When I was a Soldier: One girl's real story

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

Sue Unstead [3]

Editor'sChoice:

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4

A moving account of a girl's experience of national service in the Israeli army, this is not only a true story but also a rite of passage. Valerie, just 18, was born in France but now speaks Hebrew like a native in her new home in the Negev Desert in Israel. Her Frenchness sets her apart from her contemporaries, but still she relies upon her close circle of friends, celebrating the end of exams and commiserating over partings with boyfriends. She is the first of her group to be called up, and the mixed emotions of fear of the unknown and national pride are cause for much introspection, at first about her own situation and later that of her country's place in the troubled Middle East. The account is part diary, part narrative, as she describes her arrival at the camp, the harsh discipline and the lack of sleep, the suffocating rules and tough exams. She charts her progress from new recruit to decorated member of the intelligence service, and in the course of this transition she moves away from her friends and family, aware that their perception of her has changed too. There is much to learn here too not only about Israel seen through the eyes of the young but also the post-war history of the Jewish people. The final chapter, headed 'Free', marks the beginning of a new chapter in Valerie's life as she steps out of the base, into civilian life and a grown-up world.

Running Order:

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