

Odyssey to Israel . . .

Ellis Serves His Adopted Country

By Bernard Shuman



The John F. Kennedy Memorial, atop a hill overlooking Jerusalem, features 51 pylons — one for each state and District of Columbia. Friends from Sioux Falls dedicated the South Dakota column.

Jerusalem.

There has been a dramatic change in our lifestyle in Israel. I am not referring to the multitude of changes that we have experienced in the nearly four years since moving more than 7,000 miles from comfortable Sioux City, Iowa, to Jerusalem, the capital of the Holy Land.

I refer particularly to more recent happenings — since our son, Ellis, changed from civilian clothes into a uniform.

Ellis is now a member of Nahal, that unique branch of the Israel Defense Forces which combines military training and agricultural pioneering.

Early in 1977, he and the other dedicated young men and women belonging to his Nahal group, which is sponsored by the Movement for Progressive Judaism, will establish a new kibbutz in the Arava. It will be built approximately 35 miles north of the Red Sea city of Eilat.

This is an exciting challenge for our son, and we are as enthused as he about the prospects of fulfilling in this manner the basic principles of Judaism and, at the same time, helping the country transform barren desert land into productive soil.

That, in essence, was one of the idealistic factors which motivated the Bernard Shuman family to immigrate to Israel in May, 1972.

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But that is the future, and our current lives have altered, revolving around Ellis and the question all Israeli parents of young men and women in uniform ask — will he or won't he (she) be home on leave for Shabbat (Saturday)?

Israel's compact size makes it feasible for most soldiers to tramp (hitchhike) home on a 24-hour pass wherever stationed. Trampadas, where the soldiers gather to await deserving rides from passing motorists, are familiar sights on highways throughout the country.

On a few of those occasions when we knew in advance that he wouldn't be coming home, we drove to his base. The heck with gasoline prices, although about \$1.90 a gallon. We packed picnic lunches and sprawled around an old, torn Army blanket from my World War II days, we enjoyed the food, and especially our son's companionship. Garbi, our sabra (native) dog, sniffed around happily, always within view.

Most young men and women in Israel, when they reach the age of 18, instead of exchanging home base for a college dormitory, are committed to military service, the boys for three years, the girls for two. Although there is no war currently in the troubled Middle East, there also is no peace.

We are trying to adjust to these times by being together as a close-knit family as often as possible. Each week we send Ellis a care package of home-

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It will be four years in May since Bernard Shuman gave up his job at the Sioux City Journal and he and his wife Marion and their three children emigrated to Israel, the land of their forebears. Son Ellis is now serving his country. He is shown at left with his family, from left, Debby, Marion, Judy and Bernard. This is another in a series by Bernard Shuman on the family's activities.

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baked goodies (Army food is consistent all over the world, unimaginative), and we write regular letters.

But the apartment remains strangely quiet without him, and therefore one can readily understand our elation when he casually walks through the front door on a Friday afternoon, home on an unexpected leave.

Consequently, when we gather around the dining room table for our Shabbat (Friday evening) meal, the table covered with cloth and set with our finer dishes and silverware, with fresh flowers as the centerpiece, and after Marion, my wife, has given the blessing over the candles and I have recited the kiddush and tasted the Sabbath wine, we are indeed thankful.

I tried to laugh off Ellis' departure at the time of his induction by declaring that we had not lost a son, but that we had gained a bedroom.

Quite the opposite was true. Our two daughters, Debby and Judy, who have shared a bedroom throughout the years, decided this was the perfect moment for individual privacy. As a result, Judy stayed put while Debby moved her belongings into the vacated room.

Debby is now an eleventh grader at the Jerusalem Experimental High School, where Ellis was graduated last June. Judy is in the tenth grade at the Denmark High School. Both are busy teen-agers.

In addition to their studies in Hebrew, both girls are obligated to perform guard duty at their respective schools, assigned near the entrances to check any suspicious individual or object. Ellis, of course, has frequently stood guard in his basic training.

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I, too, receive guard assignments at the schools, as Israeli law makes it mandatory for parents to guard their children's school. This duty comes in the wake of the unforgettable tragedies at Ma'alot, Kiryat Shmona and Beit Shemen, when terrorists slaughtered the children.

The Civil Guard, however, is a nationwide voluntary organization of men and women who patrol districts and neighborhoods as an additional precaution against unwarranted terrorist attacks.

Here, in our expanding Ramat Danya neighborhood, where our apartment

building is sometimes described as the "American kibbutz" because of the number of immigrants from the U.S. residing here, I prefer the 3:30 a.m. to 7 a.m. guard shift.

I enjoy watching the sun suddenly appear over the distant Judean hills, daylight chasing the ominous shadows away, as the slumbering city of Jerusalem awakens to another inspiring day. I'm on duty an average of once every three weeks.

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Guard duty is accepted as a necessary part of our lives, and through it I have become acquainted with many of my neighbors. Since armed guarding is done in pairs, it has matched me with sabras, immigrants who years ago fled the European holocausts, and more recent newcomers like myself. I shall always be regarded as a new oleh (immigrant), regardless of the years spent in the country, due to my American mannerisms and because my language continues to be English.

One does not sense any futility in guarding, not when confronted by such horrors as the massacre in the heart of Jerusalem's business district, Zion Square. Recent visitors from the Midlands were in the vicinity when the bomb exploded in a cafe, killing six teen-agers taking a break between classes in a nearby high school.

We discussed this outrage when the former Iowans sat in for Ellis at a Friday night dinner. Although emotionally shaken by being exposed to the tragedy, it was not going to deter them from enjoying their holiday.

Similarly, although each disaster affects every one of us personally, since we feel like members of one family, the inhumane acts do not deter us from our day-to-day routines.

What does detract us from our normal patterns, however, are greeting visitors, a most gratifying diversion. There is satisfaction in each "shalom" extended, knowing the importance of tourism to the country as a whole as we renew individual ties with our former home territory.

Then we are thrust into the VIP world of fine restaurants and hotels, whether the modernistic Hilton near the bustling Central Bus Station or the stately King David, whose backyard once overlooked no-man's land in a divided city.

Furthermore, we never grow weary

of sightseeing, perpetually captivated by such landmarks in the city as the Western Wall in the colorful Old City, the Knesset where crucial parliamentary decisions are thrashed out, the Israel Museum with its blending of the past and present, and the Kennedy Memorial.

We, Marion and I, were fortunate to participate in a ceremony at the memorial, when Duke and Dorothy Hurwitz of Sioux Falls dedicated the South Dakota pylon. The memorial's 51 pylons, one for each state and the District of Columbia, ascend in streamlines around the contours of the structure, designed as the trunk of a tree felled before its prime to honor the assassinated president.

Whenever I comment to a visitor about the high costs of food, clothing and other basics in Israel, the response is that prices in the States have also climbed astronomically since our departure.

Some of our visitors have joined me on shopping expeditions to Supersol and Shekem, and after translating the pounds and agorots into dollars and cents, they insisted that there really isn't much difference in daily living costs. The answer, of course, lies in income earned and taxes paid here in Israel.

Ellis' entrance into the service has provided us with entry into Shekem, a network of stores servicing personnel of the defense establishment which is comparable to the American PX. Jerusalem's new Shekem is merchandised like a large U. S. discount store, something that we've sorely missed. But Shekem's most redeeming value is the 12.5 per cent discount.

Both Marion and I took a day off from our respective jobs (the Israel Fiber

Institute, where she is the English secretary to the director, and the Jerusalem Post, where I edit copy of news agencies and reporters) to join a Hanukka trip sponsored by the Center for Conservative Judaism in Jerusalem.

Two busloads of synagogue members and guests — among them Omahans Cantor and Mrs. Aaron (Ethel Levinson) Edgar — retraced the footsteps of the Maccabees, the brave family in the Hanukka story which happened 168 years before the Common Era.

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Ellis' induction has prompted some observers to question one aspect of our aliya (immigration), leaving a country where military service is no longer compulsory. While we were unprepared for many of the absorption roadblocks in our path, this obligation on the part of our son was never one of them, an obligation, incidentally, awaiting both Debby and Judy within a few short years.

Today, there is a growing problem of emigration in Israel, as people leave the country in search of the proverbial greener pastures to be found elsewhere. This, unfortunately, is in sharp contrast to the idealistic aliya movement which prevailed in the West and was permitted in the Soviet Union at the time the Shumans made their move.

But the reason for yordim (emigrants) leaving is never the country's military situation, albeit precarious, since regular and reserve army service is regarded as much more than a responsibility.

Defense of the Jewish homeland against those who would destroy the nation is something in which we all believe, to our very depths.



A favorite tourist spot is the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and the Shumans like to show it to visitors. Here a group of Arab children visit the building.