

Institute Reunion Brings Together 600 Students and Friends

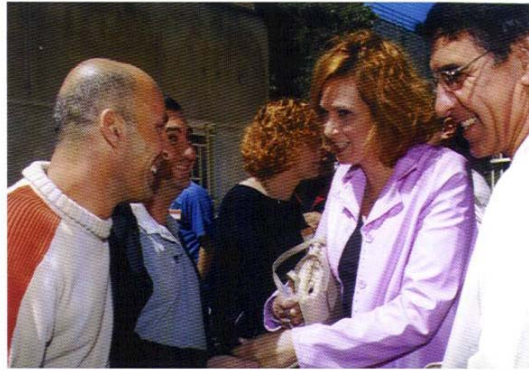
The long-awaited reunion of former students, staff members and friends of the JIB brought together hundreds of former graduates and their families as well as teachers and volunteers. "It was wonderful to re-establish contact with so many friends from the past," says graduate Yoram Shilo, who works at the Institute today as coordinator of the Institute's recording studio and news service.

Shilo adds that his formative years at the Institute were very important as he actually spent some of the most meaningful experiences of his life there. Shilo left his hometown of Tiberias when he was only seven years old to begin studying at the Institute. Later, he was accepted to an excellent Jerusalem high school, and he continued boarding at the Institute. "The Institute was really our home, and we spent more time there than we did at our own family's home," he adds. After graduation from high school, Shilo studied at Bar-Ilan

University, earning his degree in Jewish history and political science. He has just completed the studies for his law degree this year.

One person Shilo was particularly pleased to see at the reunion was former educator and principal Rachel Shemesh, who served as headmistress of the Institute's school between 1969-85. Though she retired many years ago, Shemesh has continued to volunteer at the Institute, oftentimes on a one-to-one basis. "The Institute has undergone so many changes in the last decade, and it is always interesting to see what new technological improvements are being used," she said. She particularly enjoyed meeting with former students who came to the reunion with their families. "The minute I opened my mouth, everyone recognized me," she relates, smiling. "Just like in the early years when the students said they could identify my approaching footsteps!" Former Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek spoke to the large

crowd of merrymakers, paying high tribute to the Institute and its history. "The Jerusalem community has always known the importance of the Jewish Institute for the Blind," said 92-year-old Kollek. "We have grown up with the knowledge of the work being done at the Institute." After musical performances, moving tributes and the chance to mingle and catch up with old friends, a lovely meal was served for almost 600 participants in the gymnasium of the Institute's Sports Center. Arm in arm, reunited friends walked into the meal as if they had never been separated. "This reunion has put me in touch with some of my oldest friends," one woman remarked. "We need to do this more than once in a hundred years!"



Students of all ages are happily reunited at the Institute this spring.

One of the Institute's Outstanding Friends

Erez Biton

We were children at the School for

The Blind in Jerusalem

Hiding on our tiptoes

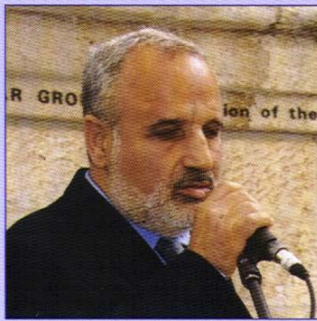
Pressing our cheeks to the glass door

To hear your lyre's tune...

Erez Biton

Well-known Israeli poet and author Erez Biton begins one of his poems with this description of his childhood. Biton spent meaningful and formative years at the Institute after his eyesight was damaged by a bomb blast when he was only eleven years old. "I spent many important years at the Institute," explains Biton.

Even today, the loss of his sight as well as being brought to Israel as an infant from Morocco are two of the recurring themes in a great deal of his work. Today Biton chairs the



Israeli Writers Association, and his career is very full. From an early age fellow pupils and teachers praised his poetry and prose. "Although I enjoyed weaving, my true method of expressing myself rested in my writing," Biton says. "We were lucky to study in small classes with first-class educators," he says. "From my years of experience, I can testify to the immeasurable contribution of the Institute in my development as a poet as well as a person who can face the challenges of reality." Biton adds that the educational approach of the Institute emphasized knowledge as well as art. "This combination enriched the student, providing the skills needed to adapt to a society of the sighted."