

Odyssey to Israel . . .

The Strange Truth of the Summer of '76



In 1972, Bernard Shuman, his wife and three teen-age children left their home in Sioux City to emigrate to Israel. This is another of his periodic reports to readers of the magazine.

By Bernard Shuman

Jerusalem. Israel's daring commando raid at the Entebbe Airport in Uganda did much more than rescue the 103 passengers on the hijacked Air France airliner.

The accomplishment, which in some circles has been described as an unsurpassed combination of brains and guts, rekindled this country's faltering spirit and reaffirmed our solidarity.

The political dissensions, economic woes, frustrations over bureaucracy and emigration, and shocking scandals in officialdom that seemed to have been

The return of hijacked hostages to Tel Aviv airport by Israeli commandos brought joy, below, the comforting of a child, left, and a lift in Israeli morale.

spawned in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, were cutting deep into the morale of the people. The rescue, of course, didn't resolve these problems. But it did place everything in the proper perspective.

Never in the four years since immigrating from the U.S. to Israel — to fulfill the idealistic goal of living as a Jew among fellow Jews in the Jewish homeland — have I been as proud to be here.

This bursting-at-the-seams feeling was universal throughout the land, shared by Jews and freedom-loving non-Jews wherever they happened to be.

The achievement by the Israel Defense Forces at Entebbe, which clearly demonstrated that man does not have to surrender his independence to the inhumane threat of terrorism, could not have taken place on a more appropriate date than the Fourth of July.

The date, 1976-style, will long be remembered in Israel, just as the date, 1776-style, is memorable in the history of the United States.

The Shuman family had already

made plans to mark the 200th anniversary of America's independence by participating in the Bicentennial celebration in the football stadium of the Hebrew University. All those of American heritage, whether they now lived in Israel or were just visiting, were especially invited, but the invitation extended also to native Israelis and others.

The impresario behind the festivities was a retired U.S. Air Force colonel, Arthur Hoffman, a neighbor of ours.

It was Hoffman who had pounded on our apartment door before 7 o'clock that morning to break the unbelievable news about Entebbe. I'll wake up to such wonderful tidings any morning!

The Fourth was a day when everybody was smiling, laughing, crying with joy and shaking their heads in disbelief. Ears were glued to transistors for the latest news. Eyes were focused on the television screen for the coverage of the hostages' jubilant return to Ben-Gurion Airport and Premier Yitzhak Rabin's report to the Knesset.

In the cloudless, bright blue sky above Jerusalem, an enthusiastic skywriter wrote "Kol Hakovod" in Hebrew. It can be literally translated a thousand praiseworthy ways — "Hats off to you!" "Hip, hip, hooray!" "Marvelous" — to name but a few.

This glowing spirit prevailed when we went to the stadium where, because we were the colonel's neighbors, Marion and I had agreed to supervise the distribution of the souvenir programs, posters and styrofoam hats.

Marion and I, with our daughter Judy, stationed ourselves most of the time at the centrally-located booth

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Associated Press Photos



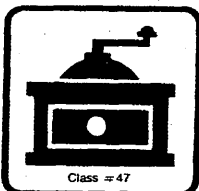
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Summer of '76

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where, in addition to selling, we watched the crowd of over 10,000 and chatted with friends and strangers.

Entebbe dominated the conversations. A doctor whom we had met shortly after we had immigrated to Israel in May, 1972, stopped to say "shalom." He was literally in the clouds. As part of his military reserve duty, he had been ordered early that morning to Ben-Gurion Airport to administer aid to any of the injured hostages on their return home.

Zahal, the Hebrew acronym for the Israel Defense Forces, had given the U.S. an unequalled birthday present.

The Bicentennial party opened with a color guard of U.S. Marines preceding a march by Jewish war veterans from the U.S. Then came sports contests, musical entertainment, the inevitable speeches, two half-hour displays of fireworks and two full-length motion pictures on outdoor screens.

Our son, Ellis, was there, too, on a brief furlough between his assignments on a kibbutz and the beginning of an advanced training course in the military. Ellis remained at the stadium until the celebration's close in the wee hours of the morning.

Only our elder daughter, Debby, was not present; she had departed two weeks earlier for Sioux City, Iowa, our former home town, to spend the summer working as a day camp counselor at the Jewish Community Center, visiting family and renewing old friendships with former class mates.

Debby has one year remaining here at the Jerusalem Experimental High School.

I, too, had recently gone back to Sioux City, fulfilling a family obligation. I found that my three-week visit in what we jokingly label as the "old country" — primarily in Sioux City, with occasional side trips to Lincoln, Omaha and the Twin Cities — did not coincide with Thomas Wolff's contention that "you can't go home again!"

I immediately felt at home. Although the downtown business district in Sioux City had changed dramatically in the last four years, the result of an extensive urban renewal program, I still felt perfectly at ease wherever I traveled.

The people I met and talked to, whether at length or casually and whether they were family, friends or strangers on the street, welcomed me as their next-door neighbor. There was a genuine interest in the lives of the five Shumans in Israel.

Today I insist that I have two homes. One is Sioux City, the comfortable Middle West farming community I chose to leave of my own accord. But 20 years of daily living in a city — a place where the foundations of a marriage are laid, where one's children are born and raised until teen-agers, and where long-lasting friendships are established — creates a bond that cannot be severed merely by not being physically present.

The second and present home, of course, is Jerusalem, a city of history, beauty and importance in the Jewish religion.

My overall impressions of my visit

were that people were friendly — I can still hear that clerk declaring, "Thank you for shopping at Woolco," — and that shopping was a pleasure, although selecting from a wide variety of merchandise presented a dilemma.

If inflation existed, it was not clearly evident to me, for the buildings and homes and automobiles were more beautiful and bigger than I remembered, and the stores and restaurants were always crowded.

It is easy to understand that after my return to Ben-Gurion Airport into the waiting arms of my family, my holiday mood persisted for a while. It took time to readjust myself to such mundane matters as working at the Jerusalem Post, shopping at Supersol, running errands, coping with bureaucrats and guarding our Ramat Danya district.

To my amazement I had discovered that our guard duty and security checks at office buildings, theaters and grocery stores have their counterparts in the U.S.

A Sioux City business man periodically goes on patrol during the night in the suburb where his store is located as a preventive against break-ins. And a security guard stopped me on the ground floor when I stopped at The World-Herald building to pay a surprise visit to the "Midlands" editor. Hollis Limprecht had to verify that I was who I said I was before I could enter.

Summer 1976, in all probability, will be recalled as when America rejoiced over 200 years of independence and Israel rejoiced over the freeing of the hostages. But this summer, like our previous summers here, is the time when links between our two homes are fortified.

There are lots of visitors, many of them college and high school students who stop by during free periods in their youth tours to bring greetings.

I would be negligent not to mention the nine Sioux Cityans who came here in conjunction with the annual River-Cade, a visit designed to give representatives of the news media a better understanding of this country's agricultural accomplishments.

Perhaps Nebraska Gov. James Exon said it best during my informal visit with him in the lobby of the King David Hotel a month earlier when he asserted that Israel "has done more in the last 28 years than any other country" to make every inch of soil productive.

Serving as their intermediary for one morning of their hurried week, I accompanied the River-Caders to a newly established moshav overlooking the Jordan River.

Moshav Phatsael has been virtually self-sufficient from its first harvest four years ago of winter vegetables, such as tomatoes, green peppers, melons, watermelons and grapes. Before the young men and women came to form the community settlement, the land had been barren, with an occasional Arab drifting through with his goats and sheep.

The Shumans' attachment to this moshav, situated in the Bek'a (the Jordan rift) stems from a close friendship with one of the 40 families living there. The young mother of two daughters is Galia, formerly of Palm Springs, Calif., where her parents, Shirley and Barney Miller, live. Galia has con-

nections with both Sioux City and Omaha through her grandfather, Max Barish, a former car dealer, as well as through her father's family. Galia's husband, Avramik, is a native Israeli.

Summer, in addition to being the time of visitors, is also a time of weddings.

In the growing shadows of the Qumran Caves, where in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, the first of two weddings that Marion and I recently attended was performed. The Judean Hills formed the backdrop on one side; on the other side, overlooking the sea, the inaccessible hills of Jordan.

The bridal couple was transported to the site on a decorated tractor-pulled farm wagon, brought the short distance from the border kibbutz where they had met as workers. The bride, a former Philadelphian, was lovely in traditional white, and she didn't seem at all out of place standing beneath the bridal canopy, held aloft in the parking lot generally reserved for sightseers at the caves.

The majority of the wedding guests had been transported to the site from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in buses. After the vows were read, these same buses took the guests to the kibbutz itself, where the kibbutzniks had prepared an ample help-yourself dinner.

The second wedding was held in more plush surroundings, the Jerusalem Hilton, where after the ceremony, we all sat down to an elegantly-served dinner. A lively four-piece band played throughout, and the dancing was spontaneous, traditional horas and other Israeli dances, led by handsome young men and women in uniforms who couldn't sit still.

The bride, a former New York girl whose parents are our neighbors, and groom danced and, for one exhilarating moment, were held aloft and encircled by their friends.

The actual ceremony took place in the hotel garden, beneath the darkened night sky of Jerusalem. In fulfilling Jewish tradition, after the smiling couple was escorted by their parents, the wedding party stood beneath the canopy.

The four soldiers who held up the canopy were all members of the groom's Air Force unit. One of them had just returned a few days earlier from an unexpected long-distance journey. He had been to Uganda!

Here, at the Jerusalem Post, things have been more hectic than usual in the aftermath of Entebbe. There have been a deluge of reactions, and as expected, favorable comments among the West and unfavorable among the Arab and African nations.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin predicted to the Knesset that the action would restore our self-confidence and reduce our cynicism. It will heighten Jewish-Israeli pride, he forecast. His vision was correct.

The rush to memorialize the rescue mission in fiction and on the screen is overwhelming testimony to its impact on modern times.

Isn't it strange that if I had read about such heroics in a book, or seen such a display of courage on the screen, I, nor anyone else, would have believed it possible.

Truth is stranger than fiction, as proven in the summer of 1976.