



The Shumans were there when Kibbutz Yahel was dedicated in Israel. Son Ellis helped found it.

Odyssey to Israel . . .

The novel "Roots" — one man's search for the knowledge of his forebears — has captured the nation's fancy. But for the past five years former Sioux Cityan Bernard Shuman and his family have been living the story of "Roots" with their move to Israel and the search for their Jewish heritage. Shuman has been writing about their absorption into Judaism for the Magazine of the Midlands and here is his latest report.

It's Time for a Party

By Bernard Shuman

This is your personal invitation to our party. Please come. It's a very special occasion.

Our apartment in Jerusalem will be overflowing with guests, but you'll quickly overlook the crush of humanity because of the interesting people you'll meet. Their heritages and experiences are as varied as the shells on the beautiful beaches of the Mediterranean Sea.

Who are they? And why have we chosen to invite such a heterogeneous crowd? The explanation is simple. The thread that ties all the guests together is that each one played, or is playing, a role in the immigration and absorption of the Bernard Shuman family in Israel.

This is an anniversary party. A fifth anniversary celebration. Five years ago, the five Shumans cast a lingering farewell glance on their comfortable life in Sioux city, their home for nearly 20 years. Five years ago, on May 2, 1972, the five Shumans began a challenging new life in Israel.

I'm positive that you won't have problems in recognizing your host and hostess — I'm Bernard (Ben) and this is my wife Marion. Five years don't make too much difference in a person's appearance after you've reached a certain age. I was on the verge of the half-century mark when I recycled myself.

But let me introduce you to our three children, who have really matured in the half-decade that we have lived in Jerusalem.

This is Ellis. Today at 20, he is serving in Nahal, the combined military training and agricultural settlement program of the Israel Defense Forces. More specifically, Ellis and the 50 other young men and women in his group have recently settled their own kibbutz (farming cooperative) in the Arava, 65 kilometers north of Eilat. The kibbutz is named Yahel, which

means "God's light," and hopefully it "will shine" as these young sabras (native-born) and immigrants make the barren desert bloom.

The spontaneous singing and dancing at the party will most likely originate with these inspired modern-day pioneers.

This is Debby, now completing her high school education at the Jerusalem Experimental High School. The school was founded in the early 1970s, a period of heavy influx of immigrants from the West, primarily to educate the teenagers who needed a freer framework in which to study than the rigid Israeli school system. Because of our indebtedness to the school during a crucial period of our absorption, members

of the teaching staff and student body are invited.

Debby, at 18, has also selected Nahal for her mandatory service, and belongs to the fourth group that is establishing Kibbutz Yahel.

This is Judy, who at 16 has another year of schooling at the Denmark High School. Judy has often served as the guide and interpreter (because she knows both English and Hebrew) for visiting dignitaries from the U.S. and Denmark. The school honors the Danish people who aided the Jews fleeing the Nazi holocaust. Judy's many school friends are on the guest list.

Perhaps I will mimeograph a list of the guests, as well as identify each with a conspicuous name tag; otherwise one will assuredly confuse people. There is a similarity in facial features between the Jewish Agency representative from Chicago, an Israeli who aided us with our initial arrangements and warned us truthfully that life here wouldn't be easy, and my neighborhood barber, formerly of Morocco, who still can't comprehend why we sacrificed the material advantages of life in the U.S. for idealistic lives in Israel.

In one corner of the apartment may be the "woman in the bakery," who every Friday morning sells me sweet halot (twisted bread) for our traditional Shabbat family dinner. She is not to be mistaken for the Ministry of Absorption official who was dumbfounded to learn that we were still here. She recently told us that we had the lowest potential of a successful aliya (immigration), as we didn't know the Hebrew language, didn't have employment, didn't have money, didn't have family in Israel, had never previously visited the land, and did have three teenagers.

I still don't know the language, although my "easy Hebrew" is sufficient for shopping and other errands. It is not the fault of the teachers and private tutors that I jokingly call myself an ulpan (Hebrew learning class) dropout. All educators in this sphere are invited, particularly those who were more successful with the other Shumans.

Among the invited are the editors and staff of the Jerusalem Post, the

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Debby, left, and Marion plant a tree with the proper blessing.



Ellis, left above, and two Kibbutz Yahel colleagues attend dedication.

Israel

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country's only daily newspaper printed in the English language. After an exhausting search for employment, which led me through brief sojourns at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I finally received permanency at the Post as a night copy editor. My 20-year association with the Sioux City Journal must have influenced their decision to hire me.

I will tell our guests, more in truth than in jest, that my Post salary provides us with "bread and margarine" and our small French-made car with petrol. Israel's high cost of living makes it imperative that both husband and wife work.

Marion's firm belief in the importance of immigration to the future of Israel, reinforced by her desire to be personally involved in helping other newcomers be absorbed (find employment, housing, schooling, friends), prompted her to resign her position as English secretary at the Israel Fiber Institute. Nevertheless, because the institute figured prominently in our lives for four years, her former co-workers are receiving invitations.

Today, however, Marion heads the Absorption Affairs Desk of the United Synagogue of America, the umbrella organization for the Conservative Movement of Judaism. Her new co-workers are coming, as is Uzi Narkiss, the head of the Jewish Agency's Immigration and Absorption Department, who underwrites Marion's challenging post.

No planned program is proposed for the party. Conversation will be the entertainment. The predominant theme will be, quite naturally, immigration and absorption, and the question most often asked will be, "Why did you come?" The answer, in highly simplified terms, will be, "To live as a Jew among Jewish people in the Jewish homeland."

There will be no guest of honor. I'm not inviting Yitzhak, Shimon, Golda, Moshe, Abba and others of that caliber. Although what they do as leaders of the government in establishing laws,

maintaining relations with the U.S., and trying to find a formula for peace with our hostile Arab neighbors affects us all eventually, I don't want to transform an informal gathering into a political confrontation.

Personally speaking, the most difficult aspect of moving to Israel has been the long distance spawned between us and our close family and friends. The exorbitant prices of airplane tickets, in addition to taxes, make frequent reunions prohibitive. Still we have retained a strong identity with Sioux City through occasional visits here by Sioux Cityans. We never know when the mailman will bring a letter or the telephone will ring, announcing the arrival of someone from our past. The mailman is invited; his stops are always eagerly awaited.

All tourists are invited back again, with the stipulation that they put our anniversary party on their itineraries, whether they be traveling alone or on synagogue tours, United Jewish Appeal missions, voluntary programs or study groups. In the tourist category are the humorous teenagers who stay overnight and enjoy Shabbat dinner with us during their summer youth visits. Seeing the visitors' enthusiasm and affection for Israel justifies our hospitality each time and adds spice to our routine day-to-day lives.

Especially encouraged to come are the former Sioux Cityans who had preceded the Shumans on aliya and were waiting at the Haifa port when the Queen Anna Maria docked five years ago. Personal and varied reasons necessitated their return to the U.S., leaving us as "the last of the Sioux" of this period's immigrants. The changes in the countryside in recent years will amaze them, with new housing development, buildings and highways indicative of what has been accomplished in spite of a budget drained by defense and security needs.

The bureaucracy is generally considered a detriment to the adjustment of newcomers. In acknowledging that such inefficiency exists, I'm inviting two or three clerks from the various governmental offices that I have been obligated to visit during the last five years. But I'm having problems decid-

ing which clerks best represent the stumbling block to seeing the proper officials, having forced you to recite the purpose of your visit as though he could resolve the matter in his self-imposed role of importance.

I am also perplexed over which Egged bus drivers to invite as typical of those who transport us, somehow safely, to our destinations almost daily. Representatives of other groups with whom we come in regular contact — bank and postal clerks, sales personnel at Hamashbir (the largest department store in town), and checkout girls at Supersol (the large grocery chain) — are also to be included.

Most of the food that we are serving — the Oriental dips hummous and tehana, and felafel and bourekas — was purchased at Supersol, where I shop at least three times each week. Inadequate storage facilities in our three-bedroom apartment make "stocking up" impossible. Because I work nights, shopping for the basic groceries is my obligation. But many husbands shop here.

The fresh fruit that we will serve will be bought at the green grocer in the city's picturesque German Colony district. Marion shops with him every Thursday, and although his prices are slightly higher than Mahane Yehuda, the hustle-and-bustle open-air market, we depend on our green grocer for quality goods. The green grocer invited us to his daughter's wedding, so naturally he's invited.

Other shopkeepers with whom we've formed good relationships over the years, thus rating that highly regarded preferential treatment, include the pharmacist, the optometrist, the watchmaker, the shoe repair man and the garage owner.

Only twice, as I anticipate it, will the conversation be interrupted. Once to drink "L'chaim" (a toast) to the men and women in the Israel Defense Forces, many of them at the party in their uniforms. The second pause will be an appropriate moment of silence to recall those who fell in the Yom Kippur War and those victims of senseless acts of terrorism. We lived through the war, screaming with the pain of the wounded and crying in anguish with the families of the dead. We lived through Ma'alot, Beit Shemesh, Kiryat Shmona and Zion Square, when those names were carved into the suffering of humanity.

But remember that tragedies do not alter our daily routines, although they keep us on the constant alert. Here among us will be my partners from voluntary dusk-to-dawn guard duty in our neighborhood and others who stand guard at the schools attended by Debby and Judy.

Now let's resume the talk and shake hands with our neighbors in this building of 28 apartments. But they're really friends, friendships founded on common interests, similar objectives and same tongue, all of which sustained us through that transitional period when we were all newly-arrived immigrants. We are, for the most part, former Americans, classified here as Anglo-Saxons.

Come greet other guests — two former Sioux City rabbis and their wives, "adopted" daughters who have no other family in Israel but us, and other im-

migrants, new and old-timers.

Here's an educator who has more part-time jobs than he can count, here's the owner of the second-hand paperback book store where we buy much of our reading material; here's the elderly guard at the Supersol entrance who waves me through because he knows me; here's our family doctor who often displays more than a medical interest in our lives, and here's the gas station attendant who never fails to check my tires or wipe my windshield. Some of their names I don't know, only recognizing them by their faces, but they'll sign the guest book.

If you ask me if I'm not upset by the shoving and pushing on buses, the rudeness of clerks, the lack of courtesy of drivers, the laundry hanging on buildings and the urinating in public, I'll answer, "I am." I'm also annoyed at the poor work habits.

But why not ask me how nice it is not to have to juggle my work schedule so that I can observe all of the Jewish religious holidays? Why not ask me about the warmth that I feel walking freely on the streets with Jews of many origins, in no danger of a pogrom?

If you ask me why people leave Israel, I'll pinpoint economics. If you ask me why people come, there are many answers possible — Zionism, assimilation, intermarriage.

If you ask me about the beauty and history of Israel, where the past, present and future of the Jewish people is irrevocably entwined, I won't stop talking.

If you reiterate the question that I asked myself when we left Sioux City for Israel five years ago — Am I crazy or courageous? — I'll admit that I still don't know the answer.

There is time before the party to double-check the guest list and ponder over the diversified backgrounds of those invited. People from Australia, England, South Africa, Russia and Argentina will come, as well as Americans and Israelis. The greeting and the parting word is "shalom," which means peace.

Once again, let me extend this special invitation to the editor of the Magazine of the Midlands, who has found space for our odyssey to Israel, and to readers, who may have read all, or hopefully some, of the installments in the series. The anniversary party will bring everyone up to date on the Shumans.



Ben pauses by the seashore.