

PROFILE

Jessica Fishman

BY SIMON YAFFE

JESSICA Fishman was raised in a typical American Jewish family. Zionism was a central part of her identity — so much so that she emigrated to Israel.

But her world came crashing down a few years into her new life there.

For Jessica was told that she could not be legally married in the State of Israel.

In the eyes of the country's Chief Rabbinate she is not Jewish — because her mother converted to Reform Judaism.

Jessica's heartbreaking tale, together with other anecdotes of an American-Jewish immigrant in Israel, is told in her book *Chutzpah & High Heels: The Search for Love and Identity in the Holy Land* (Yotzeret Publishing).

"I will not have my identity taken away from me or disrespect myself or my parents," Tel Aviv resident Jessica told me. "I will not give the rabbinate authority over my life.

"I know that I am Jewish and I do not need anybody else to tell me that I am not."

Jessica was raised in Minnesota, one of two sisters. Her mother was president of the local Hadas-

My identity being called into question

sah branch, while her father was president of the synagogue and the local Jewish community centre.

Jessica attended a Jewish day school and attended Zionist camps.

"My mother was the one who led our family's Jewish life," she recalled.

After graduating from the University of Indiana with a degree in journalism and business, Jessica, who is now in her mid-30s, moved to Israel, initially for nine months, to work as a volunteer at an absorption centre with Ethiopian children.

A year later, she decided to make aliya and worked in the Israel Defence Force's Spokesperson's Unit.

Jessica recalled: "The first time I went to Israel was with my family when I was 13.

"We went to the Western Wall and I remember feeling like it

Jessica uses chutzpah to explain her Israel move



was the most exciting moment of my life.

"But my mum, sister and I had to go to a separate part of the Wall to my dad.

"The synagogue we belonged to was egalitarian and men and women were both part of the minyan, so I thought it was sad that we could not partake in this special moment together.

"I felt that this gender differentiation hurt the men as much as the women."

Jessica, a public and media relations manager, initially realised there was discrimination on the part of the Rabbinate when she discussed marriage with her Israeli boyfriend.

Jessica told him that her mother was a Reform convert, to which her boyfriend asked her to convert to Orthodox Judaism. But she refused.

She discovered that she did not — and still does not — have the right to marry in an Orthodox Jewish service in Israel as the Rabbinate will not accept her mother's conversion.

Devastated and humiliated, the relationship ended and Jessica returned home to America.

"It was the first time I realised that my identity was being called into question," she explained.

BORN: Minnesota.
LIVES: Tel Aviv.
EDUCATION: Degree in journalism and business from Indiana University.
JOB: Public and media relations manager.
BOOK: *Chutzpah & High Heels*.

"Under the Law of Return, someone with a sole Jewish grandparent can emigrate to Israel.

"However, once they are in Israel, it is much harder for them to be married in a Jewish ceremony or buried in a Jewish cemetery.

"I realised I would be a second-class citizen in my new home.

"Israel is supposed to be the Jewish homeland, but it is more like the homeland for some Jews.

"Today, I believe that there are close to 600,000 Jewish Israelis who cannot be married in the country.

"To have a system which is discriminatory does not align with Jewish values.

"There can be no civilian marriage in Israel — it all has to be done through the Orthodox Rabbinate. The Rabbinate does not represent the Judaism I value or the one I grew up with."

After three years in America, Jessica decided to return to Israel.

"I still haven't figured out why I came back!" she said. "I guess I missed the country.

"As much as it has hurt me, there are some great things about Israel.

"I have always enjoyed it here,

apart from what I have been through."

She does, however, still feel like a second-class citizen.

"For example, when I was serving in the IDF, someone in my unit had been killed a week before I joined," Jessica explained.

"Had that been me, I would not have been able to buried in the IDF cemetery. I would have been buried outside its walls.

"Every year, the IDF Chief of Staff lays a wreath on the head-

An outlet to express horrible situation

stone of the last soldier killed before Memorial Day.

"One time, the IDF's Chief Rabbi, or someone like that, called into question this particular soldier's Jewish identity. The wreath was never laid."

Inspired by her experiences, Jessica set up the Aliya Survivor Blog online which, as well as discussing the more serious issues, also points fun at the various experiences she has endured in Israel.

That, in turn, morphed into her debut book, *Chutzpah & High Heels*.

"I had always loved writing and I found, at the time, that it was the only good thing to come out

of my experience," Jessica continued.

"I had an outlet to express the horrible situation I was going through, so it was a case of trying to turn it into something positive.

"People reached out to me and thanked me, as they realised they were not the only ones going through it.

"I want to raise awareness about this situation — I believe that we can have a progressive and inclusive Jewish homeland."

Her book is not all serious, though. Much of it discusses the cultural clashes, language difficulties and dating bureaucracy Jessica endured.

"I have tried to laugh at the misunderstandings that took place," she explained.

"It is also about being on your own in your 20s and trying to define yourself in a new location and society.

"When it came to dating, early on, I noticed that in Israel, on a second date, the guy will take you to meet his family.

"In America, that is a pretty big landmark, but here, because unmarried guys tend to still live with their family, it is not. They are more open.

"But then I would think, 'this guy is really serious about me — introducing me to his family', when, really, it is just what Israelis do."

Jessica will spend March on a book tour of America.

Visit: jessicafishmanauthor.com

Nazis were concerned about Freud's focus on sex, claims author

AUTHOR Dagmar Herzog's new book on Sigmund Freud evolved out of her previous work on Nazi Germany, writes **SIMON YAFFE**.

The professor of history has penned *Cold War Freud – Psychoanalysis In an Age of Catastrophes* (Cambridge University Press).

Against the backdrop of Nazis and the Holocaust, the sexual revolution, feminism, gay rights and anti-colonial and anti-war activism, Dagmar charts the heated battle over the late Austrian Jewish founder of psychoanalysis.

"I have a long-standing interest in popular fascism and my work

as a historian of sexuality," Dagmar explained.

"Nowadays, psychoanalysis is mostly ignored because psychiatry has moved on to neuroscience."

Freud's literature and thoughts had an enormous impact, said Dagmar, the Daniel Rose Faculty scholar at the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

"The Soviets spent a lot of time emphasising (Russian physiologist) Ivan Pavlov because they regarded Freud as individualistic, pessimistic and bourgeois.

"The Nazis, on the other hand, were concerned about Freud's over focus on sex.

"In America, in the post-war period, many wanted help with their anxieties and sex issues, so they turned to Freud.

"Post-war America also saw a major move to try and make Freud and Christ compatible – to Christianise the Jewish psychoanalyst.

"There were Catholic leaders who argued that Christianity and psychoanalysis were compatible."

Dagmar, the daughter of German parents, said her latest book was five years in the making.

Her previous works include *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History* and *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in*

Twentieth-Century Germany.

Interestingly, she pointed out that, in 1950s West Germany, when reparations were being claimed against the county, the government decided to have people evaluated by psychiatrists, who were former Nazis.

"The challenge was to make the case for mental health, but the psychiatrists tended to say that these people, many of them survivors, were already emotionally unstable before the Holocaust," Dagmar said.

"This kind of opinion was, of course, utterly obnoxious, but it was pervasive.

"It took a long time for Jewish

psychoanalysts to offer second or third opinions on this subject, who then began to publish their findings.

"The findings became known as post-traumatic stress disorder."

On the flip side, she said, leaders in the Soviet Bloc were happy with, for example, Freud's critique of religion.

"Many of them made an effort to see if his work was Marxist enough," Dagmar continued.

"If you look at it, every authoritarian government uses a form of psychological techniques to get its citizens to agree with its version of reality."



DAGMAR HERZOG