

Israela

By Dr. Batya Casper



Viewing Israel Through Three Women's Eyes

Israel becomes a character in the story as we follow the lives of three women growing up in Israel after the country's independence in 1948. In this beautifully written book by Dr. Batya Casper (Tate Publishing, 2011), we explore the debate between the Israelis and the Arabs as they try to live side by side.

I found Casper's way of presenting each side's view through these women's eyes really made me feel that I was in their shoes as they try to figure out how to live in peace and why after all this time the Arabs and Israelis cannot find a way to get along. Her descriptions are poignant, and her viewpoint is objective.

Our main characters are Orit, a child rescued from the Holocaust and brought to Israel, then adopted by parents who are sympathetic to the idea of Arabs and Israelis co-existing happily; her half-sister, Ruita, also known by the Arab name Ratiba, who takes this idea so much to heart that she marries an Israeli Arab and hides the fact that she is Jewish from him and his family; and their cousin, Ellysheva, who comes to Israel as Allison, and as an adult works in a hospital taking care of the wounded of the wars and the suicide bombers. They are all trying in their own way to make sense of the world they live in and seeking to deal with the sadness and despair they are experiencing.

Ellysheva is at the memorial service for her father, thinking back on the synagogue and religion of her youth, and she thinks, "I wonder now why loving G-d is a commandment and why to love your neighbor like yourself is the second most important principle of faith, a rule like not crossing the road on a red light. I wonder why protecting the stranger in our midst is almost as important in the scriptures as honoring our father and our mother, as not coveting our neighbor's wife. Because if the strangers in our midst were friendly, we would not need a commandment to protect them."

Hamzah, the son of Ratiba, the mother who hides her Judaism, and Ibrahim, an Arab, runs away to live with his Jewish aunt and then joins the Israeli army. He explains his impressions when he is on patrol with his unit

searching through Arab homes looking for explosives and suicide bombers. Hamzah says, "The tragedy is that in the long term, when they wake in the middle of the night to see the 'evil' Israeli soldiers in uniform in their home, their guns at the ready, they look into our eyes, and I know that at that very moment I have created a second generation of suicide bombers."

Casper also brings to life the character of State of Israel. Between chapters of the story we hear from Israela. These parts are written in italics, and it is like you are listening in to her private thoughts. At one point she says, "It was not me who first separated Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau. That would be far beyond my abilities. Do the stories of their Bible not clearly warn them how not behave? What not to repeat? Why don't they see that? It was not I who misinterpreted the Koran into an imperative for murder. Would Allah not have preferred his people to live in peace? Does Elokim, my G-d, want anything but peace for His children?... So they have Allah and we have Elokim, and we are at war."

In a local book group that read this book, the consensus was that this story reflected the reality of life in Israel, presenting a realistic view of the social history of Israel. In the story, the character Orit has a series of dreams interspersed with news bulletins. Batya Casper told me in an interview, "All the news bulletins are factual, as are the stories of Arab/Jewish intermarriage. There are, in fact, a growing number of such cases." Casper says that her interest in writing *Israela* "was to show a truly loving relationship between two good people." All of the scenarios in this story are based on fact.

Casper moved to Israel in 1956. She has lived there intermittently since childhood. She has also lived in numerous other countries, including England, Scotland, South Africa, and the United States. Batya is a director and actress. She also teaches theater. She directed several plays in Israel, including Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and Athol Fugard's *Playground*. She earned a BA in English literature, and has a Masters and a Ph.D. in theater

Arts from UCLA. Casper has taught Hebrew literature and biblical studies in St. Louis and has taught Hebrew to adults in Boston. She also

worked as an assistant to the Cultural Attache of Israel in Boston, as the coordinator of educational programs for exchange students between the United States and Israel.

New in the Federation Library

The following books arrived in the JFNH library in Manchester this winter and are available for your reading pleasure:

Ferguson, Max. *Painting My Father* (Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, 40 pages). Art.

This catalog-like personal and visual account by artist Max Ferguson (with introduction by Gail Levin) features paintings of the artist's father, Richard Jacob Ferguson, from 1986 until Richard Ferguson's death in 2005. Reproductions of the paintings are crisp and colorful, and are accompanied by the artist's commentary.

Moriarty, Chris. *The Inquisitor's Apprentice* (Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt, 345 pages). Young Adult Literature. Science Fiction.

Set in early twentieth century New York City, the Jewish protagonist, young Sacha Kessler, has extraordinary powers to see magic before it happens. Sacha aids local police in solving crimes and saving lives. Complete with heroes and vil-

lians, this fantasy will appeal to young sci-fi readers.

Moskowitz, Faye. *And the Bridge Is Love* (The Feminist Press, 147 pages). Nonfiction.

Acclaimed author Moskowitz reflects on growing up in a Jewish family in Detroit during the Depression and on her life experiences. Essays range from one about a friend dying of cancer to another on binge eating at a wedding. Moskowitz's accounts are wonderfully written, funny and touching.

Weaver, Janice. *Harry Houdini: The Legend of the World's Greatest Escape Artist* (Abrams Books for Young Readers; Madison Press Books). Biography. Children and teens.

Beautifully illustrated by Chris Lane and including many historical photographs and artifacts, this biography of Harry Houdini, a Jewish boy born Ehrich Weiss, covers Harry's childhood of poverty, his rise to fame, his career as a magician specializing in spectacular escapes, and his death of a ruptured appendix at age 52.

Educators Needed

Temple Beth Abraham Nashua, NH, an accredited United Synagogue Framework of Excellence school, is seeking educators for our Kitah Gimel (grade 3) and Kitah Hai (grade 5) classes. We are also hiring a music specialist as well as Youth Group advisors and children's Shabbat service leaders. TBA Religious school meets on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 3:45 to 6:15 p.m. Our Shabbat Sh'leyma program is an interactive learning service for children in grades K-2 that meets two times per month on Shabbat morning.

For more information or to apply for the positions posted, please contact Heidi Lovitz, Director of Education and Programming, Temple Beth Abraham, Nashua, NH. (603)883-9844 or director@tbanashua.org.