

'History Becomes a Part of Our Lives'

By Bernard Shuman

The Bernard Shuman family of Sioux City, Ia., has emigrated to Israel, the land of its forebears. This is the sixth in a series of articles about the transformation in their lives.



As I write this, Passover, one of the most beautiful and most significant holidays on the Jewish calendar, will soon be here, and it is with mixed emotions that I anticipate its observance.

There is a feeling of joy in the knowledge that this year we are fulfilling the ancient passage in the Haggadah which we recite annually at the Seder — "Next year, may we and our dear ones know the joy of celebrating the Seder in Jerusalem."

There is a feeling of sadness, too, an excusable touch of homesickness, in the knowledge that thousands of miles separate our immediate family from our loved ones in our hometown of Sioux City, Ia.

Since the arrival of the Shuman family in Israel nine months ago,

The Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem is the last remnant of the Holy Temple and the holiest spot on earth for the Jewish people. Prior to the Six-Day War in 1967, the Old City was in Jordanian hands and therefore Jews could not pray at the Wall.

many traditional Jewish holidays have come and gone. Each holiday has underscored a fundamental reason for our decision to make aliyah to Israel. At these times, an entire country pauses in its daily routine to celebrate a Jewish holiday.

I especially remember Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement, when five former Sioux City families worshipped together. The setting was a Conservative Judaism service held in a Natanya hotel. Being together with these close friends more than

compensated for the unfamiliar surroundings as we recalled observing these important holidays at Shaare Zion Synagogue.

Hanukkah was an early December holiday which gave Ellis, Debby and Judy a week of vacation from their studies at Denmark High School.

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IT SEEMS incredible that so much time has passed since our arrival in Israel, embarking on what undoubtedly must be the greatest adventure an American family of the Jewish faith can undertake.

Behind us was the comfortable and complacent life we knew in Sioux City. Ahead were the challenges of a way of life completely foreign to us, a lifestyle that would require all the courage we could muster. One crucial point had to remain in the forefront at all times. In Israel we would live as Jews among Jews.

We spent our initial five months in Israel at the center in Jerusalem's

Katamon Tet neighborhood, living in an apartment provided at a nominal rental by the Ministry of Absorption. Today, I describe this breaking-in period as our "security blanket." Our lives there were entwined with the lives of so many other bewildered immigrants.

But five months in such tight facilities proved to be more than enough. The closeness of the apartment had the five members of the Shuman family desperate for a place with a home-like quality, accommodations where we could hopefully spread out and be individuals.

As a result, five months after first setting foot on the Jewish homeland at Haifa, we moved into a rented four-room apartment (three bedrooms) in the Ramat Danya district.

Finding the apartment to rent was not a simple task. There was no explanation why information about the apartment was a secret among officialdom, except that the tendency in Israel is to buy, not rent, and we were being stubborn in our plans. Eventually, however, we signed the lease for the apartment, signing only after securing the services of an English lawyer who translated word-by-word the nine-page contract printed entirely in Hebrew.

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THE earlier-than-expected arrival of our household furnishings from Sioux City also made it urgent that we have an apartment.

The clearance of furnishings through customs at Haifa necessitates the human quality that most Americans aren't endowed with when they make aliyah—savlanute (patience).

It is an all-day endurance test, with the confused immigrant in the role of a ping-pong ball, bounced mercilessly from building to building, from office to office, from official to official. Wait here! Sign! Go there! But time is running out because the dock workers quit work at 2 p.m., and it is almost that time now. Hurry, please hurry! Savlanute!

And so, our rented apartment quickly was transformed into our new home. There were comfortable beds for sleeping. There were familiar dishes to use. There were treasured books to reread and enjoy again. And there was Marion's beautiful dining-room set where we could all enjoy Shabbat dinners as a family.

Nevertheless, we are still not entirely unpacked. Unopened boxes and suitcases stuffed with seasonal clothes clutter the meerpesset. There is the peculiarity about Israeli apartments in that they are constructed without closets. This requires that the tenant purchase an "arone," a large piece of bedroom furniture for hanging clothes and storing clothes.

There are other idiosyncracies about apartments, such as bathroom showers without a slanted floor for proper drainage of water and light switches strategically placed behind doors. But overall, I dare not com-



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plain about our sterile-looking (all white) 120-square-meter apartment, which is large in comparison to many other apartments.

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APARTMENT dwelling is but one of many new experiences for the Shumans. We live on the third floor of an eight-story building with a total of 28 apartments.

A large number of olim (immigrants) live in the building; the majority speak English. I was informed that the one Israeli family in the building is learning English in a gesture of self-defense. They needn't trouble themselves. At the recent "vad" meeting, a policy-setting meeting of all families in the building, the entire session was conducted in Hebrew.

The basic purpose of this meeting was to regulate how much heat should be provided during Jerusalem's rainy and windy and cold winter. It was decided that there would be heat furnished approximately 10 hours daily, early morning, around noon, and again in the evening, when most people are home. We pay for the heat separately from our monthly rental.

The Shumans' complete dependency on the Egged bus system in Jerusalem diminished as a result of our most expensive purchase since arriving in Israel — a five-passenger French automobile.

Perhaps the purchase of a car wasn't the wisest thing to do (this is one lifestyle that I couldn't be without), because of the senseless way Israeli drivers drive. They drive without rhyme or reason. They weave in-and-out of the lanes of traffic; they stop unexpectedly on the road immediately in front of you; they pass you on blind hills and curves and cut back in like a sharp knife; they honk their horns impatiently the very in-

stant the traffic signal flashes yellow. They hold up their hands in a "What-can-I-do-about-it?" gesture for every infraction of good driving sense.

These atrocities on the roads confuse me. With the automobile such an expensive commodity in Israel, why don't the drivers practice common courtesy on the road as one method of protecting their investments? But the truth persists — you've got to have guts to drive here.

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"DRIVE like an Israeli!" is the semi-comical advice our three children give me every time we travel.

Compounding the traffic nightmare are the people, who, once they are turned loose as pedestrians, walk in, along and across the streets wearing "I-dare-you-hit-me!" attitudes.

Another aspect about driving in Israel in comparison with driving in the States that I remember fondly is service at a service station. Service doesn't exist here, where you're lucky to get all your gasoline poured into your tank without being overcharged. The driver cleans his own windshield, checks the air in his tires and virtually begs to have the oil and water checked.

Marion and I recently took a highly scientific eye-and-ear examination to qualify for our Israeli driver's licenses (although Marion hasn't driven since we've been in the country).

The examination at the District Health Office and the procedure at the Driver's License Office, located in another section of Jerusalem, proved to be an interesting experience.

Marion and I received advice on filling out the forms from an Israeli (formerly of Turkey), who lived on a moshav (cooperative farming). He spoke to us in Hebrew. We, in turn, willingly guided a charming young couple from Riga, Russia, who have been in Israel only 10 days. Marion spoke to the wife in Yiddish. We learned that together they had to pay the Russian government 12,000 rubles to receive their visas to emigrate to Israel.

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IN SPITE of the tax imposed

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Marion and daughter Judy, below left, enjoy a view of the Old City, overlooking the Mount of Olives. The Dome of the Rock can be seen. Ellis, below right, is taking quasi-military training. Bottom photos, Debby and Judy prove it snows in Jerusalem, left, and pause with the cat.



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by the Soviets, there has been a steady flow of Russian immigrants arriving in the country in recent months. Their presence is being felt. Well-educated scientists, teachers, engineers, musicians and writers from Russia are partially responsible for the current surplus in these professions.

There is an acute shortage of apartments available through the Ministry of Absorption. However, problems such as these are not regarded as problems at all because of the eagerness with which Israel is welcoming the Russian Jew.

The steady immigration from the Soviet Union coincides with a decline in immigration from the more affluent Western nations. Officials offer conflicting explanations for the decline. I do not pretend to be an expert on the issue, although as an oleh struggling to make a success of our aliyah, I am aware of some of the hurdles keeping some American Jews at home and causing others to terminate their (mis)adventure in Israel and return to the States.

The high cost of living, employment, housing, education of children, the Hebrew language and the contrasts between American and Israeli cultures — these are the general categories for the various elements involved.

Lifestyle differences are apparent daily. For example, without a sense of humor and savlanute, going to the Driver's License Office at 7 a.m. (to guarantee being processed by the 9 a.m. deadline) would have been miserable.

The red tape involved in clearing our furnishings at Haifa was mammoth, but it is now part of our past and makes an amusing story to tell. There were anxious moments in leaving the Absorption Center and moving to our rented apartment, but these, too, are now recollections.

Ellis, Debby and Judy are the most frequent users of the Egged buses, taking No. 19 from near our apartment to a stop within walking distance (a slight hill) of Denmark High School. Each of the children has a different schedule of classes each day of the six-day school week, but, gen-

erally speaking, school starts at 8 a.m.

SCHOOL has not, by any stretch of the imagination, been easy for the children, and Marion and I are fortunate that there have been few complaints. With the exception of their English classes, all their subjects are taught in Hebrew. Each day they understand a little more, having reached a point where they can complete some of the examinations in Hebrew and pass with good grades.

As olim they are occasionally the recipients of special tutoring at school, which means staying at school until very late afternoon. Then their homework assignments keep them occupied after supper.

Ellis, a tenth-grader, has the most diversified list of subjects, including, in addition to English, geography, French, history and algebra. He also has Torah (the first five books of the Bible) and Talmud (an in-depth study of the Bible).

In addition, Ellis, who is in a class of 40 students, has "Gadna," a quasi-military youth group preparing boys and girls for military service after high school. The group has taken a number of "tiyuls," including a four-day trip highlighted by a visit to

Massada, the mountain fortress used by the Jews in their desperate resistance against the Romans.

Debby and her eighth grade class recently returned from a three-day "tiyul," also highlighted by a visit to Massada. Judy's seventh-grade class will be the next to see the ancient site where 960 Jewish men, women and children committed suicide rather than surrender as slaves.

History has become alive for the children in their studies. A trip to Beer-Sheva recalls the patriarch Abraham who, as the Bible says, "planted a tamarisk tree." An excursion to Herodion, located near Bethlehem on the edge of the Judean Desert, brings back the days of Herod (37 BCE-4CE).

And, of course, there is the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem, the last remnant of the Holy Temple and the holiest spot on earth for the Jewish people.

The first week of the school was a strain on both the wallet and the nerves. School books had to be purchased, which meant shopping at about a dozen book stores throughout the city.

Uniforms had to be purchased — blue shirts, blue sweaters and blue jeans. The girls also needed special gym uniforms, whereas Ellis had to have a "Gadna" uniform, a khaki shirt and pants reminiscent of my days in the Army during World War II.

Denmark High School is named in honor of the Danish people who befriended the Jewish people during the horrors of Nazi Germany. The school strives to maintain a close teacher-parent relationship, and Marion and I have been to several conferences to discuss our children's progress.

Progress? It's slow as the five members of the Shuman family travel the rocky road of absorption. It has been said that for every two steps forward the immigrant to Israel takes, he takes one step backward.

Each day is a challenge. Some sights emphasize our motives for aliyah, such as the man in the street, prayer shawl around his shoulders and prayer book in his hands, hurrying to attend Sabbath morning services at the synagogue. Some sounds revitalize us, such as hearing the children converse in Hebrew with Israeli friends.

Some sights infuriate us, such as the shoving and pushing of people refusing to wait in lines, crowding uncivilly around the bank teller or the post office clerk. Some sounds nauseate us, such as the pleading of beggars in the street on Jerusalem's Jaffa Road.

What would I see if I could look into a crystal ball? In the future are jobs for Marion and me, the "sherut" (taxi) rides of a commuter, tearful farewells to a former Sioux City family returning to the States, and becoming friendly with other new immigrants who are determined that Israel is the place to be.