

The Bernard Shumans of Sioux City, and children, Ellis, Debby and Judy, pose on the packing cases shortly before their departure.

# Odyssey to Israel

By Bernard Shuman

This is the first of what is expected to be a series of articles over the forthcoming months about five Americans who are establishing new lives for themselves—Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Shuman and their three children, formerly of Sioux City, Ia. Their destination: Israel, the land of their forebears.



ONE year shy of the half-century mark in age, I quit my job, sold my house and car, packed up my wife and three children and moved to Israel.

Crazy or courageous? The reactions among our family, friends and casual acquaintances to this momentous move varied from one end of the human spectrum to the other.

I do not consider myself crazy. Nor do I feel particularly courageous. It is something that I, Bernard Shuman, formerly a 20-year resident of Sioux City, Iowa, had to do.

My wife, Marion, also wanted to do it, but not in the memorable tradition of the Biblical Ruth who said, "Whither thou goest, I will go." Marion had to make the change, and thus, we are moving together to Israel, along with our children, Ellis, 15, Debby, 13, and Judy, 11.

We are making aliyah, which is classical Hebrew means "going up" or "ascent," and in modern Hebrew refers to the immigration of Jews to Israel. We are olim (immigrants) and are a tiny handful in the estimated 10,000 American Jews who will emigrate to Israel in 1972. Approximately the same number made the long journey in each of the previous two years.

Why?

AS I SEARCH for an answer to this perplexing question (this article is being written in a stateroom aboard the Greek flagship S.S. Queen Anna Maria en route to Haifa), I conclude

that there is no simple explanation. I don't desire to philosophize but each one of us making aliyah has different personal, intimate reasons; however, all the reasons add up to the truth that we must live in Israel, Jews among Jews. The reasons are all crystalized in the word "future."

I cannot pinpoint the precise moment, time or place, when Marion and I decided to leave Sioux City and move more than 7,000 miles away. I only know that the decision was suddenly there, a decision of enormous proportions, a decision that spawned numerous smaller decisions in its wake.

I only know that one day we revealed to our family and close friends our plans for the future.

Somewhere in our past, Israel, the living land of the Bible, became our way of life. I had never been an ardent Zionist, although Marion's belief in the country as a Jewish homeland dated back to her teenage years in St. Paul, Minn.

We had never visited Israel, forced for the time being to bask in the warmth and purpose of the growing nation through the photographs and stories of friends who vacationed there. A vacation in Israel for the five Shumans was out of the question because of the cost involved. As a working newspaperman in Sioux city, I had no room in the budget for a holiday of this magnitude.

AND SO, Marion and I watched and envied the others who

visited Israel and returned with a vibrant love for the land.

Eventually one couple in our closely-knit circle made the move, moving to Tel Aviv two years ago. Several other couples followed, each one of his own volition. These friends, the Harold Rosenthals, the Marvin Cohens, the Harold Falks and the Bernard Diamonds, will become our family in Israel and will be waiting anxiously at the dock in Haifa for our ship's arrival.

It is our turn now, but definitely not because of the others who have preceded us. Each Sioux City family made the decision independently. We are going basically because of our own personal commitment to Judaism and the ultimate goal of bringing up our three children in a total Jewish environment.

Please don't get the wrong impression! We love Sioux City. It has been good to us, so good that leaving was almost unbearable. The 17 years of our married life have been lived to the fullest in this community of 100,000 persons on the border of the three states of Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota. Ellis, Debby and Judy know no other home.

But we are looking ahead to tomorrow when the children will reach maturity and we can't wait any longer. We must recycle ourselves now.

THE decision to move, as one can surmise, was no spur-of-the-moment conclusion. There were plenty

of sleepless nights in the path, long hours of private, soul-searching talk in the family home before we made the final choice.

And so, we say goodbye to a steady, comfortable pattern of life and exchange for an uncertain, full-of-questions life. If this be an act of courage, so be it. If it is crazy, so be it as well.

Our first determined effort to go to Israel came when I applied unsuccessfully for a journalistic scholarship that would have given me and my family an all-paid year's sabbatical in Israel, studying the Hebrew language and writing about the colorful Israelis.

The application for that grant put into motion other applications, primarily through the Israel Aliyah Center office in Chicago (Jewish Agency), which is the principal Israeli organization dealing with the complex problems of immigration.

Medical examinations were required. Visa permits for temporary residents (we are not abandoning our American citizenships) had to be obtained. The quest for employment in Israel, founded on my bachelor of arts degree in journalism from the University of Nebraska, had to be launched.

Regarding future employment, I am well aware that there is only one English newspaper published in Israel (the Jerusalem Post), and a knowledge of the Hebrew language is a standard requirement for all editorial employees. Not one of the five Shumans speaks the language fluently, although Ellis, Debby and Judy have a fundamental knowledge from their limited attendance at the Sioux City Hebrew School after their regular public school classes.

ON OCCASION representatives of the Aliyah Center visited Sioux City to discuss aliyah first hand with prospective olim, personally answering the varied questions concerning housing, employment, schooling and thus offering a total overall preview of life in Israel.

It is hard to realize that our initial applications for aliyah were made in 1968, one year following Israel's tremendous but unsurprising victory in the Six-Day War.

Now it is April, 1972, and the Shuman family is finally on the move, sailing across the Atlantic Ocean which, according to the ship bulletin, is very rough today. As I sit in my cabin and type, the waves lift the liner up and down and I must steady the typewriter on the dresser ledge.

Personal family problems were the factor in the four-year interval between the ultimate decision to go and actually going. It was in September 1971, during the period of the Jewish High Holidays, that we managed to tell family and friends our original departure date, by the end of the year 1971. However, neither Marion or I had reckoned with a major stumbling block to this schedule—we couldn't sell our home near Sioux City's beautiful Grandview Park.

It wasn't that there weren't "lookers." There were many who came. Was it possible our home had become a Sioux City showplace for newcomers to the community, just like Floyd Monument, the stockyards and the park?

Marion and I found little comfort in the wisdom of friends who declared it only took one family to buy the house. Nor was there much comfort in the views of the real estate agents who maintained that our asking price for the house was reasonable. This was the situation when the old year ended and the new year began.

IT WAS an otherwise uneventful Friday afternoon in March when the house was shown to a young couple expecting their first child, and somehow we knew that they were the ones. This was the same period when I found it necessary to resign my position as state editor of the Sioux City Journal, my employer for close to two decades, and join the unfamiliar ranks of the unemployed.

There is no job awaiting my arrival in Israel, not even the promise of one. I go there armed with the names of individuals to see, people who hopefully will steer me in the right direction to suitable employment. And if I cannot find work as a journalist, I am not too proud to be retrained for work of another nature. The Jewish Agency is willing to retrain professionals in the various other types of work so desperately needed by the young nation.

The time lapse between the prospective sale of our home and the departure hour of the Queen Anna Maria was one month—30 short days. So much to do; so little time in which to do it. Regardless of the amount of advance preparations made, such as securing passports for each member of the family, the main details cannot be handled until the final hours.

Each morning Marion and I awoke with a lengthy list of things that had to be done that particular day. If that list was misplaced, we were in trouble.

There were so many details involved. Addresses had to be changed; subscriptions had to be cancelled. Clothes had to be purchased for the days ahead in Israel, anticipating what would be needed on the journey, what would be needed six months hence. Insurance premiums had to be paid one year in advance in order to eliminate financial worries during the initial year. Copies of our birth certificates were needed, as were at least a dozen passport-size photographs of each family member.

Personal dossiers of both Marion and myself had to be organized, which involved getting employment and school records up to date as well as letters of recommendation from past employers and others with kind words to say about us.

WE checked with the Sioux City Public Schools about our children's school records because there wasn't time for them to complete the school year. We found the schools most cooperative, with each child allowed to finish the term a month early. (However, Ellis, Debby and Judy have been asked to write their impressions of the journey to and early days in Israel for final classroom assignments.)

Ellis' teeth were also a concern because he was a regular visitor at the orthodontist with his teeth in braces. We have the names of orthodontists in Jerusalem. We had to obtain complete

medical and dental histories for each one of us.

We had to check the best method of sending our household furnishings abroad. Of course, this was preceded by deciding what to take and what not to take. We chose to keep our bedroom furniture along with our complete kitchen, except for all major and small appliances. By way of explanation, the electrical wiring system in Israel differs from that familiar to Americans.

Holding a last minute rummage sale in our basement was the method used to dispose of the unnecessary articles accumulated in 17 years of marriage. These items had been tucked away safely in our four-bedroom house. But how can one justify keeping a wedding present that has never been used in 17 years? Sell it, and we did.

But a four-bedroom house can also hide school papers and clippings of three children that go back to their pre-kindergarten days. What does one do with these nostalgic documents? I burned them (with the children's permission).

MY WIFE'S most complex decision concerned our dining room table, chairs and buffet. We had been advised that Israeli apartments, where we will live eventually, are small, generally without dining rooms befitting American standards.

One day Marion wanted to sell the set; the next day the set was going with us. At the moment we don't know whether we resolved the issue correctly, but the dining room set is going to Israel.

It is not the same solution for our six-passenger station wagon, a 1970 model, a car that the whole family thoroughly enjoyed. I didn't want to sell the car, but I too had been cautioned that a big car in Israel was very impractical. Streets are narrow, suitable for small vehicles. Gasoline is expensive, and my wagon ate gas hungrily.

Furthermore, a wagon would im-

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Ellis and other members of the family have done their homework.



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The father says an ancient prayer. Next year they will celebrate the Seder in Jerusalem.

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mediately cast me in the role of a rich American, which I definitely am not. I advertised the car for sale, and the car was sold on the same Friday that the sale of our house was finalized.

That was the Friday I paused momentarily in my hurried transactions to realize that I had no house, no car, no job—all I possessed was a dream, a prayer, a vision that tomorrow in Israel would be rewarding, not in materialistic things but in the possessions that really count in life.

**WHY AM I going to Israel?**

I sometimes awoke in the middle of the night during our final days in Sioux City, screaming noiselessly at myself that "I am crazy. This can't really be happening. Give me back my job, my car, my house. Give me back my daily routine that I am comfortable with. Stop me before it is too late!"

But I awoke each morning, not refreshed but still determined, and Marion and I would confront our list of things to do—and pack. Suitcases all over the houses. Boxes. Cartons. Piles of clothes. Piles of books. Dishes. Games. Packing, packing, packing.

In the futile effort to catch up with the mountain of work starting us in the face, Marion and I once worked around the clock without sleeping. Tired? I was so tired I washed my face without first removing my glasses.

We interrupted our packing to have dinner at the homes of friends, not even bothering to shave or change clothes. Packing, packing, packing. Marion and I wish now that we could remember where everything is packed.

The Shuman family is en route to an absorption center in Katamon Tet, a Jerusalem suburb, where Marion and I will study the Hebrew language six days a week. We will live in a small furnished apartment, and Marion will do her cooking on a two-burner stove. After a summer program, the children will return to school in the fall and hopefully make many new friends.

For Ellis, Debby and Judy, their main hesitation about leaving Sioux City involved the friends that they had to leave behind, youngsters they had known all their lives. Ellis and Debby were students at Herbert Hoover Junior High School, in the ninth and seventh grades, respectively. Judy

was in her sixth and final year at Lincoln Elementary School.

SOMEONE asked me before we left Sioux City—driving to New York City in a rented automobile, pulling a rented trailer filled to the brim with crates for the ship's hold—if I was scared.

The answer is an unequivocal "yes."

I am scared, but I am also rigid in my determination not to allow this fright to alter my course. Marion, Ellis, Debby, Judy and I will become part of the Jewish homeland. We will find peace of mind in Israel, a sense of identity, a closeness with our heritage, visible pride in our Jewishness.

I remember now the Passover Seder we had in our home before we left Sioux City. With us were my mother, Mrs. David Shuman, and my sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Ocker.

There were tears in the eyes of all as we comprehended the finality of this traditional family gathering. The tears rolled down the cheeks when we came to the ancient passage in the Hagaddah which says, "Next year, may we and our dear ones know the joy of celebrating the Seder in Jerusalem."

*'I sometimes awoke in the middle of the night, screaming noiselessly at myself: I am crazy!'*



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