

# Personal thoughts and feelings live on

Some children find pleasure and comfort in putting their thoughts and feelings on paper. That was true of Anne Frank, whose diary entries about her family's life in hiding during the Second World War became one of the earliest Holocaust books published. It remains one of the most important to this day.

It was also true of an Israeli girl, Bat-Chen Shahak, whose love of writing and drawing affords readers a rare opportunity to experience the inner world of a precocious, sensitive young girl living in a country that knows no peace.

Through their books, the thoughts and feelings of both girls, Anne Frank and Bat-Chen Shahak, live on.

## *The Bat-Chen Diaries*

*Selected Writings by Bat-Chen Shahak*

*Translated by Diana Rubanenko*

*Edited by Judyth Groner*

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*112 pages. Ages 10-14*

Bat-Chen Shahak (1981-1996) lived in Tel-Mond, Israel, near Tel Aviv. She began expressing her thoughts and feelings in both free verse and prose at an early age. By age 10, she began keeping a formal, for-her-eyes-only, diary.

In that diary and its successors, Bat-Chen combined writings with drawings and doodles. She wrote about all the usual topics that occupy most children: friends, parents, siblings, grandparents, school, teachers, young love, disappointment, growing up, etc. She also wrote about specifically personal concerns, like her numerous ear surgeries and her appreciation for a particular ear specialist, and universal concerns, especially her heart-felt longing for true peace and coexistence with the Arabs and her attempt to understand the Holocaust.

Bat-Chen referred to her first diary as "a beautiful memento to my childhood." Little did this self-aware girl know how prophetic her statement would be. Tragically, Bat-Chen and two of her friends were among the 15 people killed by a suicide bomber in Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Center on her 15th birthday, Purim, March 1996.



## Kid Lit

**Deanna Silverman**

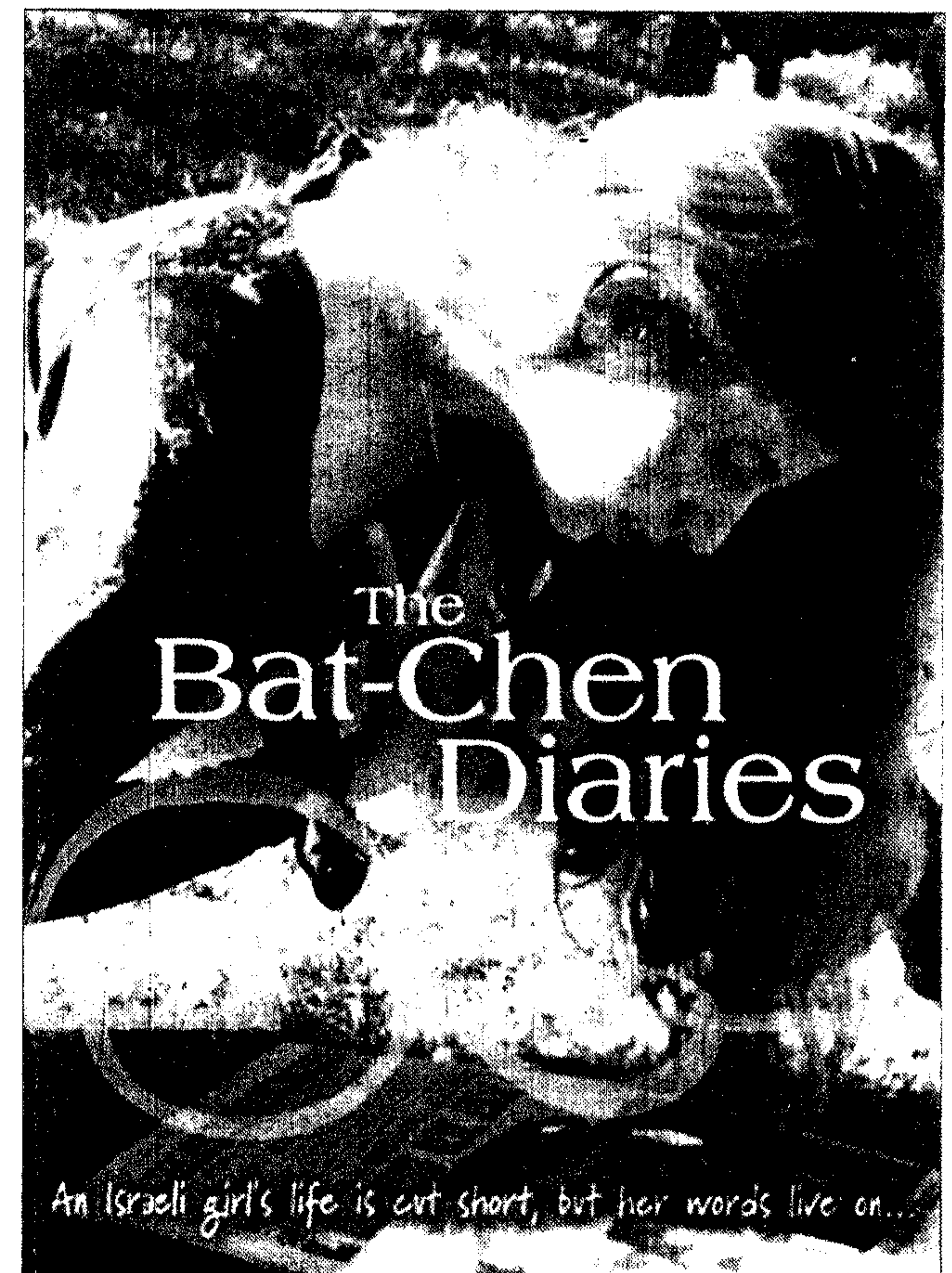
Sometime after her death, Bat-Chen's family gathered her writings and drawings and offered them for publication. Excerpts have been published in Hebrew, and have been translated into Arabic, Japanese, Italian, Dutch, German, and, now, English. That, too, was in keeping with Bat-Chen's expressed wish to "stand out from the crowd, to do something different." Or, as she later wrote: "To create songs, songs that will lighten people's lives and make them look at problems from new perspectives."

Bat-Chen's writings are a beguiling mix of innocence and unexpected sophistication co-mingled with thoughts of death. Again and again, she returns to three fundamental themes. The first, that life is the greatest gift of all, a gift that no one has a right to take away. The second, repeats her mother's refrain that it is easy to make enemies but wiser to find friends. And the third, the importance of how we look at things.

In her own small way, Bat-Chen was an activist as well as a writer. In Grade 8, she became the pen pal of an Arab girl, Nidaa, who lives in a village near Petach Tikvah. A brief example of their correspondence is included in the book.

Additionally, Bat-Chen supported Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's peace efforts. When he was murdered by a Jewish extremist, she sent his widow, Leah Rabin, a poignant, impassioned poem that's printed at the front of the book. Ironically, only a few months later, Bat-Chen, too, was murdered by the very enemy she had hoped to befriend.

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of the selected writings that make up *The Bat-Chen Diaries* is their unfailing integri-



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ty. Whether playful or serious, fearful or sad, thankful or angry, descriptive or emotional, Bat-Chen's writings depict a truth and honesty that is as constant, heart-felt, sincere and hopeful as her desire for peace and her love for her family, friends and the "sacred splendor of Jerusalem."

Photographs of Bat-Chen, her family and friends, her drawings and Hebrew script add a loving harmony to this very rare kind of book. Reading *The Bat-Chen Diaries* is not always easy, emotionally, but it is rewarding.

To Bat-Chen, and the Shahak family, this reviewer says, "Thank you for sharing."