

When it comes to discussions about Israel, we often find ourselves speaking with authority about entire groups of people whose individual stories are unknown to us. This book is a personal story of innocence and vulnerability, of being willing to be surprised and changed by individual stories. Annette's open-hearted journey has the potential to help us question assumptions about what is possible between people.

*Beth Huppin,  
Director of Project Kavod/Dignity,  
Jewish Family Adult Education Educator,  
Congregation Beth Shalom*

Still Loving Jerusalem Conversations with My Palestinian and Israeli Friends is a great book from the heart of the author. It brings out so much of the region, the conflicts of real people, and how they deal with issues. Annette writes about her own experiences, and these are not to be missed. I remember reading the manuscript when she first started it years ago, and to this day I remember so many parts of it.

*Rita Zawaideh,  
Founder and President of  
Salaam Cultural Museum, Seattle  
Owner of Caravan-Serai Tours*

Throughout her journey and at different ages, Annette is willing to ask the tough questions and put herself in uncomfortable situations with both Israelis and Palestinians. American Jews who went on similar programs at that point in their lives can identify with her experiences. What stands apart is her curiosity and courage to



# Still Loving Jerusalem

CONVERSATIONS WITH MY  
PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI FRIENDS

Annette Peizer

*Still Loving Jerusalem: Conversations with My Palestinian and Israeli Friends*

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# Introduction

THE EXPERIENCES I described in this book took place during three of my six extended trips to Israel and cover a thirty-six-year time period from 1973 to 2009. Although the last trip I wrote about took place in 2009, the social and political separations and other tensions I described between Israeli and Palestinian people inside Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, is still the same as it was then, if not worse.

In Part I, I wrote of my trips in 1973 and 1990. In 1973, I went on an almost year-long study and work program in Israel after I graduated from high school. A few weeks after my arrival in Israel, the Yom Kippur War broke out, and I wrote of some of my coming-of-age experiences while living through that war.

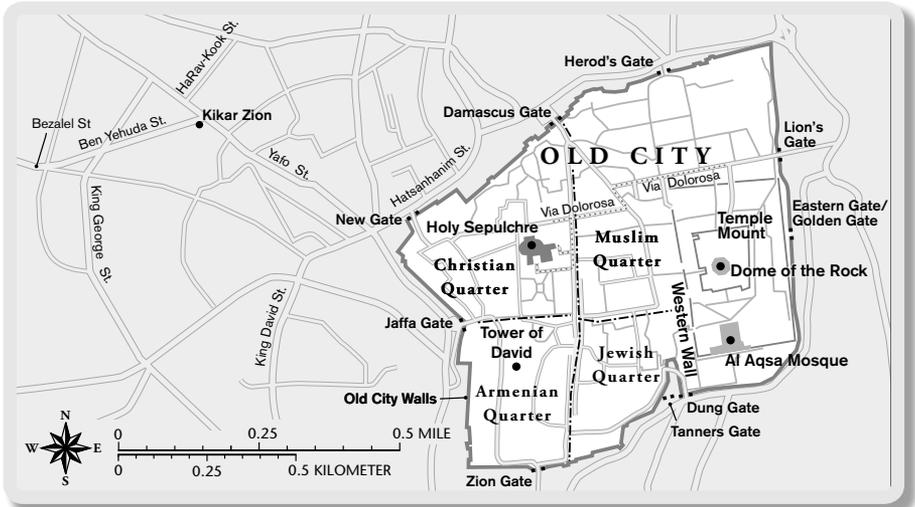
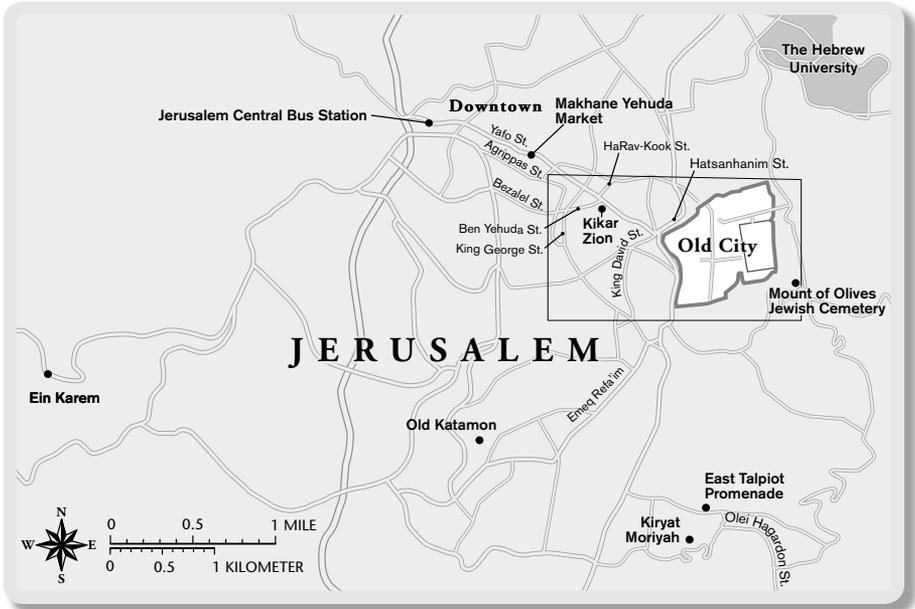
In 1990, I returned to Israel (after an earlier trip made in 1979) because I missed being there, and I also wanted to try to better understand the tensions between Palestinians and Israelis. I stayed for the summer, volunteer-tutoring English to low-income Israeli children and teaching English reading comprehension to Israeli students at the Hebrew University.

On that trip, I made more friends with Palestinians and Israelis. Since I was still single, my friends were often men with whom I went on dates. They expressed their thoughts, feelings, and stories to me, which I realized they would not consider telling each other. As an open-minded, single American woman, I felt like Switzer-

# Maps\*



\* Maps show places mentioned in this book.



# Part 1

*Youth, War, and Dating Men from Both Sides*

# Chapter One

*If I am not for myself, who will be for me?*

*If I am only for myself, what am I?*

*If not now, when?*

—RABBI HILLEL (110 BCE–10 CE)

## Fatigues

EIGHTEEN, OR *KHAI*, which means “alive” or “life” in Hebrew, is the good luck number. Jewish people make donations to charities in increments of eighteen with appropriate zeros after the number or, if it’s more suitable, thirty-six—double *khai*.

On this trip to Israel, I was almost double *khai*, almost thirty-six years old. Double life. Time for me to create another life and settle down. Being Jewish seemed to only add to the pressure. So why hadn’t I accomplished these basic goals yet? Was this the by-product of independence?

Most of my past boyfriends, with whom I had felt deep connections, were now married with young children. Some of them were married to women much younger than I—women who seemed less serious, less intense. I looked back on these men with the same kind of tough loneliness I imagined cowboys in the Old West must have felt

when glimpsing families through the windows of cozy cabins, eating and laughing together, as they galloped by into the wide-open night.

But I was almost double *khai*, damn it! Double life energy was coursing through my veins. I felt like a richly fertilized tree in its prime, flowering and ready to drop fruit.

It was July of 1990. My Israeli friends in Los Angeles and Seattle told me I wouldn't be affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since I was only visiting for a few months this time. "Just stay in safe neighborhoods," they said, meaning Jewish neighborhoods as opposed to Palestinian ones, "and you won't have any problems." Their advice was well intentioned, but they were wrong. Even in the "safe neighborhoods," I felt suffering on both sides.

The soldiers wandering the streets in Jerusalem used to thrill me when I was eighteen and living in Israel on a year-long study and kibbutz program. They were everywhere in 1973—sitting at outdoor cafés, walking through the streets in pairs or groups, laughing together in their green fatigues and black leather lace-up ankle boots, with Uzis or M16s slung casually over their shoulders. They were a little older than me, and I found many of the men dashing handsome. I remember feeling both attracted and shy around them.

Seventeen years later, the soldiers looked like kids to me. As they sat laughing and talking at outdoor tables or strolling through the streets, their confidence struck me as naïve. It wasn't their fault they were only eighteen to twenty-one years old, straight out of high school and too young to have experienced university, international travel, careers, long-term relationships, marriage, or children. They were just young, too young not to feel confident. On this trip, instead of looking straight into their eyes the way I used to, I couldn't stop staring at the barrels of their guns and feeling like a Palestinian child, scared.

But when I looked at the soldiers some more, I saw that some of them were older men, called in to do their *miluim*, reserve duty. The women soldiers, who in the early 1970s seemed to me like living proof of women's liberation, now carried their guns like overworked airline attendants lugging heavy carry-ons. And instead of the macho, overconfident expressions I remembered in the faces of the young men, more than anything, they just looked tired.

and automobiles are not allowed inside the Old City, so donkeys and carts are the only way for merchants to transport their goods.

### Looking for Abdul

THE ALLEY WHERE I used to buy embroidered shirts from Abdul's shop was to my left. Feeling excited that I had recognized the alley after all those years, I turned down it.

Abdul was still there, standing two shops down from where I had last seen him seventeen years ago! He looked exactly the same: neatly combed black hair with a perfect part to one side, thin physique, and friendly, piercing eyes. I hesitated, stunned to see him looking just like he had all those years ago. I felt like I was in some kind of time warp.

To give me more time to think, I walked into the shop across from Abdul's and looked at the Bedouin wedding mirrors with embroidery stitched into the frames. Glancing back at Abdul out of the corner of my eye, I saw that he was selling sandals instead of shirts now.

The elderly owner of the Bedouin mirror shop was gently explaining to me that the embroidered pouch sewn on top of each mirror frame was for *kohl*, the black eyeliner used on a Bedouin woman's wedding day.

"It's beautiful," I told him, wondering for the first time if I'd ever have a wedding. In the past, I'd taken it for granted that I would get married some day, but this trip to Israel was stirring up all kinds of emotions. Being almost thirty-six, world traveled, with several university degrees and relationships behind me, but without a husband or child made me feel both wise and sad. Spending time in this ancient city was rubbing off on me. I felt like a woman from the Bible—Rachel or Khana—begging God for a baby.

Finally, I worked up the nerve to turn around and approach Abdul across the alley.

"Hi! Do you remember me? I'm Annette, Anat. Khana in Hebrew. I used to buy embroidered shirts from you back in 1973, during the war. I'm sure you see so many tourists come through here, and besides, I used to be fatter," I chatted on, realizing he hadn't shown even a flicker of recognition.

anger flashed in his eyes—or was I imagining it?—but the shopkeeper’s warm smile glossed over the flicker of hostility I was sensing. After the young man took our picture, he handed me my camera, his face now expressionless.

Later, I asked Yossi what he thought. He just shrugged and said, “Maybe he was the man’s son or grandson and didn’t want to take a picture of his father or grandfather standing with a strange woman. It’s insulting to them. But since you bought the mirror, he had to.”

Yossi’s comment made me feel foolish. But I hadn’t known.

Before I left the shop, the shopkeeper carefully wrapped the mirror in newspaper and wound thick masking tape all over the package.

“*Today rabah,*” I said automatically. “Um, thank you.” I felt flustered for letting my Hebrew slip out, momentarily having forgotten the advice of my Israeli friends not to speak Hebrew in the *shuk*. Why add fuel to the fire, they said, by speaking the language of the people they resent, not to mention broadcasting that I’m Jewish?

The elderly man laughed at my quick attempt to cover up my Hebrew. He held out the carefully wrapped mirror with both hands, replying warmly in Hebrew, “*Bevakasha, bevakasha*”—you’re welcome, you’re welcome.

As I turned to leave, he handed me a little round glass bottle filled with black powder. There was Arabic writing on the label.

“It’s *kohl*. Black eye makeup, for the pouch.”

“How much?”

“Take it, take it, as a gift.”

## Jewish Quarter

I WALKED DOWN the main passageway and continued deeper into the Muslim section, where it became darker and emptier. A burly, unshaven shopkeeper with a red-and-white *keffiyeh* wrapped loosely around his head smiled at me for no reason.

As I walked further into the *shuk*, beams of sunshine poured into the alley, spotlighting the stone floor. I looked up into the skylight, relaxing a little.

A thin, elderly man wearing a *yarmulke* sat in a shop behind a large display of religious Jewish items. I looked at creative designs of



*Playing my Khalil outside of my dorm room, Kiryat Moriah, 1973*



*Clarissa in front of the Jaffa Gate, right before the Old City of Jerusalem, 1973*



*Standing at the viewpoint overlooking Jerusalem, Kiryat Moriah, 1973*



*Snow in Jerusalem, between the Old City and West Jerusalem, 1973*



*Mirror shop in Arab Market, Old City of Jerusalem, 2009*



*Overtuned tank, unknown location in Israel, 1973*

Our eyes connected for a few intense seconds. Had he been reading my thoughts, like Luria?

“So what happens if the driver asks you questions about working at the UN consulate once you’re in the taxi?” I asked.

“Ah, sometimes the drivers ask me for visa deals,” Kassam told me. “One driver said, ‘I’ll give you this fare free plus one hundred dollars if you get me a visa to the United States.’ I immediately told him his proposal was illegal, and because I’m with UN security, I could have him arrested for even making the offer. He kept repeating how he was just joking and became very scared that I’d have him arrested.”

We grew silent, letting it sink in how Kassam had scared an Israeli cab driver into thinking Kassam could have him arrested.

“If he had known who you really are . . .” I said slowly, and we both burst into uncontrollable laughter.

“A Palestinian from East Jerusalem,” Kassam said as we howled anew.

“He never would have even stopped,” I squeezed out.

Let alone allowed me to enter his car—”

“Or talked with you so openly—”

“And with so much respect!” he added.

We pounded the table, swaying in our chairs. It felt strange to be laughing so hard with Kassam over tricking the Israeli cab driver so well. But I couldn’t stop laughing with him. I laughed so much, I had to wipe tears from my eyes.

## Old Flame

I JUST COULDN’T leave Jerusalem without seeing Zev, my boyfriend from 1973. He didn’t know I was in Jerusalem. In fact, we hadn’t been in touch for seventeen years. I had resisted contacting him earlier because I had assumed he was a family man now. Most Israeli men are married with children by the time they reach their early thirties, if not earlier.

“Why make waves?” I kept telling myself. But it was my last week in Jerusalem, and I wanted to see him just once before I left. So I looked him up in the phone book.

Zev's number wasn't listed, but his father's was. When I rang, I found out that Zev was married with three children and that he worked at the same little fruit and vegetable store down the street that his father used to own, in the same neighborhood I remembered from so many years ago.

I found the little produce store and looked around. A tall, hefty man appeared—not him. After another moment, Zev's unmistakable, intelligent-looking face emerged from behind a mound of small watermelons.

He started walking toward me, still muscular, lean, and cool-looking in his faded blue jeans and T-shirt. He hadn't changed a bit!

He spotted me standing there looking at him from the edge of the store and broke into a broad smile without losing a beat of his natural poise.

"Khana, what a surprise! What are you doing here? You look the same!"

"I just had to see you before I leave Israel. I'm leaving in a week."

"How long have you been here?"

"About three months."

"I can't believe you've been here this long without visiting me sooner!"

"Well, I just got busy. And you're married now and all."

Zev whistled to the other man, his brother, saying something in quick Hebrew about watching the shop and that he'd be back in a few minutes. We walked down the street, talking about what I'd been doing in Jerusalem and what he'd been doing all these years. When I mentioned that I'd like to see his parents again, he told me we were right near their home, so why not?

We turned right and stepped through the dented steel Arab-style doors I remembered so well. We walked up three flights of the winding staircase and across the ornate floor tiles under the domed ceiling.

At the top of the stairs, Zev called out, "*Abba, Eema, Khana meh Artzot HaBrit ba l'vaker,*" announcing my name, that I was from the United States, and that I had come to visit them.

Khana. I hadn't been called that name by a friend since 1973. On rare occasions, my mother or some of her oldest friends called me that affectionately. During the tenderest of times, Mom and her

friends would refer to me as Khanaleh, the way they called me when I was a little girl.

The door opened. Zev's mother smiled warmly and nodded to me in immediate recognition, saying, "*Shalom, Khana, barukh haba,*" hello, welcome.

Zev led me down the hall. "Look who's come to visit!"

His father sat cross-legged on a large pillow on the floor in the traditional Iraqi manner. His face brightened. "Ah, Khana! I haven't seen you in many years!" he said in Hebrew.

Though pleased to see me, Zev's parents seemed somewhat reserved. I completely understood. I was still single at almost thirty-six, and their son was married with young children. But I felt clear and guilt-free since I had purposely waited until my last week to seek Zev out, just to say hello.

While walking back to the produce store, Zev invited me to have dinner with him that evening at a nice restaurant.

"I don't think so. Won't your wife be upset if you aren't home for dinner?"

"No, no, it's fine. My wife and I have a good understanding. If I want to go out with my friends now and then, there's no problem. Sometimes we eat at different times anyway."

"Well, I don't know."

"It's fine. *Ma haba'ayah?*" he asked, using the frequently used Hebrew expression, "What's the problem?"

## Virgin

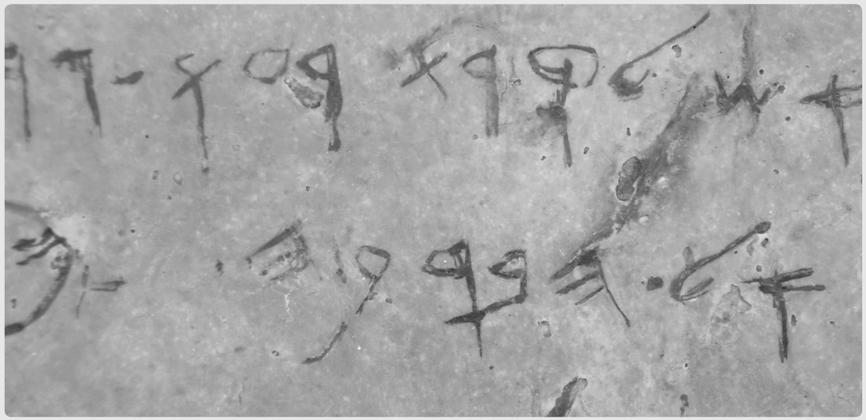
OVER LAMB KABOB, which I hadn't eaten in seventeen years but oddly felt open to trying again, I wanted Zev's take on Gabriel's story about the woman in Gaza who had stripped naked in front of the soldiers.

"What do you think? Was it a trick, or do you think she just wanted to have sex?"

Zev didn't give my question a second thought. "Of course it was sabotage," he replied. "Once an Israeli man is caught having sex with a *Palestini* woman, her brother or father can easily kill him in the name of honor."



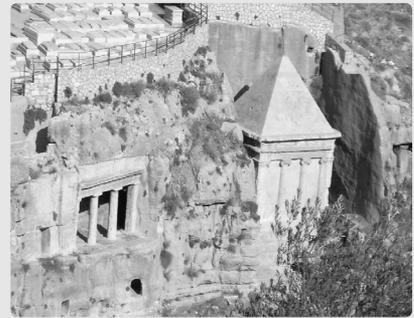
*Samarian man, Asher, writing the alphabet for us in ancient Hebrew, Samaria, 2009*



*The Shiloh Inscription in ancient Hebrew, City of David, Jerusalem, 2009*



*Absalom's tomb, Jerusalem, 2009*



*Zachariah's tomb, Jerusalem, 2009*



*The modern City of David where my guide told me  
King David had lived, Jerusalem, 2009*

# Appendix

## *Organizations Working for Peaceful Dialogue and Coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians*

### **Alliance for Middle East Peace:**

[WWW.ALLMEP.ORG](http://WWW.ALLMEP.ORG)

### **Breaking the Silence:**

[WWW.BREAKINGTHESILENCE.ORG.IL](http://WWW.BREAKINGTHESILENCE.ORG.IL)

### **B'Tselem:**

[WWW.BTSELEM.ORG](http://WWW.BTSELEM.ORG)

### **Combatants for Peace:**

[WWW.CFPEACE.ORG](http://WWW.CFPEACE.ORG)

### **Compassionate Listening Project:**

[WWW.COMPASSIONATELISTENING.ORG](http://WWW.COMPASSIONATELISTENING.ORG)

### **The American Task Force on Palestine:**

[WWW.AMERICANTASKFORCE.ORG](http://WWW.AMERICANTASKFORCE.ORG)

### **The Parents Circle—Family Forum:**

[WWW.THEPARENTSCIRCLE.COM](http://WWW.THEPARENTSCIRCLE.COM)

### **EcoPeace Middle East:**

[WWW.ECOPEACEME.ORG](http://WWW.ECOPEACEME.ORG)

**J Street:**

[JSTREET.ORG/](http://JSTREET.ORG/)

**The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions:**

[WWW.ICAH.D.ORG](http://WWW.ICAH.D.ORG)

**Machsom Watch:**

[HTTPS://MACHSOMWATCH.ORG/EN](https://MACHSOMWATCH.ORG/EN)

**Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam:**

[HTTP://WASNS.ORG/](http://WASNS.ORG/)

**New Profile:**

[HTTP://NEWPROFILE.ORG/ENGLISH](http://NEWPROFILE.ORG/ENGLISH)

**Physicians for Human Rights-Israel:**

[HTTP://WWW.PHR.ORG.IL/EN/](http://WWW.PHR.ORG.IL/EN/)

**Rabbis for Human Rights:**

[HTTP://RHR.ORG.IL/ENG/](http://RHR.ORG.IL/ENG/)

**Ramallah Friends School:**

[HTTP://WWW.RFS.EDU.PS/](http://WWW.RFS.EDU.PS/)

**Refuser Solidarity Network:**

[WWW.REFUSER.ORG](http://WWW.REFUSER.ORG)

**Peace Now:**

[HTTP://PEACENOW.ORG.IL/EN/](http://PEACENOW.ORG.IL/EN/)

**Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East:**

[WWW.UUJME.ORG](http://WWW.UUJME.ORG)

**Women in Black:**

[WWW.WOMENINBLACK.ORG](http://WWW.WOMENINBLACK.ORG)

**Zochrot:**

[HTTP://ZOCHROT.ORG/](http://ZOCHROT.ORG/)

# Glossary

*All terms are Hebrew unless otherwise noted.*

- addivim*: Courteous people  
*agalah*: Rolling cart; plural *agalot*  
*aliyah*: Immigration to Israel;  
literally, going up  
*Amerika'it*: Female American  
*ananeem*: clouds  
*Angleet*: English  
*Artzot HaBrit*: United States  
*Ashkenazi*: Jew of Central and  
Eastern Europe or his/her  
descendant  
*atslanim*: Lazy people  
*ba'ale teshuva*: Secular Jews who  
choose to become Orthodox  
Jews  
*bagelakh*: Bagels  
*bananot*: Bananas  
*barukh haba*: Welcome; literally,  
bless the coming  
*beetakhon*: Security, commonly  
used when referring to safety
- beseder*: Okay  
*bevakasha*: You're welcome  
*bima*: Raised synagogue platform  
with a table for the Torah to be read from  
*boee*: Come (feminine)  
*boker tov*: Good morning  
*bourekas*: Baked, filled pastries  
made of thin, flakey dough  
*café botz*: Turkish coffee; literally,  
mud coffee  
*cain*: Yes  
*cardo*: Ancient promenade (Latin)  
*dabke*: Arabic folkdance, danced  
in a line  
*dahm*: Blood  
*dati'im*: Religious Israelis  
*davening*: Praying (Yiddish)  
*d'var Torah*: Interpretive talk based  
on the Torah portion of the  
week

- Eretz Yisrael*: Land of Israel  
*gleeda*: ice cream  
*g'marnu*: We're finished  
*Hadith*: narrative record of the traditions and sayings of Muhammad and his companions, revered as a major source of religious law and moral guidance second only to the authority of the Quran (Arabic)  
*halakha*: Jewish laws  
*hamantaschen*: Purim cookies (Yiddish)  
*hamish*: Friendly, homey (Yiddish)  
*hamotzi*: Blessing over bread  
*Havdalah*: Service for the end of the Jewish Sabbath  
*hijab*: Traditional scarf worn by Muslim women (Arabic)  
*hurvah*: Ruins  
*intifada*: Armed uprising of Palestinians against the Israeli government (Arabic)  
*Kabbalah*: Mystical aspect of Judaism; literally, receiving  
*kakha, kakha*: So-so  
*kanafa*: Traditional Arabic dessert, thought to originate from Palestinians residing in Nablus (Arabic)  
*kataifi*: Greek, Turkish, and Middle Eastern dessert (Greek)  
*keffiyeh*: Traditional Middle Eastern headdress worn by men (Arabic)  
*khadar okhel*: Communal dining room  
*khador*: Traditional Palestinian dress (Arabic)  
*khai*: Life, alive, numerical value of letters equal 18  
*khalil*: Israeli recorder  
*khallah*: Braided egg bread eaten on the Jewish Sabbath; plural *khallot*  
*khamsa*: Hand symbol for protection  
*khatzilim salat*: Eggplant spread  
*khavurah*: Group of friends for a purpose  
*kheroob*: Carob, cold drink made from carob (Arabic)  
*khofesh*: Vacation, break  
*khupa*: Ceremonial Jewish wedding canopy  
*khutz l'aretz*: Outside of Israel; literally, outside the land  
*kibbutz*: Communal settlement; plural  
*kibbutzim*  
*kiddush*: Hebrew blessing over wine  
*kippot*: Jewish skullcaps; singular, *kippah*  
*klezmer*: Traditional musical style of the Ashkenazi Jews (Hebrew and Yiddish)  
*kohl*: Bedouin black eyeliner (Arabic)  
*kuppah*: Container where people combine their funds for a mutual purpose  
*la'sot khaim*: To enjoy life; literally, to make life.  
*lakhmaniot*: Freshly baked Israeli long rolls  
*le'at, le'at*: Go slowly; literally, slowly, slowly

# About the Author



**A**NNETTE PEIZER EARNED her MFA in Creative Writing at the University of California, Irvine, and has published poetry and prose in local and national literary magazines and newspapers. She has taught writing and humanities courses at various colleges and universities, and currently leads creative writing workshops and tai chi/qigong classes in Seattle community centers and at Mary's Place, a nonprofit serving homeless families. Mother of a college-age daughter, Annette lives in Seattle with her Bulgarian-born husband and Aussie Shepherd mix dog. This is her first book.