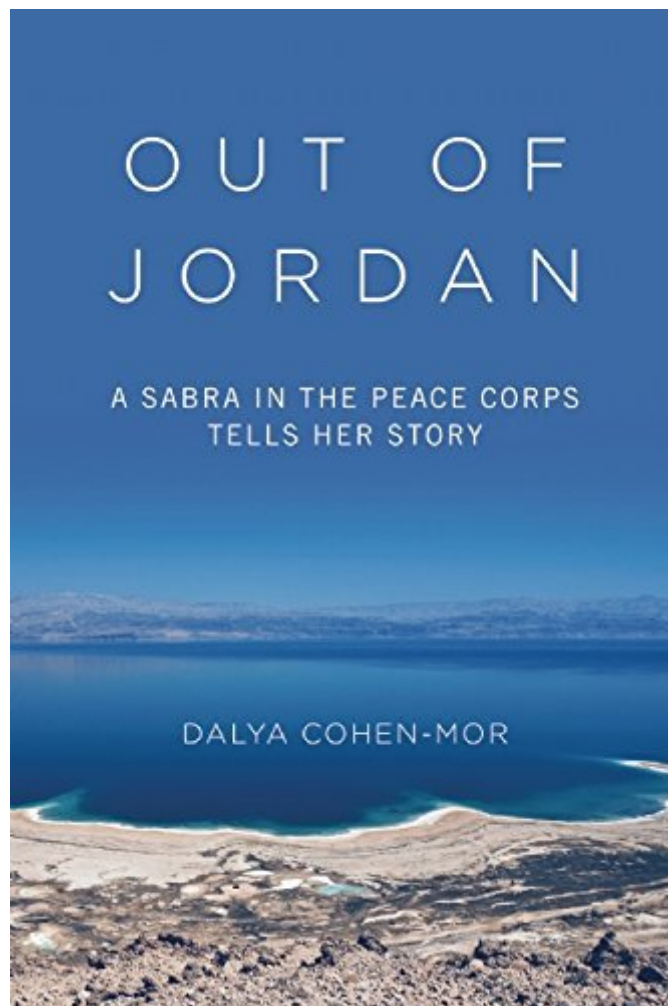




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Out Of Jordan: A Sabra In The Peace Corps Tells Her Story



Synopsis

A riveting memoir of the first Israeli-born Jewish American to be sent as a Peace Corps volunteer to a closed Arab society. A good memoir is a survivor's tale; the story of a person who has faced obstacles and made it through well enough to tell it. Dalya Cohen-Mor, a Sabra-born American woman, volunteered to serve in the Peace Corps, went through a lengthy and highly competitive application process, was accepted, and was sent to serve in the predominantly Palestinian country Jordan, of all countries. Upon arrival in Jordan, Cohen-Mor was instructed by Peace Corps supervisors to conceal her Jewish identity, use an alias instead of her real last name, and pretend that she was Christian so as not to compromise her safety and efficacy as a Peace Corps volunteer. As a single woman, a Sabra, and an American Peace Corps volunteer in a conservative Arab society, Cohen-Mor was forced to navigate uncharted territory, redefine her values and attitudes, and discover what it means to be perceived as the Other. She lived in the household of a Bedouin host family in a remote village in the eastern desert of Jordan, teaching English at the village girls' elementary school. As she traveled around the Kingdom, she often found herself in delicate, complicated, and dangerous situations. After three months of hard work in the Peace Corps, she was accused of being involved in intelligence activities and unceremoniously sent back home. Although she lost her dream to serve in the Peace Corps, she found something more precious in the process: her core identity and sense of self. Out of Jordan paints a penetrating portrait of contemporary life in Jordan, with insight into the complexities of a closed Arab society; family life, women's roles, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the perception of America in the minds of ordinary people. With relentless honesty and unflinching courage, Cohen-Mor recounts her personal journey across borders and cultures into the living realities of two peoples; Arabs and Jews; with conflicting national identities but a common humanity. Skyhorse Publishing, as well as our Arcade imprint, are proud to publish a broad range of books for readers interested in history--books about World War II, the Third Reich, Hitler and his henchmen, the JFK assassination, conspiracies, the American Civil War, the American Revolution, gladiators, Vikings, ancient Rome, medieval times, the old West, and much more. While not every title we publish becomes a New York Times bestseller or a national bestseller, we are committed to books on subjects that are sometimes overlooked and to authors whose work might not otherwise find a home.

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Customer Reviews

I was a volunteer that "served" with Dalya. I put served in quotes because she did not complete her training period. I have two clear memories of Dalya. The first was walking through the airport on our way to the flight that would take us to Jordan. She asked me to carry her bags for her, even though I was weighed down with my own bags. When I politely refused, she seemed quite put out. The second was when I casually asked where she was from and she said somewhere in New England (I honestly don't remember.) By my reckoning, if anyone, Jordanian or volunteer, were to have discriminatory tendencies towards Israelis, she would never have known, as she misrepresented her background. Other than that, I have few memories, as Dalya mostly kept to herself, and tended to be quite closed when dealing with host families or Jordanian Peace Corps trainers. In retrospect, her behavior may have belied her desire to simply stay long enough to write this "tell-all" memoir. Admittedly, I have only read sections - I'd rather not give her time or money - but the sections I have read have varied from "misrepresentation of the truth" to "that did not actually happen at all." As for the rest of us, we served our 27+ months in Jordan. Is the Peace Corps perfect - no. Is Jordan perfect - no. However, we worked alongside our Jordanian hosts, confided in them, became family with each other and with our hosts. I have lived all over the world, and have never experienced the

kind of hospitality and generosity that I did while living in Jordan. Dalya, I am sorry that you did not complete your service (whether it was your decision or PC's). I am sorry to say that I do not recall a moment that you interacted in any kind of open or honest way with the country that was so welcoming to you. I am sorry that you decided to misrepresent the Peace Corps, your fellow volunteers, and to disrespect the generosity of your Jordanian trainers and hosts. I know you don't understand the sadness that this has caused us all, because you didn't stay and contribute to the family that we created. As for potential readers - don't buy this book. If you do want to read it, I personally encourage you to return it within the 7 day return policy as to not give this woman any profit from contributing to myths that ultimately make the world a bit darker. If you would like to hear an honest account of serving a full term as a Peace Corps volunteer in Jordan, please get in touch with Friends of Jordan - the RPCV community.

As a soon-to-be (my disclaimer) Peace Corps volunteer, I was excited to listen to someone who had a less-than-positive experience with the modern Peace Corps to ready myself for service and the complications that come with it, especially from an older volunteer. In that, I was highly disappointed. I will be reviewing this in three parts: Performance, Writing Style, and Story.

Performance: Judith West's dry manner and dropping in tone at the end of every single word makes this a difficult listen. I honestly wanted to return it after the first few minutes, but wanted to hear the entire book that I paid good money for. I am not sure if I would have enjoyed the book more if it were read by someone else or not, but West's voice made it nearly unbearable.

Writing Style: It is very evident that Cohen-Mor is a writer of non-fiction and a scholar. This book, which is a first-hand account, is written in that style. The descriptions are lacking any descriptive language, but that means that the author uses many colloquialisms, depending on the reader's knowledge of American English and their own imagination to fill in the blanks. In one scene, Cohen-Mor states that, "'Person A' made the tea, and 'Person B' (Person A's wife) poured it into cups. This brief, very unnecessary description, is only one example of how Cohen-Mor uses a very distinctly factual based description, yet is constantly telling the reader that an observation lead to an observed party to "feel" a certain way. Fiction and non-fiction writers of stories know that one creates an unreliable narrator with those sorts of assumptions. This led me personally to think of the narrator as not only unreliable, but also as whiny whenever she described other's behavior towards her. The language used lacked varying adjectives and adverbs and became tedious because of constant repetition. Because of this, I was happy when the book finally finished. I felt I had accomplished something after a grueling and arduous task rather than being upset there was not more.

Story: First off, the fact

that Dalya Cohen-Mor states that Georgetown University (her alma mater for her PhD) is, "one of the eight Ivy League Universities," three quarters of the way through the book is troubling and mystifying as Georgetown is NOT one of the eight Universities in the Ivy League. It is a very prestigious University, but to claim it is an Ivy League University is highly erroneous. Second, as someone who has a PhD in language and prides herself on her linguistic background, you would think she would be more sensitive to derogatory terms. She uses the term "Irish Twins," over and over throughout the book to describe herself and her brother, but clearly hasn't researched the incredibly racist origins of the phrase. That being said, Cohen-Mor parades her accolades throughout this book on a constant basis in a "look at me, look at me" brandishing that was grating and frustrating for this reader. She is constantly making excuses for her lack of action and everything seems to happen TO her, with little action/reaction from her. She victimizes herself from the very beginning, attempting to "trust" others when she knows something isn't a good fit for her and allowing herself to be pushed into things she states she knows aren't a good idea from the beginning. She asks very few questions and just floats through, keeping her eye on the "end goal," of Peace Corps service. After her first assignment in China is dissolved and she is offered Jordan, she accepts, despite many very valid reservations, because she wants to appear "adaptable." This is repeated throughout the book, showing the character lacks any insight on her own responsibility for her own situation. Once in Jordan, Cohen-Mor complains about dirt, germs, living conditions, and the way she is treated by the other volunteers as well as the Peace Corps staff. Once in the village for training, she then laments the lack of food in her host family's home as well as the noise and sleeping conditions, but says nothing in fear of offending them. Then, while complaining about hunger, refuses to eat anything high in calories or that she deems "unhealthy." She then complains about the squat toilet (the traditional method of relieving oneself in the Middle East), the lack of a light bulb, followed by the lack of locks once she forces the Peace Corps to move her because her walk is too long and unsafe (the unsafe part where she is having rocks thrown at her makes complete sense, but is lost within her host of other complaints.) Serious concerns for her safety are lacking here because of her glancing over the abuse she suffers on her walks to describe the harsh living conditions she says she is forced to endure in comparison to the cozy conditions of the other volunteers. As I stated above, I am going into the Peace Corps. I'm doing this knowing that I could live in a mud hut with only a straw mattress to sleep upon and very little food. I know this because I have read many accounts of returned volunteers. I researched it. I know that sometimes living conditions are sub-par and unfair across the group of volunteers. It seems that this woman did little to no research on what volunteering in the Peace Corps actually entails. She even had the gall to

complain that her prestigious assignment at a University meant more work than her counterparts. I was so disgusted with this woman that I didn't even feel sorry for her that she was removed from service. It almost seemed like she wanted to be! As for her fight to find out what her background check had uncovered that led to her dismissal from service, the Peace Corps is very clear in its mission and states that any ties to intelligence offices will disqualify one from service. The mission is to promote peace and friendship in foreign lands through a government run agency. They cannot risk their reputation being tainted in any way. The author herself described a letter she received that any question in intelligence work would lead to the Peace Corps to err on the side of caution, meaning a dismissal. Applying to the FBI and failing a polygraph is absolute grounds for dismissal. The timing was unfortunate and should be explained to the dismissed, and she was correct in being upset about that, but this book is a lot of lead-up for very little follow-through. Anyone who has applied to, and been given a polygraph, to any intelligence/criminal investigation agency would most likely be denied Peace Corps service entry, especially if they failed the polygraph. This is logical. The fact that the individual was cleared for daily life in the United States does not mean she is cleared for Peace Corps mission work. She was disqualified for life the moment she failed that test. If she had passed and taken the job, she would have also been disqualified from service for life. This is simply how these agencies run. It is clearly stated in multiple sources that Peace Corps service bars a person from gainful employment in any of the intelligence agencies for life and vice versa. Perhaps if this woman took her own fate more seriously and did some research, she could have avoided this entirely. As for the FBI and Peace Corps' lengthy background check process, it's the Federal government. It isn't right, but it isn't unexpected either. I would absolutely not recommend this to anyone.

Dalya Cohen-Mor's story of her experience with the Peace Corps is an unsettling and interesting saga that I enjoyed reading. She presents a wealth of information about the culture and people of Jordan from her experiences with her two host families. Her book is really an insider's view to the everyday life in this small village in Jordan. It's an eye-opener about the hardships, including the lack of technology that many around the world endure. Cohen-Mor conveys compassion and genuine interest for her host family members. She presents her views into an Arab culture through the eyes of an Israeli born American woman. Her bravery and perseverance are admirable and prevail throughout her entire struggle to complete her training and understand the drama of her Peace Corps experience. I was compelled to continue reading to find out the mystery of her problems with her post in Jordan. I finished the book and still felt that so many questions remain

unanswered, as the author probably feels the same way. I recommend the book for its insightfulness and complete honesty.

Jordan is a closed, dangerous Arab country? I thought that was Saudi Arabia. Aren't the first two months of Peace Corps service spent in a training community? So technically, this writer spent 1 month in the community she was assigned to. I also know that when a volunteer feels unsafe in his or her community, that volunteer has the option of being reassigned to another community. I've met several Jordan RPCVs, and they all seem to have had a great experience over there.

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