

Israel, As Seen Through The Eyes of Its People

By Roz Greenspon

After spending five glamorous vacation days in Athens, Greece, now rested and "ready to work", my husband, Stanley, and I were on our way to Tel Aviv, our first trip to Israel. The excitement was overwhelming when they played the song, "Avenu Shalom Alechim" as we were landing. As President of Charlotte Jewish Federation, this trip was especially meaningful to Stan. Since our return, he has often said, "I went at an ideal time because I finally could feel and see what the many years of my work in UJA has meant for Israel. I now feel even more of a challenge to increase community awareness of the important work supported here and abroad by Federation."

We planned our trip differently than many other people. Since there was no UJA Mission available, we contracted a private car and UJA guide/driver to take us on the tour. What we experienced was not the typical tourist view of Israel. Through the many Israelis with whom we spent personal time, we were able to see and feel the country through the eyes of its own people.

ADI YAKAR...guide/driver. Adi, with us 9 hours a day for 6 days, was not only our historian, our bible teacher and political scientist. He became our friend as we exchanged thoughts and attitudes about family, children and Judaism. Through Adi's story-telling ability, we felt the Roman soldiers marching through Caesarea. The passion of his patriotism to Israel made us think more of our own attitudes toward our country, America. As we touched an ancient Torah and marveled at sparkling new desert cities blooming with flowers and trees, Adi's belief in Israel was summed up when he said, "They (Arabs) plant bombs, we plant flowers."

YAFFA AND VICTOR NICHZI... my family who have lived in Haifa since 1949. Yaffa and Victor welcomed us by serving a typical Israeli dinner (including eggplant, of course!). We spent a wonderful evening together as we talked about family and memories. They also shared with us the reality of raising a family and having a business in the midst of serious inflation and governmental problems. Their expressions were touching and so positive about the strength of the Israeli way of life. It is

wonderful to have a family connection to Israel.

BRUCE LEVIN... Yeshiva student in Jerusalem and son of Jerry and Barbara Levin of Charlotte. Bruce took us to the Western Wall at sundown Shabbat eve. Bruce and Stan were on one side of the Wall while I was alone on the other side amidst hundreds of other women and children. I simply stood and soaked up the feeling of ancient Judaism that The Wall imparts. The chants and rocking, the wails, the soft prayers of so many different kinds of people brought clearly to us that Judaism has indeed spanned time and the Universe. After sundown, Bruce took us to a very traditional Hassidic home for Shabbat dinner. In this home, in Old Jerusalem, prayer was paramount — the men and boys held the place of honor around the dinner table while the women and girls were expected to participate quietly and serve the meal. The evening was so like our own Passover Seder with songs, wine and a multi-course meal beginning with chicken soup. Dinner ended with dancing, a festivity in which the women were not allowed to participate. It was a unique experience for us as American Jews. As different as Hassidism is from our own way of life, we could clearly feel the beauty and strength those traditions bring to its followers. This night will always be a lovely, memorable Shabbat for Stan and me.

AVI ROCKLIN... college student and the daughter of Rabbi Richard Rocklin and Marilyn Perlman, both of Charlotte.

DAVID GORIN... soldier and graduating law student. Here were an American and an Israeli; two young people who helped us feel the youth and vitality of the country. They know that the future for young people in Israel is rather tenuous. College studies, career and family all must be closely tied to the harsh reality of war and imminent danger. This reality has a strong bearing on the plans and attitudes of Israel's young people.

BEDOUIN CHILD... selling vegetables by the side of the road in the desert. The temperature was 100°F, and she was dressed in many layered rags, begging for her pennies. This child, a stark contrast to the modern Jewish children of Israel, is a paradox of cultures.

OFIRA EREZ NAVON... wife of ex-President Yitzak Navon. Ofira was an exchange student

at my sorority, Delta Phi Epsilon, at the University of Georgia. She lived with us from 1959-1961. I had not been in contact with Ofira since 1961, yet, when I called her in Jerusalem, she immediately knew me (us!) and said, "Roz, did you marry the young boy you were going with?" My answer was, "Yes, and I even 'brought him with me!'" Ofira came to our hotel for an afternoon's visit. She exhibits that Sabra spirit I remember from college days. It's that positive attitude that nothing is impossible. Ofira now has a number of national projects that she directs. We hope that she will visit Charlotte within the coming year.

THE MAN AT A RESTAURANT... in Tiberius. This man, wearing a pistol, heard our queries to the waiter and he offered to share our table and answer our many questions. This man gave us yet another view of Israel and its people. His attitude was one of aggressiveness and distrust. When he traveled, he always wore his pistol. He openly declared his atheism and vehemently stated his opinion that very few Israelis practice traditional Judaism. He strongly suggested to us that our only hope was to leave the U.S. and move to Israel in order to be "real Jews". An eye-opening conversation!

GEORGIAN (RUSSIA) FAMILIES... at Project Renewal, Nazaret Illit. Jew of a culture so vastly different that a special project has been set up to slowly and carefully help them assimilate into Israeli society. Culture so different, yet religion and roots, the same.

A SMILING ARAB SHOPKEEPER... in Jericho. After having a nice conversation with this very handsome shopkeeper, our guide warned us that the smile is not what it seems to be.....

SWIMMING IN THE DEAD SEA... Arabs and Jews happily together, looking across to the mountains that work to keep Arabs and Jews apart. Sadness—recognizing the continuous separateness.

JOKE HEARD IN ISRAEL... "Israel is the only country where you can be called a 'dirty Jew' and it simply means you need to take a bath."

The country is beautiful. The Arab Market is so exciting. The Hassidic section is quite mysterious. The Christian sites bring a new meaning to the New Testament. Oil, flowers, fruit, guns; the very still Dead Sea, the very active Mediterranean; the Romans, the Greeks, the Turks, the Jews, the Arabs, the Americans; ancient Temples and modern highways, all mingle as a continuous reminder that we are but specks in the unfathomable vastness of time.

Stanley and I thank UJA Atlanta and Edith Steindler, Rabbi Richard Rocklin, Marvin Bienstock and the many other friends who gave us advice as we planned this special trip to Israel.



Stan Greenspon (second from left) with guide and Arab children.



Stan Greenspon (third from left) with staff from Project Renewal.



(l. to rt.) Ofira Navon, Stan Greenspon, Roz Greenspon visiting in Jerusalem.



Stan & Roz Greenspon with teacher (top right) and Georgian (Russia) children at Project Renewal.



Roz Greenspon at Yad Vashem.

CRC Needs Your Help

The Community Relations Committee (CRC) of The Charlotte Jewish Federation is organizing a letter writing network. People are needed to write letters to our elected representatives in Washington, D.C. or to the editorial pages of the local newspapers expressing their opinions as issues arise concerning the Jewish Community.

By generating letters from individuals within the community, with background information supplied by the CRC, it may be possible to influence a critical vote.

Please call Morey Sheffer during the day at 372-5332 or in the evening at 364-8790 if you can be called upon periodically to write a letter as part of this network.



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