

Odyssey to Israel

Part 3, By Bernard Shuman

The five members of the Bernard Shuman family of Sioux City, Ia., have closed the American chapter of their lives and have embarked on new lives in Israel—the homeland of their ancestors. This is the third in a series about their new homeland.

Jerusalem, Israel.

BUS NO. 13, which was to become a daily way of life with us, took us to Ben Yehuda Street in the center of Jerusalem on our very first night in Israel.

"So this is Jerusalem," was the thought dominating our minds as the green-and-white bus traveled a route of unfamiliar streets.

"So these are Israelis," was our visual reaction as the bus filled with men, women and children thriving in their Middle East culture.

"So that is Hebrew," responded our ears as the strangers talked among themselves, the majority of them

oblivious to the five exhausted but exhilarated immigrants seated with them on the bus. If they stared, we smiled back in self-defense.

"We are Jews. We belong here in Israel." The foundation of our aliyah from Sioux City, Ia., to Jerusalem were the words the Shumans did not say.

Perhaps we had these words in readiness to combat the feelings that we had been forewarned exist among many Israelis. These attitudes are condensed into an often-heard expression that Israelis like immigration but do not like the immigrants.

WE HAD been advised that an anti-aliyah atmosphere was rapidly spreading among wide sections of the public.

Obviously, the importance of immigration to Israel's future growth has not been successfully packaged and sold by the government to the public. The reasons for this hostile undercurrent is a simple human emotion, one of jealousy. Israelis resent the benefits extended to immigrants, especially those from the Western countries, to influence them to come to the Jewish homeland.

But this was our initial day in Israel, and, so far, the route we were traveling was smooth and glorious. No fore-

boding shadows were cast in the path of the Bernard Shuman family.

The purpose of our ride on Bus No. 13—I can't count the number of times we have depended on this bus since that first ride—was to locate a restaurant in downtown Jerusalem where we could eat supper. We had arrived in the city about 5 p.m. from Haifa, where we had disembarked.

From there we located our Mercaz Klitah (absorption center) in Jerusalem's Katamon Tet neighborhood. Only five years ago, before the Six-Day War, this area had been on the fringe of the Israel-Jordan border and had been sparsely settled.

The absorption center houses 84 separate apartments in five different buildings. Immigrants remain until they locate permanent housing.

Immigrants from the United States, Russia, Argentina, Chile, Morocco and England are assembled here. Languages overheard are global. Appearances reveal nothing.

THE arrival of the five Shumans was greeted excitedly by the children, whose helping hands carried our luggage and belongings to our third-floor apartment. Soon the truck furnished by the Jewish Agency was empty; apartment 34 was crowded. The arrival of new immigrants at an

absorption center is a major event. Everyone watches. Curiosity prevails. "Where are you from?" sums up the questions asked.

"Sioux City, Iowa, United States."

Only the other Americans at the center were slightly familiar with Sioux City, and many from the New York vicinity were amazed to learn that people of the Jewish faith resided in such an outpost.

Three flights of stairs are three flights of stairs, regardless of where one lives. In Israel, however, the difference shows up at night. Iowans, for example, are accustomed to stairways constantly aglow during the hours of darkness. Evidently, Israel's attempt to conserve power keeps the hallways and stairways in the dark at night unless actually being used.

On each floor there are small buttons to push which switch on the lights. This allows an individual enough time to climb the stairs to the next floor before the light goes off—provided he walks quickly. This is an insignificant difference we discovered to our absorption center, a difference one quickly accepts without experiencing any undue hardship.

OUR third-floor apartment can best be described as adequate.

It is a three-room apartment, con-

'Our Welcome Isn't





Opposite page, Mrs. Shuman and the three teenage children board the busy No. 13 bus for downtown Jerusalem. There is no published schedule; one comes along every few minutes. Left, Marion appears on the "laundry-drying balcony. Center, Debby displays a "bag" of milk. Right, the author is either taking a "shath" or a "bower."

Absolute'

sisting of living room and two bedrooms. The kitchen and the two-compartment bathroom are taken for granted and are not tallied in the room total. In addition, there is the familiar Israeli "meerpesset," a small open-air porch off the living room.

This porch fulfills an essential function — in addition to serving as a vantage point where one can observe what is happening below on the sidewalk. In simplified terms, the "meerpesset" is Israel's clothes dryer. This is where the Israeli housewife hangs her washing to dry.

Marion's kitchen is equipped with three basic necessities, a sink, a pint-size refrigerator and a two-burner gas hotplate.

The two-compartment bathroom is Israel's answer to American homes with two bathrooms. Each compartment is a separate closet-size enclosure. One compartment houses the toilet, with a long pipe which one pulls to flush. The second compartment houses the sink and the tub.

The latter, to my way of thinking, is neither tub nor shower. I'm never certain whether I'm taking a "shath" or a "bower," which are words the Shuman family has jokingly coined to describe the bathing facilities. The tub, half the size in length of a standard American bathtub, is built in the shape of an enclosed seat. One half is slightly higher than the other half. Thus, one can sit in the tub, with knees propped up under the chin, and bathe. There is no such luxury as leaning back in the tub, body outstretched and soaking.

Attached to the faucet is the shower device, a telephone-like gadget, that is twistable and movable, spraying

water all over one's anatomy and the entire room at the same time.

I MUSN'T forget to mention the mattresses! Everyone advises that, but I respond with the question, "What mattresses?" Beds in our absorption center apartment are couch-width and thin. "Thin" refers to the depth of the mattress, slightly under three inches. Furthermore, the mattresses are firm, which is a rather polite way of saying that the mattresses are HARD.

Despite these discomforts, in comparison with the way our lives used to be, the differences are quickly labeled as inconsequential if we are to successfully recycle ourselves into a new way of life.

Eventually our lives will form a definite routine. This will occur when I have found employment, when we move into an apartment which we can call home, and when Ellis, Debby and Judy begin regular school attendance.

So far I haven't devoted any serious attention to the pursuit of employment, although I did respond half-heartedly to one advertisement in The Jerusalem Post. I was overwhelmingly confused when I had to complete an application form entirely in Hebrew.

Rest assured that I won't depend on Debby to support us. On our second night in Jerusalem, our elder daughter babysat for three hours for a family living in our absorption center. She earned five pounds, the equivalent to \$1.25.

MEANWHILE, if I become fat in Israel, in all probability the weight increase will be attributed to the

delicious bread. It is delivered fresh several times daily to the neighborhood store, and the housewife carries it home, unwrapped, in the shopping bag which is her constant companion.

The bread is inexpensive, and like the milk that one purchases, the cost is subsidized by the government. (Incidentally, my name "Shuman" means "fat" in Hebrew letters.)

Israeli milk is different from the milk we drank in Sioux City. It is not homogenized, primarily because the housewives here prefer seeing the cream-line, thereby making certain the milk contains the correct fat content.

Milk is delivered to our apartment each morning, with the exception of the Sabbath, by a small Jewish milkman whose former home was Morocco. Every Friday afternoon he comes to collect. As a matter of fact, I had my first Israeli misunderstanding with him.

It was approximately 6 a.m. on a Friday when he knocked at our door and pointed to the six empty bottles that I had placed outside the door before retiring, indicating that we wanted him to leave us six bottles of milk.

I didn't understand all his Hebrew; nevertheless, through an occasional word, accented by hand gestures, I ascertained that he wanted to leave us a dozen bottles of milk. Still half-asleep, I shook my head negatively, but he was persistent.

Then the word "Shabbat" penetrated and I realized the purpose of his determined position. I accepted the 12 bottles. He was merely doubling our Friday morning order to compensate for no delivery of milk on the Sabbath, a day of rest throughout Jerusalem and most of Israel.

But where does one put 12 bottles of milk in a tiny apartment-sized refrigerator?

THE milk bottles in Jerusalem are equivalent to a half-litre, or a drop more than a pint. Milk here is also

available in polyethylene milk bags. I have been informed that eventually the milk bottle will be phased out entirely by the bag. Waxed paper cartons and plastic bottles are too expensive, whereas the bags are locally produced.

So what if the bags leak or are wet and clammy on the outside? So what if the colored printing on the outside of the bag runs — reportedly the coloring is edible. So what if a scissors is as necessary to your table as a knife, spoon or fork. A scissors? One must cut a slight opening in the bag in order to pour the milk.

With the milk delivered and the family gathered around the breakfast table, there is another "must" on the day's agenda. This is listening to the news broadcast in English at 7 a.m. The news in English is heard over the radio three times daily, starting with the headlines at 7 a.m., repeated at 1:30 p.m. (13:30) and again at 8:30 p.m. (20:30).

An American in Israel who lacks an understanding of the Hebrew language faces a total news blackout without either listening to one of these three broadcasts or reading that day's edition of the Jerusalem Post, Israel's only newspaper printed in the English language.

THE radio announcer predicts that the high today in Jerusalem will be "26." There is no need to panic and rush for an overcoat. Simply remember that Israel uses centigrade, not the Fahrenheit system Americans are familiar with.

To convert centigrade into Fahrenheit, multiply the 26 by nine and divide by five and add 32. Or do we multiply by five and divide by . . . ? Never mind; the weather is going to be enjoyable and a heavy coat isn't necessary most of the time in Jerusalem.

Absorption center life goes on each day uninterrupted by the ever-existing conflict between Israel and her Arab

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Reading the Jerusalem Post and listening to the transistor radio keep the author up to date on world events. The newspaper and news broadcasts are both in English.

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neighbors. The Six-Day War is over, but the seventh day, the day of peace, hasn't come yet.

Wherever the Shumans go, whether it be downtown Jerusalem, the markets of the fabulous Old City or the hustling streets of Tel Aviv and Haifa, there are young men and young women proudly wearing the uniforms of their country.

Some of these young men even carry their weapons, although they are away from their posts. These young people always seem to be smiling and laughing. No fear is visible in their healthy, tanned faces.

On the train trip we made from Tel Aviv back to Haifa — our purpose to claim our cartons, trunk and duffel bags from the hold of the Anna Maria — the train was crammed with uniformed young men and women. It was a Sunday morning and they were returning to their posts after spending the Sabbath at home with their families. They chatted and laughed throughout the hour-long journey along the beautiful Mediterranean Sea coastline.

IT WAS a cab driver on the ride back who baptized the Shumans into the hostile immigration atmosphere prevailing among the Israelis, sounding off with the English that he had learned while living in Canada for two years. Although his complaints

weren't directed at us personally, as passengers we couldn't avoid his outburst.

His resentment regarding American and Russian immigrants was centered on the housing privileges allocated to the newcomers and the fact that immigrants can purchase automobiles much cheaper than an Israeli can.

"It is ridiculous that a Russian or an American should get all the benefits," he said. "We don't owe him anything."

If this man were given his druthers, all of Israel's new immigrants would begin their new way of life either on a kibbutz or in the desert.

He questioned where the immigrants were at the time Israel was fighting for its existence. He asked "Why didn't they come then?" without pausing long enough in his tirade for an answer.

Admittedly, there is some basis for his arguments. He and many others like him have risked their lives on the battlefields for the right to live freely in Israel. But today housing is not readily available and Israel's taxes, particularly on automobiles, are among the highest in the world.

"Young men completing their service don't have enough money to get married and find a suitable place to live," he said.

LISTENING to him was a shattering experience. It was impossible to argue with him.

The "antis" insist privileges are

granted at the expense of the underprivileged Israelis, discharged soldiers and young couples on the threshold of married life. They claim that they can't obtain decent places to live because of the olim.

Other arguments are that immigrant students are crowding native Israelis out of their universities and that immigrants are abusing their duty-free import privileges.

In the first half of 1972, 28,000 immigrants arrived in Israel.

Somewhere in that 28,000 figure are the five Shumans, who often had doubts of their own about their aliyah to Israel. We quickly said "shalom" to the cab driver and sent him on his way. But we can't do the same with some of the other Americans at our absorption center, who are already disenchanted over job hunting, apartment hunting and the over-all hostile climate.

How do we reinforce ourselves?

Initially we tell ourselves, "We are Jews. We belong here in Israel. This is the land of our people and this is the land of our future."

Then, armed with a pioneer spirit, a sense of humor and a prayer for mazel (luck), we begin to learn the Hebrew language. Tomorrow morning the five of us will enroll in an ulpan (Hebrew learning) class. We will start with "aleph," the very first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.