

Facing Up to War

By Bernard Shuman

The magazine has for the past 18 months been carrying reports of the Bernard Shuman family, formerly of Sioux City, Ia., and their immigration to Israel. Then war struck the country of their adoption. This is Shuman's report.

Jerusalem, Israel.

The air raid siren blared at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, shattering the solemn observance in Jerusalem -and throughout Israel -of the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur. We were in the synagogue as a family, concluding the afternoon service, when the siren moaned, confirming earlier indications that this was to be a never-to-be-forgotten Yom Kippur.

As yet, however, we weren't aware of the seriousness of the situation, that fighting had broken out on two Israeli fronts, against the Syrians in the Golan Heights and against the Egyptians along the Suez Canal in the Sinai Desert.

The Bernard Shuman family, formerly of Sioux City, Iowa, had made Aliya (immigrated) to Israel 18 months ago. We had observed our first Yom Kippur in Israel in the Mediterranean Seacoast town of Netanya a year ago. This was our first Yom Kippur in the world's holiest city, Jerusalem.

We had been advised that on this holiday in Jerusalem everything comes to an absolute halt, with positively no vehicular traffic. The only sounds anticipated were those of Jewish worshippers lifted in

prayer and song emerging from the various synagogues throughout the city.

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Our first indication that something was amiss came at 7 o'clock in the morning when an airplane swooped low over our apartment building in the Ramat Danya district.

The second indication came as my son, Ellis, and I made the hourlong walk to the World Council of Synagogues (Conservative) for morning services. A number of cars passed us in the street, headlights on and horns honking in their haste. Among them was a truck carrying young men and women in uniforms.

The mobilization of Israel's civilian army was in progress. However, we weren't yet aware of this as my wife, Marion, and our two daughters, Debby and Judy, joined us for the morning Yom Kippur service. We also didn't know that in other synagogues men were being called out by army couriers, tearfully embraced by close relatives before they departed for duty.

In our synagogue, we learned later, Minister of Tourism Moshe Kol had been quietly called out to attend an urgent meeting of the Israel Cabinet called by Prime Minister Golda Meir.

Yom Kippur is a traditional fast day for the observant Jew. The fast ended for some men, who had traded their prayer shawls for uniforms, with battlefield rations. Others quickly devoured some food in their homes before grabbing their knapsacks and guns and departing. The obligation to fast until sunset was waived by the military rabbinate because of the outbreak of fighting.

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Each of the five Shumans fasted for 26 hours, not really enjoying our break-the-fast dinner at the home of a close friend, eaten with one lone light aglow in the dining room. A blackout had been ordered. And we were anxious to return home.

Emergency preparations were already underway at our apartment building when we returned. Neighbors had cleaned out the air raid shelter. In the previous weeks there had been much talk about cleaning out the shelter and turning the room into a children's recreation area. Ironically, it took fighting to get the job done.

Another precautionary measure was to fill all available containers -including the bathtub -with water. Flashlights and candles were placed in an

easy-to-find location on the dining room table, just in case.

Actually, the air raid siren alert was not due to Jerusalem being in immediate physical danger from enemy aircraft. The sirens sounded to advise the people of the national emergency, and to indicate that the Israeli radio station was broadcasting. Normally on Yom Kippur, the radio is silent. News broadcasts and classical music were heard, with the news interrupted by beep-beep-beep interference and strange-sounding code names, which were interpreted to mean the call-up of another group of army reservists.

This, then, was the beginning of the fighting, the Yom Kippur War, which is the name most likely to stick. (Hopefully, by the time this is read, there will be a cease-fire in the Middle East!) The Shumans, who had lived through the other Israeli struggles from afar, were now within close proximity of the hostilities.

"It's not your war!" is a ridiculous thing to scream at a family that had chosen of its own free will to emigrate from the United States to the homeland of the Jewish people. It is the war of Jewish people all over the world! It is the war of every man, woman and child in the world who wants to live at peace with his neighbors!

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It is recommended that the best remedy for a war crisis is to continue one's day-by-day working routine, but this is virtually impossible. The ranks of the work force are depleted by the men and women summoned to action. I found this so the next day (Sunday) at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Marion found it so at the Israel Fiber Institute. Tension was heavy among those who reported for work, but, in truth, nobody can concentrate on work when their minds are a few kilometers away.

The extreme tension among the people showed itself Sunday morning in panic shopping at the supermarkets and small neighborhood food stores. Some shoppers waited more than an hour at the checkout counters, clutching tightly their overflowing plastic



An Israeli soldier runs for cover as his nation's flag flies over the emplacement.

carrying bags. There was no need for the housewives to attack the stores; the food supply was ample. The occasional empty shelves encountered in the stores was due primarily to the lack of manpower to deliver the merchandise from the supplier (the dairy, the bakery, etc.)

School throughout the country was cancelled, and the older boys and girls were in the front ranks of those volunteering their services wherever they could be used. Ellis was among those who sorted and delivered mail. They worked at the hospitals. They collected and packed gift parcels for the soldiers.

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Residents with cars at their disposal became "taxis" as they voluntarily transported essential workers from their residences to places of work, such as Shaare Zedek and Hadassah Hospitals. Bus service in Jerusalem, as throughout the country, was greatly curtailed. Many Egged and Dan buses had been used for the transporting of troops to the battle areas. Furthermore, many of the bus drivers were now wearing uniforms.

This is a period when driving an empty car is virtually a crime. In the past few days I've picked up countless "trampers" (hitch-hikers) as I journeyed to work. You just find out whether or not the "tramper" is going your way, and then he or she hops in.

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This is also the period of the little transistor radio, and everything stops on the hour for the latest news broadcast. This report is given in the Hebrew language, and I find it extremely frustrating because I'm still unfamiliar with the language. However, one of the persons in the cluster gathered around the radio generally translates for my benefit.

In addition, news reports in the English language, the second language of the country, are becoming more frequent.

This is also the period of the colored headlights. As a Civil Defense measure, Jerusalem is undergoing a total blackout, and all vehicles traveling at night must have painted headlights. The headlights of my car are painted blue, with a small square in the center open. It was a strange, peculiar feeling driving home the other evening late at night, only a glimmer of light from a building or another car visible. One's eyes slowly become adjusted to the darkness.

This is also the period of Succot, the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, and the community Succa (temporary outdoor structure) has been constructed for our apartment building. A short service will be held there early this evening, with the neighbors partaking wine and cake together. Then everyone will return to their individual apartments and tightly close the shutters on their windows, observing the total blackout enforced in Jerusalem.

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Beneath it all, this is a period of intense emotions, keyed-up feelings. Some manage to conceal their true thoughts behind a smiling facade; others give way to an occasional sob and a tear-stained handkerchief. Why can't we live in peace?

Marion called a close family in the village of Bet Yanai, hoping to learn something about one son in the Air Force and another son in the Israeli Navy. No news. Perhaps this is the hardest part of all; the news is so impersonal at the present time. I wonder about the two sons of a co-worker in the office at the university. I think about another co-worker who is working on his Ph.D. and is also a paratrooper. One of Marion's co-workers at the Institute has six relatives in uniform.

We listen religiously to the news reports. Then we hear the contrasting Arab version of the developments by listening to Jordan television. We wonder what type of news reports are being disseminated in the United States. Marion makes a midnight telephone call to Sioux City to reassure our family that we are safe in Jerusalem.

And so, Yom Kippur War continues and the holiday of Succot begins. Life continues for the Shumans on Aliyah in Israel. Why can't there be peace?