

RELAUNCH RUTH

DAUGHTER OF THE WAVES: MEMORIES OF GROWING UP IN PRE-WAR PALESTINE



RUTH JORDAN

A very warm welcome to the first of an occasional series of newsletters leading up to the relaunch of Ruth Jordan's fascinating autobiography. The big date for your diary is October 19th 2023. She would have been 102!

Ruth dedicated this memoir to us, her children, and we're thrilled to be republishing her book, forty years on from the first edition. We are delighted that you've signed up for the countdown, and we also value your opinions. So, we'll be turning to you for comment as we finalise our options for the new book cover.

The newsletter will include short excerpts from *Daughter of the Waves* to whet your appetite. We will also add contemporary photos, video interviews with family and friends recalling Ruth's life, and reviews of some of her other work.

In this first issue, we've chosen an extract from the original U.S publication, which we think beautifully reflects Ruth's gift for depicting landscape and people; it also illustrates her characteristic clarity of language and gentle sense of humour.

It is a blisteringly hot day in 1926, and Ruth is just five years old. She's on foot, trudging through the relentless heat with her father and brother, when they encounter an Arab villager riding a mule cart...

She's Slowing You Down!

We were following a rough road meandering between the weedy coast on the right and the low hills of the Carmel range on the left. The road was deserted. There were no Arab peasant women balancing bundles of twigs on their heads, no line of donkeys with illegally quarried sand in their saddlebags, not even the occasional donkey rider followed on foot by an obedient wife. A small Arab village nestled against the mountain slope, its few houses painted light blue against the evil eye. It was hot. It was so hot that even the ill-tempered village dogs could not be bothered to

chase us and contented themselves with a perfunctory bark from a distance. The sound of iron-shod wheels rolling against the rough road made us look back and quickly give way for a mule-drawn cart driven by an Arab villager.

As he overtook us, he slowed down, and I noticed the dazzling white of his *kaffiyeh* held to his head by the black *agal*. "Let your day be happy," Father called to the driver. "Let yours be blessed," the driver answered, not the least bit surprised to be addressed in his own language by a European Jew. There followed an exchange of civilities based on a time-honored code, which my father had learned in his childhood from his Arab playmates near the village of Zichron Yaakov. It was quite a while before the two men felt it was correct to set formalities aside and embark on an ordinary conversation.

There was an oblong black box on the cart, which the driver said he was taking to a nearby village for somebody's funeral. As he was explaining his errand, holding back his mule to allow us to keep pace with him, his eyes alighted on me, panting heavily behind two grown men. He pulled at the reins and the mule stopped. "She's slowing you down," he said. I was intrigued. Only a few days earlier, I had heard our Arab washerwoman tell how her little niece had been promised in marriage to a little boy from a neighboring village for a sackful of grain. At the time, I thought it was a silly exchange, but now I was wondering whether the cart driver was trying to buy me for his son. Speaking disparagingly of the object one wished to purchase, I already knew, was the best way to lower its price. "She's slow," the cart driver repeated. "Slow." Father said it did not matter, as we were in no hurry. "*Ma'alesh*, never mind," the cart driver cried good-humoredly. "She can ride with me on the box."

It was kindness, not an attempt to buy me. I was lifted and seated on top of the coffin with my back to the driver and my feet dangling down, free to enjoy a bumpy ride while my father and brother kept pace behind. We parted company at the foot of Shikmona Mound, my father calling on Allah to reward our benefactor sevenfold for his kindness, our benefactor wishing the blessing of Allah upon my father, his sons, his cattle, and his house.

Who was Ruth Jordan?



Ruth Jordan with her children, Sharon and Oran Kivity (c.1963)

Ruth published several biographies, as well as her own autobiography, and was described in the British press as "one of the best of our modern biographers". She also became the first woman news presenter at the BBC Hebrew Section.

Ruth's birthplace *Bat Galim* (Daughter of the Waves), was a seaside suburb of Haifa (and continues to thrive to this day). Nestling at the foot

of Mount Carmel, it acts as a dramatic backdrop to Ruth's unfolding narrative.

These childhood years were an adventure and an education, reflecting the journey of a country in the making. Ruth seamlessly interlaces personal vignettes, such as the one above, with epoch-making events like the expulsion of the European refugee boats. And in forthcoming issues, we will share more childhood memories, juxtaposed against the wider sweep of landmark historical moments for what would become Eretz Israel.

Daughter of the Waves is testament to a bygone era. It doesn't defend, apologise or accuse. Instead, it depicts with clarity, humour and empathy, a young girl and a nation growing up together.

Next for Relaunch Ruth

We hope you enjoyed this first issue. There are plenty more golden nuggets to come, as both Ruth and the nascent country of Israel grow up. These include Toscanini's first concerts with the Palestine Orchestra, Ruth's beloved pet hyena and the battle for supremacy between Hebrew and German.

Thank you again for your interest in this project. Please do share this newsletter with your family and friends and encourage them to sign up on the green button below. We'd love your comments and suggestions, so do please contact us!

Sharon and Oran Kivity,

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