

# Understanding the Middle East

By Denis M. Taylor

Special to Stouffville This Month

If would you like to understand more about the situation in the Middle East, you will find Peter Ginsberg's lecture at Parkview Village Auditorium on Jan. 24 both interesting and informative.

Peter grew up in Montreal and at seventeen went to Israel for six years, three of which were spent in the Israeli army. While he is Jewish, he made a concerted effort to get to know people from all cultures in this contentious land.

He and his family now live in Newmarket and he works as a mechanical

engineer, but his passion is studying, writing and lecturing about the Middle East. He has even published a novel of a love affair between an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian woman.

On Dec. 14 I attended his lecture at Or Hadash Synagogue entitled "48", about the beginning and formation of the state of Israel. His approach was evenhanded, logical, informative and at times even humorous.

He likes to deal with the myths of the Middle East. For example, the prevailing idea that the 1948 war for Israel was fought between the huge armies from the rich Arab countries who were beaten back by a

small army of rag-tag but tough Sabras -- Jews born in Israel, named after the tough, prickly fruit of the Sabra cactus.

In fact, the total number of soldiers in the Arab armies was only about 23,000. They were armed with defective equipment, which was bought on the black market from Europe in the wake of WWII. The Arab countries sat out that war so their troops were not battle-hardened. Any experience they had had was in protecting their leaders from angry mobs. The professional Jordanian troops were the exception, and any Arab victories came at the hands of these troops.

As for the Israelis, the homegrown Israeli troops from the Haganah and Irgun had been fighting the British for years. After WWII many battle-hardened, well-trained and knowledgeable soldiers who had fought for all the Allied armies bolstered these troops. They were mostly Jews but there were also many non-Jews. Israel bought arms on the European black market as well, but their expertise enabled them to buy better-quality equipment.

Contrary to popular press opinion at the time, many informed people expected Israel to succeed in its quest. Peter's presentation provides insight into the situation at the time and enables people to discuss the Middle East more openly and with less rancour. A lighter moment in the Dec. 14 lecture came when he described how the Israeli Air Force got their first two planes. In 1946 and 1947 war movies were very popular, and many of them were shot with the cooperation of the Allied forces.

One such shoot took place at a British Air Force base in southern England. The cameras were set up and rolling. The Air Force planes took off, and two of them just kept going until they arrived in Israel, never to return. As you can imagine, this was not well advertised at the time.

Peter's presentation, entitled "Understanding the Middle East" takes place Friday, Jan. 24 at 7:30 p.m. at Parkview Village and is sponsored by Community Mennonite Church of Stouffville. We invite everyone to come out and learn more.



## All I want for Christmas...

Joshua Bouwmeister, 7 months, looks as if he can't quite decide what he would like from Santa this Christmas. Young Joshua attended a special Breakfast with Santa at the Ballantrae Community Centre. The event was hosted by the Ballantrae Sparks, Brownies and Guides and proceeds will be used to support free Guiding-sponsored events in the community.

## Wayne's New Year's Eve world

For the eighth consecutive year, Mayor Wayne Emmerson invites everyone in the community to his New Year's Eve celebration for local families.

The popular event is a personal initiative by the Mayor, who has once again enlisted the help of a host of willing volunteers, including members of the Lions Club and local volunteer firefighters. The fun starts at around 6:30 p.m. and includes horse-drawn sleigh rides, a bonfire, outdoor skating rink in the park, and fun and games for the kids at Latcham Hall, along with hot chocolate and cider.

The grand finale, a fabulous firework display, begins around 8:45 p.m. Join this great community tradition.

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