

## Mobra was born when he was 13

Mobra, my beloved father, was born when he was 13.

Deeply denying his childhood during the Second World War and after a long period of escape and refuge, he adjusted his count of life from the date he immigrated to Eretz Israel. Four years later, at 17, Mobra joined the armed forces of what later became the Israel Defense Forces and took part in the War of Independence, marking the independence of the State of Israel.

As children, my siblings and I never heard stories such as "when I was your age", stories about his first day in first grade or memories from kindergarten. Memories started at the age of 13. There were many such memories. Stories were told about people and places, about friendship and life experience, but only from the age of his earliest memories, at 13. Childhood for me, my brother and my sister was happy. By no means did we ever feel that we were actually the second generation of someone who had raised himself up from the ashes. There were no self-pitying feelings or the denial of anything that my father had felt.

It was only after my first daughter was born that my father, Mobra, felt that it was important for him to revisit his "pre-13" childhood and share it with us. Actually, only as adults and as parents did we understand the extent of transformation and control of destiny that my father had taken upon himself. Only many years after our childhood did we learn to understand that stories like those of my father and many other immigrants from many different backgrounds created Israeli culture, technology, academia and sense of community as it exists today, for better or for worse. During childhood and adolescence, these cultures constructed me as an Israeli.

Unlike my father, I was born at the age of 0. We lived in a four-storey housing block that was part of three such blocks in a quiet housing project in pre-1967 Jerusalem, that is, before the Six-Day War. In Hebrew, each of these housing complexes was called a *Shikun*. The *Shikun* had no luxury apartments; all units were exactly the same size and shape. Practicality and modesty were the name of the game. The *Shikun* was a melting pot of many identities and cultures; different people, foods, smells and tastes. We had religious neighbours and secular ones, younger neighbours and old ones, new immigrants and long-time residents. Having rather small apartments, much of the social life of the community took place outdoors. Everybody knew everybody and everyone knew everything about everything. For us kids, doors were open all day long. We all grew up hearing various languages, accents and dia-

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lects, and we were exposed to many cultures. We were a real big family that in some cases compensated for lost families that had been left behind or even worse, killed, mostly in Europe during the Holocaust. Of course, people had their share of privacy, small triumphs and disappointments, likes and dislikes, careers and hobbies. Most, if not all, of the people in our community were Jewish. All had the common denominator of being part of creating a nation. The State of Israel was very young at that point in time. The *Shikun* was a microcosm of the social structure of the state. There was much of an "all for one and one for all" atmosphere.

Friendships between kids who lived in that Jerusalem *Shikun* approximately 50 years ago are still flourishing today. The meaning of friendship that, later in my life, became of even greater importance was probably engraved in this block.

The Six-Day War was one of my first memories. The swift military victory after a long time of real threat and insecurity about whether the young state would survive created a thrill and an overwhelming excitement in the hearts of everyone. Many of those people had similar life stories to those of my father, and the sense of security and hope in their lives was re-established after the war. I don't remember the exact details of the war, as I was too young at the time; however, it is obvious that the sense of relief and the understanding that we were facing historical times became part of the nation's identity. It is no longer only a private rise from ashes, but rather part of a greater circle of rise and fall.

Life in Israel has continued to require the country to rely on its self-defence. My father and other fathers of the kids in the *Shikun* and elsewhere were called up to the military reserves at least one month every year. Everyone knew who was called up, when and for how long. Neighbours always helped one another when fathers were summoned or volunteered for service; friendship was demonstrated at its best. Sharing a mutual cause with such intensity gave friendship a special meaning and made friendship a value in itself. In a small intensive social environment such as Israeli society, this value became tangible and was intensified as I grew up. Another pillar of Israeliness was being built.

Not only was our *Shikun* a microcosm of Israeli social structure, but it faced Mount Herzl, the central memorial site of Holocaust victims, and the central Jerusalem military cemetery for soldiers killed in service. It also represents the main site for the opening of the annual celebration of Independence Day. For me, as a child, it served as a time machine, passing through the history of the Jewish people and the establishment of the State of Israel. Every year, in April-May, the state experiences a turbulence of emotional

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peaks. It starts with a time of grief, sorrow and memory at the Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony, which takes place on one side of the mountain, followed a week later by the annual Memorial Day ceremony for soldiers who were killed in Israel's wars, which is held on the other side of the same mountain. The festivities are concluded with the gigantic national celebration of Independence Day, held at the peak of the same mountain just outside our window. Any way you look at it, almost every person in Israel has a friend or relative who died in a war, so those days become very emotional. The emotional ceremonies are intentionally tied together at one location and are held during the same month to demonstrate the sense of dependency and the direct relation between self-defence and the pursuit of independence while offering a better life for future generations. The fact that these ceremonies took place just a footstep away from my home in the *Shikun* perhaps purified and amplified for me the sense of being a Jewish Israeli citizen, touching the essence of change from the Holocaust and the genocide of the Jewish people to the revival and success of the Israeli nation.

Ever since the establishment of the State of Israel by the generation of my parents, two anthems have become part of my life and part of the lives of other people in Israel. These transmit the meaning and the values of being Israeli. The first is the national anthem, *Hatikva*, which means "the hope" and describes the aspiration and hope of the Jewish people to live freely in their homeland. For me, being the daughter of someone who had been freed, to be born only when he was 13, the national anthem has its own special meaning. The second anthem is a song entitled "Hareut" which symbolises friendship forged in battle. *Hareut* well represents the unifying, bonding agent of many Israelis. The song was written by the poet Haim Guri, who is of my father's generation, one of the founders of the state. Guri probably puts best into words the feelings of mutual responsibility and friendship that many Israelis who built the country, as well as many native-born Israelis (*tzabarim*) share till this day, and the special regard they feel towards one another. The relevancy of this poem, though written more than 60 years ago, still serves as a northern star, an eternal assurance for the State of Israel. Somewhere, in the background, it perhaps even serves as an explanation of my existence as an Israeli and the existence of my family as Jews in Israel.

## Hareut / Haim Guri

*They are gone from our midst,  
 All their laughter, their youth and their splendour.  
 But we know that a friendship like that,  
 We are bound all our lives to remember,  
 For a love that in battle is forged,  
 Will endure while we live, fierce and tender.*

*Oh, the friendship we bore without words,  
 It was silent and grey, it was wordless.  
 From the pain and the blood of those days,  
 It remains with us, ardent and yearning.*

*In the name of that friendship we know,  
 In its name we'll go on, every forward,  
 For those friends, when they fell on their swords,  
 Left us this precious gift to recall them.*

A sense of responsibility and high expectations are qualities which are nurtured, mindfully or not, in Israelis. That was the case in the 1950s: it was relevant in my childhood and in many cases it is still relevant today. For me, it started at school and was intensified as an adolescent in the *Tzofim* (Scouts) youth movement. As a youngster I took responsibility for mentoring younger kids with very limited adult interference. The creativity, scholastic performance and - mainly - friendship as a value come up again and again. My peers and I were all brought up by older members of the youth group, and later guided the younger members of the group. Although we naturally had the need to develop our own interests and talents, there was also a very strong sense of caring for our friends.

Compulsory military service of two years after high school, away from home, pushed me to open another circle in becoming part of the big social melting pot. Tough responsibilities were given to me and to the other soldiers in my unit as very young people. Thus, new friendships were forged and evolved through various intense common denominators. Things that started on a smaller scale in the *Shikun* annually intensified in various ceremonies on Mount Herzl, grew in magnitude during adolescence and probably peaked during my period of army service. Friendships like those friendships "that are borne without words" give me and many Israelis a special meaning. A mean-

ing that even while spending longer or shorter periods away from Israel is special and creates a yearning to come back home.

Homeland in Hebrew is *moledet*. In most languages "homeland" is rooted in the word "home". However, in Hebrew the root of the word *moledet* is *Yud Lamed Dalet*, which means birth. For my mother Tikva who bears the name of the national anthem and is seventh generation Israeli-born, the *moledet* is Israel. For Mobra, my father, who was born at the age of 13, the *moledet* is also Israel.

The way I grew up, with the history of my family and the natural environment into which I was born, led me to be an adult whose Israeli-Jewish identity is most salient. Apart from this identity, or as an outcome of this identity, as an adult, being aware of what my father went through at a very early age pushed me to search for how people create meaning throughout their lives. It facilitated the attempts to understand the importance of community and friendships during important events and at life's intersections. I started to ask myself why my father and many others like him had, in spite of their difficult childhoods and lives, become healthy adults, and created full lives for themselves and others. These questions paved the way for me to become an academic scholar who researches and studies these concepts. Together with the complex environment in which we are still living, I look at the different ways people cope with the constant threats and insecurities that surround them. Unconsciously, as a continuation of my father's state of mind, I have chosen to look at things not from a pathogenic view, but rather from a salutogenic one. I believe that most people can survive and grow, even when they face very difficult adversities. Later in my life, this has become another angle of my identity.

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