

## Third Mission Still Exciting

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Our eighth day I had the opportunity to give a pint of blood at Hadassah Hospital. I have given blood many times before but never felt so good about doing it as I did there. We also visited "The City of David," one of the many new excavations near the Kidron Valley just south of the walled city of Jerusalem. They really kept us moving and we covered so very much as we toured Jerusalem and its suburbs, both old and new.

Our last day was filled with the saddest part of the trip. We went to Yad Vashem, the cemetery on Mt. Hertzl, and a hill called Ammunition Hill, where over 100 young men gave their lives during the 1967 war. This made an impression on all of us.

Soon it would be time to

depart. I know that even though I felt sad at leaving, I could rejoice that I had come. I had made new friends, had new experiences, and could begin to make mental plans to come again.

Many of you may be wondering if you should go to Israel in the near future. If you have never been, you know you must go. If you have been, but it has been years ago, then you owe it to yourself to go again. See the differences. See what I, and you, and our peers have done jointly and collectively with our brothers and sisters in Israel. It gives you such pride. I guarantee you will walk taller and feel better. It has been a real pleasure for me to share my experience with you.



Southern Regional UJA Mission Delegation. See if you can spot the Charlotte tourists.

## First Timer's Impressions

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are given homes, taught Hebrew, trained for jobs, counseled, and absorbed into the mainstream of Jewish life and culture. One young woman lost three small sons during the famine and walked across the desert to the Sudan. Here she had given birth to a baby girl, Israella. For Jews who were not acculturated during the mass waves of immigration after 1948 and 1967, Israel has an innovative program, Project Renewal. Neighborhoods are revitalized and the residents renewed. Cities around the world are twinned with one of 58 Project Renewals in the country. They help provide the financial resources for social, educational and recreational programs. We are greeted enthusiastically as we arrive; everyone smiles warmly for the pictures we take, and words are exchanged in many tongues. The children cling to us and we hug one another as if we are old friends.

We drive north. Caught between Syria and Lebanon, I see now why the Golan Heights is one of the most important strategic positions in the country. We tour an Army Base and have lunch with the soldiers. Boys and girls at 18 must serve two to three years of active duty and remain in the reserves until age 50. Some of the soldiers who spoke a little English talked candidly. "Yes, we are afraid but we have no choice. This is our way of life."

Our excitement mounted as we neared Jerusalem. From Mt. Scopus we had a panoramic view of "Jerusalem of Gold." Here lies the soul of the entire concept of God. As I gaze at the city, I can pick out landmarks that touch on three millennia of history: the City of David, the shrines of Christianity, the Islamic sanctuary, the Dome of the Rock. The setting sun casts a golden pink hue over the city. We prepared for the Sabbath with a visit to the Western Wall, one of the holiest places of the Jewish people. Until the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, the city had been occupied by the Jordanians; Jews, Christians and Moslems were denied access to their holy places. Now all three



Rabbi Robert Seigel and his wife Faye cavorting in Israel. That's a live camel they're riding!

religions live side by side in the walled city and are free to visit and worship at their holy shrines. A shofar sounded to welcome the Sabbath and hundreds of Jews poured into the plaza to touch the wall, to pray, and to insert written prayers into the cracks and crevices of the giant gray stone. I, too, touched the Wall where millions of Jews have prayed for thousands of years, and silently I reaffirmed my identity with my brothers and sisters.

Another moving experience was our visit to Masada, a massive rocky outcrop rising 1,424 feet above the level of the Dead Sea. Here 900 Zealots held off 20,000 Roman soldiers for three years rather than submit to slavery. Masada has come to symbolize, for the Israel today, Jewish assertion of will even in a hopeless situation. The oath of allegiance sworn by Israeli

military recruits on this spot is, "Masada must not fall again."

We spent the afternoon floating on the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth. Nothing lives in the Dead Sea but it is life-giving and therapeutic. The Dead Sea, with its 58 mineral deposits, is a source of industry. Thousands of tourists seek relief from a variety of physical maladies, others seek the calming air and burnless tan.

Each experience, each event is more wonderful and meaningful than the one before. We tour Hadassah Hospital, one of the most renown in the Middle East. We visit the synagogue there and see the original Chagall windows. We tour the Israel Museum and see the Dead Sea Scrolls which were discovered in 1947. We stand on the steps of Temple Mount, one of the few remains

of the ancient Temple before it was destroyed in 70 A.D. We tour the Knesset, the Israeli parliament.

Our visit to Yad Vashem, a memorial to the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust, was an awesome and moving experience. We make our way through the Avenue of the Righteous Gentiles, a tree-lined walkway to commemorate those non-Jews who helped Jews escape from the Nazis. I could not suppress my emotions as I walked through the museum and saw the pictorial history of those years and events. Everyone was silent, there were no words. I tried to comprehend the horror I saw as I stopped at each picture: emaciated nude bodies of men, women and children, mass graves, smoking chimneys of the crematoria, cavernous eyes looking out from behind electrified fences. A service was held in memory of those who died. The building was cold and dark as the death camps must have been. The smoke from the eternal flame drifted up toward the small opening in the roof. As a red rose was placed on the names of the

concentration camps, and the Kaddish was recited, I cried uncontrollably for the senseless loss of life and the potential of those lives that were now in ashes lying beneath the stone floor.

Their deaths were linked to the deaths of 187 young soldiers who died at Ammunition Hill, in the reunification of Jerusalem during the 1967 Six Day War. There was a purpose in this tragic loss. This is what the State of Israel is all about. Jews for Jews, people for people, we are linked one to the other by the miraculous adventure of redemption after the Holocaust and rebirth of the nation. I felt a bonding and an inter-connectedness with this country and its people. We shall never forget...one people, one destiny.

Since my return home, I have put my mind on rewind and tried to relive and savor every moment and every experience. If you have only dreamed of going to Israel, make your dream a reality and go on the next UJA Mission. It will be for you as it was for me, one of the most meaningful and educational experiences of my life.

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