

Writer reflects on early years covering the world

By MATTHEW BUDMAN
Of the Bulletin Staff

After 13 books and enough experiences to fill several lifetimes, journalist Ruth Gruber, 79, is finally publishing her memoirs. *Ahead of Time*, however, only traces her life through 1936.

"If I go on," she laughs, "it will make *War and Peace* look like a thin paperback."

Gruber, appearing at an Israel Bonds luncheon Monday, will discuss her adventures as a young foreign correspondent in Germany and Siberia — and her current efforts on behalf of Ethiopian Jews. Information on the luncheon is available by calling the Israel Bond office at 781-3213.

In a strong voice and Brooklyn accent, Gruber spoke passionately last week from

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New York about the Ethiopian refugees.

Saving refugees is "Israel's mission," she said. "I've been covering every exodus into Israel since World War II. I covered Exodus 1947 and I covered the first Holocaust survivors from Bergen-Belsen who left to go to Israel in '46."

"Rescue operations have been my life theme," she said in 1987 upon publication of *Rescue: The Exodus of the Ethiopian Jews*.

The poor African country is only the latest to receive Gruber's attention. For six decades she has covered the world's fron-

tiers: Israel, Alaska, Siberia and Puerto Rico — beginning with Germany and the eastern Soviet republic of Yakutsk, which Gruber visited during her early 20s.

Ahead of Time: My Early Years as a Foreign Correspondent, to be published June 24 by Wynwood Press, opens with a description of her Jewish childhood. "I was born in a *shtetl* — a *shtetl* called Williamsburg — in Brooklyn. Jewishness was my home, and God, sitting up in the sky, was my friend."

She remembered last week: "I thought the whole world was Jewish, because everyone was."

In lively prose and dialogue, peppered with snatches of dialect, Gruber's book recalls her family, friends, young romances and professors on her way to becoming, at 20, the world's youngest Ph.D. recipient.

While in Germany for graduate work, she witnessed the rise of Nazism, chillingly describing a 1932 Hitler rally in *Ahead of Time*.

"Then I came back to America and there were no jobs," she recalled, "so I began writing articles. Then I got another fellowship to go abroad to study women under fascism, communism and democracy."

The grant took Gruber to Yakutsk for *The New York Herald Tribune*. "I was the first correspondent sent to the Soviet arctic," she said. "I think the Russians were intrigued by my being a young woman."

Since then Gruber has concentrated largely on Israel, visiting the Jewish state 42 times. "It has been a never-ending voyage of discovery," she said. Seven of her books have been about Israel, and *Raquela: A Woman of Israel* won her a National Jewish Book Award.

In recent years the writer has focused her attention on Ethiopian Jews. Gruber was the only foreign correspondent al-



Ruth Gruber

lowed to witness Operation Moses — the January 1985 rescue of Ethiopian Jews.

"I've made two trips to Ethiopia," she said. "There are about 18,000 [refugees] in Addis Ababa living in horrendous conditions, but at least they're safe. It's a terrible situation. We're doing our best to keep them in good health and in the best mental and physical condition we can until we can get them to Israel."

Even with its myriad problems, Gruber continued, the Jewish state is a haven for Ethiopian Jews. "At least in Israel there's food. My feeling is that Israel will always find ways of feeding its people."

The "new exodus of Soviet Jews and Ethiopian Jews will change the face of Israel," she said. "The Soviet Jews are healthy. They have skills. It was different

with the Holocaust survivors."

Gruber covered the Camp David Accords for 150 newspapers and is optimistic about the postwar Mideast peace process. "I hope it's not stalled," she said. "I hope that our government will continue the peace process, that they will see that the obstacle to peace is not Israel, but the Arabs whose lives we saved. I feel we can't sit back and allow the Arabs to act with such intransigence. They're acting the same as they did before the war happened."

"I'm a born optimist," she added. "I feel there has to be peace. If human beings want it, and nations want it, it's possible. I think the world is ready for it. But Bush has yet to spell it out. The United States must not say Israel is an obstacle to peace. I think Israel really wants to sit down with the individual Arab states. But they're still talking international conference, and it'll go nowhere."

Gruber continues to cover international events for newspapers. Though she has no official plans for another volume of memoirs, her personal computer, she said, helps make her publication of the last 55 years of reminiscences likely.

"I think I'll go on doing it," she confided. "I really have already started and am actually already working on it. I'm a very early riser. I have a Macintosh and it beckons to me."