

Photograph by the Jewish Agency. Courtesy of the Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem



The timeless impact of these remarkable women is revealed through their stories—compelling accounts of real life heroines who lived in extraordinary times. They seized the moment with passion, dedication, and determination.

Israeli heroines



Hadassah The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
Hadassah Community Education/Outreach Department
50 West 58 Street, New York, NY 10019
phone: 212-303-8042 ■ e-mail: communityoutreach@hadassah.org

Israeli heroines

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Israeli heroines

overview

On the occasion of Israel's 50th Anniversary, Hadassah commissioned Dr. Dana Arieli-Horowitz of the Department of Political Science, Tel Aviv University, Israel, to interview eleven Israeli women to share their thoughts and their stories. In reliving the days and months in 1948, they share their memories, their lives and their histories with us.

The translations may at times appear awkward, but they reflect the accuracy and intent of the speaker. These are compelling accounts of real life heroines. Through each individual act, the efforts of these women and hundreds like them, helped a nation achieve its dramatic place in history. Their timeless impact is recognized in their extraordinary stories. What is it that makes a heroine? Is it the time, the place, the individual? What essential factors converge to define a unique moment in history? Here are exceptional women living their lives in extraordinary times. They seized the moment with passion, dedication and determination. Here then, are their stories.

programming

Sharing stories is an integral part of how we transmit history and link one generation to another. Use this material to educate, engage and involve your members and the larger community.

topics and questions for discussion

- Israel continues to remain in the forefront of the news through all the years and Israelis continue to live each day facing the ongoing issues of security. How different do you think today's news is from that of 1948? Do you find any similarities or differences? Is there an analogy between 1948 and 2007/08?
- Where were you when the State was established? Had you been born yet? Were you aware of what was happening, or have you learned of it from parents, school, books, etc.? Where were you in 1948 and do you have a story to share?
- Those born before the State of Israel came into existence and those born after 1948 have different perceptions and differing views. Those born after 1948 have never known a world without the existence of the State of Israel. How is this reflected in one's passion and commitment to preserving the State and in one's volunteer and philanthropic expressions? How does it define each of us as Jews?
- Is it the time, the place, the individual? What factors converge to create extraordinary stories? Are these factors evident at the heart of any noteworthy event?
- Could you have done what these Israeli women accomplished were you in that place and time? Have you had similar life experiences that shaped your life? Can you share them?
- Women played a pivotal role during this period of time. Many emerged as political activists, journalists, writers, politicians. Do you think young women today are prepared intellectually and emotionally to take on similar experiences? Discuss.

- Women were personal witness to war. They fought for survival and saw friends and family killed. Against that backdrop, they also struggled with their feminism. Do you find that surprising? Discuss.
- These are women who lived through the Holocaust with varying experiences. Then they fought for survival again to help bring about the State of Israel. Can you grasp these life experiences in terms of your own life?
- Women joined with men in giving up their individual rights for the sake of the collective. They often noted that this was difficult but they had a sense of national pride and determination. Discuss the socialist philosophy upon which Israel was founded and compare that with Israel today and its entrepreneurial spirit.
- Do you perceive the State of Israel as a refuge for the Jewish people? Is the existence of the State imperative for your life as a Jew in the Diaspora? Why do we need the State of Israel? Do you think that in this global society, Jews can live in safety and security without the State of Israel?

meetings, community events, study and book groups

- Invite an American and/or Israeli woman born after 1948 along with women who preceded the State to bring their experiences and their reflections to the group. Perhaps you have a member who lived in Israel in 1948 and can share her stories.
- Israelis have been viewed as a macho society. These stories reflect a world in which women are examining their feminist thinking. A university professor could offer a historical background presentation which could precede a discussion of women within this society.
- Hadassah study groups and books clubs offer unlimited opportunities. One of the books you may select this year as we celebrate Israel at 60 may relate to some of these issues. Use the stories and discussion questions to enhance and augment your book discussions.

hands-on and at-home activities

- Bring these stories and readings to senior residences. Encourage the residents to share their own feelings and experiences during 1948.
- Remember, too, you may have a story to tell. Write your own essay about where you were and what you remember of that time in history.
- Encourage older members of your family to share their reflections and memories of that time in their lives. Record their stories to share and transmit to future generations.

Shulamit Adler Aloni

Lawyer, politician, author, public activist; born in Tel-Aviv; studied at youth village Ben-Shemen, graduated from Teachers' College, Beit Hakerem, Jerusalem, and Law Faculty, Hebrew University; married to late Reuven Aloni, 3 sons; Member of Knesset 1965-69 (Mapai), 1974-1982 (Citizens' Rights-Ratz), joined Labor Party as Knesset Member 1982; Minister Without Portfolio in the first Rabin Government, 1970s; Minister of Education and Culture 1992-1993, Minister of Communication, Science and Arts 1993-1996; founder and chairman of Israel Consumers' Council for four years; author: The Citizen and His Country, Children's Rights in Israel, The Solution—From the Country of Law to the Country of Halacha (on religion and the state in Israel), Women as Human Beings. Lives in Kvar Shmariyahu.

July 1998

I grew up in this country in Tel-Aviv [Interviewer's note: Every question about her parents' home and its atmosphere is met with referral to her autobiographical books.]

Do you remember what was it like in the country before the establishment of the State?

I remember how we collected money for *koffer ha-yishuv* [redemption of the yishuv]. I remember, when I was a small girl, the manhunt for Yair Stern, the execution of Shlomo Bar-Yossef. I remember debates on whether one should die for the country or live for it. I even remember myself in the classroom when we talked about the civil war in Spain. I remember the events, I sure do. I remember Tel-Aviv. I remember the campaign for Hebrew [locally made] products, how people would overturn Arabs' wagons laden with eggs, food, or rubbish. I remember the carriages riding from Jaffa to Tel-Aviv.

Any special event?

The period before the establishment of the State was that of the Second World War. In my book, *I Couldn't Have Done it Differently* I give a full description. I was under [the] deep impressions of the first reports on the events. I was in Ben-Shemen then. Both of my parents served in the British army and the news would reach Ben-Shemen. This made a lasting impression on my state of mind, on [my] struggle for human rights, and so on. When I was 14, we were drafted to the Hagana. It was called Gadna then, supposedly. We swore [the oath] on the flag, the Bible and the gun. You'll find the same story with everyone.

In my previous conversation, with Esther Raziel, she recounts similar things. She underwent similar process, but the direction was different.

She was with Ezel [Irgun Zva'i Le'umi, National Military Organization]. She is also much older than I am. She was ahead of me. I was with the youth movement of the Labor, and my education was theirs. I was in Hashomer Hatzair, all other directions were different.

Do you remember where you were when the State was proclaimed?

As a matter of fact, I was drafted in December 1947, to the Old City under siege, in Jerusalem. It was there that I heard about the explosion at the Jewish Agency, the explosion

at Ben-Yehuda Street, and the proclamation. During the UN declaration I was in Beit Hakerem [in Jerusalem]. I studied at the teachers' seminary. My class of the David Yellin Teachers' Seminary in Beit Hakerem did not complete the last year of studies. Just two weeks ago we held a reunion and the graduation party that we hadn't held fifty years previously. All of us were drafted. Some were drafted right away, others later on, but our studies came to a halt in February-March, because everyone was drafted.

What part did you play during the War of Independence?

At first I was stationed in the Old City. The British did not let the Hagana people leave. I left on teacher's papers. We held two schools and defended ourselves. We held our own during bombardments and made our own weapons ourselves. This was one period. And then my [boy] friend was killed at Har Tuv and the British moved me out before the city fell.

Later on I moved to Tel-Aviv and for a while worked with refugees' children from Jaffa at a school in Tel-Itzhak. Afterward I was with the Palmakh. I took a platoon leaders course and was involved in training work for Gahal [foreign recruitment], training the new arrivals, teaching them about guns and pistols. Then the first machine-guns came in from Czechoslovakia.

I was their instructor and sent them to war. I went with them to Be'er-Sheva. I didn't go to Latrun with them. Later on, with the disbandment of the Palmakh, I started working with new immigrants in small towns and set up a school in Ramleh. Everything I did was a two-track enterprise.

Would you describe the culture you grew up in?

My parents were socialist Zionists. They came to the country alone, without any family. Other [family members] perished in the Holocaust, in Poland. Schooling in Ben-Shemen was very humanist, peace-oriented, and yet very patriotic—to fight for Jewish society, for rescuing Jews. Unlike the talk about togetherness, about "we" I spoke about the human being then.

In the State of Israel I was among the first, if not the first teacher of civic studies. This occurred under the influence of Ben-Zion Dinur, who was my director at the Seminary, and later served as Culture Minister. He said that the people must be taught the meaning of living in a sovereign state, since [the Jews] had always been afraid of the authorities. For this reason I went to study law and started teaching law and governance in high schools and in radio broadcasts. Later I became Knesset member.

What about your memories of the Holocaust and changes in your world-view?

The thing that was mind-boggling to me was that human beings were treated like animals. In my mind's eye I saw people like Einstein, being stripped naked and treated like animals. I swore then that I would fight for the dignity of man and his freedom. And this turned out to be my guidepost throughout my work, which wasn't exactly very popular in Israel. Golda Meir described my outlook as "liberal-bourgeois egoism." When I said "I think," she said: "There is no 'I think' among us, there is 'we think.'" This is the impact of the brutality of "us and them." Later on, the influence of M. Buber was felt—not us vs. them, but I and you, which carries a completely different significance, in which there is no alienation that makes killing possible, makes humiliation possible, makes racist attitudes possible. This turned out to be a recurrent motif of all my subsequent political work.

Who were the men and women who exerted deepest influence on you?

In literature I was very affected by two women, Rosa Luxemburg and Madame Curie. We are talking about literature I absorbed as a young woman. Among my teachers there were Martin Buber, Shmuel Hugo Bergman, Ben-Zion Dinur, Izhar Smilanski, who was my teacher, the writer M. Izhar. I think these were the people who made the most lasting impression on me.

What about prominent female personages?

There was a group of very mature women in the country who were the first to fight for the status of women in rabbinical courts. Rosa Ginosar, David Hacoheh's sister, who was the first lawyer; Rachel Kagan, who prompted me to go into politics; Irma Polak who launched the issue of consumers' rights in the country. She was very important to me and it was under her influence that I set up the Consumers' Council in Israel. Women from the Labor Party didn't like me because I wasn't "we," and I never took [the conventional] path of Female Workers' Councils. My relations with them were very conflicted, even though Baba Idelsohn, when she was dying and I came to visit her, suddenly poured her heart out to me as if I were her favorite pupil. As for Golda, it is public knowledge that at the time everyone admired her as State Lady, I said she was the most terrible and dangerous woman for the country, and that her power lay in her ignorance and sanctimoniousness. I never admired her. Among women in the country I loved Leah Goldberg very much, I went to her lectures, I loved her poems, I remember her lectures on literature. She was the only writer I knew at the time when I was a young woman and one could make one's influence felt. I also very much valued Ada Maimon, her tenacity, her war. I think that women in the country owe her a great deal in this regard, the fact that we can vote. Although she was a religious woman, she had a great deal of courage and tenacity. I valued her greatly, even though I didn't have any especially close relations with her.

What about your political outlook after the establishment of the State?

Shortly before the State was established I knew that my duty was to absorb the immigrants, to set up schools, and establish a society based on the rule of law. Already at that time I was angry over the fact that we didn't have a constitution, that we didn't move from the stage of a besieged, ethnocentric minority to a broadly based, sovereign society responsible for everyone. Since then I fought over the issue of state vs. religion, against rabbinical courts where women undergo humiliation, where they are regarded as belonging to a different status. This has nothing to do with political affiliation. This is a political world-view that projects the image of a desirable society. I was very active in this area. I also combated the phenomenon of dependence of an individual on [bureaucratic] machinery. From the day you are born until you die, you need officials. The officials here liked people standing in lines stretching in front of them. Here I fought an uphill battle against bureaucracy.

I entered politics in 1959, following an attempt to bring together all the factions of the workers' movement. Since Mapam, Ya'ari and Tabenkin didn't want [me], I joined Mapai, the young guard of Mapai activists. I worked with Shimon Peres, Moshe Dayan, Lova Elyav, Avraham Ofer—this group. I was the only woman there. Later I became Knesset member, due to my radio talks rather than my association with them.

Did you know that you would be the only woman for so many years?

No, I didn't. Also, I didn't look at myself as a woman, but as a human being. This came later on, after I studied the laws. I was pretty naïve then. The hypocrisy – machismo on one hand, and the religious domination on the other, place the women between the rock and the hard place – an almost impossible position.

At that time I started my campaign for the women's status and their rights both in the area of wages and in the area of jobs/positions. I could list many curiosities I witnessed in this context. For example, a man and a woman with the same job description, the same level, would be sent abroad for training. The woman was paid half of the man's salary. I asked "Why?" and they said, "Because she helps her husband." I said: "Why is that, she has children after all, you should pay her more." They said to me: "We didn't think that a mother of children under 18 would travel for training abroad." This is an example of something that I could redress – the wrong that could be redressed – but it shows you the mentality at the time. Or the fact that there were passports then, but only for a husband and his wife. The husband could travel alone, but not the wife; she didn't have a personal status as a legal entity.

These were times here of prejudices and difficulties which, when I think about them, they appear terrible. Later I worked with homeless youth and the Oriental Jews. I had radio talk shows in which I criticized the discrimination against Oriental children. I fought against administering IQ tests to Oriental children. A Yemenite child, for example, when shown a face without a nose, and asked to fill in the missing part, wouldn't draw a nose, but sidelocks. Then they said the child was not intelligent. "Excuse me," I said, "You take a test that fits American children, and administer it to other children. For this child the sidelocks are more important, because the nose is self-evident. Sidelocks are what he feels are missing." These things are very political; after all, even the price of eggs is a political issue.

What about a saddening event?

The day we were informed about the Holocaust, the horrendous murder, these films, the treatment of human beings as animals – all this threw some switch in my brain, leading me to think in a completely different way.

And mistakes?

Yes, the fact that we lack a constitution. A grave mistake. It amounted to [no more than] a putsch. We didn't undergo a metamorphosis from a besieged minority to a view of a responsible, sovereign country. We remained a coalition of political parties, a religious community. We dispossessed all religious communities. We are the only country in which the law sanctions segregation into twelve religious communities, so that each one of us is born into such a community, subject to the control of one of the most reactionary clerical establishments in the world. And every day it's getting worse, which is why the Orthodox can manipulate the both large political parties.

This is also what Esther Raziell said.

She is right; her party was in favor of constitution. There were two people who said, at the time the constitutional assembly became the Knesset, that this was a putsch. These were Eri Zhabotinsky and Hillel Kook, both representatives of the Herut party. On this matter Herut was right.

Did women affect your world-view? When did you become a political woman?

I had radio talk shows, and people came to me. I became their lawyer. I discovered the magnitude of discrimination against women. As I uncovered more, I fought with greater determination against it, just as I fought for the rights of all minorities, and woman is a human being, after all. But this issue, that woman does not need to become a man in order to have rights, as well as receptivity to the other, a woman, a homosexual, an Arab, everyone – this originated in my outlook on human rights. But, the most underprivileged and discriminated

against sector in the State of Israel, and I say “the most underprivileged and discriminated against” in the sense of the smallest public awareness. Why, here it is viewed as self-evident that women should be removed from the Knesset, the most secular institution in the world, in order to prevent them from singing [at a ceremony] because otherwise some Knesset members would get up and leave during the singing. Instead they bring ram horns. This is a classical example of a Knesset speaker, who has no idea what Knesset is. This was done by Dov Shilanski. This perception of women bespeaks of paternal attitude. The religious kept saying: “We don't respect women? Look at “Woman of Valor.” Come on, what is ‘woman of valor?’ “Her candle shall not go out at night. “She toils from daybreak till night, whereas he sits by the gate and sings her praises.”

Is it possible to see the establishment of the state from the perspective of women?

The period of establishment of the state proper – not quite. Because in every revolutionary generation there exists a full cooperation between men and women. Take India, Mexico, or even the United States in the 18th century. What you see in all these places is that revolution involves shared mobilization. Later things return to the petite bourgeois normal and women are sent back to the kitchen. They are bought jewels.

So, is there a women's perspective?

I don't know. I am in favor of an autonomous person. I don't see myself as belonging to any collectivity. I don't think that my perspective overlaps yours on every issue and matter. It could be that we share a common topic for debate, but apart from that I can't point out anything that we have in common. Possibly giving birth, which is unique to women and men, cannot experience it, despite the fact that there was a movie with this theme [*Junior* with A. Schwarzenegger]. A human being is autonomous – be it a woman or a man. Sometimes I think that women are wiser than men for the simple reason that Eve ate with great pleasure from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, whereas Adam had to be prompted to do so. Later, when caught, it was he who had to make up excuses. Instead of being happy he accused “the woman that you placed alongside me.” So, we can joke about it.

What question I should have asked, but did not?

There is one thing unique to Jewish and Muslim societies. In the Christian society there were nuns who worked as teachers and nurses, which resulted in a respectful attitude to an individual, unmarried woman. Here, things are very hard for an independent, unmarried and childless woman. I think that I had it easier in my career even though I worked very hard, that I could be more easily accepted by the public, because I was married and had children. Single, divorced or childless women are harassed. That this should happen in this country is very interesting, and this is also true among the Muslims.

But this is also true with regard to men, here and in other countries, isn't it?

But with men it is for different reasons. There are family rituals in general, but for a “golden boy,” if he is successful, life is not bad. A man with family is a guardian; he is a good father, a good husband. But a woman in Jewish and Muslim societies is not accorded fair treatment.

Yemima Avidar-Tchernovitz

Writer of children's books; born October 9, 1909, Vilna, Russia; immigrated to Israel 1921; graduated Herzliya High School, Tel-Aviv; Vienna and Berlin Universities; married to Y. Avidar, diplomat; published some 40 books for children; recipient: Zeev Prize for children's literature; Israel Prize, 1984; gained publicity as contributor to the Eden children's newspaper, New York, when 12; among her books Eight on the Footsteps of One (1945), the first detective story in Israel; took part in radio shows for youngsters and children Lived in Jerusalem.

February 1998

Describe the period preceding the establishment of the State.

I was married to a Hagana man who was kidnapped by the Lechi and hidden by them. After the Etzel blew up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, they decided to kidnap some of the leaders of the Hagana, and among them were Yosef and Zeev Yavitz. I remember that at five-thirty, they knocked on the door. Yosef opened it because he was sure someone was trying to give him an urgent message from the Hagana. Then ten members of the Lechi came in; all of us joined together. They said, "We've come to take you." Yosef tried to call because he already had a telephone. When they discovered that, they cut the line. Rama opened the window and shouted, "They're kidnapping Dad." The neighbors asked what the noise was at Rochel's because that's what we were called then, but they didn't do anything.

Yosef said that he wasn't going out of the house in his pajamas and he said that he had to take something. He went to the closet to take his prosthesis and the kidnapers thought it was a weapon. I asked them, "How do you dare attack a commander in the Hagana and to take him?" He put on his prosthesis very slowly, trying to gain time, but he didn't succeed. A few minutes after they disappeared with him, people from the Hagana arrived. Years later we found out that he was taken to a vineyard near Zichron Yaacov.

From the moment I married Yosef I was in the underground of the Hagana. Nothing else existed for me. He used to come for vacation in 1946, the period of the Black Saturday; after weapons searches, the British administration decided to arrest all the leaders of the Jewish settlement. Even Golda Meir was arrested. The leaders of the Hagana, in reaction, went physically underground. Yosef acquired additional identity cards and would change his appearance. He was called Yosef Biberman. That's what it said on his identity card, and his profession was real estate agent. He was also called Yosef Finkelstein, and his profession was an agent for agricultural machinery. That was the sign that appeared on the door of our house.

I personally did not disguise myself, but I was in the underground. I even remember that my daughter was with Vera, who was married to my brother, and Yosef came in dressed in one of his disguises. He patted her and she asked Vera who the man was. I remember very well weeks when we didn't know how he was. Actually, we didn't even know where he was.

Describe your memories of the period when you made aliyah to Israel.

My family made aliyah from Vilna in Russia. I was twenty-two when we made aliyah, after my studies in psychology with Alfred Adler. Yosef made aliyah in 1925. In 1931 his hand was

amputated in training that was conducted by the Hagana. He came to Vienna to recuperate and we were married in 1932. My family still spoke "Ivris" at home. I had an aunt in Ein Hashomrim. I remember perfectly that they asked her if they had a biblioteque [library] in Hebrew. I came with my family directly to Lower Galilee. We went from Haifa to Tzemach by train. We included my father, mother, and 'bubbeh' [mother's mother], Yaacov, my big brother, and Alex, my little brother, who was then eight years old.

My mother's sister married a man from the Shomer. They had already made aliyah in 1910 and settled in Bet Gan, near Yavneh. It was one of the IKA [official name?]. We lived for a year in Bet Gan, and in 1923 we moved to Tel-Aviv. In those years my father was the secretary of *Ha'aretz* [a daily newspaper.] We lived in Tel-Aviv on Nachmani Street in a building that was called Bet Hapoel [Worker's House] because it was built crooked. In 1928 my parents died.

Describe your family status on the period just before 1948. In your answer please refer to the economic situation, your parents' business, your own (if relevant), the number of people in the household, etc.

In 1948, I lived with Yosef and my daughters, Dana and Rama, in Tel-Aviv. My brother Yaacov lived in Jerusalem with his wife, Vera. In terms of conditions, we lived in an apartment in a worker's residence, a three-room apartment. One room was rented out, and no one felt poor. Everyone rented out a room in order to get a mortgage. In the kitchen there was a primus stove and a petilyah stove [types of cooking stoves that were fueled by kerosene] and an icebox. The ice wagon would come three times a week. We heated water with mozet, bricks made of sawdust with kerosene, and later on we had direct kerosene, which was considered an improvement.

There were no refrigerators, so we shopped almost every day, sometimes every two days. A quarter kilo of ground meat and a half a package of butter was enough for a whole family. We ate a lot of yogurt, produced from Tnuva milk. As I said, my brother, Yaacov, lived in Jerusalem. Because Josef was, at that time, the head of the quarter-master corps, he tried to get food to Jerusalem. Of course, he mainly tried to get weapons there.

In those years I was a kindergarten teacher and was employed by the Tel-Aviv municipality. I taught Haim Topol, the actor. I was a member of the kindergarten teachers' union, and I was involved in the kindergarten teachers' theater. The kindergarten where I worked was located in the middle of a leather factory at 89 Herzl Street. The first kindergarten I worked in was in North Tel-Aviv in the sand. Bina Ofek was my pupil in the kindergarten. We didn't have any toys in the kindergarten. We used to invite Professor Shor to play the neighbor's piano opposite the kindergarten. He used to open the window and that's the way the children listened to music.

I wrote my first stories for the children in the kindergarten. *Mickey is Mad at Mummy* [Mooky Tzur, yes, my brother, Yaacov], *Stories for Rama* [my daughter], *Kooshi and Nooshi Go to Jerusalem*, *Yoram's Arrow*, and others.

At that time I told everything to the children by heart and Yitzchak Alterman, Natan's father, was the inspector from the Department of Education. He asked me to collect them. Yitzchak had another kindergarten in Moscow, and I was educated there along with his son, Natan.

When I was twelve I wrote my first legend. It was sent to a children's newspaper, *Eden*, in New York. The first collection that I wrote is called *Stories for Rama*. I received thirty lirot from the bank, on credit, so I could advertise it. Within a month I had returned the money. Nachum Gutman did the illustrations for that first collection.

All the first stories that I wrote were for little children, and the following collections, especially *Eight on the Trail of One*, were written for young teenagers. Before the publication of *Eight on the Trail of One* I took a leave from kindergarten teaching so that I could finish writing it, and from then on, I never went back to kindergarten teaching and have mainly written.

At home we read Hebrew and six other languages. I know German, French, Russian. We read all the classics before we made aliyah. We came from Russia with a crate of books; it's important to read books. After we came to Israel, especially around 1948 when we lived in hiding, I read a lot in German.

Are you willing to share your memories of the Holocaust with us?

I remember that very well. Indeed, it was Yosef who brought home the famous note from Hanna Senesh, and we immediately believed the things that were written. Not only that, Vera, my brother's wife, had a sister who remained there, and she told us what happened from a firsthand source. We didn't know a lot about the dimensions; we definitely guessed.

Alex, my younger brother, during those years, was in the Brigade. The Brigade didn't actually fight, since the British didn't really want Jewish manpower, but at the end of 1944 he was part of a mission that freed the Jews from the ghettos of Europe. Among other places, Alex was in Bergen-Belsen, where he looked for and found Lisa, his wife's sister. Lisa knew Hebrew. What is shocking is that Bergen-Belsen was in British hands and they didn't allow people to be taken out and didn't issue certificates. I remember very well his description of his meeting with Lisa. He was a Jewish fighter in the Brigade, an officer, wearing a Star of David. Alex smuggled Lisa out in a truck. He brought her to Paris. She had a four-year old daughter as well as a mother who died in the camps.

What do you remember about the period just prior to the establishment of the State?

I lived through the events primarily as an accompanist. Yosef didn't tell a lot; he was very closed, but it was possible to sense the mood.

When the Hagana came out of hiding in June, 1948, I remember that everyone wore uniforms for the first time. There were Dori, Yadin, and Yosef. It was a very moving moment when everyone was finally in uniform and not in the underground. At that time I wrote a piece called, "They Waited Outside" about the wives of the commanders who accompanied all the events, which was published in *Ma'ariv*.

Between November 1947 and May 1948, the major struggle was over the roads. During Passover, 1948, there were two large bombings of Tel-Aviv, and one bomb fell on the house next to ours, but it didn't explode. I was on my way to buy sandals for my daughter Dana. On the roof of my house, where my second daughter Rama was, another bomb weighing 15 kilograms fell and didn't explode. Rama was hurt by fragments and thrown into the air by the blast. Neighbors told me afterwards that on her own initiative she started to go downstairs, and the neighbors yelled, "There's a girl up there." When I got back from Dizengoff Center with my daughter Dana, the whole road was destroyed.

I remember another event when the whole family was invited for the Seder during Passover 1948. In the middle of the Seder, they brought Yosef for a quick visit. Later on he told me that that was the evening the ship with the first cannon from Czechoslovakia arrived.

Where were you when the State of Israel was established? Can you focus on a specific event that you remember and that is connected to the establishment of the State?

I was at the Tel-Aviv museum with Yosef when Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the state. When Ben-Gurion met us in the museum, he said, "You are our guarantee." But during the actual event, I and the rest of the women were outside. They didn't let us into the actual declaration ceremony.

What is the main feeling you have when you remember that event?

The event that especially moved me was the vote in the UN. There were loudspeakers in the streets. When we heard that it passed everyone went out into the streets. From Pinati Café they brought out bottles of wine, and everyone joined into wonderful circles of the Hora. I was very moved. Yosef was pessimistic the whole time. He was afraid that fighting would start. Within only three days Yehoshua Globerman was killed on the road between Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv. He was a very good friend of ours. Afterwards, Yair Walzman was killed. He was the one who brought the note home for Yosef. That was very difficult. Yosef didn't cry, but it was very hard for us. It was the same with Yechiam Weitz who was killed on the Night of Bridges. I cried a lot.

How did you react to events? What happened to your family and people close to you during the War of Independence?

Within the immediate family we didn't have young people who fought. Yosef was already forty-two. Actually only Dalia, my brother Yaacov's daughter, was conscripted to the Yohanan Battalion.

It was taken for granted that one didn't talk and one didn't cry. All the meetings of the Hagana took place in our living room. And not a word ever escaped my lips. I knew all the names of the ships of the illegal immigrants. 'No Surrender,' 'In Spite of,' and others. There was a weapons cache in our house. Imagine that for years I knew it was there, but it never crossed my mind to ask where in the house it was. Afterwards, we found out that it was in the desk that my daughter Rama used to study.

I tried to do a lot from the social point of view. The people in the Hagana used to come to our house frequently, and I entertained them. There was a clear distinction between me and Yosef. I took care of the house and my literature, and Yosef was involved in Hagana affairs and managed the financial aspects of the house. I understood nothing about military matters.

Describe the connections with other members of your family that weren't in Israel.

Fortunately, the branches of the family that weren't in Israel weren't in Europe. Yosef's father had two brothers, one called Shmulik and a second called Chaim. Chaim was known as the 'young rabbi.' He wrote Chronicles of Religious Law and lived in America. The second brother was an academic and in the great feuds during the founding of the university he did not receive a position at the Hebrew University. He also lived in America. I corresponded regularly with him.

What were your feelings about the link of Diaspora Jews to the events in Israel?

I very much wanted to bring everyone to Israel. I was very enthusiastic about Zionism, and I

wanted everyone to be here. I remember a very definite letter from Chaim, from which I understood that apparently he would never come here to live, and I found it painful and a pity.

Was there any change in your daily life after the establishment of the State in comparison to the period preceding it?

Yes, of course. Yosef was now an army man with a regular salary and a driver. Economically, the situation was much better. At that time there was rationing, and from time to time food packages would arrive from America. We never bought anything on the black market. We never acquired abandoned property.

In general, after the establishment of the State, we were no longer in the underground, and that was a big difference. Suddenly we were legitimate. We were invited to many public places. There were cocktails and public relations, not in the underground. Everything was so innocent. In the United States, for example, there were the Friends of the Hagana. The only thing that Yosef agreed to accept from them was his famous cap with a visor that he wore for so many years. When they used to come to Israel they stayed with us. I also contributed my part. In 1950 my first story was published in Betzaron. At that time I received the sum of 100 dollars and with it I bought our first refrigerator. It worked on electricity.

How would you describe your political position and that of your family in 1948?

Mapai, of course. We were party members. Yosef admired Ben-Gurion. For him, he was a god.

Did being a woman have an influence on your being politically active/inactive during that period?

I did not fight for women's rights. I was not a feminist. Although I was involved in the activities of the organization for working mothers – I wrote for Davar Hapoalot, a publication for working women—it wasn't because of feminism. I was a little disappointed that commanders' wives found themselves excluded after all their efforts. Children were the most important thing for me. I tried to make sure that there would always be children in the house. I saw myself as an educator.

Is there a particular event from the period of the establishment of the State that you remember as being basically mistaken? Or, in other words, can you remember any event which, if it had been up to you, you would have acted differently?

No.

Do you think that your perspective of the events of 1948, as a woman, is different than a man's?

It's simply not relevant.

Can you recommend other women who were at the central political and social pivotal points for an interview of this kind?

Perhaps Yona Etzion or Yehudit Shaltiel.

A personal picture/documentation of the period.

I'll be happy to do it if needed.

To complete this interview, is there any central point that we haven't related to?

No.

Geula Cohen

Fighter, journalist and politician; born December 25, 1925 Tel-Aviv; attended Levinsky Teachers' College, and Hebrew University (M.A. in Philosophy and Literature); joined Etzel 1942, and Lehi 1943, held posts in Lehi Youth and Recruitment Division, known primarily as radio announcer of underground Lehi station, arrested during broadcast 1946, arrested, wounded during break-out attempt, sentenced to 9 years, sent to Beth Lehem prison, escaped in 1947 and returned to her duties; after 1948 on editorial staff of Sulam, organ of Lehi veterans, on editorial staff of Ma'ariv for 15 years; Member of 8th Knesset 1973 (Herut), 9th Knesset 1977, chairperson of the Knesset Absorption and Immigration Committee; after peace treaty with Egypt resigned from Herut and founded Tehiya party 1979, Member of 10th Knesset (Tehiya); author of The Story of a Fighter 1972. Divides her time between Kiryat Arba and Jerusalem.

June, 1998

Could you describe the period preceding the establishment of the State?

[Refers to her autobiographical book, The Story of a Fighter, 1962.]

What was your family like on the eve of the events of 1948? Please, address the economic situation, your parent's occupation, etc. What did your family read in those years?

I grew up in a family of ten children. In 1948, after I had escaped from prison, I left home for good. As a matter of fact, I had not lived at home since 1943. First, I joined the underground and was on the run from the British, and, later on, I was arrested.

My parents' home was national-religious in many senses of the word. I have always said I was born into public assembly. My father was treasurer-general of Yemenite Jewry, and my mother had always been deeply involved in public affairs. I received education in involvement. Jewish traditions were preserved in our home. I remember very well that my participation in the activities of the youth movement was also marked by political-ideological involvement. You could say that I passed through natural national education.

We were rather poor, but after some time my father became a business owner so that I did not suffer want. I could say I lived in decent conditions even before I left home.

What did you read?

Like every girl my age I read everything I could lay my hands on. I don't think there was any special reading material in our house. Perhaps the Yemenite poetry of Shabbazi, which could be heard whenever my father returned from the synagogue and his friends would come and join him. They read also the songs of the Land of Israel, songs of love for Zion. If anything, it was foremost a culture of poetry. We studied the Bible a lot at home. I remember, my father used to hire a Yemenite teacher to teach us kids to read the Bible with Yemenite pronunciation. I remember we read Saturday portions extensively.

What are your memories of the Holocaust?

There are two things I can share with you in this regard. The first is a story, whereas the second is more of a political experience. I attended the Levinsky Teachers' Seminary, and every time the Jewish Agency would proclaim a Day of Mourning or a Day of Fast, after reports about Auschwitz started coming in. I remember that in my heart I rebelled: "Why day of mourning or fast? What's the point? Why not do something?" We argued with our teachers, but now I see it as the onset of my rebellion.

One day the literature teacher gave us an assignment of writing an essay on the subject: "What shall I tell the child on the day of victory?" At that time I was a third-year student, and the subject truly upset me. I wrote harshly-worded essay the essence of which was that I would tell the child that the victory was not ours, that we lost six-million Jews, that perhaps the world benefited, but we lost, without a doubt.

My essay set off a storm. I was expelled from the college. I am pretty sure I was the first forced to leave. I remember that the history teacher summoned me to him. One could see that he wasn't exactly thrilled with the task he had been saddled with. He told me I was being expelled due to suspicions of my affiliation with the separatists. I was expelled because at the Seminary they understood my views. You should bear in mind that at that time Ben-Gurion sought to oust the separatists [from the Yishuv institutions].

What do you remember of the period immediately preceding the establishment of the State?

Look, throughout my imprisonment, the possibility of proclamation of the State seemed like a distant dream. I thought that I would never be able to get married, would never have children, that my whole life had been vouchsafed to the underground. We all saw ourselves as lifetime soldiers. We recited lines like: "Only death releases from the ranks." In those days I was busy recruiting youth and sympathizers, I definitely was engaged in propaganda and political activities, but to say that I anticipated it? No, you can't say that.

When the British announced at the UN their intention to leave the country, something that we had striven to achieve, we were astonished. We sought to inflict damage on them, after all. But when it came we refused to believe. Not only that we were caught by surprise; we simply refused to believe. We felt as if the foundation of our lives had been taken away. There was a kind of frustration, the feeling we had just begun fighting the real fight, and now they simply take it away from us all? So we didn't believe them, we thought it was a ruse, a lie they spread to make the underground to break up. We thought they had said those things to make us stop fighting, but there was no truth in it.

Where were you when the State of Israel was proclaimed? Can you focus on a specific event associated with the proclamation?

I was at Mugrabi Square, together with everyone, next to the David's Shield Square in Tel-Aviv. The UN vote was announced over big loudspeakers. Everyone danced in ecstatic, joyous circles.

What do you feel today when you recall that event?

I had a difficult time taking part in the great merriment; I experienced a total split. On the one hand, I felt I had the right to be more happy than everybody else; through my deeds I hastened these events, after all, but, on the other hand, I felt that everything had been cut short too early, as if we could win more. There were a handful of us who declared war and

we just started gaining ground. Now, with the withdrawal of the British, we could not go all the way to the end. So, I had mixed feelings about all this, because the state did come into existence, we had won, we had been right, but, at the same time, we experienced frustration, since the borders of the new state amounted to a caricature, most of the Land of Israel was left beyond the borders, without Beth Lehem, without Shilo, what is now called Judea and Samaria, without Jerusalem. Completely indefensible borders. Without Jaffa, without Lod, without large sections of the Negev. Then the war broke out and, of course, some of the borders were corrected, whole areas captured and later settled, so that some correction did take place.

How did you react to the events? What happened to your family and relatives during the War of Independence?

[Refers the interviewer to her answers to previous questions and her biography.]

Can you describe the relationships with other relatives who lived abroad at the time?

We had no contacts with close kin abroad.

How did you feel about the involvement of the Diaspora Jewry in the events in the country?

I remember very well that during my imprisonment, as I sat on the windowsill of the Beth Lehem prison, I thought a great deal on this subject. I believed that when the borders would be opened – at that time the struggle was mostly over throwing the gates [of immigration] open – the entire Jewish people would start streaming in, that everyone would want to come.

The disappointment that set in after the War of Independence was tremendous. Immediately after the war was over, I thought to myself that there had been a terrible war, so that it shouldn't come as a surprise that people were not eager to arrive. And, in fact, only a handful came in. At this stage I thought, well, let it be. But later on, when nothing happened, I experienced a terrible disappointment over the non-coming of Jews. This was, in fact, my critical point, and, by the way, nothing has changed in this respect since then. It constitutes unforgivable sin, and, in my view, the root-cause of all the ills of Israeli society today.

Did you experience any changes in your daily life after the establishment of the State, compared to the preceding period?

Materially? No. As a matter of fact, not in any other respect either.

How would you describe your own and your family's political views in 1948?

My father adored Zabotinsky, I remember him describing his experience of having heard him speak. Mother was more involved in social affairs, she was definitely possessed of social-public conscience. She also helped Lehi a lot, in a personal fashion. For example, at the time of the underground, she herself was a soldier, I remember how she used to bring us mail during her visits to the prison. She hid it in her shoes, clothes, cans.

Did your political views affect, in your opinion, your reading of the key events of the times?

Of course they did. I described it earlier in answers to the previous questions.

Did your being a woman affect your political involvement or lack thereof at the time?

I knew I couldn't handle the gun as well as men could. I tried to do all the things the way they did, at least as well as they, but, of course, I had my limitations. We were all soldiers,

I was in combat all the time. During my underground activity I was in danger all the time. Even being a [underground] radio announcer was not all that simple, because in the event of capture I would have been in mortal danger. I am saying that we were all soldiers because the mortal risks that we took neutralized all distinctions between the sexes.

In the period of the establishment of the State, is there any event that you now regard as a cardinal mistake? In other words, do you recall an event that if it had been up to you, you would have made it turn out differently?

I must say that I have never been asked this question. There are many small things, but nothing critical. I certainly have no regrets over my joining Lehi, but as far as my conduct in Lehi is concerned, I actually can't recall anything of substance that later I thought I could have conducted myself differently.

In your opinion, does your perspective as a woman differ from a man's perspective vis-à-vis the events of 1948?

In those days women played a different role, they really did, without waving any feminist banners. We played important part in underground activities, and our being women had nothing to do with it. Some women managed to go out into battle together with men. I did not admire them. I remember Netiva Ben-Yehuda, for example. In my view such behavior carried no special significance. There are, possibly, some exceptional cases, such as that of Deborah the prophetess, who carried Barak Ben-Avino'am away, but this is rather quite exceptional.

Now it is clear to me that a woman, if she wants to, can be a fighter pilot. But, in all the wars that came later, these matters were of no significance. The entire division [of labor] between men and women [in military affairs] will no longer be relevant, since what will count shall be the button and not the actual field. A woman would be able to sit in a command room and press the button exactly like a man can. Physical condition and ability required of a soldier running in the fields will be rendered obsolete. The women's issue did not preoccupy me. I realized that there were some things I couldn't do. On the other hand, no man anywhere in the world has ever experienced the feelings of having an embryo growing in your belly.

Netiva Ben-Yehuda

Soldier and writer, born 1928 Tel-Aviv, Israel; after 1948 studied for two years in the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, art studies in England 1950-1954; in 1956 enrolled in the Hebrew language department, studying philosophy, Hebrew language and linguistics, Hebrew University, never received formal degree; conscripted to Palmakh 1946, completed course for sabotage and reconnaissance officers, took part in battles and operations of Palmakh, fearless fighter who demanded to be part of military operations in accordance with her skills and not her gender [nicknamed "the yellow devil" by the Arabs]; worked for the Labor Ministry for six years starting in 1965; after leaving the university spent the next 13 years studying spoken Hebrew, street language, slang and argot; author: World Dictionary for Spoken Hebrew together with D. Ben-Amotz 1972 [v. 2 in 1982] a huge bestseller in Israel; Blessings and Curses - Private Collection, 1984; three books on her days as Palmakh fighter Among the Sephiroth, 1981; Through the Thick, 1985; When the Country Broke Out, 1991. Lived in Jerusalem.

February, 1998

Describe the period preceding the establishment of the State.

Ask Meil Pail to describe the period. It's hard for me to do something general. I can only tell you that here around my neck I'm wearing something that saved my life exactly today, yes, today, fifty years ago, and by the way, exactly at this time.

What is it?

It's a pin of the hand grenade I threw in a battle. Since then I keep it on my key chain, and I never took it off. In those days, when a hand grenade worked for us we saved the pin. We would hang it on a pocket button. This pin is worth saving, but I wrote a whole story about that. It's hard for me to explain the period to you. It's hard to tell it in two sentences. Then, no one knew what was going to happen. No one knew what a fighting Jew was. Who knew what a Jew was who goes to battle with a brigade, with a battalion, with commanders, with a hierarchy.

No one knew if we'd be successful. I was scared to death. I knew that we were good at education. There was a system. Here were district managers. There was everything needed to create an education system in an independent state. But the economy was in the hands of the British, and we didn't have an army. We had only a few units of the Palmakh, and Ben-Gurion, as you probably know, couldn't stand our very soul. He wanted to break us up, but even before the break-up he couldn't stand us. Palmakh stands for strike forces. They were the commandos of general headquarters, an elite unit. Why did he have to break us up? We were under orders of general headquarters; we didn't revolt. It has to be understood that the feeling of success is not like anything that you can know. It wasn't like The Six Days and not like Yom Kippur. We were simply afraid; the fear was rational. It made sense. Try to imagine the

significance of the thought that all the Arab countries are going to invade Israel on May 15th. It's incomprehensible.

We were half a million here. We weren't 600,000; that's nonsense. A lot of people emigrated. The British offered a Cretan passport and even a free ticket to every Jew who stood in line. I remember that a friend told me about it and I refused to believe it. I had come back from the Galilee. I asked him to take me by car to the British Consul to see if it was true. You have no idea what a line there was. I felt terrible. The fear was so great that no one would remain here that we tried to comfort each other.

Describe your memories of the period when you made aliyah to Israel.

Not relevant.

Describe your family status on the period just before 1948. In your answer please refer to the economic situation, your parents' business, your own, if relevant, the number of people in the household, etc.

In 1946 I enlisted in the army. That is, in 1948, I was already out of the house two years. The family didn't know I had joined the Palmakh; we hid it from them. Nobody told; nobody told about what was happening to us. At the time I was the only one in the house who was enlisted. My big sister was in the British army, in the air force. She was part of the secret table of those who knew where the planes were. She served with the one who became her husband; she got married in 1946. My second sister served in the Palmakh, but in those years she was already arrested.

My parents didn't really know what I was doing in the Palmakh. I really didn't tell them, but I always had the feeling that they didn't really love me at home, so I also didn't bother to tell them. I don't remember that I had an argument with my parents about this or anything else, but I do remember very well that since I couldn't really stand my father, I didn't tell him what was happening to me. I never talked about everything that I did.

My father was a real genius. [Look at] everything that he did for Hebrew poetry, formed choirs. He formed the teachers' council for the National Fund, created the Bible Competition. He had a Ph.D. in mathematics, a man of vision. He taught in the seminary [teachers' college]. He established the youth movements. Then they were called clubs. I had a lot of respect for him because he knew a lot of unusual things, and with all that we weren't close. He knew the entire Bible by heart. He knew it backwards. I remember that once he came to visit my daughter, and she asked him why people said that he knew the whole Bible by heart. So he said to her, "So, bring the book." And when she brought it to him, he asked her to turn it to the last page, and he started to read it to her from the end to the beginning.

He had the genius and intelligence of those who start studying in the *cheder* at the age of three, and with all that he had a lot of qualities that I didn't like. I didn't like the dictatorship, the being judgmental, constantly knowing what was correct. I was never Mapai or Likud; I wasn't religious or anti-religious. My father was a Mapainik [member of Mapai], of course.

My mother wasn't educated at all. She was his wife, spent all her time cleaning. She was crazy about cleanliness. In her last years when she understood what a disaster her life had been, she got closer to me, and I think that is when she appreciated what I did.

Look I didn't really miss the closeness to them. In my childhood we lived with my grandfather and grandmother. My grandfather was my best friend in my childhood. He was called Ahahron Torkowitz. He was very modest, but actually he did a lot. He was one of the nine founders of *Hapoel Hatzair* [Young Workers] a member of the representatives committee that eventually became the Knesset. He was a teacher at the seminary [teachers' college]. He used to take the students on their visits to kindergartens.

I remember that every time he went to Jerusalem he would take me with him. He taught me to read at the age of three. At four I read fluently. I remember that I used to walk with my grandfather in the streets of Jerusalem, and when he met friends he would brag in the street about what a genius I was because I knew how to read. But I was, then, and still am now, shortsighted, and no one discovered it till the age of seven. My nickname at home was the 'blind one.' Understand, when they finally examined me, they found minus ten for glasses.

I remember that I was walking with him in the street and he met a friend and said to him about me, "She knows how to read." He asked me to read. But in Jerusalem the signs on the stores were terribly high; it was above the display window in a sort of arc, and first it was written in Arabic, and afterwards in English, and all the letters were transparent. So I didn't succeed in reading. And my grandfather asked me, "What happened to you? Did you forget how to read?" And then, lucky for me, a little boy in a kipa [skullcap] passed opposite me, and it said on his kipa "a good Jerusalem boy," and so I read that to him. And my grandfather burst out laughing, and he told that story maybe a thousand times, till I was sixteen and a half when he died. I had heard that story at least a thousand times.

At home, a lot of things were read. There were the publications of Mitzpeh and Schtiebel, where they translated Dostoyevsky; it was actually a terrible translation but we didn't know it. Even before that there were art publications, with diacritics. I read *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*; there were all kinds of books. We read a lot. There was no radio or television then. But when I was in England between 1951-1954 with my former husband, Avivi, he brought home all the great British physicists, and then I understood how rustic we actually were. Understand, my husband and I, till I fired him from that job, were considered highly educated in Israel; we read everything.

Are you willing to share your memories of the Holocaust with us?

It was terrible for us here. We didn't know; we didn't know anything. Look, when I was twelve, maybe thirteen, there were bombings here in Israel, in Tel-Aviv, next to Habima House. It was terrible because in the first bombing there were 240 deaths. Imagine that a plane crosses Tel-Aviv during the day, at four o'clock in the afternoon. That was when I saw my first deaths. I remember that the milkman was killed with his donkey, and it's sad to say that I cared about the donkey just as much as about the milkman. He was smashed, lying cut-up, and he continued to bray. I was in shock. During the second bombing, at night, in the same area, near Habima House, again people were killed.

I told you that because afterwards when I saw in the newspaper on the last page at the bottom that 9,000 Jews were killed, I suddenly understood what dead people were. Never in Israel, did they present it as a certain disaster. What was certain was the disaster waiting

for us if the Germans arrived from Syria and Egypt. Afterwards, when the bombings ended and the British also conquered Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, we understood for the first time.

In the years 1943, 1944, 1945, the Middle East was a paradise that never returned after that. The British brought all the sailors of Eastern Europe to live and to rest behind the lines. All the Americans, the Poles that received leave came here. There was prosperity, growth, grain surplus, and juice; it was impressive. In the background, people here and there said there was a Holocaust. Nobody related to it. So there was a Holocaust in secret.

I remember the great catastrophe when the first relative arrived. By the way, to this day it's not clear to me how he managed to come to Israel. He left the camps. His name was Arieh Kovovi. He was one of the first to arrive when the war ended. The British gave a few passports to individuals; I'm not clear on what basis he got one. He was Yodkovski's best friend. He arrived in July 1946. He and Dad sat day and night and talked in Yiddish and French. I didn't understand a word in either of those two languages. I kept asking them to translate for me. I asked Dad what he was saying, and Dad kept the descriptions from me. I was, at that time, a pupil in the eleventh grade. I don't remember my sisters; maybe they were at home; maybe my big sister was in the army. Our relative didn't know a word of Hebrew.

Dad translated everything for me. I pressured him terribly. And then everyone was in shock. Everyone who came to see him in the house would hear the complete story and go into shock. You could clearly see among your friends at the high school who was in shock and who wasn't. You knew who had heard first hand and who hadn't. The youngsters in high school never talked about it. Everyone swallowed it and kept quiet. But you could see on the faces who already knew and who didn't. After that the only cousin to survive arrived. He came to Israel with the illegal immigrants. He arrived and knew excellent Hebrew. Before 1945 we actually didn't know. Maybe we heard something partial, but we didn't imagine that it could all be true.

It influenced my desire to enter the Palmakh, to struggle against the British. Can you imagine what it meant to put people who had just gotten out of the camps into a transit camp in Cyprus? It was shocking. They were there for a year, maybe a year and a half. At the end the British even kept 1000 men of military age till the end of 1949 so that they wouldn't be able to help here in the Jewish settlement. Those people who were in the Nazi camps for five years were now in British camps. They all live in Negba. And that was Labour [the government in Great Britain].

What do you remember about the period just prior to the establishment of the State?

In the Galilee it wasn't so complicated. The guys in the Galilee had a lot of successes. Although in the beginning there were 'mistakes,' approximately in March the tank soldiers came to replace us in the kibbutzim.

Where were you when the State of Israel was established? Can you focus on a specific event that you remember and that is connected to the establishment of the State?

In connection with the 29th of November I have a terribly funny story. We were on a course for demolition officers for a month and a half. At the end-of-course-party, we were sixty to seventy young demolition officers with the most modern equipment for the times imaginable. And the explosions we used to do far away in the Negev, in Sdot Yaacov. We were in

Ruhama, which was outside British territory. We used to go there on foot and execute all the explosions. We had the party for the end of the course in Nir Am. In the morning buses came to collect us, and drop us off for a leave. And that was after we had partied and got drunk all night. The sailors used to bring alcohol. Understand that the people in the training [in preparation for settling on kibbutzim] didn't know what hard liquor was. There wasn't even sex. In the morning we got on the buses and came to Gedera, and all the people of Rehovot were the same, in white shirts with flags.

When we were about to enter Rishon Letzion, Gold Meir's taxi was ahead of us. Then some of the guys got down and called her "Golda." She got out of the taxi and asked, "Who are you?" They told her they were demolition officers, so she stopped to talk to us. How many demolition officers were there, then? We asked here, "Why are there flags and white shirts in your honor wherever you go?" Then she said, "It's not for me. Maybe we'll go inside. Maybe I'll make a speech." Then they said, "No, absolutely not. You tell us what happened, and we'll tell the trainees." Then she told us that on the previous day there had been a decision for the UN to establish the State.

You can't know what happened. We got on the bus again, we went a little further, and then Chaim Zinger stopped the bus and made us all get off. We went into the orange groves. Someone asked, "What will happen if the British catch us?" Someone replied, "We'll say we're doing orange research." Then he took Tolka [later to become Dr. Tzvi Arad, the director of Yad Vashem], his assistant, on the course. He took him aside and they conferred about what to do with the officers. It was clear that the war would begin in the morning. Then they gave us a lot of explosive material. We got on the bus again. Nobody spoke. From time to time somebody said aloud, "Well, let's start singing," and started clapping. It was amazing.

How did you react to events? What happened to your family and people close to you during the War of Independence?

In our family no one close was killed in the War of Independence. I personally have a bullet in my shoulder, but that happened two months before the war. I got shot by the British in the street. We were three females; my big brother was twenty-nine, that is past the age where it was even possible to think about him in connection with fighting.

Describe the connections with other members of your family that weren't in Israel.

People were killed and killed. And our friends were killed. Right from the beginning it became clear that we didn't have enough ammunition. Maybe we told it to the battalion commander. We met with Alon. We yelled, but we didn't think at all about the international aspects.

I remember that Mickey Stone came to visit the whole country, and he came to us in Migdal, also. And I remember that he was accompanied by Yigal Alon who was bragging that we also had women fighters. And then Stone's reaction was, "I don't believe it." Yigal shouted to bring over 'Tiva,'—that's what they called me then. So I came and I met Mickey Stone, and he, as an American general, said so much nonsense that I simply exploded. "You have to bomb from above," he said. He didn't understand at all that we had only three Pipers, maybe.

Was there any change in your daily life after the establishment of the State in comparison to the period preceding it?

There was a radical change because there had been a war. First of all, war. Day and night, one goes out to everything, one receives orders. From the 30th of November to the middle of May I was in the field all the time. There was war the whole time. There had never been such a time for the people of Israel. The females were removed from battle ten times. I remember that already at the beginning of December, they removed the girls from battle orders from above. There was an event when six soldiers were tortured. Nobody heard about all six. They heard only about the girl.

Look, I can tell you as a personal witness. I won't go into details because you won't sleep at night, but when a male is tortured it's a lot more difficult than for a female. Every time they would come and say to me, "Netiva, that's it, now you're being removed." Afterwards they would return and say, "Netiva, you're in." What could be done, it was an order. Maybe ten times they removed me and returned me each time. When I was not in the field, I was a guide. The next day there wouldn't be a demolition officer, so someone would come to me and say, "Netiva, now you're in the field."

Look, if you take for example the famous battle that I had with the bus, I remember that I met a girl there in the field. She was the commander of a division. I think her name was Specter. A few weeks ago she gathered a few of us together and brought us to the place where the battle took place. It was at the summit of Nebi Yesha that climbs to Mezuda. We waited for them there and when the bus came, we destroyed it. It was a response to everything they had done to us at that time. It's this week, exactly fifty years ago, on the 7th of February. Exactly now fifty years ago.

February, generally, was the most difficult month for me. Now when we met after so many years, we all remembered that at the top in the division that was waiting to ambush the enemy there was a girl called Bracha. Actually it was almost two months after there were instructions to remove all the women, and the fact is that she was there. Why did they put her in? Because there weren't enough combatants, and whoever was most fit, whoever was on the spot, was taken.

How would you describe your political position and that of your family in 1948?

I did not see myself as politically connected. In those years I had friends in Etzel, in Lechi, people who studied with me in high school, and they tried to influence me to go with them, mainly to Lechi. I didn't want to because I believed that there would be a war with an army and not with the underground. Absolutely because of professional considerations.

My father's dogmatism didn't bother me. I understood that there are people who know exactly what has to be done. I wasn't like that. Already in 1946, maybe 1947 when all the secrets of communism began to be exposed, I understood why I would never be a person with a rigid ideology. I'm not one who knows exactly what's right and necessary.

I think that if I had to be something, I should have been an American. But actually there's one central problem, and that's the problem that Americans have with black men. It's insoluble.

I'm not left, and I'm not right. I'm like the Americans, to open one's ears and accept, to listen. Immediately after I was released from the army in 1949, I started to yell that we had to free the Hebrew language, to stop saying what's wrong and what's not and to let the language flourish.

Then I was told that I didn't understand anything, so I went to study for a degree in Hebrew language. I finished all the course work for a BA in two years. Then they didn't agree to let me take the exams, so I got angry so I requested that I be allowed to continue studying. Then they gave me an MA program. I completed it in a year, and then they requested that I take the exams for the BA. It made me mad, so I didn't take the exams. And that's why I remained, formally, without a degree. Since I had studied philosophy, I understood the intention very well. I was and I remained skeptical. To accept the good, to reject the bad. During war perhaps it's necessary to be a dictator.

Did being a woman have an influence on your being politically active/inactive during that period?

It wasn't relevant, it was never relevant. I don't accept stigmas. I believe that everyone's decision should be made on the basis of the issue. Only in Hadassah's gynecological department should one wait according to one's sexual organs; in any other place it isn't significant.

No one in the Palmakh ever told me that I was weaker. There was really an ethos of equality. I think that the entire philosophy of this sort in the Palmakh came from the kibbutzim. It was a product of the training. After all, they were mainly children of the kibbutzim, the youth movements. The youth movements were very influenced by the kibbutz ethos. We were very influenced by equality, justice, socialism. Babble, I wasn't smart at all, I didn't think, I was considered stupid at home.

I remember perfectly that when I got my first mark of ten in studies, when the Hebrew University was still in Terra Sancta, I ran with it to Katamon and I told everyone I met that I had gotten a ten. And everyone asked me, "What did you think you deserved?" but I thought I was stupid. Look, I was already close to thirty. I didn't believe I was smart; at the most I thought everyone at the university was stupid.

Today, I'm sorry I didn't complete my education and become connected to one field. I can't say who I am. Am I a lawyer? No. Am I a philosopher? No. Am I an artist? No. Am I a writer? Not that either because I wrote all the books like the "writing of an eyewitness" and not literature. So, what am I? I don't know how to answer. A linguist, for sure not. I never make a mistake in Hebrew; I can correct everyone, but neither can I lecture in an organized manner of language.

Is there a particular event from the period of the establishment of the State that you remember as being basically mistaken? Or, in other words, can you remember any event which, if it had been up to you, you would have acted differently?

One mistake? Many more. I can't point to one event. Mainly in connection with battles. Those are, of course, life-and-death mistakes. Others don't count. There were casualties. Do you know what it was like to try and bring back from battle the bodies of people who had been in the Holocaust and were killed? You can't imagine what's involved, people without any identification on them, with only a number on their arm. Nobody knows to this day who they were. Tens. Yes, tens.

All that because of Ben-Gurion's mistake. He made the plans on a map of the National Fund. I have no way to describe for you what we went through.

There was a company commander who simply didn't sleep nights. He was killed later on. He couldn't grasp it. It was shocking and all because Ben-Gurion, who was a corporal, decided that he was also a general. Ben-Gurion didn't have enough people so he took a brigade that previously had been hanging around Tel-Aviv. They didn't have a 'green' [single] idea about battles. They walked around with half shoes and a cuff on their pants [without even proper uniforms]. He took everyone, people who had arrived three or four days earlier from Cyprus and put them into combat.

Nightly we used to disobey the orders of general headquarters, so as, each time, to bring some of the bodies back from the territory held by the enemy. At night we used to go out to release them, and during the day we used to sit with field glasses and see where the buzzards were. From them we knew where the bodies were. It was terrible. Of course, there were other people who were killed near me. There was also a friend who was killed next to me. It was terrible. Those were mistakes. One remembers events like those for a lifetime.

Do you think that your perspective, as a woman, of the events of 1948 are different than a man's?

Look, in the Palmakh, all the men were anti-feminist and didn't like strong women very much. I was, in fact, a champion at throwing an iron ball. In my youth I was slated to win an Olympic medal. So in the Palmakh whenever anyone started anything with me, I would ask him if everything was in working order under his clothes. And then when he got confused, I would say to him, "Look, first let's get undressed and we'll hand wrestle." Then I would win, easily. I would put down men—it was something. I had unbelievable strength. I was the best hiker, the best runner. Whenever a new platoon arrived, I would take them and show them how to throw a hand grenade. They never found a man who threw like me. The men really valued that.

Who are the feminine figures that you admired which you can remember from around 1948?

I never admired anyone. But there were women around, even a lot of them. There was Rochela Shtemp, who was with me in first grade in elementary school up to twelfth grade. There was Rachel Berrara, the physics teacher; she was wounded in the battle for Zfat. Since then she's limped. There was also Devora Flaum, who lost an eye in the battle for Atlit.

There was Dalia Mairi, who was the commander of the course and was absolutely okay. Afterwards, she was a member of Hulata; I don't know if she's alive. There was also Tzippi Neria, the mother of Yuval Neria. She was a medic. She had to fight. She was also okay.

There was Fat Ada, Ada Ben-Nahum, who got cancer. She was two meters tall. Fat. She was from Haifa; she also threw an iron ball. I remember that as a teenager I met her for the first time in a competition, so I ran to my coach and told him that I didn't have a chance against her. She was like the big Samoans. Ada was with the unit that went into Ramot Naphtali. On the 10th of May they encountered tanks. They lost their heads there. Ada grabbed the machine gun and fixed everything.

A personal picture/documentation of the period.

I have some pictures in my books. If you'd like, I can get them to you sometime.

To complete this interview, is there any central point that if we haven't related to?

You haven't asked at all about the sex. It's a very interesting point. It's very interesting because the films were more liberal during the period. After all, at the beginning of the World War there was kissing, at the most. And when the movies began to be more liberal it was surprising how much they didn't at all affect my generation. My generation remained virgins even at age nineteen, sometimes twenty. Women were also virgins. The ones who were free had a problem because in the Palmakh it was very conservative. They used to go with the old Mapainiks or with kibbutz members. I remember that I got very sick in my uterus from all the lugging and the weight that I carried into battle. I remember that I went to the gynecological department. I was there for a few days, and I was amazed at what I saw. Understand, let's suppose there are young girls from Jerusalem who started having sex and didn't have the most basic idea of what it was all about. There were condoms or other methods, it was called then "retreat," funny, but the Jerusalem girls didn't know anything about it. They were more permissive and they got pregnant. I met them when they came to have abortions.

It was a subject we didn't talk about, especially in the Palmakh it wasn't talked about.

I don't understand how we became so puritanical. How did it happen? After all, our parents' generation in the twenties was a lot more open. My mother's generation, the artists in Cassit, the stories alone are amazing. Or take, for example, the twenties in Nahalal.

And with us there was total puritanism. I never saw among us till much later stages, except for me, that sex existed at all. When I met the girls in the hospital, I understood that things happened. They were open to talk.

I lost the ability to give birth because of all the carrying. The doctors told me I would never be able to give birth. But I finally gave birth to my daughter.

Hava Brenner-Stern

July, 1998

Could you describe the period preceding the establishment of the State?

I am glad you started out with this question because only children believe that all that had existed here was a barren wilderness and then, out of the blue, the State was born. People kept going out to work, just as they had done before then, they read the same newspapers, there was a university here, also the Technion [Haifa Technological Institute], a railway, etc. What I am really trying to say is that there was continuity. Earlier this year I was asked to speak about the War of Independence in my grandson's elementary school, and I was really bothered by whether I would be able to make this point of continuity. It has to be kept in mind that continuity made the establishment of the State possible. It is important to begin this discussion with the years 1945-46, because it was then that the working settlement movement began, the Palmakh, *hakhsharot* [agricultural training].

I would like to emphasize the ways in which each one of us felt he or she contributed to the general effort. We, for example, worked two weeks and then trained for two weeks. It was obvious to us that one [work] and the other [military training] were interrelated, otherwise how could we have an army? We knew we had to make our own living.

It was different then. When a ship bearing illegal immigrants approached the shores of Tel-Aviv, everyone would go out in the streets to give the new arrivals a sense of belonging, to integrate them. It took me many years before I could part – in debates, not in practice – with the slogan: “For the sake of collectivity.” It was clear to everyone that things must be done if the homeland was to be built. The state could not be built on the foundations of individualism that holds sway nowadays. [Then] everything had to be collective otherwise we wouldn't succeed. Furthermore, when one thinks about those years, there was no one we could complain to, because, at long last, we didn't have a government.

What are your memories of your arrival in the country, if relevant?

I myself was born here, but I can tell you that my maternal grandfather arrived in the country in 1912 from Belarus. According to a story I heard, the entire township came out to accompany him to the nearby town with the railway station, from where he took a train to Odessa, and boarded a ship which brought him to the shores of Jaffa in 1912. My mother arrived at the age of 12, she was born in 1900. My grandfather was a fervent Zionist, but not of the Second Aliyah type. He went to live in Neve Tzedek in Tel-Aviv. He loved this country with the innocence of an honest man. So, as you can see, my mother came from the family of committed Zionists. Mutual help was a way of life with them; it was viewed as part of Zionism. To this day the quality I value most is honesty. My father, too, arrived in 1912, but from the Ukraine. He was of the Brenner family. His brother was Yossef Haim Brenner [renowned writer], also a Zionist. Yossef Haim Brenner wrote a letter to my grandparents, asking them to send the children, including my father, and he would take care of them. Because both of my paternal grandparents were Zionists, they consented. It goes without saying that Yossef Haim Brenner did not raise them, as he was preoccupied with his own affairs, but my

father, when he came here at the age of 14, was quite determined to get a job right away. He worked in vineyards and as a watchman. My aunt, Batya, who arrived together with him, was, later on, among the founders of kibbutz Eyn Harod. When my father came of age, he refused to get drafted to the Turkish army. He fled and lived with Bedouins who remained his friends for years afterward. Later, he was with the group that founded the Geshet Kevutza in Eyn Harod.

He met my mother in the small town of Tel-Aviv. He had been sent by Geshet to recruit young women, and he asked my mother to join. Both worked very hard for many years. In 1925 they married. One of the most moving stories has to do with his proposing to her. He was penniless, but he put her on a horse all the way from Geshet to Kokhav Harekhovot. Mother was scared out of her wits. When they ascended the mountain, he said to her. "Zelda, the whole country is in front of you," and proposed to her.

What was your family like on the eve of the events of 1948? Please, address the economic situation, your parents' occupation, etc. What did your family read in those years?

Look, my parents lived in a state of boundless innocence. Their understanding was of the straightforward variety: one must give everything one can to build a society. Take, for example, *koffer hayishuv*. It was self-evident that everyone should take off medallions and jewelry and give them, everyone to the best of his ability. By the way, to this day I don't have a jewelry box, and neither did my mother.

My mother and father were zealots of simplicity. Their ability to give agreed with my temperament; it may be that I was brought up that way. In any event, this attitude [of giving] was typical of the Yishuv as a whole. [My parents] never said no when someone asked them for something. If need arose, they put up another person in their one-room apartment, already packed with our family. Our devotion to some goal, or ideal, was what gave us strength. I think that I am among the last people on the left who until this day believe that everything is allowed for the sake of the ideal. But, it is important to emphasize that we were socialists, not communists.

In this context I must tell you a story: Daniel Sambursky, who composed songs, was my song teacher in elementary school. I was an excellent student. One day he wanted to see me. I was very much surprised since I was truly a good girl. I trembled with fear. But he just wanted to send a message through me to my mother that he would like to see her. I asked why, but he refused to answer. When my mother came to see him, Sambursky told her that I was very talented musically and too bad I wouldn't be able to develop my skills. He suggested that my parents send me to the conservatory.

My father was a worker and didn't have any money to pay for my piano lessons. I remember that when my mother told me the reason for her summons to Sambursky, she stressed that the previous month the Unemployment Fund and the Mish'an Fund had hiked their membership fees, and therefore the family wouldn't be able to afford to pay for my piano lessons. I don't remember myself getting mad at them. It was clear to me that I was not exceptional; if my parents paid for my piano lessons, what about my sisters? Besides, my parents were honest; they had faith. Because these things were so authentic, I harbored no resentment whatsoever. Like the Yishuv in general, we went hungry. I remember how, as a girl, I looked for a half-a-groschen coin to buy myself a falafel. I never found one. But, I must

stress that ours was not a psychology of poverty. When I had a dress sewn, for example, we never used a new fabric. There was no such a thing. They would unstitch my older cousin's dress, turn the fabric inside-out, iron it, and ask me what cut I wanted. It goes without saying that nothing could be made to my exact order, because the fabric had already been cut in the past, but for me this was a new dress, and I was happy for it.

I remember how my mother would make things out of nothing. She used cardboard to make wonderful board games. I loved to go with her to the market, carrying bags. After many years my father got a job with the Electric Power Company. Our economic situation improved. It's not that he made much money, but the workplace was very prestigious and the pay was steady. For us it meant a great deal.

What did you read at home?

We read everything that was translated into Hebrew. Every month the Shtibl Publishing House published one book for adults and one for children. My parents subscribed. You should realize that when a book came out, all the children read the same book, they didn't need reading groups or book reading evenings, it was just a natural thing to do. Someone in the class would ask: "Have you read *The Boy Who Flew Seaward?*" and, because everyone had got the same book, a conversation would start.

It's not like today when you can hardly know what's out, because so many books are published. Everyone also listened to the same news on the radio, and to the same radio shows, so the kids had a lot in common. My older sister, for example, would read the books and then recommend them to us. I remember, once she recommended *Les Miserables* [by Victor Hugo]. We raced to the library of Mr. Axelrod, who apologized for having only two copies in stock. I read *Oliver Twist*, *The Boy Who Flew Seaward*, I knew the stories of Beit David and Zvi Livnat by heart. When I was younger, I read Levin Kipnis, and, of course, the children's section of the Davar newspaper. It used to be called Our Paper. All the kids subscribed to it, my older sister even wrote for it.

My parents always went to Habima and Haohel [theater houses]. They didn't have good seats because they couldn't afford them, but theater-going was a true need. So, despite everything, even though I don't like the word, these were elitist groups of new arrivals. There was an authentic culture being created. Great changes took place; we made a culture.

What are your memories of the Holocaust?

As a matter of fact, my mother's family, the Zionists, came here in 1912, whereas others, the Bundists, emigrated to America. No one had stayed behind in Belarus. Make no mistake, the Nazis burned the whole village down. On my father's family side, Yossef Haim, as I have mentioned, ran away from being drafted into the British army, whereas his brother, Shmuel—we know next to nothing about him. He was a true genius, a rabbi, had a wife and three children. After the Russian Revolution in the [civil war] of 1919-1920, the Kossaks attacked the Jews. They assembled everyone, the entire community, locked them together and set everything on fire. My grandfather, too, died in the Petrola disturbances—we don't know their exact date. Short time afterward, my grandmother died of sorrow. Before my father came here together with one of his sisters, in 1912, his older sister and younger brother had arrived in the country, so that practically all the other branches of the family came here. Even though no close kin of mine perished in the Holocaust, I have never bought German products, I made

sure not to ride in German cars—all this because of national considerations. Menachem, my husband, lost some of his kin in the Holocaust.

What do you remember of the period immediately preceding the establishment of the State?

We were all in the Hagana. I was sworn into [its ranks] while in the ninth grade. It goes without saying that everyone who was member of a youth movement, or instructor, or in training—our entire activity was oriented toward the collectivity. No one was a master of his schedule—we gave our time to the Yishuv.

When I finished high school, after the Black Saturday, we all went off to the kibbutzim. We went to Ashdot Ya'akov. It was then that I got conscripted to the Palmakh and went to the *hakhshara* [training] of Kefar Gil'adi. Later on we established kibbutz Ma'ayan Barukh. By the time the State was proclaimed I had left Kefar Gil'adi; I had some back injury and they let me to go to the Teachers' College in Beit Hakerem, Jerusalem. I managed to study for three months, then the War of Independence broke out. During those three months I was held in a reserve of sorts, for miscellaneous activities of the Palmakh. I remember I was asked to smuggle firearms. I rode a car with a bundle of live grenades hidden on my chest.

Where were you when the State of Israel was proclaimed? Can you focus on a specific event associated with the proclamation?

Jerusalem was cut off. I remember the 29th of November [UN vote], the YES, and NO. All of us left the college and we went downtown. The joy was tremendous. At night there were reports of shooting and it was clear we were going to war. Look, at the time of the proclamation, in May, Jerusalem had already been under siege. Many people had been killed. The winter of 1948 was terribly cold. We kept asking: "When will this cold be over? When will the war be over?" So, as you can see, the proclamation by Ben-Gurion now seems to me less poignant than the 29th of November, 1947. In November we were ecstatic, everything seemed possible, there was hope. On November 29, I simply broke into a song. I truly believe that the fact that we stood our own in the war was quite amazing. Maybe it had to do with the feeling of "there's no other option." Also, our feeling of being right.

What do you feel today when you recall that event?

All I can say is that on November 29th we were gripped by tremendous emotion, and I, personally, am a bit emotional. I can't put it into words. Even today I feel the goose bumps, this is so powerful [she starts crying]. When I think, in May 1948 we were so beaten, so many comrades had fallen, such a heavy price, I simply don't remember myself being happy. And, at that time, we didn't know about everyone because Jerusalem was cut off. I remember how my friend from the *Hakhshara* sent a soldier with two cucumbers to me. The soldier did reach me.

As a teacher I had always taught the events of November 29 better, every year the Independence Day ceremonies exert a powerful grip on me; it is something that all of us had absorbed in childhood.

How did you react to the events? What happened to your family and relatives during the War of Independence?

My family was not hurt, but many close friends and acquaintances were. Later, my cousin was killed in the Six-Day War.

What did you feel about the involvement of the Diaspora Jewry in the events taking place in the country?

Look, I have always believed that Israel should make efforts on behalf of the Diaspora, and not vice versa. I considered it important to bring young people to the country. I never thought that Diaspora owes us. To this day, I see joint ventures between us and Diaspora as very important to bringing the two closer together. On those few occasions I went abroad, it was important to me to be a host. My English is not so good, so I have always insisted that someone would translate. Woe to him who failed in this task; I understand every word, after all. I believe that the Land of Israel must radiate the will to maintain contact with the Diaspora.

Did you experience any changes in your daily life after the establishment of the State, compared to the preceding period?

This was a long process; it didn't happen all at once. In fact, after every revolution people tend to think they have reached peace and rest at long last, but this is never the case. I remember the black market when the country was poor. This bothered me. I remember that because the population of the country doubled within a very short period; we waited for hours for the bus to the university. All in all, the country had changed so much, people grew tired of struggle, they wanted to go back home. Maybe also because people themselves changed. The Yishuv generation settled down and then changes came. Suddenly I saw members of the Palmakh, with all their [idealist] ethos, employing housemaids.

How would you describe your own and your family's political views in 1948?

My parents were enthusiastic and innocent Laborites. I worked in the new-immigrants' camps and the United Movement. I didn't go to Hashomer Hatzair, but I had many friends there. My instructors came from Ahduth Ha'avoda. As a result of a split we crossed over to the United Movement, so that I was still part of Mapai. But even in Mapai I was on the left side of the spectrum. My mother admired Debora Netzer, Baba Idelsohn, Golda Meirsohn. I was more on the left. My older sister admired Mapai, just as my parents did, whereas my younger sister was not interested in politics at all.

Theoretically speaking, my sense of justice led me to the left. I was also a close friend of Tuvia Shlonsky, who influenced me, and he was more on the left. The term "leftist" didn't exist then. In the elections to the first Knesset I voted Mapai which, at that time, commanded a most impressive crew. Later, I voted Mapam.

Did your being a woman affect your political involvement or lack thereof at the time?

Yes, certainly. I am in favor of "Blessed be He, for having made me a woman." In 1948 I wasn't a mother yet, but even as member of the movement I was in favor of full equality, perhaps because I was a strong young woman. I remember how, during the great trek, when my turn came to haul the big can, it occurred on the steepest uphill section. My good friend, who was later killed, said to me: "Hava, I am not telling you not to carry the can, but why do it along the hardest part?" I refused to listen to him. What's the matter, if equality, then equality all the way. So, with great fervor, I carried the platoon's can. Today it seems pretty silly to me, they [the men] had it easier; they were stronger. This was a misconceived equality. Even the communists talk about equal opportunities, but this doesn't mean that everyone has to eat grapes together, even if you don't like grapes. In short, there is no need for automatic, mechanical equality; the equality of opportunity is enough.

In the period of the establishment of the State, is there any event that you now regard as a cardinal mistake? In other words, do you recall an event that if it had been up to you, you would have made it turn out differently?

I was very critical of those called “the salt of the earth,” due to the fact that they started getting concerned with themselves. All of a sudden they grew rich, forgot everything. Mapai bears a great share of blame for this. The word “corruption” is perhaps too strong in this context, but certain qualities, such as modesty, simple life-style and concern with collective good, began disappearing.

Menachem and I stayed modest throughout our lives. No gold-coated door handles for us. No conspicuous consumption. I would have given up had I felt the need. I always asked Menachem to agree for the two of us spending our sabbatical in Dimona. I believed that good teachers should go to remote areas. Conditions were harsh; there, new immigrants and all that. Menachem refused. He argued that his work at the university is his true contribution. So, I chose to work in the Denmark high school—in the poorer neighborhood of Jerusalem. I believed I could make a difference in a place like that.

In your opinion, does your perspective as a woman differ from a man's perspective vis-à-vis the events of 1948?

Perhaps not at the time, but since then it's been clear to me that motherhood was a great moment in my life.

Who are the women you admire, women you can remember from the year 1948?

Manya Shochat, Sara Czyzyk, women of the second Aliya. Perhaps also Rachel, the poetess who lived such a simple, modest life.

Rachel Elboim-Dror

Professor of Educational Policy, Planning and Administration; Head of Division of Educational Planning and Administration, School of Education, Hebrew University, Jerusalem; born 1931, Poland; immigrated to Israel 1936; studied at the Hebrew University (1949-1954), Harvard University (1954-56); married to Prof. Yehezkel Dror; three sons; professional and research activity in Israel and USA; lectured on education in institutions of higher learning and scholarly conferences in Europe, Japan, USA, South America; author of numerous books and articles in Hebrew, English and German including Hebrew Education in the Land of Israel, 3 v. (Hebrew), The Tomorrow of Yesterday: the Zionist Utopia, 2 v. (Hebrew), 1993; editor of international series of books on educational policy, Holland; recipient: Jerusalem Education Prize, 1992, Witchnizer Prize, 1993. Lives in Jerusalem.

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Could you describe the period prior to the establishment of the State?

At the present moment this is something quite ambivalent, because the question can be "How do I see things now," or "How did I see things then." These are two different worlds. How was it then? I grew up in the very heart of the working, pioneering and settling community, and as a girl who grew up in this world I can say that it seemed something out of this world compared to what I read in literature. I read a lot as a child. I saw ourselves as standing head and shoulders above the others, as a nation, as a society of equals, of justice, a society that tried to blaze its trail through a hostile world. Ideals counted for everything. I don't remember criticism. It could be that there was criticism and I suppressed it, so that now I cannot recover it. Now I remember the period as times of everyday excitement, tremendous excitement. Everything was new, special. The excitement of the generation of our parents and teachers truly rubbed on to me. I recall this entire period as suffused with heroism.

Nowadays I am very critical, I have a different perspective, I ask many questions, so these two [seeing the past vs. the memory of the experience] are two very different pictures. The concept of dispossession of the Arabs simply did not exist in my vocabulary. Everything seemed just. Relations between men and women, for example, anything of this sort was simply beyond my awareness. In other words I accepted the slogans of equality, women were equal, everything seemed all right, I felt I was equal, there was nothing problematic in this respect, in the sense that I and men were equal, I could perform any man's job, etc. So, the question is do you want me to describe the world as I saw it then or as I see it now? This is the question. The reflexive aspect of everything that happened in terms of equality and justice, women and men, conquest of Arabs—all these issues did not exist in my consciousness as I recall it today. Again, I am not sure this is true, because I wasn't a happy girl. The picture that emerges in my mind's eye—everything was heroic, wonderful, even ecstatic—somehow clashes with the fact that I wasn't happy. So, I think that many things were questionable then,

but the question marks were suppressed. Some of them surface now, but I am sure that I don't remember a great many of them. My sister who is two years younger (I have two sisters, one older) remembers many different things and every time we speak I am stunned anew and say to myself: "She was a child younger than me then, so, how can she remember all this?" Now and then, as she talks, she manages to bring these memories to the surface. Memory is a very tricky thing, we should be very careful with it. Anyway, I grew up on the banks of the Jordan River, in the first group that settled in the Beth Sha'an Valley.

Were you born here?

No, but I came as a very small child, and I don't remember all that much. My memories begin at the age of five; I was already in the country then. We came from Poland, my father had come earlier, as an illegal immigrant...there were problems with certificates [for official immigration], and he was with the first group of 35 to 38 men that the Jewish Agency wanted to settle. The Agency purchased land, close to Beth Sha'an, between the Beth Sha'an valley and the Jordan River valley, which was empty of people. Some nomadic Bedouin tribes lived there. The men of the group lived with the Bedouins in their tents, together. But one day a group of Bedouins, not the ones they lived with, attacked them and killed one of them. As a matter of fact, it was this group that conquered the land for the first settlement established in the area, Beit Yossef, very close to the bank of the Jordan River. It was one of those "wall and watchtower" settlements. After they set up the camp with the tower and the wall, they brought in the first families. I was among the first children to be brought out there. My childhood memories start there. Before then they sent out the families to prepare the land for the settlement.

Everything was top secret; this kind of settlement had to be set up overnight, because, according to the Turkish law, once the wall is up it must not be pulled down. The next morning there was even a roof. At the time, when everything was planned in great secret, one night the entire area would get mobilized to establish a settlement. Over the year of preparations the families were sent to Kvar Yehoshua and Nahalal to get agricultural training. That year we lived in a shed that had previously functioned as a chicken coop belonging to the Ben-Ner family, the writer Itzhak Ben-Ner. I was a very good friend of his sister, Rachel was her name. We were a couple called Roha'le and Roha'le [an account of a prank by the two girls on the baby brother of the friend, the future writer Itzhak Ben-Ner].

In any event, after one year we moved to a camp. Later, great debates raged over whether the settlement should be a kibbutz or a moshav. My father, who served as the group's secretary, was very much in favor of collective framework, and conceived the idea of cooperative moshav. I remember that on Saturdays we would travel to Moledet and Kefar Khittim—built as cooperative moshavim. In other words, they were more cooperative than ordinary moshav, but not as much as kibbutzim, in the sense that every family had its own kitchen. I remember myself as a child, traveling with my father who delivered speeches, and spoke about difficulties with the people who lived there. But most people did not want the previous arrangement, they built houses and we moved into houses.

Later on, health problems came up, my mother fell ill with malaria all the time. The doctors kept telling her she couldn't stay in that area. We decided to move but the project stretched over several years. We moved to Kefar Yehezkel. My father worked there as secretary and I lived there until I entered the university, in other words up till the establishment of the State. It

was in Kefar Yehezkel that the news about the proclamation reached us. I remember Ya'el Dayan, who was about six at the time, eight years my junior.

When the State came into existence I was a high school student, and we traveled to school in the children's village. At the time we were arms smugglers, they would hide weapons on parts on our bodies, because the British, when conducting searches on buses, did not search girls. Bras were always thought as the best spot for this purpose. It goes without saying that we were members of the Hagana and working youth movement. I underwent arms training, including shooting range, from a very young age. I remember that at the age of 15 I went through real training. During the War of Independence and the period immediately preceding it, we did guard duty.

This was the part of the memories of the heroic aspect of the times?

Very much so. It was very exciting and a bit scary.

You think of them as positive memories?

Well, if you recall what I said at the beginning [of the interview]. Every day brought new events. I remember, for example, the Black Saturday, when most Yishuv leaders were arrested. We were close to it, because near Eyn Harod and Tel-Yossef there was a kind of provisional detention facility that the British had brought there. When the news came on Saturday morning, I ran away from home so that my parents wouldn't know. Together with a group of other youngsters we crossed the fields and got close to the kibbutz to see how we could help. The British arrested us. I felt very happy because no one from among us kids got arrested before, and I was together with a group of older boys from the moshav. They locked us up in the detention facility. It was terribly hot there, but to my great distress, they discovered that I was just a high-school girl and set me free in the evening. The rest were taken to Rafah, I think. I became the hero of the day on account of my arrest. Everything was a fun of sorts.

Was everything like that?

Well, I think we lived in a kind of...I don't want to use a term like psychosis, or propaganda, or brainwashing, but the whole situation was heroic. It was a very small group of people, there were British all around, colonial regime with all that it implies, "lilies," paratroopers with red berets, the Arabs—and all this while we studied at school. Rifle shots could be heard every night. We were shot at all the time. We lived in the world of "we and the world against us." Not in the contemporary sense of this term, but for real. To live in a "wall and watchtower" camp, the first in the Beth She'an valley, when my father came up with this tiny group – Amal was their name – I think. When the town of Beth She'an was completely empty of Jews, only Arabs lived there, so, such a small group, fusillade every night—this was not just a turn of phrase. It was only later that this turned into an empty phrase, Zionism in quotation marks. For us this was real life.

I don't have to give you speeches on this. You felt it, breathed it every day. The children were not allowed to leave the compound, conditions were pretty harsh, and the feeling of a small, besieged group fighting for its life – this was everyday reality. It is clear, then, that under such conditions no reflexive thinking could develop, what is right, who is right, who takes what, etc. Apart from that, the land was bought, not conquered. We paid full price and didn't dispossess anyone. There were small groups of nomads who stayed near us and later used to

bring over their sheep to feed on the green. Certainly, feuds over pasture rights did break out, as we call it nowadays, between farmers and nomads with their herds.

But this was very different then—the Arab national consciousness was not as developed as it is today. These were truly disputes between farmers and shepherds. I sometimes ask myself: where are all the question marks of today? One needs to remember the context, it was completely different then. These were times of thrill and excitement; it was felt very acutely. The Arabs attack, shoot at us, every day something happens. We were hitched to the idea; there was no time for reflexivity. Not like today.

Could you describe your family on the eve of independence?

As I mentioned, my father worked as the treasurer/secretary of the settlement. We owned a small farm. My father was the “inventor” type, kept inventing things. Apart from maintenance work—leaking faucets, etc.—the economic situation was OK, by the standards of the day. He received salary, I have no idea how much; he had chicken and a garden. I did garden landscaping and was busy at it all the time. But all that time I had this uneasy feeling that we were not real workers, not quite farmers...today this is called a higher, managerial status. I didn't feel good about it. When asked about my father's job, I never said he held the post of the secretary. I would mention the chicken to befuddle the issue. I myself hoed the garden beyond the call of duty to get calluses on my hands.

Today it sounds very funny but I remember it as the most natural thing to do. Checking every time whether the skin has hardened enough, so that people wouldn't talk about my soft hands. As a girl at the age of 14-15, this was very important to me. I worked not so much to till the land, but to get calluses, a symbol of sorts. When the establishment of the state became imminent, they started pressuring my father—accountant and mathematician—to move to the Corporation Alliance. This was terrible for me. It goes without saying I voiced my fierce opposition to this and my father, too, felt ill at ease about the proposal. We had to leave Tel-Yossef, the heroic, pioneering period of our lives. My father went through a serious crisis; he truly didn't want to leave. At a certain stage he became chief accountant for Tnuvia [dairy industry], first in Haifa, and later at the headquarters. He was the first to computerize the enterprise. I remember very well the passage from “invention” stage, making small gadgets for the needs of an agricultural settlement to computers and other modern technologies. Our teachers were wonderful people. And I am talking about Beit Yossef, the toughest place of them all. It was really a very harsh place. Horrible weather, hot and stifling, isolated, no access road, just a train. But our first teacher was a woman with an MA from a famous European university.

Economically we fared pretty well. Never went hungry, but even when there were goods to be had, we lived on a shoestring budget. Later, I was very angry with my parents who were rather well off, my father was a senior official with good salary, but still lived as though he was poor. This was how they brought us up. We were not given much. But what made me really mad was that even when they got on in years, old, they still would never take a cab to a hospital. I see this phenomenon with the parents of people of my generation; it's got nothing to do with material conditions. “That's the way to live,” was the slogan. Until the day they died my parents never allowed themselves anything. In the last years we, the three daughters had terrible fights with our mother over everything that cost more than a dime. She just

wouldn't let herself go. I used to discuss those things with my father, an intellectual and a very interesting man, but they just couldn't.

It was drilled into me that merchants are terrible, cheats. If someone has money it means there's something wrong there, that he takes too much, that he is not honest. Honesty means to work on the land. My father felt very strongly about it, and these beliefs forged the atmosphere at home.

What seems strange to me is the speed with which all this changed. I studied an earlier period, changes from the 19th century onward. There I was astonished by the speed of transformation from the ghetto Jew to Herzl who wrote plays for Vienna theater houses. In other words, cultural generations are very short. I look at Israel and am truly amazed how fast the passage occurred from the kibbutz as I remember to the kibbutz of today. The youth then and now.

Aliza Guri

Educator; born Belarus; immigrated 1935; graduated from Teachers' College, Beit Hakerem, Jerusalem; B.A. in Bible studies and general history, MA in Education, Hebrew University; Class master in elementary school for ten years; teacher in the Teachers' College, Jerusalem, combining educational theory and practice, until retirement held key posts in Teachers' Seminar, among the founders of David Yellin Teachers' College, Beit Hakerem, Jerusalem. Lived in Jerusalem.

Could you describe the period preceding the establishment of the State?

My perspective is that of a Jerusalemite. The War of Independence offers a special vantage point. It goes without saying that the siege had made itself felt before then. Jerusalem suffered from shortages in water supply, food, and irregular transportation. I belong to the class of high-school students whose matriculation exams had been moved forward to enable us to get drafted. It goes without saying that before I went to the army, the older age groups all got drafted. I saw that at home, since my brother, seven years my senior, also went to the army.

Even before the advancement of final exams, we were due for some preparatory activities which included guard duty one night a week. This was part of what was called "special physical education program." I, for example, was posted at Talpiot. Although we took an oath—hand placed on a gun, in a basement, if anything happened, all we had were our ten fingers. Zvi Ben-Yossef, the one who wrote the Kinneret song, was one of us.

What was your family like on the eve of the events of 1948? Please, address the economic situation, your parents' occupation, etc. What did your family read in those years?

I grew up in the Mevor Barukh neighborhood. In those days this was an ideal place to grow up in. The Rashbam Street was small, with two-story houses. The population was mixed: workers and lower-middle class. Children born in the country and those who came in the 1930s, like myself, played together. According to my research, this small street alone produced two presidents, two army generals, eight to ten university professors. There was a feeling of fellowship; as a child I felt safe and protected.

My father came from a family of merchants in Russia; they fled after the revolution. He tried to rebuild his family business in Poland, but in 1934 he chose to immigrate to the country; his sister had come earlier. It was he who came before us to make things ready for our arrival. At first, my father rented an apartment in the Romema neighborhood where we arrived in 1935, but after the events of 1936 we could live there no longer and moved to Mevor Barukh. Our childhood was marked by the transition from the well-being of our parents' homes to in the harsh conditions of the times on the eve of the Second World

War. I have in mind chiefly the lack of work. My mother found the transition from a wealthy rabbinical family especially difficult. We were told all the time that learning is what really matters. It took some time before father got a steady job as an accountant with the

Solel Boneh construction company. Mother was a housewife all these years. She was a champion in the kitchen; during the siege, for example, she managed to get a large fish. I remember that it had to be soaked in water for several days so that on Thursday fish cutlets could be made from it for the Saturday. She was always worried about something. My brother studied at the "Gymnasia" [renowned high school in Rehavia neighborhood], whereas I won a scholarship from a high school in Beit Hakerem. I had also a younger sister who was about ten at the time.

What are your memories of the Holocaust?

My mother lived in Europe for many years. Whenever she said "among us," she meant Europe. My brother had little patience for her, whereas I drank in all her stories because they conveyed a sense of a whole, integral world. She grew up in Belarus, in rabbi's house, with seven brothers and sisters. My grandmother was married at the age of 16 and one year later the doctors told her she wouldn't be able to have children. Ultimately she gave birth to eight children so that my mother grew up among a throng of brothers and sisters. I never met my grandparents; they lived only in my mother's stories. She grew up in an Orthodox home, but there was tolerance toward relations between boys and girls. My father was a frequent visitor there before the marriage. The only "cover story" he used for the meetings [with my mother] was his sister. She told me stories about splashing together in the river, etc. In other words they both had a normal childhood. My mother ran away with my father after the Revolution. They had not even been married yet.

Their whole world was obliterated by the Revolution. Not a trace remained. Not one person. My mother always hoped that two of her younger sisters who married Communist officials would survive, but this did not come to pass. Mother had been devoted to the radio program, "Searching for Lost Relatives." She always had a transistor radio stuck in her ear.

All that she managed to find out after all these years was the date of the death of a few of them. She knew nothing about the rest. She knew though, that in all probability her parents died of natural causes.

What do you remember of the period immediately preceding the establishment of the State?

On the eve of the War of Independence, before I got drafted and before the State came into existence, I remember two traumatic events. The first has to do with the death of the convoy of the thirty-five, most of them Jerusalemites. In the streets of our immediate neighborhood there were five homes of grieving families; it was as if a bomb had fallen nearby. Unlike nowadays, announcements did not reach families in time. Parents of Elik, who was my boyfriend, read the tragic story in the newspaper. It was terrible. Elik was 17, the only child, very handsome, plump, and good-natured. He graduated from the Rehavia High School well before his time because all the time they moved him to a higher grade. He loved to paint. This sounds like a eulogy, but he was really an exceptional boy. The thing is that Elik was not a macho type, he was not a member of Hagana or Palmakh, or, at least, this was what we thought. So, when the news of his death reached his parents they weren't ready for it at all.

His father saw Elik's name in the list of the fallen printed in the newspaper the same morning. The newspaper vendor was two streets away from my parents' house, but I will never forget the scream, the roaring of Moshe Cohen, after he had learned that his son was in the convoy of the thirty-five and was killed. He told his wife immediately, without

preparing her for it; she died of sorrow several months later. He himself would go out on the streets during bombardments, he just wanted to get hit by a shell; he wanted to die. He never forgave Elik for what he had done to his mother. Despite longing for death, he lived to a ripe old age. Years later, after he was adopted by the Ein Hod Artists' Village [he was an artist by training], he put up a large tombstone for his wife with the inscription: "For Nehama [consolation in Hebrew] who was not to be consoled, angel in purity, Job in suffering." It took him a long time before he went to his son's grave. He was angry with him for keeping the secret from his parents. Why had he gone [to the army] at the age of 17? Why had he done this while knowing what this would do to his mother? Well, this is the first traumatic experience.

The second event of this nature that I remember involved the uncle of Tzali Reshef [former spokesman of the Peace Now movement], who was named after him. His father lived next to us at the Rashbam Street. There was a large synagogue there of the Babylonian congregation—they were completely different then, not like the Shas party of today—and they began their morning prayers very early. Tzali Reshef's grandfather was a member of the Ashkenazi minyan which prayed after them. He was told the news of the death of his son, Bezalel Prokhovnik was his name, while at prayer in the synagogue. This was the second "siren" that I remember. They came to him to tell him about his son's death. In other words, shells fell very close, all around us.

Not counting the casualties, I remember the entire period of shelling in Jerusalem, lines for water, food rationing. When the bombs fell for the first time, we didn't realize what was going on. Everyone had water storage tanks on the roof, so we thought that several tanks blew up together. Before my conscription, my brother, who had served right here, in Jerusalem—he used to take me to their base in the city so that I might be part of it all. He used to fix me a sandwich or something else to eat on those occasions. One day he arrived at my high school in Beit Hakerem where I studied. He came early one morning, white as a ghost. It was before the first class began. "Say a prayer of thankfulness," he said, "Be grateful that you still have a brother." Apparently, his platoon staged a raid, or something, he didn't go into details. Later—he was a physicist by training—he was transferred to the scientific command, which in time became the Authority for Developing Firearms [Raphael]. But at the time he served in the infantry, and it looked like the raid was very traumatic for him. At that time I hardly studied, our exams were moved to an earlier date and in April we were drafted. I was part of the Boy Scout *hakhshara* [training]. On Passover all my companions went off to the central plains to get organized. I got stuck in Jerusalem on the Passover eve together with a few others from training. We got separated from the main body of our formation. My original group comprised the 7th battalion, whereas we got stuck with the 5th battalion of Palmakh. Since I was part of the training formation, I got a direct line to the Palmakh. I became fully conscripted only a year later, after the siege, at the Zrifin base where I got my soldier's card. Until then I was stationed in Jerusalem, in Beit Hakerem. We were assigned to deputy company commander, Michael Ben-Barak of Nahalal, and went away for our first rifle training. It should have taken one month; the training was for boys and girls together. But due to the worsening situation, the boys were taken away and posted at vantage points of the Jerusalem road, whereas we remained assembled at the Schneller base awaiting our orders.

Most of us on the base were girls and a few boys on non-combat duty. In the middle of the base stood a tower which served as an excellent target, since it was within range of artillery. In this fashion, it turned out that the girls and non-combat boys were subjected to several intense shellings more than in other places. I remember that when a decision came to transfer us from Schneller to the Jerusalem corridor, the vantage points, we all heaved a sigh of relief. I remember being scared to death during bombardments; the enemy was aware of the military nature of the site, which made it a high-priority target, and, since they didn't know it was occupied by girls and non-combat boys, they devoted a great deal of attention to it.

The shellings were merciless. My parents lived not far away, but getting home posed a challenge. My mother always wanted me to go down to a basement in Schneller rather than make a run for it through the streets. Schneller was cramped, under siege, filled with fear. The commander was Danny Peterzeil, later activist of the left, member of Matzpen [radical left-wing organization]. I remember him punishing [by humiliation] anyone who abandoned his or her observation post while under fire.

I remember that on one occasion, in a lull between bombardments, we went out to the gate of the base, we just stood there to get a breath of fresh air. All of a sudden Uri Pollack, who was with us, collapsed and fell on the ground. A stray bullet hit him. All the time we were being shot at with tracer bullets, but on this occasion it was simply amazing. We just stood there, in a lull, without realizing what was going on. We thought he got a heart attack. People had said that he was shirking army duty – that he didn't have to be in Schneller – and now this of all places. At the time the atmosphere of suffocation reached its heights. Years later, whenever I happened to pass the base I would turn my head away. The place had been associated with my deepest fears. I was scared there all right. The siege lasted weeks. Every day there were several bombardments.

When at long last we were told about evacuation, our spirits were revived. It was then that among soldiers of the 5th battalion I met members of the Na'an *hakhshara* [training] formation—working boys, quite extraordinary, with tremendous social commitment, wonderful. They have conducted themselves in an exemplary fashion until this day, for example, in helping the families of the fallen. Their togetherness was truly extraordinary. In contrast to the Jerusalem group, which had always been mocked as “intellectuals,” they were bound in strongest ties of brotherhood. They gave me tremendous strength.

In Schneller I belonged to no one, people knew I belonged to the *hakhshara* of Boy Scouts, but the sense of belonging that gives strength to bear one bombardment after another, was missing. As a matter of fact, I was alone. In contrast, at vantage points in Abu-Ghosh, and later, Sha'ar Ha'gay, the feeling of companionship was overwhelming. We felt we formed a part of a force. Every night we accompanied the boys of *hakhshara* to combat duty and, in the morning, waited to see who came back and who didn't.

The nocturnal battles at Kiryat Anavim and Harel were of the most bloody kind. This is also the source of my deepest fears. Years later, whenever we traveled down the Jerusalem-Tel-Aviv highway, I would instinctively lower my head when going past the Nebi Samuel. Sniper fire, artillery fire – Nebi Samuel was the weak point – I carry this within me, but this was not the primal fear that used to seize me in Schneller. I didn't experience something comparable throughout the war.

Shortly after our arrival in Abu-Ghosh, the battalion commander asked me to assume the duties of the welfare officer of the 5th battalion. I faced a mythological person—Deganit, a walking legend. At the age of seventeen-and-a-half I was saddled with an ill-defined assignment which at first comprised caring for the wounded. Later it expanded to include the most terrible thing I've done – I told the story once on television. I remember that when Jimmy was killed – the one described in the book *Friends Talk About Jimmy* – out of the blue all standing orders were suspended. Until then the fallen had been buried either on site or in Kiryat Anavim. Under no conditions had parents been brought in. Jimmy's case, however, was different; perhaps because of his fame which enveloped him even in his life, or because, in addition to being a soldier he was also a man of ideas who had been in the habit of reining in his emotions.

I was given the assignment to bring in his parents. Jimmy fell after the battle of the Burma Road, after he had been wounded in one of the large operations of mopping up the Hebron hills and the environs, and after returning to duty. I visited him as he lay wounded in Jerusalem. His father was Shemi, the painter.

In preparations for the TV show I tried to discover who gave the order to bring in Jimmy's parents, but no one seemed to remember. In any event, I had at my disposal an American car of the battalion commander with his driver. We decided to make a stopover at the kibbutz Ma'agan Michael to locate his brother but couldn't find him. A woman relative of his joined us and we traveled to Haifa where Jimmy's parents lived. I sat in the passenger seat next to Lipa, the driver. All the way from Zefat to Abu-Ghosh no one in the car breathed a word. We pulled up at the Abu-Ghosh monastery, entered the room where the body lay, Shemi uncovered his son's face and started painting him.

Where were you when the State of Israel was proclaimed? Can you focus on a specific event associated with the proclamation?

I heard the radio broadcast together with my parents. Afterwards, my girlfriend and I dashed off to the Zion Square where we danced till morning. The proclamation came out of the blue; we didn't expect it. There was shooting that night. I remember that my mother traveled to Tel-Aviv to attend a wedding and came back only several days later.

What do you feel today when you recall that event?

I was aware of the magnitude and intensity of the events, no doubt about it. Maybe because I witnessed the struggle that had gone on prior to that. I wasn't aware though, of the price that we were bound to pay for the proclamation. For a while I had the feeling that a huge and wonderful sun had risen. Everything seemed to bode well; there was optimism in the air. In retrospect it appears an unbounded optimism. When I think about it now, it is clear that this was the event we all had dreamt about, and when it happened, nothing distorted the picture.

How did you react to the events? What happened to your family and relatives during the War of Independence?

I have already described the situation of my immediate family, but there were casualties in the immediate neighborhood. I remember that my brother left Jerusalem, heading for Rehovot right after the siege of Jerusalem.

Can you describe the relationships with other relatives who lived abroad at the time?

There wasn't any contact, not counting two distant uncles. No news reached us about events abroad. The only relatives we knew about were killed during Einsatzgruppen raids. We knew some circumstantial details about one of my father's brothers who had been taken away. I saw their pictures. One had blond hair, and the second looked like a Gentile – it was told that he was an officer in the Russian army, but we heard nothing from either.

A rumor had it that some of them were murdered during Stalin's purges, but mother never believed those stories. I remember mother's reaction when she was notified about the fate of her family. Because the news reached us years afterward, she could not sit shiva, but she decided to sit for a whole day on a low stool nevertheless. Through her stories I knew a great many details about her kin, but as I looked at her sitting on this low stool, I suddenly realized that her brothers – Eliyahu, Reitzel, Shamai – all of them were to her what my brother Deddi meant to me. Suddenly I grasped the magnitude of the disaster.

What did you feel about the involvement of the Diaspora Jewry in the events taking place in the country?

This was clearly our business. The thought that someone has a responsibility for what went on here didn't even cross my mind. I was possibly a little mad at the British rulers who made a mess of everything. Personally, it took me several years to begin to perceive another side of England.

Did you experience any changes in your daily life after the establishment of the State, compared to the preceding period?

Yes, in a certain sense of this word, because after the war I left home for good. I continued my *hakhshara* [training] program in preparation for Gevat and tried to decide whether to leave with them for Tel-Re'im. Ultimately, I decided not to and returned to Jerusalem. I experienced terrible remorse; this seemed like treason. I lived in my parents' home for a while, but at that time I had already become friends with Haim [Gory, the poet], who served with the Negev Brigade. I married him at the age of 22, and felt I was a grown-up, not a child anymore, with a great deal of experience. It seemed to me that since my conscription many years had gone by. The intensity of it all was tremendous.

How would you describe your own and your family's political views in 1948?

I was Mapai all along. My father was a true socialist, mother perhaps not socialist by family upbringing, but she did "catch" it from him. Father was with Solel Boneh; so that, in point of fact, he was also party functionaries; this was in his marrow.

Did your political views affect, in your opinion, your reading of the key events of the times?

I received my education within the Boy Scout movement. Our main slogan was the pioneering attitude in all spheres of life. This slogan was always a subject of intense debates with comrades from Hashomer Hatzair. Their members could always be counted on to have a ready answer, whereas we sounded like people who had lost their bearings. Our views and positions had something lukewarm, fuzzy about them, without a focus. I remember I envied them for their intense concentration. They read certain texts; they could quote them, whereas our readings were general, humanist, involving discussion of general questions. My drifting toward the workers' movement lasted many years, but I have always held moderate views.

Did your being a woman affect your political involvement or lack thereof at the time?

Personally, this was irrelevant. I have always resisted being defined by gender. Maybe because I have never encountered things I could interpret them as a function of my being a woman. It is also possible I didn't entertain far-reaching aspirations, which spared me unpleasant experiences in this respect. At the Teachers' College and teachers' training programs everything was quite open, because I belonged to the generation which always had everything open to it.

In the period of the establishment of the State, is there any event that you now regard as a cardinal mistake? In other words, do you recall an event that if it had been up to you, you would have made it turn out differently?

When things happened, my intense involvement precluded any critical attitude on my part. I wholly identified myself with everything that took place. Maybe because I was young, everything seemed pure, as things do at the very beginning.

In your opinion, does your perspective as a woman differ from a man's perspective vis-à-vis the events of 1948?

No.

Who are the women you admire, women you can remember from the year 1948?

I could mention Golda Meir and Baba Idelsohn, but the truth is I didn't admire anyone.

Esther Raziel-Naor

Public activist, senior Herut member; born December 29, 1912, Smoran, Russia, immigrated to Israel 1923; married to Y. Naor, three sons; graduated Levinsky Teachers College, Tel-Aviv; member of Betar and Etzel, from 1936 took part in Etzel operations, first announcer of the underground Etzel radio station 1939, joined Etzel High Command 1943, arrested together with her husband, also Etzel commander, after British police discovered broadcasting equipment in their home 1944, under arrest for seven months, rearrested following the bombing of the King David Hotel 1946; after 1948 Member of the Knesset (eight times); member of the Knesset Education Committee for many years; author of numerous articles in Herut and underground press. Lives in Jerusalem.

May, 1998

Please describe the period before the establishment of the State.

It was a very long period, in which British rule was followed by the awakening of the Arab response, encouraged and directed by the British. I was a little girl then, but there are things that a person carries with her. My parents came to the country in 1914, and the announcement on the start of the [First World] War caught up with them in a ship in high seas. I was a year-and-a half old then, whereas my brother, David Raziel was one year older. We were a young family. [My Parents] were Zionists who spoke Hebrew before they knew each other. It was their life-long ambition to come to the country. My father was a teacher in an educational institution in Grodno. It was quite famous at the time. It was the first teachers' training institution established by the Tarbut association, which was active in large and besieged cities. Both my parents came from Lithuania, which was Russia then.

But let me go back to the year that the Tachkemoni School, which had recently opened, offered [my father] a teaching post. It goes without saying that he was overjoyed. I don't remember that period, only the stories I heard. We spent several months in the country, approximately from August till December. [Here the recording is illegible. She came back home late and children were waiting for her outside.] My brother David and I sat by the entrance door. We lived at Blich Street. We came out and stopped at Herzl Street. All of a sudden a stream of people started passing by, led by two columns of Turkish gendarmes. Terrible shouts "Ya'allah, ya'allah, ya'allah." Suddenly I realized where she was [the mother], she was in the convoy. The convoy was marched to Jaffa, together with the children. What was that all about? It turned out that Turkey joined the war on the German side, and the Turkish citizenship had to return to their points of origin. We were deported from the country and became exiles. We were brought to Alexandria. Sometime later a Russian ship, a warship, came in, all persons with Russian papers were put on the ship, and brought back to Russia. We stayed in Russia until the war was over. We lived through the October revolution, the civil war, the Great Famine.

All this time we wanted to go back. Many Jews who spoke Yiddish were thought to have spoken German, and suspected of being a fifth column, subject to deportation. We were exiled to frontier areas in the Russian interior. We lived in the city of Saratov, an important city on the Volga River. It was there that father organized Pirkhey Zion [Zion cadets], Zion Youth and other such outfits with the name Zion in them. He also joined the Hechalutz association, and together they revived Hechalutz. He was part of the group called Volga Guard, similarly to Jordan River Guard. Some members of this group are in Genigar [kibbutz]. There are maybe one or two survivors, but their families, their descendants all know about this affair. My father was their teacher.

There was a revolution in Russia and the schoolhouse could not accommodate all those who sought to learn there. One day the Yevsektiya [Jewish department of the Cheka] took over and Yiddish replaced Hebrew as the curriculum language. Father refused to teach Yiddish, and took his class to the city park. The next day he took them to the attic of the Great Synagogue. On the third day he found a family that agreed to host the class. In this fashion he worked many years. All this time my parents sought way to immigrate to the Land of Israel.

The Caucasus had always been a problematic area. Now and then someone would rise up and revolt. They would suppress the revolt and instantly another one was on the way. [Soviet authorities who sought to impose order] held a census. One question was: "what is your native tongue?" The mountain Jews who lived in the Caucasus Mountains all replied "Hebrew." They spoke a kind of dialect, a mixture of Persian and Aramaic, languages widely spoken in that region. But they answered "Hebrew" because all of them were religious Jews and in those days being religious was very important.

We traveled to Caucasus by ship. Ordinarily, this ship was used to haul coal, but in these early days of Soviet rule, everything was good. The ship was crammed with people instead of coal, and on the return trip it brought back workers from Persia. In those days Tashkent was the city of bread and fruit. Everyone worked in agriculture there and now it was time for them to go back home. It was fall. All of them fell sick with typhoid and we also contracted the disease. We lay on the floor; there weren't any sleeping places. People infected one another. To our great surprise it turned out that the Volga River which never freezes over at its estuary, did so that year. The ship had to be towed back.

We reached a town called Pyetrovskfort—now it has a different name, of course, Makhachevka. Our whole group of pioneers was split up between different houses. One family took one group. We were adopted by the Morad family. They searched for ways to reach the Land of Israel they even contemplated crossing the Caucasus on foot. We got stuck on the border, and had no choice but to return to Russia. Meanwhile, the war was over, the year was 1921. The Baltic republics, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania came into existence. My father hailed from Lithuania, so, he thought, there was his chance. We returned to the country on the fifth day of Chanukah, exactly eight years after we were deported. So, as you can see, in a house such as ours there were more sublime things than day-by-day existence. A completely different set of values. For us, the return to Zion and "in joy thou shall go" was not just a verse in the prayer book. This was what we wanted.

Father returned to the Tachkemoni School. On the day of his arrival there he took out a small key from his pocket, opened the desk drawer and found the notebooks he had left behind. The people in whose house we had lived kept all kinds of things my mother had left behind and which have been kept in the house to this day.

The State was about to be proclaimed. Meanwhile, David, my brother, one year my senior, had one purpose in his life ever since he was a child, namely, to regain the honor of Israel. I remember, when we were children, six or seven year-olds, an adolescent youth in Russia taunted us. We returned home boiling with rage. David thought up all kinds of stratagems. This means that already at this tender age he was politically aware.

When he finished school he went off to study at the Schneor yeshiva. The entire yeshiva, with its rabbis and students, moved to Hebron. He went along with them and then the events of the year 1929 [the Hebron massacre]. David did not want to stay. He stayed for two weeks and left because the classes were taught in Yiddish. We grew up with Hebrew and spoke only Hebrew. My parents knew several languages, but we spoke only Hebrew. Anyway, David came back during the Days of Awe, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and went to Jerusalem to study at the Merkaz Harav yeshiva. When the events [Arab revolt] broke out, he volunteered for the Hagana. This was really the thing he was looking for since he was 7. He was 17 at the time and his first assignment was to go to Hebron escorting the coffins [with bodies of] the men with whom he had studied two weeks previously. This, as you can imagine, left a profound impression on him. In any event, he devoted himself almost completely to those things. Later, after the split in the ranks of the Hagana, Etzel [IZL] was established in 1931. He joined Etzel and stayed with them for the rest of his short life. He was killed at the age of 33.

When I graduated from the Levinsky Women's Teachers' Seminary, the Yishuv experienced a period of draught. These were times of serious crisis. Plants closed. I managed to get a job nevertheless. I heard that in Jerusalem they were looking for a teacher at the Talpiot neighborhood. The school belonged to the neighborhood. Talpiot was far away from the city at the time, it was a self-contained world. Beit Hakerem on one side, Talpiot on the other, and the old yishuv was in the middle. I went there and got the job. I spent two years in Jerusalem and for reasons I do not wish to go into, I returned to Tel-Aviv. I worked in the city and, at the same time, was with Etzel. At first I was a rookie soldier; then I took a first-aid course, and later passed the lieutenants' course. I went through all the stages.

Meanwhile I worked as a teacher. One day an inspector came in for my Bible class. I felt he was literally exploding from within. He could barely sit still in his chair. When the class was over he summoned me to the principal's room and announced that I didn't so much as approach the curriculum. "You do not even work by the curriculum," he said "because had you opened it, you would have known that the book of Joshua, from chapter 7 till the end, is not to be taught. Why do you teach this material?" he wanted to know. "Because, at the end it is written: "All these Joshua conquered one time.'" I taught them so that they may know. The children in the class were in heaven. They had to find places with the same name. The experience was at its keenest in the fourth grade. And he told me that I didn't work by the curriculum. Later, he met me at the meeting of the Education Committee of the Knesset and spoke with me in a different tone. I stayed on and got the benefit of the third year, instead

of two years' worth of experience. I was the only teacher in the country who stayed on for the third year, but I don't have any regrets. Many of my pupils went on to Etzel without me saying a word to them about it.

Meanwhile I married one of the best men there are, in my view the best that ever was. Two children were born to us. Later on, both of us got arrested and one night, in a jail in Beth Lehem I discovered I was pregnant. I said to myself that if I give birth to a daughter I would call her Ephrat, since the jail was on the road from Beth Lehem to Ephrat. She is called Ephrat to this day.

Meanwhile my husband was sentenced to four years in prison. He did time in every prison in the country and also abroad: in Jerusalem, in Acre, in Latrun, and, later, in Kenia, Sudan, and, twice, in Erythrea. At long last the State came into existence. I had managed to be a party member and the first radio announcer of the Etzel. The radio station was called the Fighting Zion Voice and my husband was in charge of the war. In any event, I had accomplished a few things. My husband spent four and a half years in prison. Meanwhile Ephrat was born and she didn't know him. I had a framed photograph under the glass on my desk and she thought that the photo was her daddy. Every day I used to take a walk with my children up to the Rothchild Avenue, and every day we would drop a letter in the post office box. She thought that her father lived there. "But how can he get out of there?" she would ask. "Well, this is precisely what I, too, want to know," I would reply. Ultimately, when the state came into existence, they brought him in. She went out on the balcony and proclaimed: "Now, I have a father, like all other children do."

What about your political views?

We not only wanted and foresaw the State, we fought for it as well. In the atmosphere that prevailed in the early days the word "state" was something unclean, impure. Many a time it came to blows over the issue. Why is "national home" not good enough? In his appearance before the Peel Commission, Ben-Gurion himself had said that "national home" amounts to more than a state. Later, it was claimed that he was quoted out of context. How I love this expression "out of context!" But we really fought for the establishment of the State. My husband's head was cracked until the end of his days from all these fights with the socialist friends' of his. It really came to blows. What was our world-view? We wanted a State. How should it govern itself? It will govern itself the way it should.

Did your political views affect your way of looking at things?

I don't think it makes that much of a difference. It might make a difference. My political view has not changed. It is crystal clear to me that had the State come into existence earlier, part of the Jewish people would have escaped the extermination. I don't think that all of them could have been saved, but some would. According to some testimonies, before the Nurenberg trials they caught someone who was charged with killing two Poles and twenty-thousand Jews. It was possible to put him on trial for the murder of the two Poles, but not for the murder of 20,000 Jews, because no country could make this claim. But even today we see that not all the Jews come running home. It is quite possible that had the Jewish leadership followed Zabotinsky's way, the State would have come into existence earlier and some Jews would have been saved.

Has your being a woman affected your activity?

In the obvious sense, yes, since it is not easy being a mother and being involved in politics at the same time. Ephrat, for example, told me that when she was four-and-a-half years old, the State was proclaimed and I was elected to the first Knesset, she sat in her bed and said that she wants a plain mother. This was like an arrow that pierced my heart and remains there until this day. I have always thought I wasn't a good enough mother. My greatest luck was that we lived with my parents and what I couldn't spare they filled in, certainly with greater success. Every working woman holds two jobs, and if she happens to be a member of an underground, she holds three jobs.

So, your family backed you up?

Very much so! I was in the Knesset thanks to two people: my husband and my mother. They took upon themselves everything. I can't tell whether I accomplished wonders, certainly not consolations. But I could go to the Knesset only because I had someone to lean on.

What about mistakes?

Well, first of all is the fact that the State of Israel has no constitution. The first Knesset failed to discharge its duty. After all, we were elected to the Constitutional Assembly whose task was to give constitution to the people of Israel, and we were proclaimed the first Knesset of Israel instead. But the constitution shall come. Not everything that suits the British is suitable for us, not by [national] character or temperament, not by history, or the rifts and cleavages that keep on widening. This is the mistake that we have been suffering from to this day. Constitution does not mean gag order. Constitution determines exactly what everyone is entitled to, what he can do, and what he shouldn't do.

On men's and women's perspective and the differences between them:

I don't understand these questions. I have never understood them and I shall never be able to fathom them.

Do you think that the biological fact must impinge both on psychology and on politics, on everything?

I don't think so. If you were a man, would you see things differently? If I were a man, maybe I would have fought more. But I did the best I could.

Who are the women you admire, women you can remember from the year 1948?

The admired female personages: I think that Mrs. Shoshana Bernstein deserves much admiration. One of the pillars of the Hebrew culture. The Tarbut movement was the family's foundation. I myself was a very good friend of Dvora Netzer, member of the core of Mapai leadership, which did not prevent us from being great friends, until the end.

Tamar Rodner

Social worker; born 1928; graduated from the School of Social Welfare, Hebrew University, completed MA degree through the scholarship of the National Council of Jewish Women; worked as prison social worker, youth parole officer in the Lod-Ramla area, coordinator of field work in the Social Welfare School, Haifa University; during the Yom Kippur War served as coordinator of social workers who brought the news of death of soldiers to their parents; after 1974 division head at Oranim, the child and family clinic. Lived in Tel-Aviv.

August, 1998

What do you remember of the period immediately preceding the establishment of the State?

I completed my studies at the Gymnasia high school, and became member of Hashomer Hatzair. Originally the battalion I was in operated as two sections. One was drafted to the Palmakh and trained in Beit Zer'a, whereas the second, comprising younger members, me included, stayed in the city. I remember, I awaited conscription to the Palmakh. All of us had been active before then in Hagana, carrying out operations such as guarding the sea-shore when ships bearing illegal immigrants came in. I remember how we used to walk up and down the sea-shore in couples, pretending to be lovers, but in actual fact we were on guard duty; this was a ruse to disguise our real mission.

As I waited for the draft, Hashomer Hatzair sent in a request to recruit eight to ten people to help with getting kibbutz Shoval off the ground. We were torn between our desire to go up to our kibbutz [in Beit Zer'a] and the request for assistance from Kibbutz Shoval. In our repertoire of images, Hashomer Hatzair was our mother, whereas the Palmakh was our father. Our deliberations were not easy at all.

Ultimately we opted for Kibbutz Shoval. We were told to get to Ruhama where we were due to meet people from Shoval. At that time we were not aware of the fact that Shoval was part of a larger settlement operation which included eleven settlements in the south. I remember that we arrived on the Day of Atonement in 1947 and ran away in Hanukkah 1948; we wanted to go back and rejoin our friends in Beit Zer'a.

After our escape we waited, excited, for our imminent conscription to the Palmakh. Once again Hashomer Hatzair, however, intervened, and, this time we were told to get ready for Gush Etzion. We were not exactly overjoyed by the news, but did join Kibbutz Revadim in Gush Etzion. Shortly afterward, Palmakh sought to throw us out arguing that we did not belong there, but this didn't change a thing and we stayed on in Gush Etzion.

When I got to Gush Etzion I immediately felt really at home there. In 1936 my father, together with his friend Shneorsohn, came to Gush Etzion to split Hebron from Jerusalem. Before the

[Arab revolt] my mother, who was a medic, was asked to go there. During Passover, when the riots started, we got chased away. I remember well how a truck, packed with Arabs wielding swords and yelling "Nebi Mussa," moved toward us. Shortly afterward, my father was wounded. So, you can see that when I finally got there, my heart skipped a beat. My friends knew the depth of my bonds to the place; they even brought my father over for a visit.

What was your family like on the eve of the events of 1948? Please, address the economic situation, your parents' occupation, etc. What did your family read in those years?

I spent the first five years of my life in Kfar Gil'adi. I was the only child. After he was wounded, my father got a job in the municipality. By trade he was an inventor who patented his inventions. Among other things, he invented an apparatus for testing the level of chlorine in the water.

When the War of Independence broke out, he asked for unpaid leave and worked for the armaments industry, hoping to help in this area.

We lived in a four-room apartment. My parents and I had one room, the second was given to a divorced woman—my parents' friend—and her two sons, whereas the fourth was rented to a young woman who arrived from Poland. Her rent was five pounds which we needed very badly. I remember that before signing the rental agreement with her, she was asked to swear she would live there by herself and not bring any boyfriend over, otherwise we would suffer from terrible congestion. It goes without saying that, ultimately, she got married and lived in the same room not only with her husband but also with a baby that was born.

Because of his wounds my father did not earn much. My mother worked hard all her life in menial jobs. Under the British she worked washing shells and mines in kerosene. Can you believe this? Her hands had always been inflamed. Later, she worked cleaning up diamond factories. She would sweep everything and then pass it through the sieve looking for diamond chips. The little money my parents earned was earmarked for purchasing food parcels for my mother's sister who lived in Russia.

I read a great deal as a child. I carried cards of at least two libraries, I read everything I could lay my hands on. Translations from Russian and Polish. I read *With Fire and Sword* [by Sienkiewicz], and, of course, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy. My father, a chemist and agronomist by profession [which explains also my reading chemistry and agronomy books], knew almost all Russian poetry by heart. He would read to me in Russian and this was how I learned. I remember the excitement when Hebrew translations came out. We would hold reading duos: he read in Russian and I in Hebrew.

What are your memories of the Holocaust?

No one from my family perished in the Holocaust. All of my family has Russian roots; we had no relatives in Poland. The only one who died was my father's brother and he was killed by the Red Army. I was 12, maybe 13 when I first heard about the Holocaust. I remember I wrote a poem about the subject. I was terribly disappointed when after many years I discovered that two notebooks with everything that I had written, including that poem, had been lost. I can still curse myself over this. I wrote at least one poem about the subject and it's gone. I also wrote a story about an Israeli child who travels to Europe to visit his grandmother, and cannot

go back. The Holocaust left a particularly deep impression on me; my parents were preoccupied with it for a long time, spoke about it a great deal at home. Recently I found myself going to Poland, in one of the first visits by young Israelis.

What do you remember of the period immediately preceding the establishment of the State?

I was in the hospital then due to some stomach problems. Interesting that you are asking me this question now, because recently my granddaughter telephoned me asking about my memories of those times and I have just written to her about it. In any event, I was in the city, hospitalized, after surgery.

Where were you when the State of Israel was proclaimed? Can you focus on a specific event associated with the proclamation?

My classmates came to visit me in the hospital and told me about the declaration of independence. They literally dragged me out of my hospital bed and together we went to Dizengoff Street, the Magen David Square.

I remember singing and dancing. But I also remember well the anxiety. Terrible anxiety. Revadim, my kibbutz had already been under one attack, seven policemen with the local Jewish police force had been killed. During my stay in the city, the 35 of the convoy died, and we had to bring the news to some of the parents. Every day someone "went away" [was killed]; we really didn't know what the day would bring.

Under these circumstances I couldn't stay in the city, of course. The next morning I began looking for a ride to Gush Etzion, despite the fact that my doctor told me I must stay in the hospital. I remember that my father asked for my poem notebook, saying he'd better keep it, just in case.

Our driver kept a seat for me in his truck, and I got to Gush Etzion in the last convoy, the convoy of Nebi Daniel. The Arabs knew that a large convoy was planned and they were prepared for our arrival. Later, I was taken prisoner. I was in Beit Lehem, in Hebron, and on the other side of the Jordan River. We, the girls, were released after one month, whereas the men were kept prisoners for nine months. On my return I got discharged from the army. I decided, however, to get drafted again. I spent several weeks in the Palmakh, until it was disbanded by Ben-Gurion. I was transferred to the headquarters of the southern front and there I stayed until they began discharging students.

I remember, when I returned, Rivka Alfer came to see me; she was the editor of D'var *Ha'poelet* [Working Woman's Voice] newspaper. She asked me to write a story to appear on the first page. She even agreed to delay the publication for one week to give me time to write it. The title I gave to the story was *Letter to Mother*. Over the years this letter became quite famous. During my imprisonment I had thought about my mother more than anybody else, she was my role model as a fighter's wife, as someone who had gone through the real world.

What do you feel today when you recall that event?

I wasn't happy. There was a great fear. There was the initial mirth and joy, people danced on the streets, but mostly it was fear and anxiety. What is going to happen? Will we be able to hold out? What will the British do? We were very much aware of what went on around us.

How did you react to the events? What happened to your family and relatives during the War of Independence?

I have said, my closest family was very small, we were not directly affected.

Can you describe the relationships with other relatives who lived abroad at the time?

My father came to the country together with his sister. She had two sons; one was killed later on. Then, their cousin came together with her three sons. She settled in Afikim. Her first-born son was killed three years ago in a road accident.

What did you feel about the involvement of the Diaspora Jewry in the events taking place in the country?

Maybe the question should be phrased in reverse; in other words, I thought that we had a commitment to the European Jewry. In 1948, American Jewry made a great contribution. They dispatched ships with supplies. There was this sustained feeling that they kept on giving, that they really cared about us.

Did you experience any changes in your daily life after the establishment of the State, compared to the preceding period?

Look, even before the establishment of the State we were hard up. Every family had conscripts, the general feeling wasn't good. No one knew where their children were. On the other hand everybody knew we had no choice that we had to do it this way. There wasn't any euphoria. No significant changes took place after the State was established. The questions that buzzed in the air around us were, "For how long we'll have to keep paying the price?" "How many comrades will fall?"

How would you describe your own and your family's political views in 1948?

My parents supported Poaley Zion, Mapam. I supported Hashomer Hatzair. On elections day I voted M, for Mapam.

Did your political views affect, in your opinion, your reading of the key events of the times?

It's possible that they did, but the feeling was that things other than politics determined the course of events. At that time the people made all the difference. Later on, when I was in the army, elections were held and things got dirty. My feeling was that it was the community or collectivity that was in charge. Sure, there was bitterness, for example, [the] Lehi people over the Altalena affair or our bitterness over the disbandment of the Palmakh, but in general, the feeling was that the burden was shared by everyone and that this made a difference.

Did your being a woman affect your political involvement or lack thereof at the time?

One thing that I remember was that women shared everything with the men. Guard duty, regular duties, everything. Under siege, we were possessed of maternal feelings, as if we felt obliged to take care of our men. I thought about my mother a great deal then, about all she had gone through all those years as a guard's wife, and, later, when my father was a policeman [with local Jewish police] in Gush Etzion, and afterward, when he was wounded. All these years she worked so hard and refused welfare assistance. All of a sudden I understood her emotional burden. And this was the reason why, after my release from captivity, I wrote a letter to mother. More than with anything else I identified with her, with her difficulties. You should keep in mind that in those times people came of age very quickly; all of a sudden everything turned serious.

In the period of the establishment of the State, is there any event that you now regard as a cardinal mistake? In other words, do you recall an event that if it had been up to you, you would have made it turn out differently?

Look, so much has been said about this. Since then everything has taken on political party colors. I was very much concerned with the split between right and left. The fact that Palmakh and Lehi could not be brought together as a single body; the fact that Palmakh had to be disbanded. I also remember very well the contribution of the Orthodox. There was a young man with me, Avrema'le who got enrolled together with me at the literature department. He was Orthodox through and through. But he also served as emissary of Hagana. I remember that when I started looking for information about him, I discovered that he fell in the War of Independence. So, it turns out, the Orthodox did shoulder the burden, but in those days those things were pretty much self-evident. There was no polarization as it exists today.

In your opinion, does your perspective as a woman differ from a man's perspective vis-à-vis the events of 1948?

I never faced the dilemma of man vs. woman. Everyone did what he could. In recent years I thought about our way of dressing, how far we were from feminine coyness, make-up, etc.

Who are the women you admire, women you can remember from the year 1948?

I admired Mania Shohat. I knew her well, and simply adored her. Also Tova Portugali. Both were Hashomer women. For me they embodied the small woman who kept the country together through the sheer force of her effort. I didn't like Golda Meir, didn't identify myself with her. True, she radiated a great deal of strength, but I discovered those things about her only in retrospect.

Yael Vered

Scholar and Researcher in Middle East studies; born 1922, Tel-Aviv; studied botany, MA in Arabic language and literature and Islamic history, Hebrew University; started working for Foreign Ministry in 1948, appointed political advisor at Israeli Embassy in France 1960, director of the Middle East Division in Foreign Ministry 1970-79, appointed Israel's ambassador to UNESCO 1979; Foreign Ministry Deputy Director for Non-Governmental Organizations; Israel Radio commentator on Arab affairs 1960's; author: Revolution and War in Yemen 1977; in recent years involved in campaign for improvement of quality of life and restrictions on motorized traffic in Israel. Lives in Jerusalem.

February, 1998

Describe the period preceding the establishment of the State.

To describe the period generally or specifically for me?

If possible, preferably with a focus on yourself.

I studied Arabic language and literature and botany at the Hebrew University. At the end of 1946 I was about to complete my MA. One has to understand that there were no regular BA studies; instead there was a straight program for an MA. I started studying in 1941 in a full program. I preferred the botany because I wanted a profession with my feet on the ground. Besides which, the botany trips for the courses were wonderful.

During my studies I was enlisted into Shai, the information service of the Hagana. I assume they approached me because I had excellent command of English as well as Arabic. I was enlisted with two other friends; one was killed in the War of Independence and the second, later on from an illness. I remember that we sat in a cellar and listened to conversations of the high Arab committee [the chairman of the workers' committee-Jamal al Huseini], to certain British sources [mainly the British High Command] and sometimes also to private Arab homes.

Today when I remember what we had at our disposal, I realize how primitive everything was. We listened to conversations and wrote things down by hand. Sometimes we were connected to telephone centers, sometimes to private telephone lines.

Our cover that we prepared for the British was that we were turning the cellar we were in to a warehouse for medicines. Funny as it sounds I pretended to be a cleaner. Today it's clear to me that the excuse was pitiful and if someone had raided the warehouse I would have, without a doubt, been jailed. The cellar I'm telling you about was on King George Street in Jerusalem. I think it was the house where afterwards the Mandarin Restaurant was for years. The British were always in the area. To make sure that no stranger entered we had a password and only if you said it along with a special knock on the door could you come in. During those years I lived in the Bet Hakerem neighborhood. In the morning I would go to work by bus.

If my memory is correct, the information service paid me something, but I'm not sure. I remember that I asked what would happen if I were arrested, and the answer that I was given was, "You'll have a good lawyer." I believed that. I didn't really expect money.

In those years I also taught in an evening school of Working Youth [a labor youth movement]. Those were the last years of study. The evening school was in Lemel in Jerusalem, and it was hard to get to. On the way I was subject to searches by the British because of the activities of the underground, mainly of Etzel. It should be understood that those were years of great tensions, but we were totally filled with belief. In the background, of course, was the end of the Second World War. At that time I was immersed in a lot of work connected with the "listening."

In my childhood my parents lived for many years in the United States. At the age of two I stayed in the USA for a year. My mother's parents still lived there and during that stay and others I learned English as well as Yiddish. Dad was the one who taught me English. At home in Bet Hakerem we had a radio. Not many people at that time could afford to have such an instrument. It was a rare commodity.

I remember that while I was in school we were already demonstrating, all the children in the school, against the white paper. Those were tasks we undertook with joy. Nobody had to ask us. We had a sense of a just struggle.

Describe your memories of the period when you made aliyah to Israel.

As I said, except for the year I stayed in the USA when I was two, I was never abroad for a significantly extended time.

Describe your family status just before 1948. In your answer please refer to the economic situation, your parents' business, your own, if relevant, the number of people in the household, etc.

My father was the assistant engineer of the Jerusalem district for the British. That was, of course, a good position economically and status-wise. We were three children in the house. One of my brothers, the little one, fell in the War of Independence. My second brother was already in Ein Harod. Afterwards, toward the end of the Second World War, he moved to Menarah. My mother was a housewife all the years. The food in the house was Lithuanian Jewish, what's called today "laundered chicken." But actually food didn't interest anyone.

Dad worked a lot with Arabs, and I remember that from the age of seven or eight I would join him. So, for example, I would sit at an "apology" ceremony between two families which had sworn blood revenge. I remember that the chairman of the ceremony opened with the words "Ladies and gentlemen," and I was no more than ten years old.

I also remember that I once went on a trip to the Judean wilderness with a very important Englishman. We also went to Carmel and to Maon. He primarily wanted to know what Jewish children knew about the Bible. I had a Bible in Hebrew and he had one in English, and so we wandered. I was a girl. I remember the excitement of independence without parents. Later I discovered that I had traveled with the head of the British detective service. I grew up in a house with a very developed Jewish consciousness. Actually the whole family was connected to the Hagana. My younger brother was twenty-one when he was killed in the Palmach.

We read a lot in the house. I read a lot in English. There was a cosmopolitan feeling. I read everything, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, like everyone. The school library was very extensive. I think that French or English children didn't read like we did. Especially in Jerusalem, in those years, there was a cosmopolitan ambience. In our family it was even more significant because we had very many Arab friends because of Dad's profession.

Are you willing to share your memories of the Holocaust with us?

I don't want to talk about the Holocaust.

What do you remember about the period just prior to the establishment of the State?

When I completed my studies in Jerusalem, I moved to Tel-Aviv, and then I got a job at D'var Hapoalot [a publication for working women]. I didn't have a contract to continue the connection with the information service. I think that they even stopped my work. I don't remember exactly.

It was a difficult period from every point of view. In Tel-Aviv I lived in a room in the house of Rabbi Uziel. They were important people and they had an apartment on Yavneh Street in Tel-Aviv, close to Yehuda Halevi Street. As I said, I had a room, and in the room there was a radio. Imagine. It was, as I told you earlier, a period of great hopes. The job at D'var Hapoalot, within the framework of the organization for working mothers, was not fascinating. But I remember that at the time I met Rachel Shazar, Devorah Idelson, Rachel Dayan, all the important women. I was there for a short time.

Where were you when the State of Israel was established? Can you focus on a specific event that you remember and that is connected to the establishment of the State?

I definitely remember the excitement. We were totally immersed in the radio. We called friends to let them know. I went out to dance with friends immediately after the announcement. A short time afterwards, in January or at the latest, February 1948, I stopped working with the organization for working mothers. I remember that people from the Hagana approached me and asked me to work in the Red House on Hayarkon Street in Tel-Aviv where the general headquarters were.

At that time we received material of various kinds and we were supposed to produce a daily report, sometimes even twice daily, depending on the quality of the things that were received. I remember well that when Abed el Huseini was killed we received his identity card. Sometimes things that fell into soldiers' hands were brought to us, and we were supposed to analyze and explain what we could learn from them. Some of the things we got were interesting; others were stupid.

At that time we worked in teams of three. We all knew Arabic well. Sometimes we would get a diary, sometimes, lists, and sometimes "listening" reports. Everything passed our desks. Obviously what interested us was mainly military material.

What is the main feeling you have when you remember that event?

To this day I become very moved when I see a section of the UN vote. "Yes. Yes. Abstain."
To this day I am very moved.

How did you react to events? What happened to your family and people close to you during the War of Independence?

As I said, during the War of Independence I was physically at general headquarters, in the Red House. I remember a particularly difficult evening when Gush Etzion fell. Yigal Yadin was then the head of general headquarters. It was a very heavy evening. Although he didn't show his feelings, it was clear to all of us that it was especially bad.

The second event I remember was when my brother fell. They came and a girl who was my brother's girlfriend for a certain amount of time told me. I won't go into it. Actually, the story is not very clear about what exactly happened.

Describe the connections with other members of your family that weren't in Israel.

My mother was in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was under siege. My little brother lived for a short time in Kalia in Bet Haarava. I think that, in fact, in the first phase he was in Kiriath Anavim and in Maale Hahamisha. By the way, my brother was supposed to be on the list of 35, but he was rejected. My father worked in Tel-Aviv during those years. He was already retired. Another brother was in Menarrah. I remember that I mainly corresponded with my little brother, who was killed. My grandfather, grandmother, uncles and aunts were all in Tel-Aviv. My aunt was married to Shprintzak, the one who was the speaker of the Knesset.

What were your feelings about the link of Diaspora Jews to the events in Israel?

The truth is that more than anything I was involved with the war. The reality of the times must be understood. My cousin fell in battle. I don't know if you remember but on the 15 May 1948 a plane fell on Tel-Aviv. My cousin was in it and he was killed. Nobody thought about Diaspora Jewry then. We couldn't think about it. I worked very hard. I kept getting information about the casualties. Understand, we were 600,000 in the Jewish settlement and we suffered 6000 deaths. A lot of those who were killed were civilians. It's a situation which is hard to describe. We didn't deal with Diaspora Jewry at all.

Was there any change in your daily life after the establishment of the State in comparison to the period preceding it?

Of course there was a change. First of all, I transferred to the Foreign Service. I continued to deal with Arab issues, although the path was much more organized from a professional point of view. In March 1949, I also married Aaron.

How would you describe your political position and that of your family in 1948?

I think it's very clear from everything I've said up to now. Understand, the household was enlisted in the Hagana, the Palmach. If my uncle was Shprintzak, nothing more needed to be said. Look, grandfather and grandmother made aliyah in 1905. Grandfather, at that time, was at the end of his thirties. Maybe we didn't talk about politics, but that was because there was no need. That grandfather lost two grandsons. That says everything. Everyone was engaged.

Do you think that your political position influenced your interpretation of the central events of the period?

Look, of course. At the beginning I intended to work on Arab folklore. Since I was connected with Arabs, I encountered them a lot in my childhood. When I studied at the university, I had to choose another subject because of the events of the Second World War. The possibility of doing anthropological research that involved travel was eliminated. That's how I left the

subject, and I finally wrote about Arabic literature. My subject is called "Sira" or "These Chronicles." It's a story that is told in Egypt; actually they're mythical folk tales. They have a fascinating basis. For example, I wrote about superstitions and witchcraft.

Everything started from the fact, as I told you, that I couldn't do field work in those years. When I was enlisted in the information service, it was because I had been looking for work, although when they offered it to me it was obvious [that I would take it]. Afterwards I spent a period of time in the immigrant camps. From this you can see the direction of things.

Did being a woman have an influence on your being politically active/inactive during that period?

It didn't have any influence because there was no difference. All the business about feminism sprang up artificially afterwards. In the department where I worked I was one woman with one typist, but it seemed entirely natural. In my studies at the university I met a lot of women.

Is there a particular event from the period of the establishment of the State that you remember as being basically mistaken? Or, in other words, can you remember any event which, if it had been up to you, you would have acted differently?

Look, there's no doubt that in the battles there were very many mistakes and errors. Who am I to judge, but it's clear to me that there were numerous mistakes. Take for example, the fact that they didn't clear the people from Gush Etzion. That was a mistake. From the political point of view, I didn't feel there were things I would change.

Do you think your perspective as a woman of the events of 1948 are different than a man's?

No. Not at all. That's a question I never thought of in those years. Later on, I became aware of the differences, but then it wasn't at all relevant. It wasn't an issue. Nobody asked questions. Understand that even in 1946 in the cellar with the two boys, they were my friends. What was relevant was what would happen if suddenly the British broke in and not at all the fact that I was a woman and they were men.

Who are the feminine figures that you admired which you can remember from around 1948?

I told you that I was on the D'var Hapoalot. So, there I saw all the battles for respect, status, authority. It repelled me. I didn't like the place; it had a sticky ambiance. Because I didn't see that place as permanent, it didn't really bother me and I dealt with it with humor. During those years, I didn't meet any women warriors, but it's clear that especially it was then that I lost my innocence.

Can you recommend other women who were at the central political and social pivotal points for an interview of this kind?

Yes, Aviva Rabinowitch—the former head scientist of the Nature Reserves.

A personal picture/documentation of the period.

I have almost no pictures from the period, because almost no one took photographs at that time. Anyway, because of the sensitivity of the things I told you about and also the people with whom I came into contact, even if I have a few photographs, I prefer not to show them.

To complete the interview is there any central point that we haven't related to?

Look, it's important to me to repeat and emphasize that the feminist issue didn't exist at all at that time. My mother was a housewife. When the Palmach went out on duty, the women were enlisted to help. I can also tell you another story about a mother of a good friend of mine. Look, at that time there was a significant lack of food. And that friend of my mother had an only daughter. I remember a visit when I went with my mother, who brought her an onion as a present. I remember how my friend's mother held the onion in her hand as though she were holding a diamond. The women used to prepare food and make tea. It was understood. And it was a big contribution. Those were years when people waited in line for water.

Rivka Weingarten

August, 1998

Could you describe the period preceding the establishment of the State?

Look, I must describe things from a broader perspective and take into account my first years. My first memory, when I was 4, is of the earthquake in 1927. This experience made a lasting impression on me. As a child I was very much attached to my father. He was not simply my father; I terribly wanted to be like him, he was an extraordinary person. We lived in this apartment then, but on the lower floor. Underneath was a water cistern. It goes without saying that in those days there wasn't any air-conditioning, and we used to spend our summers there. I remember, we were taking our afternoon nap, myself, my sisters—Yehudit, one year my junior, and Masha, two years younger—and my parents. I woke up to the smell of frying eggplants. Mother asked me why I had woken up at the same moment that the house started moving. All the dome-shaped ceilings cracked and caved in. My father's appearance is etched in my memory: the man who had always been particular about the way he dressed, came out of the house wearing socks and without his coat. It is written, after all, that the learned man with a speck on his clothes deserves to die.

What was your family like on the eve of the events of 1948? Please, address the economic situation, your parents' occupation, etc. What did your family read in those years?

My family has an extended history which I describe in my book, [The Jerusalem Mission](#). There I told the story of my three forefathers after they came to the country, including Rabbi Shlomo Pakh Rosenthal.

He was one of the first ten Ashkenazi Jews who came to Jerusalem, out of a group of Hagra students who came to Zefat in 1810. Our house was a spiritual and, cultural center for all residents of the [Jewish] Quarter. My family was religious but very Zionist.

I remember how, on eve of the events of 1929, all of us stood outside—we were a group of children—and my father showed up together with his friend, and they just scooped us up and carried us to the storage room of my parents' house. I heard shouts growing louder and as they got nearer us we could hear them more clearly. They shouted, "Slaughter the Jews!"

My life was filled to the brim with overwhelming and saddening experiences related to the Jewish Quarter. I don't know whether you are aware of the fact that a great many Jewish properties were located in the Moslem Quarter, whereas Arabs owned a great deal of property in the Jewish Quarter. Until 1929 Jews lived in all parts of the Old City, in other words, also in the Armenian and Christian Quarters. After the events of 1929, the Jews left all the three Quarters and settled exclusively in the Jewish Quarter. People drew conclusions from the Hebron events. When the events broke out again, in 1936, the Jewish Quarter itself suffered from looting, burning and robbery. People started leaving the Quarter and their departure haunts me until today. I had always watched people leaving the Quarter, but never returning to it. In my childhood, just like today, I was bound with deep emotional ties to the Quarter, owing, naturally, to my father's influence.

In the aftermath of the events of 1936, it was decided to establish the Jewish Committee of the Old City [of Jerusalem], representing all the communities. I still have in my possession all the voters' lists; each community elected a leader who was a rabbi, and my father was elected chairman of the Committee, despite the fact that he was the youngest of all the members. Most representatives on the Committee were members of the old Yishuv [predating Zionist immigration], and my father represented the new Yishuv, largely thanks to his knowledge of innumerable languages.

My father worked all his life to improve the well-being of the residents, but he always ran into obstacles. His actions were foiled by national institutions, of all things. Despite the fact that my father argued forcefully that the Jewish Quarter was a unique place, with a Jewish population and holy places, his pleas fell on deaf ears.

Over the years most rabbis resigned from the Committee, leaving my father together with another representative as the only members. More and more the Committee became his own venture; it goes without saying that he recruited my mother and me and worked us very hard.

In time he founded a clinic for all residents of the Quarter, without regard for their religion or race. I am proud of it. I remember well how, as a child, I played with Christian and Armenian children; we also got together on the occasion of holy days or other celebrations. We got along fine, had correct and I believe even authentic, relations.

The second institution my father founded was a soup kitchen, which was run by my mother. Nowadays it's called a public kitchen. This venture continued to function until the fall of the Jewish Quarter in 1948.

What are your memories of the period immediately preceding the establishment of the State?

In 1947 the UN proclaimed the division of the Land of Israel. It was on November 29th. The next day the Arabs declared a three-day strike, it was a custom with them. They closed all the gates leading to the Quarters. No one could get in or out. In fact, the Arab siege of the Quarter lasted for six-and-a-half months.

During that time residents suffered terribly. First of all, we were locked up at home from 6 p.m. for days on end. Second, whole families were torn apart. In the morning a father would go out for work in the western sector of the city and did not return, leaving his wife and children alone, or a son departed leaving his parents behind, etc. In any event, doors to our house were kept open throughout that period which I remember very well.

When the siege began I worked as a government clerk in the office of the district commissioner. On November 30th, I left home as usual in the morning, on my way to work. I had a girlfriend in the Quarter, a new immigrant, with whom I used to go out to work every morning. I felt something in the air. I remember we went past the police [station] which was empty. The area around the King David's Tower was also empty. In the Jaffa gate there was no living soul in sight. Having crossed the gate, right on the other side, we saw a group of some 300 Arabs armed with stones and sticks. I told her, "Rachel, stick close to me." Then, all of them, as one man, started moving toward us. I saw the end. Suddenly, I heard someone yelling in Arabic: "Leave her alone, she is Mukhtar's daughter!" Although my father wasn't a mukhtar [village or city district chief]

this is what Arab residents of the Quarter called him. I remember myself stopping dead in my tracks. I took Rachel along and we kept on going toward Mamilla [neighborhood outside the Old City walls, adjoining the Jaffa Gate].

My office was located in the triangular building on David Street, vis-à-vis the power company. About one-and-a-half hours later we heard voices outside. We came up to the window and there we saw the same group of 300 rioters, but this time they swung toward Princess Mary Street [now Shlomzion Hamalka]. They got as far as the Generalli building with an intention to attack. Members of Hagana and the police chased after them and they retreated.

On that day they set the entire commercial center and the Shma'a neighborhood on fire. Everything was burning. Having been forced to watch the hours-long spectacle from the window of my office, I asked permission to go home. Members of Hagana escorted everyone to their homes, but I couldn't go back to anywhere.

I telephoned my father—we had a telephone at home then—but it got disconnected, together with power and water lines. Father suggested that I stay with grandfather who lived outside the Old City walls. He told me that people had been killed and injured there. It rent my heart and I wanted terribly to go back. I was fortunate that in the early phase of the siege of the Quarter, people of the Red Star of David were allowed in. I went to their offices, and waited there for two days. I am ashamed to tell you that I hoped someone would suffer injury and need their help. At long last, on the third day, someone called for an ambulance and I returned home. After that I did not leave the Quarter.

The most terrible thing was that we had no idea what each day would bring. We didn't know how long this was going to last. I remember convoys with food arriving, and my father being in charge of food distribution.

Where were you when the State of Israel was proclaimed? Can you focus on a specific event associated with the proclamation?

In my opinion, we didn't know at all about the independence proclamation, because by that time all connections with the new city had been disrupted. We learned about the event after it had occurred: the Arabs surrounded the entire Quarter, standing on the rooftops in order to threaten us. There were not just Palestinians among the Arabs, but from all the Arab armies as well. Ultimately, it turned out that no real war took place during the siege; the war began only after the State was proclaimed, after the departure of the British from the country. As I have said earlier, the Arabs surrounded the Quarter which was small and contracted anyway. We lived in a ghetto.

By that time I had been married for one month. I remember I was standing in my new apron, making coffee for Hagana troops who guarded the Quarter. All of a sudden I heard shouts: "Run away, run away!" My mother panicked and suffered a stroke from which she didn't recover to her last day. Since people had nowhere to run away to, all of them got inside, into their homes. One large concentration of Jews was in the Rabbi Yohanan Ben-Zakkai Synagogue. Most of the synagogue was actually located underground, below the street level. On the street where the synagogue was, the Beth-El Street, Jordanian soldiers were patrolling with bayonets. They were aiming straight at the small window of the synagogue, where 1,700 people, men, women and children, were packed.

The war lasted for two weeks. I learned about some of its horrors from my sister who, it turned out, heard about them from a woman who worked as a certified nurse. There were dead and wounded people and my sister was supposed to identify them. Initially, we could bury the dead in a provisional cemetery, but during the last two days we were not even allowed to bury them, so we had no choice but to assemble the bodies in the mother's poor's shelter.

Medical supplies practically ran out before the war ended, my mother was paralyzed, and one of my sisters was slightly wounded in her leg. So, I visited the hospital quite often. It was terrible to see people being operated on without anesthesia. There was no electricity and the screams shook the heavens. There wasn't any alcohol. I remember a case of a young man whose jaw was broken by a bullet. What screams! It was horrible. There was a doctor there, a plastic surgeon, who tried everything.

In another case, my sister Yehudit was asked to sit by the bedside of a young man who had been wounded in his back by a grenade, a few hours before his brother was killed at another location. She was asked to sit by him and try to stop the bleeding. He screamed her name for two days, only to die from blood loss.

I was with my family in the Misgav Ladakh Hospital, the site of the second largest concentration of civilians. The situation came to a point where the Arabs would pass notes to us through the walls, to convince us to surrender. They wrote: "We have always lived together, surrender, nothing will come to you." In Lag Ba'Omer the entire Quarter was on fire. Nothing remained. I simply felt the flames all around me, all the time. Ultimately, we were instructed by the Palmakh commander to surrender. Some evil tongues say that it was the residents of the Quarter themselves who asked to surrender. Others maintain that my father told them to surrender, but this is completely untrue. It was an instruction from the Hagana High Command. It was on orders of the Hagana commander that rabbis of the Quarter came out with a white flag. I remember, when they reached a certain alley, shots were fired in the direction of Rabbi Hazzan.

They sought a meeting with Abdallah Altal, commander of the Jordanian Legion. At the meeting the rabbis said they wanted truce. His response was that he was willing to talk only with two people: commander of the Israeli forces and the person in charge of the civilian population, in other words, my father. My father said he would agree on the condition that all the residents of the Quarter would be allowed to cross over to the new city through the Zion Gate, and that only the fighters would be taken prisoner.

When Abdallah Altal came out with his exquisitely dressed officers, and gave the order to split the residents into two groups, he was astonished. I remember his astonishment when he looked at me; he had always seen me in my very best.

When he approached the group of 23 fighters, their faces covered with beards, without uniforms, haggard looking, he ordered them to lay down their weapons. It turned out there weren't two firearms similar to each other. He said loudly, for everyone to hear: "If I had known that this is the situation, I wouldn't have wasted any guns or ammunition on you, I would have fought you with sticks and stones." He simply refused to believe what his eyes saw, the paltry number of our fighters. He decided to abrogate the agreement right then and

there, and took civilian prisoners—sixty, seventy, even eighty-year old people. It was so humiliating.

Meanwhile all the wounded and the sick were transported on the stretchers. Someone called my name, saying my mother wanted to talk to me. She couldn't really speak; she just kept mumbling something. I called to my father, who had always been able to understand her. Father said that mother wanted me to leave together with the residents. Her argument was that we had lived in Jerusalem for so many generations, and now she was afraid of a slaughter. She told father to convince me to leave, so that at least I could have a family, there will be some continuity. I started crying [she starts sobbing]. I tried to resist, but ultimately I left together with an old aunt after the Sabbath came.

After my departure I searched for my parents for ten days. I searched for them among the survivors, I asked who saw my father. No one told me the same story. Every day I came to the [Jewish] Agency, I got to know everyone there. On the tenth day the Red Cross list of prisoners arrived and all members of my family were included in it.

Ours was the only family to be taken prisoner in its entirety. My father was released in a prisoner exchange due to his prominence. The rest of my family returned six weeks later. My father lost all his possessions with the fall of the Jewish Quarter. Shortly after his release we became penniless; we had nothing left. All these years, father hoped we could go back, but he didn't see the reunification of the city, because he died in 1964. My mother lived up to 1973.

What did you feel about the involvement of the Diaspora Jewry in the events taking place in the country?

I knew the meaning of exile very well, because after our departure from the Quarter we lived in Rehavia for many years. Father used to sign every letter he sent: 'from exile in Rehavia.' People laughed at him because we lived twenty minutes walking distance from the Jewish Quarter, but for him not living there amounted to a real exile. All those years, father refused to allow us to take care of the house, or to listen to music. His life was the life of the Quarter. For him departure amounted to the destruction of the Third Temple. Every year he fasted on the day of the fall of the Quarter.

I understand, therefore, the meaning of exile, and I am sad over the fact that people come here only when the oppressor arises. I wish everyone would come.

How would you describe your own and your family's political views in 1948?

My father was not affiliated with any political party, he voted according to his conscience. So did I, all my life. The Orthodox did not like the fact that he reported to the [Yishuv] national institutions, which he held in high regard. But, as I have mentioned, we combined religiousness with Zionism.

Did your being a woman affect your political involvement or lack thereof at the time?

Look, there were only girls in our house, and I was the first-born. I was my father's tail. Nowadays, it seems most natural to talk about equality, to see women holding key posts. I have never waved bras or slogans. I am a quiet person who made her way step by step. I always joined every activity, every center. I tried. I had never used my name or connections. I

reached the top. I worked as department head in the Finance Ministry, a very senior position, and never talked about it. Everything I did was slow and on the safe side.

In the period of the establishment of the State, is there any event that you now regard as a cardinal mistake? In other words, do you recall an event that if it had been up to you, you would have made it turn out differently?

I am critical of the treatment accorded to the Jewish Quarter from 1947 onward, because we were neglected. Today it is easy to talk about it because there are new historians who added a great deal of new evidence to the discussion, documents hitherto hidden, and, besides, the archives have been opened. Today, it is clear to me that not only was there no plan to defend the Quarter, but also that they didn't want to defend Jerusalem. Even today people are not interested in the Quarter. The only ones to come here to visit are the settlers with whose views I disagree.

Who are the women you admire, women you can remember from the year 1948?

Look, I have always admired women. I don't recall names at the moment, but I didn't admire Golda; she had not one drop of femininity in her.