

**The Bonfire Gangs; A Story for Lag B'Omer
By Hagit Aharonof**

Chapter One which will tell the story of two gangs and their hideaways.

In the Hashalom neighborhood there are two groups of children: one group of younger children and one of older children.

The older children are fifth and sixth graders, and they call themselves the Maccabees. The younger children are third and fourth graders and they call themselves the Paratroopers. All year the groups get along well enough with each other. But as Lag B'Omer begins to approach, something seems to happen to this good will.

Why is that?

It's all because of the wood for the bonfire.

The moment Passover is over, the excitement begins. Everyone starts getting ready for the Lag B'Omer bonfires. Every day after school the children of both groups meet, divide up into smaller teams, and go out on their mission – gathering wood for their bonfire.

Where do they go to look for wood?

That is a secret! Where to find wood is the confidential secret of each group. And there is another secret that they will never reveal.

Their hideaway.

What is a hideaway?

That is where they take the boards, branches, and broken-down bits and pieces that can burn which they have collected, to keep them safe until the great event: Lag B'Omer.

Chapter Two, which will tell of the “brilliant idea”.

This year, like every year, when the children returned to school after Passover vacation, they immediately organized themselves to collect wood for the bonfire.

- I have a great idea, said David.

Everyone's ears perked up.

-We'll knock on people's doors and ask everyone in the neighborhood if they have any old junk they are planning to throw out.

-And then what? asked Alon.

- And then what? Davd imitated him impatiently. He thought it was all very obvious.

We'll ask the people to save their junk for Lag B'Omer, and then we will pick it up from their house as a service – straight to our bonfire.

- Terrific, Ricki said happily, and I have another idea – the shelters.

- What about the shelters? the children all asked in a chorus.

- Ricki explained: There are many people who keep old furniture and junk in their shelters, and that is a bad idea for two reasons: First, if they ever G-d

forbid have to use the shelters, there won't be any room for the people. And second, when the shelters aren't kept neat and clean, spiders and mice go live in them.

Everyone shuddered at that thought.

- **I suggest, Ricki continued, that we volunteer to clean out the shelters and that way, we will "earn" some broken-down furniture for our bonfire.**
- **That is a brilliant idea, said Tami.**

So the Paratroopers split up into two smaller groups: one group knocked on peoples' doors and the second group spread out through the neighborhood looking for sticks, branches, and boards – anything that could help a bonfire burn better.

Chapter Three will tell how to set up a junkyard

Ricki's idea was a very good one. The people in the neighborhood agreed to the plan and the neighborhood looked like it usually does before Passover. Old mattresses, broken bookshelves, chairs that were limping on three legs and whose stuffing was coming out, and all kinds of other "great finds." Now the children had a new problem. They had to find a very large, safe hideaway.

- I think, Dan said choosing his words so the others would listen – I think that the hideaway should be at Anat's house. First of all, because they live in a big house surrounded by a fence, and no one would dare go into their yard without permission. And secondly, because of Thunder, their German Shepherd dog. We know that Thunder only barks but the Maccabees don't know that. They'll get scared and they won't dare go near our "collection". All of the children agreed with Dan.

Anat asked her parents for permission, and they said yes.

One week before Lag B'Omer, no one could recognize the neat, carefully-tended yard of the Lavie family (that was Anat's last name) .

Piles of junk towered high, almost hiding the house. Everyone waited for Lag B'Omer but Anat's mother-waited most impatiently of all. Every time Anat's mother met one of the wood-gathering gang, she would sigh and say:

- **I have seen many things in my life but I never lived in a junkyard.**
- The children smiled sympathetically but it never occurred to them to look for a different hideaway.**

Chapter Four, which will tell of a mystery

Six days before Lag B'Omer, the children went to inspect their "junkyard" (that is the name Anat's mother gave to their yard).

- **Guys, where was that old book that Mrs. Fisher gave us? Adi asked.**
- **That's right, where is it? some of the children wondered.**

- **-Hey, what about that giant log that Yoni and I dragged all the way back here? It's gone, too – Dan yelled from the other end of the yard.**
- **-And the Cohen's broken bed—I think it's also disappeared –Ricki said as she went on searching.**
- **And indeed, the pile of junk really looked smaller. The Lavies' house could be seen again. Now, no one could say that the pile of junk nearly blocked out the entire house.**
- **I don't understand, Anat said. – How did someone dare go into our yard? Thunder barks at anyone who comes close.**
- **Who could have done a thing like that?**
- **It must be the Maccabees, said Alon angrily.**

Chapter Five, which will solve the mystery

Anat is a fourth grader and she is a member of the Paratroopers. Her brother Avi is a fifth grader and he is old enough to belong to the group of older children, the Maccabees.

Anat and Avi are not just brother and sister. They are also really good friends. They usually don't keep secrets from each other.

Now on the day that the wood disappeared from their yard, Anat felt that that Avi was acting very strangely.

Avi, who was usually a very active, outgoing boy, barely answered her questions. He didn't chat with his friends; he didn't joke around. He seemed to have turned into a different kind of boy, a sad one.

And when Avi is sad, the whole house is quiet and sad. Anat was worried and she decided to find out what was happening.

- Avi, what's the matter?

Avi woke up out of his daydream. Anat was standing right in front of him. He saw that Anat looked very worried.

- **What's bothering you? Are you angry at me? Are you in a bad mood because of school? Tell me, Avi, I promise not to tell anyone.**

Avi looked down at his shoes, and said:

- **Anat, I have a terrible secret. Since the afternoon, I've been thinking it over and I don't know if I should tell you or not. Well, I shouldn't tell you. But I feel that I have to.**

Avi took a deep breath and went on:

- **The Maccabees stole your wood and I helped them. I didn't have any choice. You know what I mean... I cooperated with them. I tried to tell them that it wasn't right and that it was really stealing. And there were other kids who also thought it wasn't right. But Yakir, he's the head of the gang, decided that we didn't have enough wood. He said that we weren't really stealing...**

Avi was embarrassed. A red blush slowly spread over his face. His head was down and his eyes darted back and forth, as if he was looking for something in the cracks in the floor.

- **We have to do something, Anat. We just have to. But what can we do? The wood is already in the Maccabees' hideaway, and they won't let me bring it back.**
- **Suddenly Avi's eyes lit up:**
- **I know – he said happily – I think I have the solution!**

Chapter Six: All's well that ends well

Two days before Lag B'Omer, David received a letter in the mail. This is what was written in the letter:

**To David Ron
And all the Paratroopers**

**We the Maccabees invite you to the bonfire of the older kids. If you want, you can bring your wood, and we'll make a really huge fire.
We are bringing the refreshments.
You bring the good mood. And bring a 'We excuse you'.
If you don't get it- we'll just say it straight out – we took your wood and we're sorry.**

**Please forgive,
And see you at the bonfire.
The Maccabees**

So what happened in the end?

The Paratroopers naturally agreed because the older kids had never let them come to their bonfire before.

The very same day all of the wood and broken-down furniture was taken out of the Lavies' backyard and carried over to the big empty lot at the edge of the neighborhood.

The Maccabees brought their collection of junk, too.

On Lag B'Omer, the bonfire burned until the next morning. There are those who say that there was enough wood left over to save for the bonfire the following year...