

My Summer in Israel

By Michael Scott Lass



In the Negev, Michael Lass (R) with great new friends (L to R) Mark Levin and Claude Grubair.

On June 22, 1988 I was extremely fortunate to be able to attend the Summer Session of the Alexander Muss/High School In Israel program. This eight-week academic experience allowed me to see first hand a lot of the things that I have only seen in books and magazines or have heard about in school.

Israel: the word can be explained with so many adjectives. Before I left for Israel I had no sense of my Jewish background and pride. It is a place where I do not have to think before I express my Judaism. Even though the Constitution grants us the right to "freedom of religion," in Israel I was not afraid of doing so. I felt for the first time in my life that I was not a minority due to my religion. I was able to wear a "kippa" or pray without being stared at. I always thought that Judaism was just a religion, but it is not just that. It is also a culture and a nationality. Israel allowed me to see that it is also my home and that I am always welcome. It is a home for all of the Jewish people in the world.

The AM/HSI program was uniquely designed to enhance the students' education in Judaism and Israeli history. Upon arrival in Israel, we began our education. We started with the Biblical period and ended in the eighth week with modern day Israel and its conflicts. Inbetween were countless hours of fun and yes, studying. When we would learn a lesson, we would go on "tiyulim" (field trips) to where that particular event in history took place. We went on approximately 3-4 tiyulim a week. At these places we had class and very intense discussions. It was like no class

that I ever had. For the first time in my life I was allowed to freely express my beliefs to any extent that I wanted to.

The program was very challenging and rewarding. Whether it was hiking in the Negev, climbing Masada at three o'clock in the morning, hiking in the desert in summer heat for five hours or crawling on our stomach in unexcavated caves, all sixty-five of us found it very exciting and yes, fun. We gained a sense of self-satisfaction and achievement. If one would ask any of us if we would do it again, not one would probably say "no."

I gained so much knowledge and maturity from this program. I am really glad I did not experience Israel on a tour from an organization or through a travel agent, because I probably would not have learned anything. I received credit at my high school (South Mecklenburg) and I was able to receive credit at any college through Miami-Dade Community College.

I can not express enough how grateful I am to AM/HSI for the experience. I made the most fantastic friends from all over the United States whom I will never forget. We grew to be one family and it was really hard to say goodbye to sixty-five of the closest friends who lived together for two months.

Lastly, I recommend this program to any high school Junior or Senior who wishes to experience Israel in the best way. I would like to thank the Charlotte Jewish Federation for awarding me the "Teen-Israel Summer Scholarship" for 1988. Without this scholarship I would not have been able to obtain the most fantastic experience of my life. "Bitiyuk, Toda Raba!"

Hundreds Attend Kristallnacht Commemoration

By Rita Mond

More than 800 people, Jews and Christians, gathered at Holocaust Square on the evening of Nov. 9, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht. Worshippers of all ages held flickering candles as they formed a silent procession behind the men carrying the seven Torahs. They then filled the sanctuary of Temple Israel to overflowing.

Rabbi Marc Wilson stated, "These singular flames represent the spirit of God that can not be extinguished in the human soul." He then introduced five eyewitnesses to Kristallnacht, all of whose stories were pain-filled memories of that night of Nazi violence. Speaking were Irving Bienstock (Dortmund, Germany), Henry Hirschmann (Gross-Auheim am Main, Germany), Alice Sternberg (Essen, Germany) — her story was read by Rabbi Wilson. Robert Markmann, originally from Vienna, Austria, had his story read by his daughter, Elaine Markmann Chernotsky, and Henry Wasserman from Nuremberg, Germany had his memories read by his granddaughter, Alana Cooper.

Rabbi Robert Seigel and Steven Haas led a special "Kaddish" (mourner's prayer of affirmation) which recognized the places of the mass murders of six million Jews: Maidanek, Mauthausen, Babi Yar, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Auschwitz, Lodz, Gurs, Warsaw, Bogdanovka, Ravensbruck, Treblinka, Chelmno, Vilna, Belzec, Buchenwald, Sobibor.

Msgr. John McSweeney, Vicar General, Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte, gave the



Hundreds gathered at Holocaust Square: silent candlelight vigil. Note Torah processional on left.



Crowd entering Temple Israel.

Photos/Phil Joffe

prayer of rededication, the prayer of St. Francis. The Rev. Thomas Graves, senior minister of St. John's Baptist Church, offered the emotional benediction.

Mayor Sue Myrick read the proclamation dedicating the week of Nov. 4-10 "to the memory of those who suffered and perished in the Holocaust."

A highlight of the evening was the dedication of a Holocaust Memorial Torah, written in 1830, and rescued from a desecrated temple in Breznice, Czechoslovakia. This Torah was given to Temple Israel in honor of Celia Scher, a gift of her family, students and friends. Celia has distinguished herself by decades of

commitment to perpetuating the message of the Holocaust by teaching Jews and non-Jews, young and old, the lessons of the Holocaust. She serves as a member of the N.C. Commission on the Holocaust and has taught for 29 years in Temple Israel's religious school.

The Kristallnacht Service was sponsored by The Charlotte Jewish Federation, The Jewish Community Center, Temple Beth El V'Shalom and Temple Israel. Refreshments after the service were provided by both of the temples' sisterhoods. A special thanks goes to Fred Bergen for his dedicated efforts in procuring the Holocaust Memorial Torah.

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