

The young champion swimmer who brought down Israel's Goliath telephone monopoly now fights injustice, intolerance, and ineptitude throughout the land.

ReBEL

WITH A CAUSE

Anat Hoffman is executive director of the Israel Reli-



gious Action Center, the legal and advocacy arm of the Reform Movement in Israel. Previously she held a seat on the Jerusalem City Council, where for fourteen years she stood in opposition to the policies of the city's right-wing and ultra-Orthodox administration. She was interviewed by the Reform Judaism editors.

How did you become such a fighter for social change and justice?

My drive to take on tough challenges, tough opponents, goes way back to my childhood. For example, when I was nine, a swimming team coach from Tel Aviv saw me performing a gymnastics routine at a Jerusalem community center and said, “Can you swim?” “Sure!” I said, and into the pool I went, dressed in my leotard, kicking around in the water. I didn’t know how to swim. “Do you want to be a champion?” he asked me, and I answered, “Yes.” “I’ll teach you how to swim,” he replied, “and you’ll become a champion.” He did just that. In my teens I became a champion swimmer, competing in the Maccabiah games representing Israel. I held titles in nine events. The demands of swimming took a toll on my schooling, of course, but that didn’t stop UCLA from recruiting me for its swim team.

Is that where you got involved in Jewish activism?

Yes. First I organized the Israeli Student Organization in Southern California to do “Israeli things” together—Israeli folk dancing, song nights, movie nights. I was a totally secular Jew—the choice I’d seen in Israel was to be Orthodox or nothing—and there was a general agreement among us Israelis that we didn’t do “Jewish stuff.” But my attitude changed when my husband and I got involved with the Westwood Free Minyan, which met at UCLA Hillel. It opened our eyes to the fact that rabbis could be friendly and accepting. I also learned that there is more than one way to be a Jew, and returned to Israel with a strong desire to be a religious-pluralism activist. ➤