



INSIGHT

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Fifty Years of Independence Fostered by the Jewish Institute for the Blind

As Israel celebrates its 50th anniversary of statehood, the Jewish Institute for the Blind nears its centennial. We decided to dedicate this issue to people that studied at the Institute 50 years ago, and surprisingly this was not difficult. One former student is still a switchboard operator at the Institute today, and many of these people remain in touch with the Institute through extra-curricular activities, swimming at the Sports Center or using the recording library.

Through these firsthand stories, we can understand the difficulties of studying in war-torn Jerusalem in 1948, and we can appreciate the steadfast determination of the pupils to succeed despite hardships. Also apparent is that special quality at the Institute which helps to foster relationships that can span 50 years and the independence to last a lifetime!!

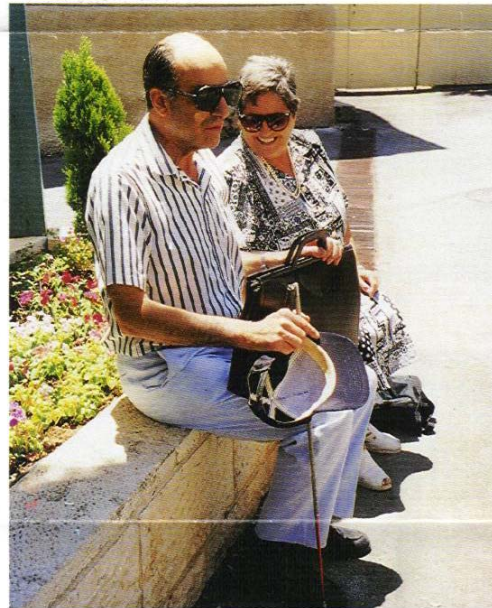
"I can still remember the sound of bullets and the uncertainty of waiting and wondering what was to be," recalls Ya'acov Vaknine. Vaknine studied at the JIB from 1937 — 52, and in 1948 he was a 16-year-old student when the war broke out. "On November 29, 1947, everything began when the



Ya'acov Vaknine demonstrating braille printer

United Nation's Partition Plan was passed." School continued, somehow, and it was practically uninterrupted for the entire year and a half of the War of Independence, he remembers.

"Transportation slowed to almost a standstill, but teachers managed to reach the Institute" For four months from May 1948,



Ya'acov Vaknine and Esther Hooli in the garden where they grew up

however there was no electricity, and food was cooked in large wooden ovens or on kerosene stoves. One of the biggest problems was the lack of water. "I do remember turning on the spigot to realize that there was no running water, and in the long run, the cisterns on the grounds of the Institute saved the lives of the pupils and staff," he says. "We tried to grow vegetables in the garden of the Institute, but we couldn't spare the water, and they dried up."

There were Arab neighborhoods in close proximity to the Institute, and we knew just how difficult the situation was," recalls Vaknine. "Also the Jerusalem — Tel Aviv highway was nearby, and we knew that it was almost impossible for convoys with supplies of kerosene, flour and ammunition to

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