

# The Charlotte Jewish Federation Comm

By Margie Goldstein

Eighteen years had gone by and here we were, once again in flight, destination Israel. The Charlotte Mission was composed of nineteen men and women with a common goal — to see, to learn, to feel the joy of Israel. Little did we know that this would be an adventure far beyond our expectation.

We arrived in Israel at 9 a.m. Monday, June 25. The morning was filled with sunshine as the blue and white flag of Israel flew proudly against a cloudless sky. The fatigue of travel seemed to diminish as we boarded our bus to meet Matti Kasher, our guide and teacher for the next ten days. Matti embraced us as if we were old friends. His knowledge and our enthusiasm would prove to be the perfect combination. We learned very quickly that this was a leader that we would be privileged to follow.

Our first hour, we went into the countryside and placed our hands into the earth of Israel. Each of us planted a tree as thousands have done before. I looked at my tiny tree planted in a field of barren rocks. Someday, these rocks will yield to become a forest. Here we were, the Charlotte 19, reclaiming the land of Israel.

The first night was spent at the Tel Aviv Hilton, a modern deluxe hotel in a modern vibrant city. Dinner was the first of many interesting and lovely evenings together. We ate at the Gamliel Yemenite restaurant in the Yemenite quarter, everyone ready to experience new tastes as well as ideas. Colonel Mike Eldor, a naval officer of considerable charm, outlined the challenges confronting Israel. This was to be just one of many round table discussions. The learning experience had begun.

Tuesday morning, well nourished from the famous bountiful Israeli breakfast, we were off to Beth Hatsfutsoth (the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora). This museum is destined to become a unique institution in Jewish life the world over. It portrays visually and graphically a 2,500-year-old story, the miracle of Jewish continuity against seemingly inseparable odds. Inscribed are the following words: "This is the story of a people which were scattered over all the world and yet remained a single family, a nation which time and again was doomed to destruction and yet, out of ruins, rose to new life." Days could be spent in exhilarating study in this creative institution. After only a few hours, we had gained a deeper



(L to R) Morey and Lynne Sheffer, Mike Minkin at Russian absorption center in Natanya.



Visiting with soldiers in the Golan Heights. Writer Margie Goldstein is 4th from left.

sense of who we were, where we had been.

Israel is a country of complexity...vibrant, contemporary...a country of today and yet immersed in a history thousands of years old. The morning had been a look into the past and now we traveled to Netanya. This afternoon would propel us quickly into the challenge of the present.

Netanya is a small city near Tel Aviv, one of several deeply involved in the direct absorption of Soviet Jewry. The first stop was in Ulpan, where Soviet Jews were learning Hebrew. The buildings were simple but quite comfortable, clean and bright. Every classroom was filled with eager students ready to learn a new way of life. In our class, adults ranging from age 25 to 60 were learning to read a Hebrew newspaper. The teacher stopped the class and the olim asked us questions: Who were we? Why were we in Israel? We told them very proudly about our Charlotte Soviet families. There were many questions. All of them expressed a desire to begin jobs, to become independent. They were so appreciative. Here was Operation Exodus at work.

From the Ulpan, we went to

the absorption center, hot, no air conditioning, but throbbing with activity. Six thousand Soviet olim are in Netanya in need of housing, jobs, education, social services. We next visited two of the families in their small, sparse apartments. They offered us fruit and juice with much warmth and then they joined us for a long lunch. After sharing several hours with our new friends, we left them, sadly but confident in their future. The adjustment will be difficult but as Jews throughout the ages, they will find their place. They will live as Jews without the fear of persecution, a free people in a free society.

Once again, Matti gathered us together on the bus. It was not always easy to stay awake as the bus rumbled along, dulling us into sleep, but there was Matti's voice, teaching, always teaching, forcing us to stay awake, not to miss one turn in the road. The countryside is so beautiful. Flowers are everywhere. The cultivated land is productive as well as beautiful. Around the next curve are barren fields. We watched in amazement. How could these people turn rock fields into gardens?!

The late afternoon was spent in the Neve Michael Youth Aliyah village. After our inspiring visit with the Soviet olim, we felt nothing could equal that, but this was to be a day of emotional human contact. We were met at the Youth Aliyah village by a truly remarkable

woman. Chowa, 42-years-old, originally from Washington DC, beautiful in face and spirit, pregnant with her eleventh child, told us the story of Youth Aliyah in Israel today. Youth Aliyah schools are rescuing troubled children and turning them into worthy citizens. These are children suffering from neglect, abuse, malnutrition and poverty. At this village school, 250 children, ages 5-18, 60% Ethiopian, are fed, housed, educated and loved. The buildings were not elaborate, but they were clean and attractive. Neglected by their families, embraced by Youth Aliyah, these children will be saved. Once again, our money well spent.

As darkness came upon us, we rode weary and thoughtful. We had quite a day — Soviet olim, Youth Aliyah, the Museum of Diaspora. We would not forget the lesson of the past, nor shirk from the challenge of the future.

We arrived in Tiberias at the Galei Kinneret Hotel on the Sea of Galilee. Overlooking the water, this lovely resort sits like a jewel in the north of Israel. We walked from our hotel and ate outside in an Israeli food court — falafel, pizza, blintzes — a culinary cultural exchange was available to the hungry travelers. People were everywhere enjoying the soft night breeze. It was hard to think of Intifadas, rock throwers, dynamite or bullets in this atmosphere.

The next morning, bright-eyed and ready for what proved to be high adventure, we boarded the bus. As the bus rolled up the Golan Heights, Israeli Army Sergeant Yuram joined us for our next important lesson. He showed us Syrian bunkers and detailed the military threat to Israel's borders. We climbed higher and higher up Mt. Hermon, the highest peak in the mideast, until we reached an Israeli army camp isolated at the top of the mountain. Very few civilian groups have been allowed to visit this military site.

In deference to our quickly aging legs, Matti insisted that Julius and I ride in the colonel's truck. The rest of the group climbed straight up the mountain. At the peak, we all went into covered trenches with no daylight. Hand in hand, we walked through the trenches. Nicki guided me and Rich pulled Julius along in the darkness. We emerged into the light of day, and there before us was Syria. There we were — in the range of Syrian guns — looking into the eyes of the enemy. The Israeli soldier, so young, so handsome, defends his country on top of this mountain. We descended the mountain, back through the dark trenches, to join the soldiers for a hearty lunch. They mingled among us, talking and

Nineteen people went on The Community Mission to Israel. Participants were Meg Goldstein and Julius Goldstein, Emily and Sam Zimmern, Lynne and Morey Sheffer, Nicki and Miles Levine, Linda Levy, Alan Kronovet and Rich...




Visit to an Army base at top of Mt. Hermon (L) and Janet Minkin (R).



Two generations (L to R): Julius Goldstein, Margie Goldstein share a view of Jerusalem from Mt. Hermon on Shabbos eve.



Some of the group relaxing in the water.



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## National Mission

Aug. 19-24, 1990	Prime Mission
Oct. 21-30, 1990	\$10,000 "1"
Oct. 21-31, 1990	Young Leaders
Dec. 23-Jan. 2, 1991	Winter Festival
Dec. 23-Jan. 2, 1991	Winter Festival
Dec. 23-Jan. 2, 1991	\$50,000 Dinner
Dec. 26-Jan. 6, 1991	Winter Festival
Jan. 9-18, 1991	Southeast

For further information on t  
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