

Ursula Nehab in the Land: Conversion and Love Story

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High Leigh 1949

The three of my four evening contributions here at our LCJE conference at High Leigh 2011 will focus on individuals who took part in CMJ's Summer School about 1950. All four are women. What would the church's mission, Jewish mission included, have been without women? It is surprising how little women missionaries to the Jewish people have been described by the predominantly *male* Jewish mission historians. We have got to do something about that in the future. And if the men do not want to, it is time that female historians get cracking. There is no shortage of women missionaries to deal with and plenty of material about and by them to investigate.

Tonight we shall meet Ursula Nehab, who was one of CMJ's young recruits in 1949. It is the second time she takes part in a Summer School. She had come from Palestine in the days immediately before the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948. But, as she says in an interview printed in *Mishkan* in 2009: "I wasn't fleeing the country or leaving in order to get away, but in order to get to England in time to start nursing course."

So now we put the clock back to August 1949. Here at High Leigh is a beautiful and charming young woman, 22 years old, born in Germany in 1927 in a family with a Jewish father and Christian mother. The family moved to Palestine in 1936. What is on her mind? The question of identity? No! She "just" wants to say that Jesus is the Light of the World and has become her Lord and Saviour and that he has given her a call to work "among His Own People".

In 1949 they needed to hear such a testimony here at High Leigh. Professional leaders at an LCJE conference also need to hear simple testimonies. For encouragement. This is Ursula's testimony according to *Jewish Missionary News*, October 1949.

Ursula Nehab's story at High Leigh 1949: conversion and call

To me Christ is not only the Light of the World, but He is the Leading Kindly Light, and I want to tell you how I have come to know him as my Lord and Saviour and as the leading Kindly Light in my life

At the age of six I was baptised in a German Protestant Church and was called a Christian, but my father was a Jew, and religion, whether Jewish or Christian, was not discussed in our home, so that my profession of Christianity did not mean very much to me.

In 1936 we went to live in Jerusalem, where we stayed for twelve years. While there I was sent to the Jerusalem Girls' College and it was at the college I learned for the first time to say the Lord's Prayer as a prayer, and to read regularly the Old and the New Testaments.

One day I went to the service at Christ Church and that was the beginning of my learning to love the friends I met there and enjoyment of the fellowship and friendly

spirit. I soon got to know the English Mission Hospital and the staff that worked there, and at the Hospital, as at Christ Church, the Spirit seemed to be very real.

I and my friends, though we called ourselves Christians, did not live up to the name, but there was a longing in my heart for something more than the fellowship and friendship I had found at Christ Church and the Hospital. The cares of this world seemed to choke me and there was a darkness in my soul which I wanted to dispel. I know it was the darkness which must prevail in every soul that is without Christ. "Only the redeemed of Christ know what the darkness can teach."

One day I went alone for a long walk in the Judean hills near Jerusalem and during that walk I felt God's "still small Voice" speaking to me and my soul responded. I could see that life without Christ was empty, and that He could satisfy the longing in my heart and take away my cares of this world. I knew that I must answer this call and a little while afterwards when Canon Jones asked me if I would be prepared for confirmation, I was confirmed in February 1947.

It was at this time I was taken one day by an armed escort before the Arab Higher Committee in the Old City, but I was not afraid because I knew that Jesus Christ was with me. I was questioned for a long time, as they thought I was a Jewess, and I told them I had come to love the Lord Jesus. At last the questioning was over, the Arabs released me and they gave me a permit to pass in and out of the Old City.

I knew that God was calling me to work for Him in some way and I wanted to come to England and train as a nurse and in April, 1948, I flew out in almost the last plane to leave Palestine. Here in England I have experienced more of Christ's love and power, and at the Summer School last year [1948] I felt called to work amongst the Jewish people and yet I felt that God could not work unless I surrendered everything to Him, and so I did.

At the Autumn Meeting last year [1948] Mrs. Dunbar spoke of how the fishermen of Galilee beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come across and help them, and it was then I offered myself to work for C.M.J. Mrs. Dunbar told me afterwards how she had been praying that some young person would offer [himself or herself] at that meeting. The Committee of C.M.J. has accepted me for training and I am now at St. Michael's, Oxford, a women's theological training college. Next year I shall take my diploma in theology, and thus equipped partly as a teacher and partly as an evangelist, I hope to go abroad and tell the Jewish people of Christ, His love, His power and His abiding presence.

I ask your prayers in the choice of a field. I appeal, too, to the young people here who may not know what to do for Christ. Once I did not know, but God has granted me great happiness in leading me to prepare for work among His Own People.

Canon Hugh Jones: Ursula & I have got engaged

Having finished her studies, Ursula Nehab works as a secretary at CMJ's headquarters in London. It has been decided that she is to go to Israel. In December 1951 General Secretary W.A. Curtis mentions that Ursula will be very grateful if Jones can "prod the authorities" in Israel. But seen

from his desk in London Curtis would not mind if Ursula's visa is not issued. "For myself", Curtis writes, "I would be perfectly happy if the visa did not come at all, because we have no one at all in view to do our shorthand typing when she leaves but I promise you that, as soon as her visa comes, she shall be sent on the way without too much delay." Squarely and fairly said by the General Secretary in London to the Head of the Mission in Israel.

Ursula's visa comes soon after; it is a one-year visa and she is to be in Israel before March 30, 1952. And then Jones hastens to ask the headquarters in London to buy two bicycles – "one man's and one lady's" – which Ursula is to bring along. Each bicycle needs to have a "detachable motor, which can be fixed to any bicycle". When Jones reports Ursula's arrival at Lydda Airport February 20, 1952, he writes: "The journey did not seem to have worried her at all and she appears to be as fresh as a daisy ... Her bicycle and heavy luggage, which have been sent by airfreight have not arrived yet but we expect they will be here in a few days." Perhaps a little inaccurate with the singular: "Her bicycle"! It would have been more accurate to write: "Her and my bicycles" or "our bicycles". In mid-August Ursula writes: "The Minimotor is a great boon and has not let me down yet." And she sends a greeting to that year's Summer School.

What is Canon Hugh Jones up to? Is there a romance under way between him and young Ursula *before* she arrives in Israel? I do not know but I note that eight months after Ursula's arrival, Jones announces that the two of them have become engaged. If not before then at least now we witness a love story, a story about how Ursula, who on her arrival appeared to be as "fresh as a daisy", becomes Canon Jones' "daisy". This caused some problems between Jones in Jerusalem and the headquarters in London. It was a matter of principle. Seen from London's side there are rules and regulations to be considered.

On October 29, 1952, Jones sends a typed letter to Curtis: mission business. But on the back of the letter he adds in his own hand: "Ursula & I have got engaged – needless to say we are very happy ...". In a letter of November 23, 1952, he apologizes for the way in which he informed them of this: "I am really sorry I put you in a predicament by disclosing this news amidst a whole lot of Mission material: – very stupid of me." The day after, November 24, he writes: "Our engagement was announced in the Jerusalem Post today ..."

And Jones continues: "You will be interested to hear that the matrimonial fever is spreading among the Cathedral Canons, as Canon Every has also found a lady-love..." He, Canon Edward Every is "being permanently in the seventh heaven, making him very forgetful of mundane matters." As when Canon Every forgot his picnic lunch en route to Haifa. Every had visited Jones at Christ Church and Jones walked him to the taxi station. Here Every discovered he had left the picnic lunch at Christ Church. "I rushed back for it", Jones writes, "and after a desperate search found it at long last on a stool in the lavatory, which was his last port of calling before leaving here!!"

Do not say that research in old mission archives is boring!

Also Hugh Jones is "in the seventh heaven", even if he does not use the expression about himself. Already in November 1952 he tells that the wedding is scheduled for "soon after Easter" – whether CMJ's rules and regulations approve of it or not. As a reply to the criticism that has been levelled at him, he makes an "interview" with himself on December 29, 1952, and sends it to Curtis in London. There is humour and sarcasm in it but no doubt: He wants to marry his "daisy". And this can only happen too slowly. This is his letter to General Secretary Curtis in extenso.

Rules and regulations vis-a-vis love

English Mission House,
P.O. BOX 191,
Jerusalem.
December 29th, 1952

My dear Bill,

Being a great stickler for rules and regulations! the contents of your letter of 19/12/52 have naturally caused me considerable concern and alarm.

I immediately arranged for an interview with myself on the matter of my proposed marriage to Ursula Nehab and at once began to take myself to task for not having paid due attention to the rules forbidding the marriage of missionaries before the completion of their two years of service. I said to myself that under the circumstances, of course, it would be necessary to delay the affair for another year and after all what is one year more or less anyhow?! When suddenly an accusing voice boomed in (it must have come from my rational self) saying, what! Delay the wedding another year, what are you thinking of! You should have taken this step at least 10 years ago and now you talk of postponing it another year. Too absolutely absurd. You will be an old dodderer before you get spliced, if you go on at this rate.

Well, you can imagine my dilemma. There was my conscientious stickling for rules and regulations on the one side and the voice of my rational self on the other. What was I to do? When suddenly the atmosphere cleared, as a legal voice was heard coming all the way from the depth of the C.M.J. Headquarters in London, saying, “my dear chap, don’t you know that your fiancée was never asked to sign a contract in London before going to the field, and therefore the whole blooming business about rules and regulations is baloney”. Well, this was a surprising situation. I cannot believe that the London Committee, who are such sticklers for order and rules and regulations could knowingly let my fiancée come out without signing a contract, unless they had some premonition or presentiment that she was either going to leave them or get married so quickly, that it would have been a waste of time to sign a contract anyhow.

The net result of my interview with myself is, therefore, that, there appears to be no legal grounds standing in the way of an early marriage. Nevertheless, always being of a humble and obedient nature, I dutifully submit the account of this interview with myself and request you to bring it before Committee and crave their indulgence on an early wedding, i.e. about middle of April.

I feel sure that if they agree on principle to the marriage, they will easily find a way round the rules and regulations as indicated in my own interview with myself.

Meanwhile, as you conclude in your letter, arrangements for the wedding are going ahead, if not exactly “apace”, yet with “due decorum”, as befits the Head of the Mission. Please, however, do not breathe a word of this to the Committee as long as the case is “sub-judice”.

We hope, however, to announce shortly the day of the wedding but for the sake of good order, I should be very grateful to have the Committee’s decision to go ahead before finally announcing the happy day.

The reverend
W.A. Curtis,
16, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2

Yours ever,
Hugh Jones

Love prevails over strict rules

The wedding between Hugh Jones and Ursula Nehab took place on April 15, 1953, in Jerusalem in the presence of about 200 guests. The headquarters in London writes about this in *Jewish Missionary News*: "All members and friends of C.M.J. will unite in sending them their warmest good wishes and will pray for God's richest blessing on their life together in His service." The discussions prior to the marriage are deposited in CMJ's archives. And that is how this should be.

As Mrs Jones Ursula took part in the mission activities. The marriage was blessed with two daughters, Ann, born in 1954, and Rhoda, born in 1956. After 11 years of marriage Hugh Jones died in England in 1964 after a rather long treatment for his illness. Ursula Jones returned to Israel and her two daughters, who had been left there during their father's state of disease. In 1965 mother and daughters settled in England. Ursula was offered a job at CMJ headquarters. She worked here until she retired in 1992, bringing the total number of years which she worked for CMJ to forty.

We invited Ursula Jones to participate in this LCJE conference at High Leigh. Pushing 85 she had to decline. Would she have revealed the whole and full truth about when the romance between herself and Hugh Jones began? I do not know. Nor is it really relevant. There are things that belong to the private sphere and which do not concern others. The reason why I have told a little of this love story is that there are principles at stake between the mission worker and the mission society. In this case love prevailed over the mission society's rules and regulations.

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love," writes the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 13:13). The next time I, as a leader, have to handle a "situation" where on the one hand there are rules and regulations to consider and on the other hand what is good for *both* the person in question *and* the society, I will think of this "situation". And think of love. Love that can overrule rules and regulations – for the benefit of all parties involved.

Maybe I should have these words framed in my office: "And now these three remain: rules, regulations and love. But the greatest of these is love."

Select bibliography

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The correspondence between Hugh Jones and W.A. Curtis, cited above, is deposited in Bodleian Library, Oxford, dep. CMJ, c. 219 and c. 220.

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