

Coming Face to Face With Israel's History

Meeting Zippy Porath is like shaking hands with George Washington—only Zippy has better punchlines.

As a young journalism student, she won a scholarship and moved from her native New York to Jerusalem in October 1947. She was supposed to spend an interesting year abroad studying at Hebrew University and honing her craft.

When things heated up, her family urged her to return to safety in the U.S., but she wasn't about to miss her shot at covering one of the biggest stories ever.

She's still in Israel, and we are the richer for it.

Some years ago, when cleaning out her parents' apartment, she discovered a cache of the letters she had sent home, describing history as it was happening all around her. She edited those letters and added "a lot of things I didn't tell my family at the time," and the result is *Letters from Jerusalem 1947-1948*.

The immediacy and freshness of Zippy's insights make you feel as if you are standing over her shoulder as she writes.

But Zippy was not just an eyewitness to history. She helped make it—as an active participant in the Haganah, as a trained nurse and as a devoted Zionist.

Having had the honor of attending two of Zippy's lectures as a volunteer for Israel, I can tell you she is even better in person than on page, and that's setting the bar quite high. She expands on the material in her book, adding riveting detail.

Even as her idealism and love for Israel shine through, Zippy

is honest and clear-eyed as she discusses things that could be—and should be—better. For example, she complains about the low-level duties assigned to Haganah women despite their theoretical equality.

She tells of Haganah girls hiding hand grenades in their bras while they strolled hand in hand with the boys, betting the British soldiers would do the gentlemanly thing and search only the men as the women stood demurely to one side and waited.

She mentions that, as a good American girl, she always kept her bright-red Revlon Fire and Ice lipstick handy. When she was the first person with medical training on the site of a terrorist bombing, she used the lipstick to draw a huge Star of David on a wall and then set up a first-aid station.

She describes the Siege of Jerusalem, and her voice still catches when she tells of seeing the lead truck on one of the first relief convoys to reach the city.

Someone had written on it “אם אשכחך ירושלים” —“If I forget thee, Jerusalem,” from Psalm 137.

Zippy is an inspiration. She is my Israel memory.

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