I welcome this chance to unlock memories

dating back in some cases 60 years. I am amazed how vividly they return to me.

I was a young child when I went from London to live with my family in Haifa in the late 1940s. Home was a yellow stone-built house in a vaguely castellated style in Crusader Street, a dusty track off Mountain Road (later renamed United Nations Avenue), near the French Carmel. From the balcony you could look out over the wasteland to the lower town, the red-tiled roofs of the German Colony, and across the bay to Acre. On a clear day you could make out the white cliffs on the Lebanese border, and the snow-capped peak of Hermon.

The view of the town was interrupted by a large grain silo, and the cooling towers of the refinery. At night there were a thousand twinkling lights round the bay. There were very few houses then in the part of Haifa where we lived – I was astonished on a recent visit to see how it had been built up. Below Mountain Road was a rocky terrain with wild shrubs and flowers; above us was pine forest that I sometimes crossed when I walked to school in the Merkaz (Central Carmel). At other times I took the bus that wound its way up the mountain.

The Bahai Gardens were a haven of calm. It was a pleasure to walk in the gardens but (apparently as a matter of policy) there was nowhere to sit. The gold dome, one of the most prominent features of the city now, was erected while I was in Haifa.

Just up the mountain was the French Carmel, known to us all as Stella Maris after its main road. A Carmelite convent marked the entrance to the quarter, and the road ran on to the big Carmelite

monastery on a promontory overlooking the sea, which had served as a hospital for the French troops during Napoleon's siege of Acre in 1799.

Stella Maris had some useful local shops, but our main shopping centre was the Merkaz, the Central Carmel further up the mountain. For serious shopping you could go down to the smart shops of Hadar. So we were perched in a kind of no-man's land, with Hadar, the business quarter and the port below us and above us the Merkaz, with the villas of Ahuza beyond. The Merkaz was a real centre, with its wide street (when I walked to school alone I had to ask someone to take me across), its shops and cafés.

My school was at the top of Sea Road, next to a little private zoo which provided endless interest. It was the preparatory school of Reali School, a private foundation dating from 1913. The language of instruction had been Hebrew from the beginning, though the pupils came from many linguistic backgrounds. We wore khaki uniforms (shorts, shirt, and a kova tembel, a dome-shaped hat with a rim that could be turned up to make a kind of brim). The badge was a dark blue triangle adorned with the school motto from Micah 6:8, *vehatsnea lekhet*, 'and walk humbly'. In fact I think we were encouraged to do anything but that, but the sentiment was a fine one. So far as I recall the teachers in our branch of the school were all women, and the headmistress was the stern but fair *Giveret* (Madame) Danieli. We had the usual lessons, including Hebrew of course, and a class called '*Moledet*' ('Homeland') which was mostly about the landscape, flora and fauna of Israel.

We learnt to play the recorder and to sing Hebrew 'folk songs', a blend of Russian and local Arab tunes. In arithmetic we were not allowed to use the cross-shaped plus-sign, but had to omit the lower part of the upright, presumably from some obscure religious motive. It was a Jewish school, after all, and I suppose all the staff and pupils were Jews. We also looked after a small garden, after school.

There were wild creatures everywhere (sometimes even inside our homes): lizards sunning themselves on rocks, little tortoises on the mountain, snakes and scorpions, and once we had a plague of locusts. Inside the house we sprayed with Flit (DDT), using a pump-spray, against the insects.

The summers were hot and brilliant. The hillside lost its colours as the flowers died, and we went often to the beach, generally Khayat Beach, with its thick, deep sand. The sea stayed warm well into the autumn – you could swim in October or even November if the weather was fine. The first rains came in about late September, around the time of the Jewish festivals, and suddenly the hillsides

came to life again: it was astonishing how quickly the vegetation returned with the rain. The winters were relatively mild, but the houses could be chilly with their stone floors, and only a paraffin stove for heating.

One year (I think it was the winter of 1949/50) it snowed: a rare occurrence. My mother, used to the English winter, put my boots on me and walked me up the mountain to school. Passers-by taunted her: 'What sort of a mother are you, to take a child out in the snow?' Most stayed indoors, but some people managed to find skis (left over perhaps from the days when they used to go to Lebanon for the weekend), and took advantage of the unexpected weather. In spring the flowers returned.

I remember the wildflowers: in early spring the deep red poppy anemone, the majestic asphodel, and many others. The first autumn rains brought the cyclamen, the autumn crocus and the fragrant narcissus. And I remember the blue cornflower-like centaurea, the hollyhock, different kinds of rockrose, ranunculus, the exotic caper, and others too numerous to mention. Blue-flowered morning glory covered low trees and made a perfect hiding-place, a cavernous den for young children to play in. An ancient carob dropped its big, brown, dry pods that were cloyingly-sweet to eat. In our garden there was an olive tree: every year when the fruit was ready a whole family of Arabs came, spread blankets under the tree, and shook and beat it till the fruit fell.

Nature was abundant, but in other ways life was not easy I think. Private cars or telephones were rare. We had a refrigerator, but most families did not. We had an electric cooker, but could not use it because of restrictions on the use of electricity. My mother did all her cooking on two little paraffin burners (called *ptiliyot* in Hebrew), as she did not trust the Primus stove, a fascinating piece of equipment with a little pump and an intimidating roar. It was amazing the meals my mother would cook over two little flames. She even made cakes on top of the burner: they were hoop-shaped, and mottled, yellow and chocolate-coloured.

The paraffin seller came round every day. So did the ice-man, selling big blocks of ice for ice-boxes. He handled the blocks with big metal tongs and wet rags. Another daily visitor was the milk-woman with her donkey, which carried the milk in large metal containers, from which the woman scooped out the milk with a 1-litre jug.

Food became scarce as the period of austerity (*tsena*) and rationing set in. I can remember my parents buying day-old chicks and raising them in the hope of having eggs. Those Jewish chickens

never laid (they ended up in the pot), but later we were given a speckled brown Arab hen that laid an egg and sometimes two every day. I can also remember people raising carp in the bathtub.

The brown hen was a present from Giuliet, our home help, whose family lived in Kafr Kana, near Nazareth. She played a large part in my life. Having been educated in a convent school, she spoke Italian, and taught me the rudiments of the language. She also taught me some Arabic, and I still have the Arabic writing book she bought me. She was kind and patient. I enjoyed chatting with her as she cleaned and ironed, trying to please and impress her by learning the lessons she set me. Lunch with her family in Kana (reputedly where Jesus turned the water to wine) was a memorable experience.

Everybody in Haifa seemed to have several languages. We, of course, spoke English at home, and my parents' friends were all English-speakers, from England, South Africa or America. I have a feeling that many of the English-speakers never mastered Hebrew. I spoke Hebrew at school, even with English-speaking friends: it was a tacit point of honour for us never to speak English in the playground. Hebrew was the usual language in the streets and shops, but there was a fair amount of Arabic, and many friends at school had immigrant parents who spoke other languages.

There was music everywhere, on the radio and on wind-up gramophones: Shoshana Damari, with her wonderful voice and distinctive Yemeni Hebrew, singing her early hit *Kalaniyot* (about the red poppy anemones), or *Ani Mitsfat* (about a girl from Safed), and the song of the Palmach ('*Anu anu hapalmach*'). There was Arab music, too, which wound its way into one's mind and soul (Umm Kalthum was at the height of her powers). I have a recollection that the news on one of the radio stations was introduced by a sinuous orientalist dance from Saint Saëns's Samson et Dalila.

The view from my home may have been panoramic, but my horizons, I realise now, were quite narrow. I knew the immediate surroundings – French Carmel and the Merkaz – very well, but I rarely had a chance to explore the rest of the city. I recall a school trip to Atlit, with its Crusader castle and strangely beautiful salt pans. Occasionally with visitors we managed to tour the Galilee, to Nazareth and as far as Tiberias with its black basalt and whitewashed houses tumbling down towards the lake. In the summer there were seaside holidays at Nahariya, far to the north near the Lebanese border. It was still very Germanic, and we children were not allowed to eat at the grownups' table in case we made a mess or a noise. But I knew nothing of the rest of Israel, and never went to Jerusalem or

the South. I think many people thought of Israel as being something separate from Haifa, and rather remote.

I was just nine years old when we left Haifa and returned to London. I had spent half my life on the Carmel, and found England very drab and cold by comparison. The brilliant light and colours of the Mediterranean always stayed with me, as a wistful memory, and I have retained a deep fondness for the city, and a powerful attraction to the Mediterranean. The other thing I have retained from that time is a love of languages. and it is surely due to my childhood years in Haifa that I have become a professor of Hebrew and a translator of Hebrew literature.

DOV MEDZINI.

NICHOLAS DE LANGE is Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at the University of Cambridge and is an ordained Reform rabbi. De Lange is an author and has translated works of fiction (Amos Oz, S. Yizhar and A.B. Yehoshua).