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CD-Rom Review: Historical, poignant photographs of Israel fill CD-ROM

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In 1974, when Golda Meir decided to leave office in the wake of the political fallout from the Yom Kippur War, Time-Life photographer David Rubinger captured Meir in the Knesset during a moment of complete resignation. Rubinger then boarded a plane and flew to New York to be sure the photo could be published in that week's Life magazine. These and a thousand other images are part of a new digital photo-essay on CD-ROM called "Portrait of Israel."

Israel's JeMM Productions teamed with Rubinger to produce this multimedia exploration of 50 years in the Jewish state. Rubinger's images combined with new video and audio narratives plus a multimedia interface provide a powerful and often surprising narration of the complex and unique history of Israel.

The CD-ROM is divided into three sections: "Gallery," "Theater" and "Archive." The first comprises 50 of Rubinger's most memorable images. For each, Rubinger explains something about why that image was so important. These stories often describe the events that surrounded the snap of his shutter.

One example is the messy conflict between Israelis who refused to leave the town of Yamit and the soldiers who were sent to evacuate it before Israel handed the Sinai back to Egypt. Rubinger describes how the Israelis began attacking and dumping paint on the soldiers, which was the subject of his photograph. He goes on to tell what was left of the town when Israeli officials decided to demolish it and what the Egyptians have done there since then.

The second section includes a moving interactive video called "Then and Now: 1947/1997." The video explores one of Rubinger's most famous photographs, taken in November 1947 just one day after the U.N. resolution to partition Palestine, making way for the creation of the state of Israel. In the picture, a group of young Israelis has climbed on top of a British armored car. Now, 50 years later, Rubinger gathered as many of them as he could locate to stage another photograph of the event.

The video profiles seven different people who describe their feelings about Israel since that fateful day. Shimon Halberstadt immigrated to New York in 1957 but went back to live in Israel two years ago. In a tearful statement about the photograph and the state of Israel today, Halberstadt says, "It's emotional for me. But it hurts that we don't live in peace with our neighbors."

The third section includes a series of slides with themes such as "Early Years," "Immigrants" and "Leaders." Choose a theme and follow the images, music and poetry readings that help tell each part of Israel's story.

The "Archive" part of the CD-ROM has a collection of 1,000 photos with brief captions. The onscreen toolbar user-interface offers several unique features that come in handy in this section. Click the pop-up menu to choose whether to view the images by date or by name. Click on David Ben-Gurion, for example, and browse a series of more than 60 photos.

The toolbar provides a brief description of each photo but also disappears at the click of a mouse for a full-screen look at the image. It also offers a "copy to desktop" function for cutting and pasting images into other documents. This feature allows students doing reports on Israel to use the photos. The toolbar also helps you navigate to any part of the CD and to switch between Hebrew and English narration at any time.

The "Portrait of Israel" CD-ROM provides an amazing view of the first 50 years of Israel's statehood. This intimate behind-the-scenes look at the life and times of the Jewish state also tells the story of one man and his work. Rubinger won the coveted Israel Prize last year. His body of work has informed three generations. Presented here on one CD-ROM, the Jewish state's history comes alive for all to use and enjoy.

"Portrait of Israel" by David Rubinger (JeMM Productions; \$19.95 plus shipping) Special offers for schools and organizations include 10 CD packs for \$100. Information: (800) 871-0695 or visit Web site at: <http://www.jemm.co.il>
