קשר רב דורי – עלייתי לארץ בשנות ה-50 – סיפורה של רבקה רגינה (באנגלית)

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Country of Birth: Iraq

I chose to briefly tell the story of my Aliyah to Israel in the 1950s. The story is part of the story of the early years of the State of Israel, during the great immigration, in the fifties.

I was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1938, in the name of Leonin, the eldest daughter of Naima and Efraim Taco-Cohen.
In Baghdad we lived in a huge house with my grandparents and my uncle and his wife. A house surrounded by a huge garden with rose bushes, whose smell still accompanies me to this day. I studied at Alliance Girls School from kindergarten, and continued on to my elementary studies. The language of instruction and speech was French, and the secondary language was English. The level of studies was very high compared to studies in Israel at that time, but mostly I learned discipline, courtesy and respect for teachers and others. This feature is imprinted in me to this day.
We immigrated to Israel through a flight in March of 1951 when I was 12 years old.
My name was changed to Rebecca by a teacher at the school where I studied.
When we arrived at Lod airport we were greeted by DDT spraying, and we were loaded onto trucks in the direction of Haifa to the transit camp at Atlit. After three days we were loaded onto trucks to the Nes Tziona transit camp and housed in tents. After a night we would not forget in a tent in the terrible cold we were dressed in fur coats and loaded onto trucks to a house in Ramat Gan that was bought by our acquaintances, where 2 families and (a total of 11 persons), and our family which was my parents, four siblings and I (total of 7 people) lived.
From a 12-year-old girl, I became an adult overnight and I was responsible for everything. I quickly learned the language and became an interpreter for my parents and my younger siblings.
I dealt with austerity regime that restricted consumption of basic and essential goods only to minimal quantities. There was a lack of any basic food; Milk, eggs, clothing and footwear. My parents underwent cultural, mental and physical trauma. A sharp transition, hard and cruel one, filled with hopes and disappointments, sufferings from shakings, difficulties of absorption and acclimatization in a new society, in a different culture and in a different and unfamiliar environment.
We loved the country, we yearned for it, we were very happy at the time of the establishment of the state and the Declaration of Independence, and we understood as children that immigration to Israel was a dream come true. We tried hard to adapt despite all the difficulties. We went to school, we learned a new language, competed with the people of Israel and with immigrants from all over the world (my best friend was a French immigrant named Rachel Price who I communicated with in French).
As mentioned, at the time teachers changed the original names of all of us to Hebrew names without any deep thought about the meaning of the act. In those days I did not understand that there are roots and meanings to names. I still have the note I received from the teacher that changed my name, it says "Rebecca's blessing to Rebecca".
Over the years, I understood that erasing a name is like erasing the personality, erasing me. I asked my children to engrave not only the name that was given to me in Israel but also my original name on my grave when the time comes. The name Rebecca was chosen at random without any connection to my roots and without the participation of my parents.

Food coupons were distributed. I remember standing in line for food at the grocery store and returning home with a cucumber and tomato. Luckily children had joy and enthusiasm , everything was new and challenging to them. We knew a new and exciting world, but we did not grasp what our parents were going through: a sharp transition, a lack of ability to cope with the purchase of basic necessities, inability to find work and support, inability to help children study and compete in a new society. They were simply left to themselves - this trauma was not forgotten until the day they died.

The security situation was very difficult, Arab countries, and especially those around us, harassed the settlement in Israel and in 1956 a war broke out. The state succeeded in establishing a strong army that managed to cope with the terror attacks and the security difficulties.

Coping with daily hardships was difficult. My mother, who was especially talented in cooking, sewing and embroidery, played an important role in supporting the family.
We managed to bring with us quantities of fabric to Israel, and my mother sewed, repaired, reduced and changed our clothes so that we did not have to purchase clothing. My mother also managed to cook and bake delicacies from the few basic commodities that were also obtained from the black market.

My family was a traditional family. We kept the customs of the Sabbath, and the customs of Jewish holidays. We were careful to keep the family nest. We loved and supported each other and so we survived.
I tried to help support the house as much as I could. After completing my elementary studies, I went to a high school in Givatayim (I was a good student and excelled in mathematics and English – today English is difficult for me). At the end of 10th grade I had to stop my morning studies and continue my matriculation exams in evening classes (During that time elementary studies were not mandatory and a fee was paid for the studies. Since my two brothers had come to continue their high school studies, my parents did not meet the burden and I had to study and work at the same time).
Throughout my youth I was a member of Hanoar Haoved and I also taught at the Borochov branch in Givatayim.
I joined the army late because my parents objected to conscription for reasons of conscience, and after fierce wars I defied them and enlisted in the air force, to the David camp near Nahalal.
At the age of 21, I married my high school partner, a soldier - a former soccer player in the national league named Asher Bilavsky, a native of Israel and of Polish decent. It was a revolutionary and an unbelievable act. My husband was dark-haired and I had fair hair, skin and eyes and more than once I was asked why I married a Sephardic man.
We succeeded in educating our three children to respect parents, relatives, and others, to be patient, to tolerance and honesty, helping others, diligence, devotion, perseverance, to love of the land, and to live by the saying "Live and let live".

In conclusion, many errors were made during the time of our aliyah, and are still being carried out. However, today I am involved in politics and the doings in Israel. I have no bitterness or frustration. Over the years I have learned to accept, respect and preserve the heritage, the past and the roots, and also to look forward, hopefully and optimistically, and to accept the one that is different from me.
Today I am a widow approaching the age of 80, living alone, very fond of my children, my son-in-law and my two daughters-in-law and above all "mad" about my 8 wonderful grandchildren.

The past, and especially the memory of my husband and the memory of my dear parents, are still with me. I have a close, loving and indulgent relationship with my brothers and sisters and their families who are very dear to me.

Dedicated with great love to my dear Amit and all of my grandchildren