

'Odyssey to Israel' . . .

# After 11 Years, the Nest Is Empty

By Bernard Shuman

The author is a former Sioux City newspaperman who, since 1972, has been writing reports for the magazine about his family's immigration to Israel.

Jerusalem, Israel

**I**T WASN'T A question of location; it was just a matter of time. The "empty nest" in the Shuman household would have happened whether we had continued our comfortable life in Sioux City, Iowa, moved to a different community in a different section of the United States or immigrated, as we did, to Israel.

And so the natural development in the family cycle came about in Jerusalem, 10 years plus a few months after the Bernard Shuman family began its "Odyssey to Israel."

The three Shuman children, Ellis, Debby and Judy, have married and moved out of the family home, leaving Marion and me to fend, so to speak, for ourselves.

Veteran readers of the Magazine of the Midlands through the mid-1970s were exposed to the trials and tribulations of our initial days in the Jewish homeland, where we went in search of our roots.

This installment in the "Odyssey" series, long overdue, is designed to bring the curious reader up to date on what has happened to the family of five who in 1972 accepted the challenge of a completely new lifestyle in a Middle East land abundant with meaningful history and traditions, fantastic beauty and, unfortunately, constant tension.

Any excuse for the delay in writing this article can be attributed to the fact that the Shumans have settled down into an almost routine existence. What happened to us — the marriage of the children, birth of grandchildren, vacations, illnesses, purchasing of a home, etc. — happens in the average family.

Although I am a newsman by profession, employed by the Jerusalem Post, I no longer considered myself newsworthy. I fell into the trap of forgetting the obligation I undertook when the first "Odyssey" report appeared in the magazine in May 1972.

A few months ago Marion and I moved into a comfortable but small two-bedroom apartment that we have purchased in Jerusalem's expanding East Talpiot neighborhood.

**T**HE KNOWLEDGE that we were faced with an empty nest was a basic reason for acquiring this permanent foothold.

We no longer needed the three-bedroom apartment that we had rented the past 10 years through Israel's Housing Ministry. Coincidentally, the rental lease was expiring and was not to be renewed.

To make the purchase easier for us in this country where inflation runs rampant, the ministry reactivated our immigrant rights, entitling us to attractive housing mortgages.

Taking out a 20-year mortgage at the age of 60, when at this stage of life most people are completing their mortgage payments, was frighteningly easy.

Because I made reference to the country's economy, I must point out that Israel's inflation last year was 131.5 percent, the second highest recorded since the consumer price index was set at 100 in 1960.

Government officials have undertaken a new economic program with the objective of lowering the annual inflation rate to 85 percent. At present, to ease the burden on Israelis, cost-of-living increments are given regularly to workers, albeit not at the same rate as inflation.

The Shumans had needed the larger apartment during the period when Ellis, Debby and Judy were making the typical transition from teen-agers to adulthood.

The transition, of course, is much different in Israel from the United States, with military service obligatory for both boys and girls upon graduation from high school. All three fulfilled their required periods of duty.

Nevertheless, there is always room at the new Shuman address to accommodate visits from the children and their respective spouses and from the dividends on our investment in raising three children, our two granddaughters.

Raute, our older granddaughter, was the first of eight children — all girls — born to members of the Reform Movement's Kibbutz Yahel, where Ellis and his wife, Jodie, are founding members. The 70-member kibbutz is located in the Arava desert, some 60 kilometers north of the seacoast town of Eilat.

**R**AUTE WAS 3 this year, and her sister, Merav, recently observed her first birthday.

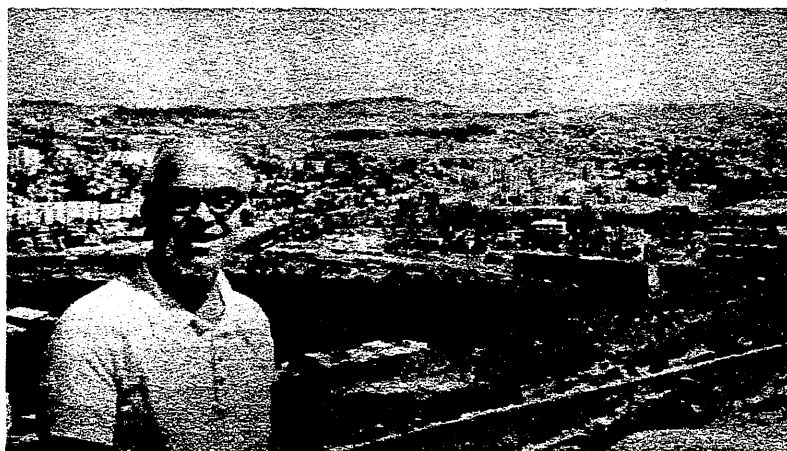
But 1963 is destined to be a boom year at Yahel, which has just celebrated its sixth anniversary. At last count there were eight pregnancies among the members, and therefore the children's population on the kibbutz is guaranteed to double.

The children have their own 'beit yeladim' (children's house) where they play, rest and eat during the morning and afternoon hours while their parents are busy with normal kibbutz chores and activities. In the evening the children live with their parents.

Development of the Arava, including the planned Yahel No. 2, has been stymied by the present government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, which has concentrated all its efforts and money on developing settlements in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank).

This, as all front-page readers know, is a confrontational issue in the relations between Washington and Jerusalem.

There are plenty of wide open spaces for new kibbutzim and moshavim (collective farming settlements) in the Arava, and Marion and I can testify as to how the pioneering



The three children of Bernard and Marion Shuman were teens or pre-teens when the family left Sioux City to emigrate to Israel. Now all are married. From left, at Judy's wedding last summer: Ellis with his wife, Jody, and their daughter, Raute; Debby holding Raute's sister, Merav; newlyweds Judy and Shlomo; and Marion and Bernard. Debby's husband, Barry, is absent. Lower photo, Bernard stands against a backdrop of Jerusalem, his home the last 11 years.

spirit of a younger generation can transform the barren soil into green fields.

We saw it happen at Yahel, where today onions, tomatoes, peppers, pomelos (grapefruit), dates, grapes and flowers are grown during the winter months for export to European countries.

There is also a dairy barn with more than 100 head of cattle; it is there that Ellis works.

Marion and I make the four-hour journey from Jerusalem to Yahel on an average of once every two months. We travel by Egged, the public bus system, because it is more reasonable than making the trip in our 1972 Peugeot (with gas at approximately \$3.50 a gallon).

Furthermore, letting Egged do the driving makes it easier for me to enjoy the passing scenery of the Dead Sea, Masada and the ever-changing formation of the desert.

**O**UR NEST WAS emptied in August 1962, when Judy, our youngest, was married to a sabra (native-born Israeli), Shlomo Elispur, whose parents immi-

grated to Israel from Iran in the mid-1950s.

This is intermarriage, as it is known in Israel, the union of an Ashkenazi (Eastern European background) and a Sephardi (Middle East origins).

Both Judy and Shlomo became students after putting their military service behind them, although he is called periodically for army reserve duty, as he was during the war in Lebanon last summer.

Judy will receive a bachelor of arts degree in June at the Hebrew University, having studied English linguistics and education. Shlomo is studying computer science at the Hadassah Community College.

Both Judy and Debby, who was married in April 1961 to Barry Schwartz, wore their mother's wedding dress under the chupah (wedding canopy).

The dress was one of the questionable possessions that we didn't know what to do with in 1972 when we packed for the 7,000-mile journey from Sioux City to Jerusalem. Initial-

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ly it had been left behind with my sister, Edythe Ocker, for use in a synagogue fashion show, then to be stored in her home.

However, when Marion and I visited Sioux City in 1980, we decided to rid Edythe of the storage problem and bring the dress to Israel, for possible use as a Purim celebration costume. Imagine Marion's delight, and the tremendous savings on the pocketbook, when both daughters chose to wear the dress on their wedding days.

Debby, who is currently living in Brooklyn, N.Y., was the only guest from abroad for Judy's wedding.

Both she and Barry are also studying. Barry is a Reform Movement rabbinical student at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. Debby is studying occupational therapy at the Downstate Medical Center, Brooklyn, after completing prerequisite courses at Brooklyn College.

Kibbutz Yahel was where Debby and Barry met. He was a volunteer worker on a break between studies, and she had just completed her service in the Nahal unit, which combines military training with settling the land.

They were married in the garden of Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem.

**R**EFORM AND Conservative Movement rabbis are still not authorized to perform marriages in Israel, where the Orthodox element wields far too much power in government affairs.

The absence of religious pluralism in the Jewish homeland continues to be something I cannot understand.

Nevertheless, Rabbi H.R. Rabinowitz, a Conservative rabbi formerly of Sioux City's Shaare Zion Synagogue and now of Jerusalem, was permitted by the Religious Affairs Ministry to deliver a short message at each of our children's weddings. Ellis and Jodie had been married in July 1978.

After living in Jerusalem for 10 years — it will be 11 years on May 2, 1983 — I still haven't come to terms with the riddle that is Israel.

On one hand, we have found our roots here in this land full of Jewish heritage and tradition, customs and ceremonies, fact and folklore.

It is a land of breathtaking beauty and contrasting scenery, where one never grows weary of sightseeing.

But on the other hand it is a land of crisis after crisis. Surrounded by hostile Arab neighbors, it hasn't known one day free of fear in its 35 years of statehood.

But today there are also internal conflicts among the various ethnic and political groups that comprise the nation; Israelis, it is said, stem from more than a hundred different origins.

Still revoltingly vivid are those scenes of Israelis fighting Israelis, settlers battling soldiers, when the North Sinai town of Yamit was forcibly evacuated under the terms of the peace treaty with Egypt.

That was still being heatedly debated when Israeli troops moved into Southern Lebanon in June 1982, with the objective of Jewish

settlements on Israel's northern frontier.

**T**HE WAR IN Lebanon has been the most controversial and longest war in the country's history, and even as this is being written, our soldiers are still on the other side of the border.

Although politics and security are out of my realm, I'm not immune to what is happening.

It is such a small country that one feels a definitive kinship with everyone else. The names of those killed in the war were read slowly on Israel television night after night, and we wept with the bereaved. We had experienced a similar suffering in the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

How are Marion and I coping with the "empty nest" syndrome? Our conflicting work schedules provide some of the answer.

I work in the evening on the copy desk of the Jerusalem Post, continuing in the journalism field that I studied at the University of

12,000 newcomers. They came mainly from North America, Argentina, France, Romania and the Soviet Union.

There was a slight rise last year, with approximately 13,260 immigrants landing at Ben-Gurion Airport.

**D**ESPITE THE decline, Marion finds herself continuously busy helping to solve the problems of immigrants from the United States and answering the myriad of questions asked by potential immigrants. She is also the Israeli representative of the Women's League for Conservative Judaism.

Whatever the immigration figures are, I maintain that the influence of people from the West, Anglo-Saxons as we're called, has had an impact on the local scene.

Some of the niceties have rubbed off against the brusqueness that formerly dominated life here. True, pushers and shovers

We waited two years at our former apartment before we had a telephone installed. This time we were three months without a telephone, and then it took the technician less than two minutes to twist a few wires and connect the telephone and end our feeling of isolation.

**M**ARION AND I take advantage of one of my evenings off from the Post to attend a course on Jerusalem from Biblical times to the early Second Temple (538 B.C.) period.

Social obligations, a movie, a concert or a play adequately fill any vacuum arising from the empty nest.

And there is always the Friday night (Shabbat) dinner, with Judy and Shlomo generally joining us along with other invited guests, quite often visitors from abroad.

Because I go to work in late afternoon, when sensible people are coming home from work, I do the marketing. In this society where the majority of wives works, many men shop for groceries and other household supplies.

Once a week I go to Jerusalem's open-air market (Mahane Yehuda) to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, amazed that the stall owners still bargain in lirat despite the fact that the country's currency was switched to the shekel several years ago.

I can look out the window of our new home, and the scene before me is of a picturesque Arab village nestled against a hillside, with the minaret protruding into the blue sky. Several times a day one hears the call to prayer echoing across the way.

In the distance is Herodian, the Judean mountaintop fortress built by Herod during the Second Temple period.

Our East Talpotei neighborhood is a hilly area, formerly a no man's land close to the old United Nations headquarters. Streets in this 10-year-old, densely populated neighborhood are named after Jewish men who were hanged by the British Mandate authorities before statehood was proclaimed and the fight for independence prevailed.

The drive into the neighborhood affords one a spectacular view of Jerusalem, with the walled Old City at its core.

It takes time to become accustomed to a new neighborhood, albeit not quite as much time as it takes to become accustomed to a new country.

**I**N OUR FORMER high-rise apartment building, we were surrounded by other new immigrants such as ourselves, and there was a cohesiveness among us as we wrestled with the complex problems of adjusting to the Israeli society.

But after 11 years there has been a gradual exodus from that building, as each family was confronted with situations comparable to ours.

In our new building of 24 apartments, we find ourselves among young Israeli families, struggling with the problems of raising small children and making ends meet.

But Marion and I no longer need that basic familiarity and closeness. Our apartment is situated in the back of the building, with a separate back door and a plot of ground virtually our own.

Although the times in which we live rarely allow us to be complacent, we can honestly declare that we are comfortable — and happy — in our empty nest. [M]



Left photo, Merav (flowers in her hair) celebrated her first birthday in the children's house at Kibbutz Yahel. Right, grandmother and Raute pose with Raute's pomegranate tree. A tree is planted for every child born in the kibbutz.



Nebraska-Lincoln and pursued at the Lincoln Journal, Albion News and Sioux City Journal.

The Post is the only English language newspaper in Israel, well regarded in diplomatic circles because of its independent views. Newspapers printed in Hebrew with their religious and political affiliations enjoy a large circulation, however.

Newspapers printed in Arabic, French, Polish, Yiddish, German and Hungarian are also available. Israelis are very newspaper conscious, with total daily circulation more than 600,000, or about 21 papers per 100 readers.

Today Marion is in charge of the absorption desk for new immigrants at the Center for Conservative Judaism in downtown Jerusalem.

Immigration to Israel was at its peak in the early 1970s; for example, in 1972 when we arrived, the total annual figure was some 54,000, including 6,000 from North America.

But 1981 saw the lowest immigration figures since the state was established, with

can be found at every Egged bus stop, but in contrast there are respectable lines in the banks and post offices. The clerk who says "thank you, have a nice day" can be found.

Just recently, for example, the speaker of the Knesset (parliament) announced that 10 \$10,000 quality-of-life prizes will be awarded annually in such categories as absorption of newcomers to the country, ethnic integration and bridging the social gap. Such a competition would have been undreamed-of 10 years ago.

There are campaigns against smoking in public places and against throwing litter on the streets. The rowdiness at the movies, when pop bottles used to be rolled helter-skelter beneath the seats, is a thing of the past.

However, some things take longer to correct, such as the bureaucracy in the Communications Ministry, which Marion and I encountered for the second time when we moved.