

## **My First Week Of Work by Leon Moss**

I began work on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1978. After 5 months in the *mercaz klita* I was bored and ready to work and confident that the Hebrew I had learned was enough to get me through any situation. I found a job at a small engineering company in Jerusalem that had just been awarded the management of a new construction project running to hundreds of apartment buildings. I was a 46-year-old site supervisor. The two partners in the firm were nice enough guys, slightly older than I and between them could raise twenty or so words in English. So when we spoke to each other they did a lot of nodding at my English and I nodded at their Hebrew, meaning no one understood anything.

The office where I sat was a corrugated iron shack. A far cry from my wood-paneled office in Johannesburg but I reckoned I would manage in it, new country and all. There was water from a tap at an adjacent road. My first job every morning was to fill a bucket from the tap and take it to the office so I would have water for the day. Inside the office was a table and one chair - mine. Building plans were kept in rolls standing in cardboard cartons in the office. Hundreds of rolls with no visible markings or names, meaning I had to un-roll and re-roll maybe hundreds of rolls if I had to look for the plans of a particular apartment.

On the other side of the road were buildings, all occupied as far as I could see, by very religious people – lots of black suits and skirts. I never crossed the road and they never crossed the road.

I had to supervise 5 or 6 buildings that were in the early stages of construction. Each one had an Arab foreman who spoke fair English, making things easy on site. After the third day one of the bosses called me over and asked how I was managing.

“Everything is okay,” I replied, “but I am having a problem with the Hebrew. I never learned any of the words they use.”

He looked puzzled for a minute and then he brightened and said, “The foremen are Arabs and they speak Arabic. The workmen are Romanian and they speak Romanian. You no speak Romanian?”

Another couple of days passed and it was Thursday. Again the boss called me over. “Tomorrow you are here! Only you!” It was an order not a question.

“Okay!” I replied. I felt quite pleased with myself. I am to be in charge of the whole site by myself. Pretty good after less than a week on the job! So on Friday morning I stopped at a *makolet* and picked up the Jerusalem Post to see me though the morning. There is no work going on. There is no phone in the office. What am I going to do?

At about 10 there is a knock at the door and I yell “Come in”. It is an Arab and I can hear the engine of a large truck idling outside. He is the driver. And he doesn’t speak any English. But by pointing and using some strange sign language gets me to understand that he is delivering a load of sand or stone and where should he dump it?

I look at him over the top of the paper and point out the door, “*Sham!* There!”

“There?” He seems surprised.

“What’s the problem, Mack?” I ask. “Dump it there! Up against that pole.”

Again I get the surprised look “You sure?”

“Of course, I’m sure! Go! Do it!”

He nods and smiles at me and goes to his truck. I hear the contents sliding out and a few minutes later he comes in with the delivery slip in his hand to get my signature. I sign, he leaves and I get back to the crossword.

An hour later the door is wrenched open and the opening is filled by a huge bearded man dressed all in black. And he is shouting. I put the paper down and stand up.

“Boh!” he barks. I understand. This is a word I know from the *mercaz klita* lessons. He wants me to come outside.

He is standing there, his face, or what I can see of it, is purple. He is pointing. I look and see the pile of sand that the nice Arab dumped and sticking out the side of it is a four-inch diameter metal pole to which is attached a thin wire.

The man is screaming and shouting: “*Ha-Eruv! Ha-Tchum Shabbat! Mah asita lanu? What you did? Vos hos tzu geton!*”

I never explained to my bosses why I left work early that day. And I never explained the black tire marks on the road left by my brand-new tax-free car either. The wheels always spin when you slam your foot down on the accelerator...

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