

# A Q & A with the author of *Checkpoints*, MARILYN LEVY

## 1. You deal with a very complicated and provocative subject. Why did you choose to write it as a young adult (YA) novel?

There are several answers to that question. Most important, many adults have fixed positions, not only about the Israeli/Palestinian situation, but about the politics and positions of their own countries. We read the newspapers that reflect our thinking or watch news programs that mirror our ideas, but teenagers seem to be less rigid in their thinking and more open to the possibility of trying to understand "the other."

Second, the teenagers who are attracted to this kind of book may well be our future world leaders. Perhaps my book will encourage them to look beyond their own borders and barriers, both physical and psychological.

Last of all, it was natural for me to write this as a YA because I have already had 17 novels published for this age range, and the form is both familiar and comfortable for me.

## 2. How is it that you still have an ear for teenage dialogue?

I continue to maintain relationships with teens and listen to what they say and the way they say it, and though their interests may be different from mine at times, I'm encouraged by the fact that so many of them do care about the way other teenagers live and think.

## 3. Why do you seem to know Israel so well?

Actually, I lived there for over a year. In fact, my family and I rented a house in Beit Zeit which is where the main character in *Checkpoints* lives.

## 4. What other research did you do?

I did a lot of reading -- newspaper and magazine articles and books from both the Israeli and Palestinian perspective, and I talked with people. I interviewed a young woman who had recently graduated from the Hebrew University, among others, and my family still has good friends in Israel, including one who is very active in Israeli/Palestinian relations. They were incredibly helpful. And I have a good ear for dialogue, so once I'd gathered my information, I was able to place myself in a totally different situation and allow my characters to live and breathe there.

## 5. What were your greatest fears about the book?

My two greatest fears were that the book would not sound authentic and that because I am a Jew, it would be perceived as biased.

## 6. Well, it is written from the point of view of a Jewish Israeli. How could it not be biased?

I tried to be as even-handed as possible, and I hope that comes across in the book. It would have been presumptuous of me to write from a Palestinian point of view, given my own background, but I worked very hard to make the Palestinian characters' stories believable and sympathetic.

## 7. What would you like your readers to take away with them after reading *Checkpoints*?

That the world is not black and white. That while we may each believe that our cause is righteous, it's important to listen to the other side, whatever or whomever that other side may be. There doesn't always have to BE an enemy -- and sometimes we're our own worst enemy, on a personal and even a broader cultural level.

