

pass through." During the last months of the war, the pupils devoured newspapers which were still being delivered in Jerusalem, and they all sat huddled around the radio waiting for news.

Today, fifty years later, Vaknine is still a dedicated employee at the Institute on the same grounds that he spent his childhood. Although he hopes the year 2,000 will usher in an era of peace and prosperity in Jerusalem, he still remembers the whiz of bullets and the pangs of thirst that were reminders of a Jerusalem that was divided by war.

Making Music In Palestine

Blinded after a bout with diphtheria as a young child in her native Alexandria, Egypt, Esther Hooli's parents knew that her only possible future lay in Palestine, and she was brought to the Institute as a young child in 1938 through the assistance of the Jewish Community of Cairo. Terribly lonely, and



Esther Hooli enjoyed music from her earliest days at the Institute

without a knowledge of Hebrew, Hooli's only comfort was music. "At the Institute my musical talents were discovered and developed," she says. "Despite the difficult times in the country, I had private lessons from an early age, and thanks to the encouragement and investment in my talents, I was the first blind student to graduate from the Rubin Academy of Music in Jerusalem.

Perhaps Hooli rode out the War of Independence on the calming notes of her music, but many were the times that she was worried about the fate of her family in Egypt. It was only in 1950 that the family could all be reunited in Israel.

Dormitory Accommodations or Guest House

"I don't come back to Jerusalem too much anymore, but to be invited for a week's summer retreat and stay in our refurbished dormitories, that was a treat," smiles Yosef Meuchas of Hadera. Meuchas visited a few summers ago as a guest of the Institute, and he was interested to relive some of his old memories of the period. "Even though we were at the Institute during the War of Independence, we always felt very protected and cared for. Things were very difficult all over Jerusalem, and there was even a period when a teacher and his wife came to live at the Institute when their house was destroyed by an enemy attack."

All in all, with the exception of the difficult days of the war, life at the Institute and in Jerusalem of that era was very quiet and free. "We were given a good basic education and lots of extras," Meuchas says. "Even the blind students knew their way around Jerusalem in those days without a cane." Meuchas, like the other students of his day at the Institute, received a strong base on which to build. Fifty years later, that base is still sturdy.

One of the Institute's Most Outstanding Employees

Physical education is a vital class that students and teachers alike take very seriously at the Jewish Institute for the Blind. With the varied handicaps of the students at the Institute today, blindness is sometimes the least of their problems, explains Michal Eldar, longtime sport instructor at the JIB.

With handicaps of impaired muscular power and coordination, it is important that pupils learn spatial concepts. They circle around, under and through objects, and they must be constantly reminded to use both sides of their bodies and both arms and legs. Sometimes in a class of five or six pupils, they all need an individual lesson plan of instruction, and very often Michal has assistance in her classes.

"I believe that every pupil can benefit from sport, and they should not



Michal Eldar

be made to feel unusual. If everyone is running, a blind child also must run even if he needs a sighted partner," she says. "My students need lots of body work to strengthen their muscles and increase their flexibility. The students are fortunate in that the modern new sports center is spacious and the state of the art equipment is available for their use.

Michal particularly enjoys working with her students on the body-building machinery, because there, every student can work according to his own ability and needs. One pupil who is confined to a wheelchair is particularly fond of sport. "For her to leave her wheelchair and change positions on the mats is already a positive change."

Although Michal has been at the Institute for 15 years, last year she and her family moved to Petah Tikva and she leaves home at 6:00 a.m. in order to be at the Institute for an early class. "If I didn't love the students and appreciate the dedication of the entire staff, I don't know if I would continue to commute," she says honestly. In the meantime, Michal finds satisfaction, and the entire student population of the Institute benefits from her classes.