



This Year In Jerusalem

Mordecai Richler

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"In 1944, I was aware of three youth groups committed to the compelling idea of an independent Jewish state: Hashomer Hatzza'ir (The Young Guard), Young Judaea, and Habonim (The Builders).

Hashomer Hatzza'ir was resolutely Marxist. According to intriguing reports I had heard, it was the custom, on their kibbutzim already established in Palestine, for boys and girls under the age of eighteen to shower together. Hashomer Hatzza'ir members in Montreal included a boy I shall call Shloime Schneiderman, a high-school classmate of mine. In 1944, when we were still in eighth grade, Shloime enjoyed a brief celebrity after his photo appeared on the front page of the Montreal Herald. Following a two-cent rise in the price of chocolate bars, he had been a leader in a demonstration, holding high a placard that read: down with the 7cents chocolate bar. Hashomer Hatzza'ir members wore uniforms at their meetings: blue shirts and neckerchiefs. "They had real court martials," wrote Marion Magid in a memoir about her days in Habonim in the Bronx in the early fifties, "group analysis, the girls were not allowed to wear lipstick." Whereas, in my experience, the sweetly scented girls who belonged to Young Judaea favored pearls and cashmere twinsets. They lived on leafy streets in the suburb of Outremont, in detached cottages that had heated towel racks, basement playrooms, and a plaque hanging on the wall behind the wet bar testifying to the number of trees their parents had paid to have planted in Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel.

I joined Habonim -- the youth group of a Zionist political party, rooted in socialist doctrine -- shortly after my bar mitzvah, during my first year at Baron Byng High School. I had been recruited by a Room 41 classmate whom I shall call Jerry Greenfeld..."

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