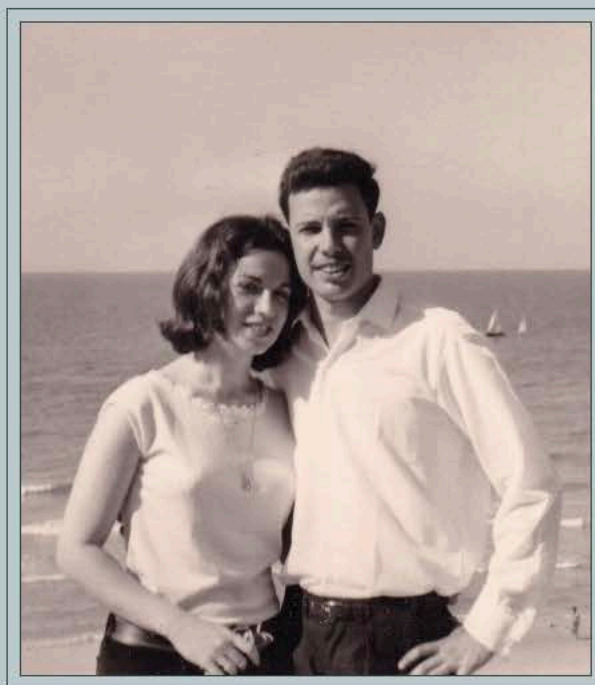


# Between the Sands and the Mountains



**Nava and Amos Ben-Zvi**  
**A Life Story**

## Dedication



This book really should have been written by two people – Amos and Nava. The story might have been a simple, ordinary one that took place in an emerging, developing country. A story of two children who grew up and blended their love for each other into a love for life.

Yet, it was important for me to write our story because it is such a wonderful one...and like most true stories, it has a sad ending.

This book is primarily intended for those who know us, but I hope others will find it interesting as well.

I thank all those who look through this book and embark on our journey between the sands and the mountains.

I thank all those who touched our lives and made them what they were.

I thank all the people and places from whom and which we grew and developed.

Finally, I send lots of hugs and love to those who are here because of our love for each other.

*-Nava*



Amos and Nava, honeymoon at the Sharon Hotel in Herzliya, 1967

## Between the Sands and the Mountains – Introduction



How beautiful is this balcony I'm sitting on right now; our lush balcony in our house in Jerusalem's long-established Rehavia neighborhood. I am a young woman – just eighty-one years old today – and I want to recount the story of myself and Amos, my husband, who unfortunately left this world about seven years ago.

When I contemplate how to begin telling this story, one short phrase comes to mind- between the sands and the mountains. This is how I see Amos' and my story in my mind's eye. The image that beautifully illustrates it to me is a topographical and verbal painting that encapsulates our life story. Amos and I – between the sands and the mountains, between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Entwined into this fabric of our story, which I shall begin to weave here and now, are also the lives of my parents and grandparents. I know it will include everything I wanted and dreamed of and everything that Amos and I worked together to achieve. I want to bequeath

this unique fabric to our grandson and granddaughters.

I will try to convey things exactly as I experienced them at the time, even if these experiences actually belong to two people – Amos and me. Boy and girl.

It is important to know that those distant days, the days of our childhood, were language-poor for us. In those days, the Hebrew we spoke was very limited as the pioneers were trying to establish a modern, expressive language based on the ancient words of our Jewish heritage. The problem was that none of us wanted or dared to use those archaic words, so we ended up speaking an ineloquent, somewhat limping Hebrew that was often a clumsy amalgamation of words derived from the people who surrounded us and those who had come from the four corners of the world.

The story I am telling here is, in fact, the story of the first generation born in Israel after World War II; a generation born in this place that was not yet a state. The streets around us were streets of sand; there were no real sidewalks yet. These sands of this nascent, tiny city, which in time evolved and expanded into the great Tel Aviv, were the pattern of our native landscape.

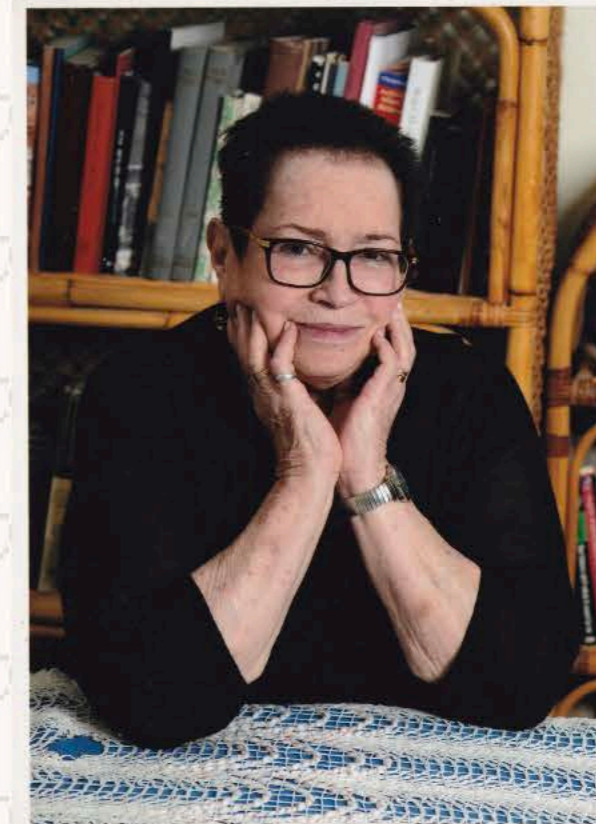
These sands form the background to the beginning of our story, a story of two people, a story born in these virgin sandy spaces, spaces that were then strewn with desert plants in shades of green and yellow. The assorted buildings and

structures built in Tel Aviv then, were named as they multiplied in these same sands. The street names given then were also different from those given today and were mainly based on the geographical location where they ran. There was HaYarkon Street, named for the Yarkon River, Zion Gate Street, along which the new immigrants (olim hadashim) entered the country from the port, Jaffa Street, that led to the ancient port city, and so forth.

I remember how going down to the beach hurt our feet. The hot sand scratched and scorched us, and we overcame it in a

creative and amusing way. We equipped ourselves with an "anti-sand" towel, stood on its edge, and then started running as we threw it ahead and stepped on it with every step we took.

I still remember the many smells that surrounded me in those days such as the scent of the salty sea, the heady fragrance of the citrus trees, the pungent spicy dishes that our Yemenite neighbors prepared, and the aroma of Grandma Pnina's cooking. Every morning when I left the house, I savored the bouquet of the flowering plants in our and our neighbors' gardens.



Nava Ben-Zvi, Jerusalem

## My Childhood Home



We lived in Tel Aviv in the home of Grandma Pnina and Grandpa Yosef until I was six years old. My grandfather delivered milk for the Tnuva Dairy Cooperative. He would leave for work early in the morning and return in the evening. My father, who worked for Peltours, the large insurance and travel company, also spent most of his day at work. My mother was a teacher at the Ness Ziona Elementary School (which later became the Gertz School) and worked two shifts – the first in the morning and the second in the afternoon. The reason for this was the sudden increase in the number of students as a result of the masses of olim (new immigrants) arriving in Israel and the limited number of available schools and teachers. To solve this problem, the educational system was split into two shifts. I remember that some of those families were very poor, and therefore their children got a bottle of chocolate milk and a sandwich at school. The result of all this was that Grandma Pnina looked after me at home. This wasn't a given, as Grandma actually left her job as a nurse in a sanatorium (a

clinic that was a kind of small hospital) so that I, the little one, wouldn't be left alone. She was a wise woman who rarely interfered in my education. I remember being considered a "walking plant guide" in the fields of Tel Aviv at the time. My mother had taught me well, and because of her, I remembered the names of all the flowers and plants.

I know I was considered a very "easy" baby. "The quietest in the world" my parents claimed. One day, Leahla, a family friend, came to our house and wanted to see the baby in her crib. As soon as she entered the room, I burst out into a howl, and she quickly came out and told Grandma, "The girl is fine. She knows how to cry!" This same Leahla, it should be noted, was never invited back to our house.

I can still remember my third birthday. I had my heart set on a red lollipop near me, but a little boy got ahead of me and grabbed it right before my eyes. I started to scream. Even at this early age, I had no choice but to learn that you don't always get what you want. I ended up settling for a purple lollipop, but nonetheless, to this day, the concept of compromise is not an easy one for me. I loved, and still love, to do exactly what I want. Over time though, I learned what is worthy of compromise and what should never be conceded.



With my parents, Gad and Tzipora, Tel Aviv, 1943

## My Maternal Grandparents



Grandma Pnina was born in Buczacz, Galicia, which is also the hometown of S. Y. (Shai) Agnon, the renowned author of modern Hebrew literature. Her father, Shmuel Katz, was Agnon's teacher, and she was friends with his lovely daughters, whom I met when they were already grandmothers. I know my grandmother kept in touch with them throughout her life.

Grandma's father Samuel, my great-grandfather, was considered an educated man in those days of the late nineteenth century. My mother recalled how he would help her with her math lessons. Grandma's mother, Bluma (flower, in Yiddish), also grew up in Galicia.

My grandfather, Yosef, came from Skala, Galicia. His last name was originally Morgenstern (morning star), but when he arrived in Israel he changed his name to Shahar, which is the Hebrew word for dawn.

Pnina and Yosef immigrated to Israel in 1924 with my mother, Tzipora, who was

six years old at the time. They settled in Jerusalem near the Mahane Yehuda market. Sometime later, they moved to Jaffa near the iconic clock tower.

In 1929, bloody riots broke out in the area, so my grandparents decided to leave Jaffa and so they applied to the Jewish National Fund. With help from them, they were able to purchase a plot of land in the "Hulot," the barely developed sand dunes just north of Tel Aviv not far from the coast on what was eventually named Shaar Zion Street. They built a small home there. In the 1930s, shortly after the house was built, construction began on the Tel Aviv port, which was quite close by.

I spent my early childhood in this tiny, two-room house, just beyond the Tel Aviv port.

In 1948, when I was almost five, the War of Independence broke out. The Arab armies directed their first bombs toward the Tel Aviv Port. Our little house didn't have a bomb shelter, and I remember my father carrying me in his arms, still dressed in my animal printed flannel pajamas, and running to the bomb shelter under his parents' building on HaYarkon Street. However, it wasn't long before the neighbors started to complain about the overcrowding in the shelter, so my parents moved into the home of my mother's cousin, Sonia, and her husband, Avraham. They lived in the area that was then called Nordia (today's King George Street).

Sonia and Avraham had a baby girl named Batya, and I positively hated to be around her, so I decided that I would rather live with my grandparents. Thus, at the age of four, I moved in with them. They were living with Grandpa Yosef's younger brother, Yitzhak, in his ground-floor apartment on Nordau Boulevard. Uncle Yitzhak had three children around my age; Talia, Avraham and Amnon. For me, this was a fun-filled and exciting home. Talia was two years older than me and I slept in her room.

I remember that once a shell fell into the yard next to the house. It didn't explode, but nonetheless, we were forbidden to

walk anywhere near there in case it would suddenly detonate, and injure us. This was a tense and dangerous period of course, but for me as a child, it was also thrilling. This living situation lasted about a year, and I remember feeling very grown up there. I really loved living with my grandparents.

In those days, our main sustenance was bread and margarine. Later, they began handing out food stamps so that we could buy other basic necessities, including butter. I remember Grandpa Yosef going and bringing me a cube of butter. To me that cube was an out-of-this-world delicacy!



Three years old, with my parents and grandparents, Pnina and Yosef, 1946

## Going Back in Time: My Parents

### My Father

My father, Gad, immigrated to Israel in 1939 from Germany at the age of twenty-eight. He had been studying economics at the University of Berlin, but with the rise of the Nazis, his family was forced to leave their homeland.

Among the items that he brought with him from Germany were two typewriters—an English one and a Hebrew one. Keep in mind that typewriters were a rare commodity in Tel Aviv at that time. My father, who was fluent in German and English, took his two typewriters to the corner of Ahad Ha'am and Nahalat Binyamin Streets, sat down beside them and waited. Who and what was he waiting for? To offer his services to people who needed to write "patishiyot" — that is, official petitions of request to the British government, which then ruled the country. At that time, he was still living on HaYarkon Street, near the port, with his parents, Mordechai and Dora Liebling, and his livelihood relied on those letters.

One day, while he was sitting on the sidewalk with his typewriters, someone approached him and expressed astonishment at what he was doing. It was

Dr. Mayer, my father's former economics teacher at the University of Berlin. Dr. Mayer suggested that my father forget this idea of "patishiyot" and instead come to work for him at Lloyd's, the well known British insurance company. Later, when Peltours insurance and travel agency split off from Lloyd's, my father, who was by now a specialist in marine insurance, was made co-CEO of Peltours.

During the first half of the 1940s, my father also served as a guard in the British Army.

### My Parents Meet

One day in the summer of 1941, a young woman went down to the beach in Tel Aviv and stretched out on the warm sand. Still in her bathrobe, she focused her quiet gaze on the waves ahead, cascading toward the shore. A young man came up to her. He asked her name and made some small talk, and since it seemed like she couldn't take her eyes off him, he suggested she join him for a dip in the water. That's pretty much how the love story between my parents, Tzipora and Gad, began. The romance that began on that hot summer day did not fade in the fall, and by the third candle of Hanukkah that year, they were already husband and wife. About two years after their marriage, on June 20, 1943, I was born.



My parents' wedding, Gad and Tzipora, third night of Chanukah, 1941

## My Mother

My mother, Tzipora, grew up in Tel Aviv, where she loved folk dancing and spending time with her friends. She was always surrounded by her Israeli friends. My father, on the other hand, was a "yekke," the slang term for a Jew of German-speaking origin and his Hebrew never became fully fluent. My mother's friends were amazed that Tzipora, their Tel Aviv friend, chose a "yekke" who had not grown up in their society and had not absorbed their Sabra (the moniker for someone who was born in the country) heritage. My mother however, did not always heed the opinion of others and recognized in Gad some spark, a potential that would lead him forward towards future success.

My mother studied to be a teacher at the Levinsky Seminary, which was then located in the south of Tel Aviv. I know she used to ride there on the bike that her parents bought her.

## Childhood Days

The Peltours building stood next to where my father used to sit with his typewriters. His office was on the highest floor of the building, and I loved to go there with him. The company's offices reminded me of those I had read about in my childhood books written by Erich Kästner such as Dot and Anton, Emil and the Detectives, and more. I remember the elevator in the building. It was enclosed in a metal grille and we would ride it up to the fourth floor. At ten o'clock in the morning, the tea cart made its rounds. It was a small cart upon which there was a tray that held the hot glasses. Under it were rolls that the employees had ordered. One of those rolls would be the one that my father had ordered for me and I remember its special flavor to this day.

When I was in high school, I worked alongside my father at Peltours, and later, I worked in its sister company, Binyan Insurance. Being hired was conditional on passing certain pre-employment tests, which I passed, despite, or perhaps because of my father's high-ranking position in the company.

My father specialized in insurance transactions with England and every year his job required him to travel to London and Switzerland for about a month. I was very proud that my father had a position that was so important that it included trips to Europe. Some beautiful souvenirs I received during that period included the wonderful sweaters he brought me from Marks & Spencer.

## "Daddy's Girl"

When I graduated from university at the age of twenty, my father invited me to go with him on an extended trip to Italy, France, Switzerland and England. We traveled together for about a month, and I felt like a princess.

I loved my father very much and looked up to him. I was at the time what is called a "Daddy's girl." His job involved writing articles in English, which I translated



Amsterdam



The trip to Europe with my father, 1966