak, it was decided to form additional chapters in Toronto. It is interesting to note that this enthusiasm to form an organization working towards a Jewish homeland in Palestine came before the Balfour Declaration, which declared that “His Majesty’s government views with favor the founding of a national home for the Jews in Palestine.”<sup>6</sup> The movement grew quickly in all parts of Canada. By 1919 the chapters in various parts of Ontario held the first regional conference for groups from Toronto, Hamilton, Windsor, London and Brantford. This meeting was really the first Hadassah convention.

In January, 1919 the 16th convention of the Zionist Organization was held in Toronto. At this time there was an urgent appeal made to help the homeless and destitute Jews living in Palestine. A fund was created called Helping Hands, and Mrs. A. J. Freiman of Ottawa headed this massive effort. The contacts that she made with communities throughout the country launched Hadassah as a Dominion wide movement.<sup>7</sup>

In 1921 members of thirty chapters across the country were devoting their energies to such projects as a Girls’ Domestic and Agricultural Science School at Nahalal, the Jewish National Fund, Palestine orphanages and child centres as well as a nurses’ training school. The women sent aid to the haluzim (pioneers), established a tubercular centre at Safed, and supported a convalescent home.<sup>8</sup> By 1921 there were about 300 members of Hadassah in Toronto, divided into chapters.

In 1920, after the Armistice and the beginning of peace, the first attempt was made to bring together all the Zionist groups that had been cut off by the Great War. This first post war Zionist conference was held in London, England. Rebecca Sieff, eldest daughter of Michael Marks (founder of Marks and Spencer) decided to call together all the women who had been working in Zionist groups. She sent out letters and cables, and the word spread to many countries that this conference was of special interest to women. In July, 1920, steps were taken to establish the Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO). The first meeting was held in London, and Mrs. Sieff was elected president. The women who attended resolved to “promote the health and welfare of women and children in Palestine, and to undertake to carry out specific work in the reconstruction of the country.”<sup>8</sup> Wizo saw its’ task . . . as two-fold, . . . in the diaspora and in Israel . . .”<sup>10</sup> At the time when

women were getting the vote in Canada, the founders of WIZO were deeply conscious of their responsibilities towards the future of their people, a future that was to be rebuilt in Israel while at the same time maintaining a Jewish life in all the countries of the diaspora.

In 1921 Vera and Chaim Weizmann<sup>11</sup> made their first trip to the United States and Canada, and at this time Mrs. Weizmann persuaded Canadian Hadassah to become a part of the new WIZO. As part of this organization Canadian women joined a large sisterhood, an international link that united women in more than 65 countries.

In 1927 the organization in Canada celebrated its' tenth anniversary. In a Jubilee Yearbook the achievements of Toronto Hadassah were listed:

' . . . (Toronto) had a great many firsts, such as the first Bazaar. The significant feature of the Hadassah movement in Toronto is that it has taken a large number of women away from a continuous round of household and personal considerations and has made them aware of their relation to the group of which they are members. It has fired them with the desire to contribute their share towards the welfare of their People, both in the realm of the reconstruction of Palestine and in the field of communal work.''<sup>12</sup>

### **The Reporter**

As Hadassah WIZO grew in Toronto, the organization began to publish the *Reporter*, as a method of keeping contact with all the membership. As a former editor, I note that the magazine has undergone many changes over the years, both in format and context. An examination of the editorials in the *Reporter* for a ten year period, 1937-1947 will provide insight into what the organization was officially doing and saying during the war years. Through the editorials issues were raised, and women were called to action.

A glance at the *Reporter* published each month in Toronto during this period, chronicles Hadassah-WIZO's (H.W.) official position, the aims, goals, dreams and ideals of the organization. Each issue contained an opening editorial, announcements of meetings and programs, and an update on projects carried out by the chapters. The years 1937-1947 were years of growing awareness of death, destruction, and finally rebirth. The women who were active in Toronto H.W. during these years had to meet challenges for which they were not really prepared. Conditions were extra-ordinary, and there was no real set of rules. The organization did have certain aims and aspirations:

1. to extend material and moral support to Canadian Jewish women and to the people of Israel.
2. to assist the needy and indigenous population of Palestine by sponsoring health, education and social welfare services for women and children from day care and creches to clubs, vocational training and guidance

centers.

3. to strengthen and perpetuate Jewish identity, and to encourage Jewish and Hebrew culture in Canada.
4. to cooperate with other organizations in the promotion of the Canadian ideals of democracy, human dignity, freedom, justice, and the pursuit of peace . . .<sup>13</sup>

How did the women and the organization strive to meet their objectives, their aims, during the period under discussion? There is a saying in Hebrew, “‘Ain Breyra” (there is no alternative), and that describes the situation of the time. People and nations went beyond acceptable human behaviour, both in brutality and in bravery. It is only today that the full details of those times are being made public, as records are being released. In the *Canadian Historical Review* Abella and Troper chronicle the situation in Canada regarding Jewish refugees coming into Canada during the years from 1933-39 in their article *The Line Must Be Drawn Somewhere*.<sup>14</sup> They depict the attitude of official Canada that Jews were not welcome.

The mood of the country was no secret, especially to the Jews within her borders. It is important to be aware of the attitudes of the country at the time in order to fully understand what was officially happening within the ranks of Jewish organizations.

Many felt that they were powerless in the broad framework of Canadian politics to lobby effectively for admittance of Jews from the war-torn countries. Their very impotence affected the policies of their organizations. The “‘establishment” numbers were afraid to ‘rock the boat’, afraid to bring out the latent anti-semitism at home by working for the Jews abroad. At the same time, they had to take some action, the world conditions were such that women, they decided, had no alternative. If Jews could not be brought into Canada, then Hadassah-WIZO women had alternative goals — they could, and did, pour their energies, and their money into general war work, and specifically, into child rescue operations, into **Youth Aliyah**.

**Youth Aliyah** refers to a massive child rescue operation that was begun in 1936 by a German woman, Reche Freier. ‘Aliyah’ is a term that means ‘to go up’, and is used when Jews are called up to read from the Torah on a Sabbath in the Synagogue. This term came to mean more than a spiritual going up, it also was used in a physical sense, to go up to the Land of Israel. Through Youth Aliyah, Reche Freier hoped to save children from Germany and Europe and send them to live in Palestine, in children’s villages. Gradually other organizations in Canada, Jewish and non-Jewish joined in this effort, all under the umbrella of H.W. The work of rescuing children

became a main part of the work of H.W. Women joined the organization in the late 1930's in order to be a part of this effort. L.L. remembers:

Youth Aliyah had just begun. Reche Freier came to Toronto and Rose Dunkelman had a big meeting at her home. After the meeting I went up to Rose, said I was very impressed, and wanted to do something — so she said, 'come join Hadassah'. I did, and we started to have dinners to get funds for Youth Aliyah. I even got the unions to donate for this.<sup>15</sup>

Not everyone in the community supported this effort. There were tensions within the community; people felt that this project would take something away from the local community. "There are only so many peanuts, and if you take some away, there won't be enough left for those of us at home".<sup>16</sup> These feelings prompted the editorial of the *Reporter* to state in January, 1939;

the whole refugee situation has laid bare the moral bankruptcy of our civilization — a civilization where human values are low in the scale, where property investments, interest, and political considerations far outweigh the regard for human life. Even in our community there is evidence of this distortion of values . . . Toronto Hadassah is collecting for Youth Aliyah. In comparison with Jews in other lands we live in freedom, comfort. Yet some infection must be drying up the channels of pity in Jewish life when Jewish fathers who could, with a stroke of a pen lift a child from hopelessness to happiness have failed to do so.<sup>17</sup>

The women were frustrated in their relief efforts. Yet while the men in the community advised keeping a low profile, thus leading to inaction, the women went to work. The women did not rely on the men, but did their own fund-raising. In Toronto, in 1939 the chapters began a new plan for raising Youth Aliyah funds; they devised a 'minyan'.<sup>18</sup> In Judaism a minyan refers to the ten men needed for a quorum during religious services. The H.W. minyan consisted of groups of ten women, each paying 36¢ per week. By 1942 reports began to come to Canada of the incredible rescues; children who walked for years from Poland, Rumania and Hungary to Teheran, children who were saved. Youth Aliyah work changed over the years, but it is still a major part of H.W. activity.

There is a story that Rose Dunkelman sent in her money for Youth Aliyah each month, without the knowledge of her husband. Any account of the beginnings of Hadassah in Toronto includes Rose Dunkelman. She was born in 1889, and died in 1949. She married in 1910 and had five children. After the First World War in addition to her many volunteer activities she and her husband founded the *Jewish Standard* and she was the managing editor. In recognition for her many activities she was presented with a Coronation Medal at the time of the Coronation of King George VI, May 12, 1937.<sup>19</sup>

Another major part of H.W. work during these years was of course, devoted to the general war effort. Through the pages of the *Reporter* we learn

of the scope of these activities, similar in many ways to those of other organizations, yet with a difference.

How often have you, Hadassah member, said to yourself, What can I do to help the war effort? . . . Hadassah has stepped forward and offers you the opportunity to serve . . . Red Cross knitting, money for blankets . . . clothes for refugee children in England, contributions for ambulances . . . socks for men serving in mine sweepers . . . and now Canadian Hadassah has made itself responsible for a ward of thirty beds, completely equipped, at the Canadian Red Cross hospital in England. And in addition, Canadian Hadassah will erect and completely equip a hospital unit of 60 beds in Nahalal (Palestine) as a service to Empire troops in the East. (October, 1940)

The difference in war work was that Toronto Hadassah women worked not only for the Empire, but for Palestine. Canadians had a clear cut idea of what the fighting was for. The forces of good, the allies, were poised against the forces of evil, the axis. Canadians knew that their government was behind them, that the Commonwealth and England, the mother country, was one fighting unit against the Axis. For Jews, and for women in organizations such as Hadassah there was also another front to this war.

In 1939 The Malcolm MacDonald White Paper on Palestine was issued.<sup>21</sup> It was unbelievable to the Jewish people around the world that at a time when only the doors of the death camps were open to them, the British would seal off Palestine. The Jewish soldiers in Palestine fought bravely in the British forces against the axis, as if there was no White Paper, and they fought the British as if there was no war. The children that were rescued by Youth Aliyah often had to be smuggled into the country. Hadassah women in Canada continued to raise funds to rescue children, knowing that they would have to be brought into Palestine illegally. Other countries would not accept Jews either. In Canada 1,000 certificates were issued to rescue children, but as the politicians argued, the children perished in the death camps and after the war, when Canada finally was willing to admit orphans, only 600 could be found to bring to Canada.<sup>22</sup>

Canadian Hadassah women, part of the Dominion, raised funds for all aspects of Palestine relief in spite of the British White Paper. The Hadassah woman was affluent, part of the Establishment, but she was also politically aware, and often took real action before her prudent husband. While her husband held private debates she went from door to door, organized fund raising projects, and worked for an unpopular cause. She didn't wait until it was politically sound to act, she just acted.

In February, 1942, the *Reporter* put out a special issue highlighting the achievements of the organization over 25 years.<sup>23</sup> Involvement in war work and in activities in Palestine were featured in this issue.

Jewish Palestine is providing the Empire with a trusty ally and with considerable war

potential both in men and materials . . . Fifteen thousand Jews are serving in various British units . . . we too are proud of our contributions. By special request of the Rt. Hon. Malcolm MacDonald, High Commissioner in Canada for the United Kingdom, we provide funds for the purchase of an Aircraft Ambulance for Palestine, we furnish a ward in the Sara Delano Roosevelt Memorial Nursing Home for the bombed children in England . . . we establish and support soldier's clubs and huts in Palestine, and provision of comforts for the British and Empire forces in Palestine. We provide financial assistance to the wives, children, and other dependents of Palestine soldiers serving with the British forces in the East . . . and creches and other necessary services for the children of soldiers whose wives are engaged in war work . . . We also support two mobile canteens, one for England through the Canadian Red Cross, and one for Palestine.<sup>24</sup>

While women the world over were working in some measure for the war effort, the Hadassah woman worked in addition for her people because . . .

Jews are not the only ones who are suffering . . . but each one of these others has a government to speak for it . . . and the hope for a national restoration after the war . . . Listen to the rollcall of the United Nations, the name of Zion is not there. And yet our men and women are fighting . . . Palestine must be established as the National Home for the Jewish People.<sup>25</sup> (May, 1943)

## Education

Through the pages of the "*Reporter*" we learn that in addition to the demands made by the war effort and Youth Aliyah activities, there were also concerns closer to home. Education was a theme that appeared frequently. "The dedicated member, the one who will work, had to be educated, has to know what she is working for." Courses, seminars, book reviews, special lectures, reading lists, program ideas, all appeared frequently in the pages of the "*Reporter*". In March, 1939 the *Reporter* stressed the "need for Jewish education, and repeated the theme in 1945:

We cannot be inactive or indifferent in this war of the mind, we cannot let our ideals slumber. Unless we keep our ideals alive, they perish, and if we allow them to perish, we will have lost the war even though we won every battle. It has been said that it is easier to die for our ideals than to live by them . . . The ideals for which we fought, Truth, Peace, Freedom, and Brotherly love, these are the basic principles of Judaism. Enough people died for them. It is our part to study them, to know them, and to live by them.<sup>26</sup> (February, 1945)

In the issues of the *Reporter* that came out after the war this theme continues — a Jewish woman has to be an educated woman. Study groups, formal and informal, were an important part of each chapter. Realistically, however, the educational aspects of the program did not reach, or did not appeal to the total membership. Some of the women interviewed stated clearly that this was not their area of interest. They were Zionists, yes, and fundraisers, but did not spend time on the educational program per se.<sup>27</sup> As in all organizations, the official policies and the content of the organ, the "*Reporter*", did not apply to the total membership because each woman joined, and remained in the organization for a variety of reasons, unique in importance to each individual.

## Membership

Each organization needs to renew its membership, and Hadassah in Toronto, used the pages of the "*Reporter*" as one way to appeal for new members yearly.

Woman joined the organization for a variety of reasons. An older woman interviewed joined because . . . "my husband told me to."<sup>28</sup> Another, to be part of Youth Aliyah,<sup>29</sup> while the third woman, said that ". . . it was the thing to do. My mother-in-law was a member, my sister and sister-in-law as well. The question wasn't to join or not, it was which chapter would I join."<sup>30</sup>

In the early years the organization remained small, by choice. The woman interviewed all agreed that this was an elite organization. You were invited to join, you had to be a somebody or married to a somebody. You may have been asked to join, perhaps by Rose Dunkelman, and then it was important to be in the right chapter. The War years brought about a great change in this view of membership. Instead of an exclusive group with a narrow power base, a base that played musical chairs with all the positions of importance, the War years saw the beginnings of a real democratic organization.

The forces that drew women into Hadassah were similar to the forces that brought women in general into volunteer service organizations. The idea that women should expand their motherly roles into society as a whole, and for the benefit of their religion, was universally acceptable at this time. These ideals were most important in the Jewish ethic, which taught that women had a unique role, and that they were responsible for the welfare of others. Zionist groups were not new, and it was natural that a certain segment of Jewish women would join them; these groups combined the ideals of general women's groups with the specific goal of Zionism and brought the women together under an ideological and religious roof into Hadassah. In a sense the Zionist groups were a distant cousin to the missionary groups that flourished during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. Hadassah's main projects and concerns were with families, children, religion, women and medical concerns. Their "State" was both Palestine and Canada.

In a sense, women joined not for social and cultural purposes alone but were organized to exert moral pressure on those people and institutions that could change society.

Hadassah members (pre-World War 2), were typical of their sisters in other organizations. They were women who could afford to join, both in terms of availability of household help, and in terms of not having to work. Indeed many of these women could not work due to social pressures. The women had the time, the ability, and the skills needed to function in this

organization. In turn they were given a sense of being involved in something useful, they learned skills, leadership techniques, and obtained educational benefits. The chapter provided a network of friends, and it put the member in contact with the outside world.

Many of the members of H.W. needed the organization as much as the organization needed them. "I had graduated as a trained social worker, but I was discouraged from ever entering the job market. My mother-in-law wouldn't hear of it. A married woman just didn't work."<sup>31</sup>

Hadassah-WIZO's membership expanded, and changed both during, and especially right after the Second World War, both numerically, and in terms of its social and economic components. In addition, there were now new immigrants in the organization. Chapters conducted their meetings in Yiddish once again, and in Polish, Hungarian and French.

Before the War, an editorial tried to define the kind of woman who should be a part of Toronto Hadassah.

Hadassah membership consists of women who believe in Zionism . . . women are the reason for male Zionists . . . Most men are Zionists by marriage, but every woman is a Zionist at heart. We know that each member will awaken the heart of a mother, daughter, sister or friend, and make her realize that by being a member of Hadassah, with its fine ideal of democracy, loyalty and liberty, that she is being true to the ideals of womanhood.<sup>32</sup>

By October, 1938, the tone of the membership appeals took on the mantle of war-time language. The title of the editorial was "Spiritual conscription," and it stated that all Jewish women must join the ranks of all Zionist men and women . . .

we cannot believe that the conscience of the world is dead . . . we must recruit our own armies . . . armies of peace. We have no brass bands no government regulations to swell our ranks . . . our conscription is spiritual. Her conscious loyalty to our historic tradition, her determination to range herself on the side of morality and justice, these on the forces we rely on to bring every Jewish woman into the ranks of Hadassah.<sup>33</sup>

A year later, October, 1939, the question raised in the *Reporter* dealt not only with membership, but also with citizenship;

. . . women have failed as democratic citizens insofar as they have not taken the trouble to equip themselves to face responsibility which citizenship entails . . . Both as women and as Jews we have had a long and hard struggle for equal rights as citizens. If this hard won position is not to be lost, we must assume with seriousness and sincerity our responsibilities as Jews and as citizens.<sup>34</sup>

The organization in Toronto was depicting women who had all the traditional values of their society, a society that divided men's and women's lives into two spheres. The member was told that she could be a modern woman, have a career, and in Palestine (if not in Canada) works the fields as an agronomist, work hand in hand to build a new country. Women in

Toronto could participate, from the sidelines, cheering on with their fund-raising projects the *Halutzim*, the pioneers, who were actually in Palestine.

The war-time issues of the *Reporter* reflected the propaganda that was associated with the times. It was necessary to call the women to their tasks, and to inform them as well as inspire. There was no instant television to bring the world into the living room. It linked the member to the world, it bound them to Palestine, and it articulated dreams for the future.

### **The Women**

Three women were interviewed on tape to broaden the understanding of the women and the organization during the decade in question, a decade that saw an organization gear up for a war effort, and then use its increased membership to fight for its new land, Israel. Who were the women in the organization at this time? The majority were Canadian born, middle and upper class, educated, some spoke Yiddish, most were affiliated Jews, and many of the chapters still retained the original members who had formed the organization twenty years before. They considered themselves above the 'greeners', the new immigrants who spoke only Yiddish and who came mainly from the working class and socialist backgrounds of Eastern Europe.

G.R., the oldest member interviewed, remembers mainly the early, formative years. She remembers the friendship of organizing events in the kitchen, while eating Rose Dunkelman's cream puffs. In her time, the fund-raising events were personal, each woman was directly involved. Her mother and friends, for example, got material donated, this they sewed with the machines in her father's shop into aprons, and G.K. and her friends sold them. The social aspects of each chapter were important in her time.

. . . *Rose* chapter was nice, but *Naomi* was, 'eppiss' nicer. The women were younger . . . soon the chapters became cliques. We lost members from *Rose* chapter, they tried to get into *Naomi*, couldn't so went to *Miryam*. I was a member of *Rose*. It had one president for twenty years. Some of the members of the chapter couldn't even read or write English. The chapter began at Rose Dunkelman's house, she got hundreds of members with her cream puffs."<sup>35</sup>

Mrs. K married in 1912 and joined her chapter that same year. In the 1930's she and her family actually went to live in Palestine, one of the few committed Zionists to do so at that time. They returned to Canada before the War. Many of her memories are selective, she remembers positive aspects of early Hadassah life, but the details are often vague. (She died in October, 1985 and was greatly mourned in the Toronto community — who recognized that she was indeed a pioneer, and a model of how women were involved in Jewish community life).

The editorials quoted in this paper were written, for the most part by M.R. who was the editor of the *Reporter* for the period in question. Mrs. R. entered Hadassah in the same way that most women go into a volunteer organization . . . “it was just one of those things that everyone did. I was married in 1924, my sister belonged to *Scopus* chapter, so I joined.” M.R. always put her home and family before any organizational commitments. She has five children, and ran a traditional, orthodox religious household. Her educational background was not typical. She was the first woman to receive a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in physics in the late 1920’s. When she couldn’t find the kind of education she wanted for her children she was involved in organizing the first Jewish Day School in Toronto, Hillcrest Progressive School. In addition to teaching at the University of Toronto during the war years, and her Hadassah activities, she also did daily broadcasts for the C.B.C. After the war she represented Canada at the first meeting at the United Nations Organization on the Status of Women’s Commissions convened by Eleanor Roosevelt.

Each woman looks for different things in an organization, and makes her own contributions to her group. “I was active, but I never was a common soldier. I was busy doing other things than fund-raising,” L.L. said in her interview that “. . . M.R. was considered the intellectual. Her area was education and she did this well.” It was a stroke of good fortune for Hadassah-WIZO in Toronto to have such an eloquent spokeswoman as editor of their magazine. She set the tone of the official policy that each and every member could read, and absorb in the monthly *Reporter*.

Each woman who was interviewed was asked about the relations between Hadassah and other organizations in Toronto at the time. L.L. felt that the women who belonged to other Zionist groups such as Pioneer Women came from a different group. “They were all newcomers who spoke Yiddish and who moved in different circles.” M.R. had a few words to say about the National Council of Jewish Women . . .

“it was not the right organization for me to join. There was outright war between Hadassah and Council. Council was then run by “die Deutchen” (Germans) and they were adamantly opposed to anything Zionist . . . they fought it as late as 1939.”<sup>36</sup>

The women who were interviewed all were part of the elite, they were women in positions of power and influence in the organization. Between them they had held most of the posts on the Toronto and National executive. When asked about their perceptions of the ‘typical’ Hadassah woman of the era their answers were similar.

“There were all kinds, first generation as well as new immigrants. The chapters became

more than just a chapter, it was also a social life. If one was sick, the others helped — it was a source of mutual help. The chapter filled a big part in the lives of the women. Certain chapters had the reputation of being above the others, socially it was hard to get into these chapters. People would recruit their friends and relations.” (M.R.)<sup>37</sup>

L.L. was the third, and youngest woman interviewed. She joined the organization in 1936, answering a call for help in the work of Youth Aliyah. In common with M.R. she was professionally educated before her marriage, with an M.S.W. from the School of Social Work of the University of Toronto. She never worked for pay after her marriage, so devoted her time and energies to volunteer organizations such as Hadassah. When asked about the organization she said:

“Hadassah has to be most marvelous organization in the world. It has always fascinated me that after all, in those days we didn’t travel to Israel, or Palestine, it was too distant. I marvel at the fact that we could get all those women to work for an ideal. We had to manufacture our own inspiration. There wasn’t the feeling that we had to work to fulfill ourselves, you could do this by being a volunteer. Everyone who came into the organization gained, they gained skills, and self-confidence.”<sup>38</sup>

The Hadassah-WIZO organization in Toronto in the 1980’s is very different from that of 30-40 years ago. It retains most of the fund-raising projects, and has added many more. Its education program is expanded, but still appeals to only a fraction of the membership. The older members remember the difficult days of the War, and the founding of the State. The newer members were not even born when Israel became a reality. The sense of urgency, the sense of participating in history is different today. Today’s organization also has to manufacture inspiration. The member may be a professional woman who devotes some, not all of her time to volunteer work. She can call a caterer to prepare for a function, and might have difficulty understanding a time when an organization grew by the cream puffs in a wealthy woman’s kitchen.

In difficult times there are special people who bring out the best in individuals, and in an organization. Yesterday’s Hadassah woman was a volunteer for a dream, today’s member works hard to make the dream a reality.

#### NOTES

1. Stephen A. Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto: A history to 1937* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1979) p. 200
2. Hadassah Organization of Canada, *Jubilee Book, 1917-1927* (Montreal, 1927) pp. 101-104.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Taped interview, Gert. Kronick, 1979.
6. Balfour Declaration — written by Lord Balfour, the foreign minister, to Lord Rothchild saying, in part, that Great Britain would view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish People. (Balfour Declaration was signed, November 2, 1917).

7. Hadassah Organization of Canada, *Jubilee Book, 1917-1927*, "Helping Hand Fund", p. 139.
8. *Ibid.* p. 138.
9. *Ibid.* p. 140.
10. World Wizo, *Aims* (Jerusalem 1957).
11. Weitzmann discovered an explosive that helped England win World War I. He lobbied for the passage of the Balfour Declaration (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, v.4, 1971) p. 104.
12. Esther Waterman (ed.) *Golden Jubilee* (Montreal, Eagle Publishing Co. 1967) p. 37.
13. World WIZO, *Aims*, (Jerusalem, 1957).
14. I. Abella, H. Troper, "The Line Must be Drawn Somewhere: Canada and the Jewish Refugee, *Canadian Historical Review*, V. LX. No. 2 (June. 1979).
15. Taped interview, Lil. Levy.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Reporter*, (Toronto, Hadassah, January, 1937) p. 2.
18. Hadassah Organization of Canada, *Jubilee Book, 1917-1927*.
19. Interview, Mattie. Rotenberg, about Rose Dunkelman. Any account of the beginnings of Hadassah in Toronto includes the work of Rose Dunkelman. She was born in 1889 and died in 1949. She married in 1919 and had five children. After the First World War, in addition to her many volunteer commitments she and her husband founded *The Jewish Standard*, and she was managing editor. In recognition for her many activities she was presented with a Coronation Medal at the time of the Coronation of King George VI, May, 1937. (*Jubilee Book, 1917-1927*).
20. *Reporter* (Toronto, Hadassah, October, 1940) p. 2.
21. *Encyclopedia Judaica*. (Jerusalem, Keter Publishing Company, 1971) v. 16, pp. 482-485.
22. Taped interview, Roberta Marcus, one of the children brought to Canada after the war under this scheme.
23. *Reporter* (Toronto, Hadassah, February, 1942) p. 2.
24. *Ibid.* (January, 1944) p. 2.
25. *Ibid.* (May, 1943) p. 2.
26. *Ibid.* (February, 1945) p. 2.
27. Taped interview, Lil. Levy.
28. Taped interview, Gert. Kronick (1979).
29. Taped interview, Lil. Levy.
30. Taped interview, Mattie Rotenberg.
31. Taped interview, Lil. Levy.
32. *Reporter* (Toronto, Hadassah, October, 1937) p. 2.
33. *Ibid.* (February, 1938) p. 2.
34. *Ibid.* (October, 1939) p. 2.
35. Taped interview, Gert Kronick.
36. Taped interview, Mattie Rotenberg.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Taped interview, Lil. Levy.