

Thoughts from Abroad

From the Brandstetters

in Australia

WE, Judith and Alfred (Aharon) and our three boys: Yuval (12), Chaim (7) and Sharon (3), came to Abingdon on September 4, 1969 - on Bank holiday - for a two year period. Abingdon (on Thames) is a nice little town ten kilometres South of Oxford with, in those days, a population of perhaps 20,000 but only a handful of Jewish families, most like ourselves associated with the various Science Research Council Institutes concentrated in this region of South East England.

On the very day of our arrival we phoned the Silvers, whose number had been give us in Tel Aviv by a student from Oxford; and on that very evening we already had dinner at George and Freda's house in Charlbury Road. This is how we were welcomed to the Oxford Jewish Congregation, and initiated for the first time in some of the details of Jewish life in Oxford.

This, together with our introduction to Natalie and Richard Koch - the dedicated all-time Warden of the Oxford Synagogue - also was how our active involvement with the Congregation started. From there on it continued to strengthen, with fairly regular participation at *Shabbat* and *Yom-Tov* services ... and reading the "Oxford Menorah". Yes, this is the Community paper, so caringly edited/typed/published by Miriam Kochan. We always loved to browse through it, even when we continued receiving it for a number of years after our return to Israel.

Of the various other activities which we fondly remember, apart from frequent invitations to Congregation members' parties, - usually on Saturday nights - were such marvellous musical events as Daniel Adni's piano recital in the Silvers' "music room", and Daniel Barenboim with Jacqueline duPré and Pinchas Zuckerman giving an unforgettable concert on Israel's Independence Day at the Oxford Town Hall.

In April 1970 we celebrated Yuval's Bar Mitzvah, *Parshat Shemini*, at the Synagogue and on the Shabbat evening at our little cottage in Appleford Drive. What a memorable event this was, to ourselves as well as to the family and the many members of the Congregation who came to participate in our *Simcha*.

In October, last year, twenty-one years after we first came to Oxford, we happened to spend *Yom Kippur* there again, this time in the beautiful Synagogue building, the construction of which had just started when we left in 1971. It was good to meet again so many friends and acquaintances from the old days, including in particular the Lyons's, the Curtis's, the Lewis's, the Kochans and Richard Koch - with all of whom we have kept up personal connections of one sort or another during these twenty-one years.

Epilogue: We now live in Canberra, "down under" - and will stay there for a further two years or so before we return to Israel - and continue the "tradition" of celebrating "*Seder*" every year with our friends of those Oxford days: the Hambergers of Abingdon. Yuval, now father of two is paediatrician at Milwaukee (Wisconsin, U.S.A.) Children's Hospital, and about to take up a position at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. Chaim, father of three, is electro-optics engineer in Jerusalem; and Sharon, then the "little *lobbus*" and now graduate of New South Wales University, serves as an officer in the Israel Defence Forces. We all love Oxford and its Jewish Congregation, and we keep comparing Canberra Jewish Community's "*Hamercaz*" with Oxford's "*Menorah*".

Rosemary Eshel

writes from Israel

ALTHOUGH we're now in Israel, Oxford for us conjures up a wealth of memories - the first welcome from the community, the Freshers coffee morning, the myriad of activities, its special atmosphere, but most of all its people - the warmth and the lasting friendships.

When we arrived in the summer of 1979 with a 3-week old baby we found Oxford and the community a lively, vibrant place. We still return *en famille* every summer, initially it seems unchanged, except for the shrubs and trees we lovingly planted all those years ago, now reaching maturity. It's a time to replenish the batteries, enjoy old pleasures, recapture friendships and forge new links.

Nowadays Oxford begins at Heathrow ... It always evokes that slightly heady feeling of anticipation. It never disappoints.

From Phyllis Lieberman

in America

THINKING back to our Oxford days is not at all a difficult task because it remains not only a clear memory for all of us but it was a time and experience that has had tremendous and positive impact on us. We often wonder how we let it all escape. Perhaps we shouldn't complain. We had three wonderful years, more than most visitors have, and that should have been sufficient...

In the winter of 1982 Ira and I made a trip to England to check out the family-living possibilities in Oxford and Cambridge. Ira having been offered a place at both Universities, we decided the choice would be based on where we felt our family would be most comfortable and find the fullest living experience... We would be leaving New York City as we both approached our fortieth birthdays. Aaron was almost 10 and Michael almost 8 years old. The boys were attending a great school, we were active in a dynamic and provocative reconstructionist synagogue, we lived in a wonderful Park Avenue apartment, Ira was running a major international trading company and I had my own business... we had more than a few criteria to meet!

Little did we know when we went in search of the Jewish Centre in Richmond Road that this little outing would make all our decision-making so easy. While the building was locked up, we were able to take off the announcement board the name and number of one "Freda Silver". That one 'phone call not only satisfied most of my questions, but it armed me with several other names and numbers for further questions. The Jewish Network was alive and well in Oxford, and how lucky we were to be able to tap into it.

In June 1982 we all returned ready to give Oxford a try. Having left Ira and the boys in London (in digs belonging to friends made via a previous Jewish Network experience), I commuted to Oxford to settle housing, schooling, etc . . with the benefit of Freda's tips and "Network Lieutenants", Judy Brown and Angela Baum. After several days, I returned to London to announce I hadn't quite resolved housing or schooling but had

invitations for *Shabbat* dinner, a breakfast, *Rosh Hashonah* dinner, and a WIZO luncheon. Was the system working, you bet!

Eventually all the “nitty gritties” were resolved and we settled down quite easily. With the continual help and friendship of many in the Jewish community, we felt quite at home. Coming into a new community is never totally easy, especially one that sees so many transient people each year. However, we found many open doors and for that we will always be appreciative. People often commented to us during our three years in Oxford that we had a surprising number of friends and acquaintances ... you know, British reserve and all... and we seemed to be involved in so many activities. This always struck me as odd, since it was made so easy for us. But, we came for a full experience and were delighted so many opportunities were available to us.

With two sons pre-Bar Mitzvah, we were obviously quite concerned and involved in what their Jewish/Hebrew school life would be. While the Sunday program was much less demanding than the three day a week program they left in New York, it turned out to be an interesting experience and a chance for them to stay connected with synagogue school life. As Aaron approached his 11th birthday, we went in search of additional tutelage for him. We were led to a young orthodox student, Sasha Stern, who did a marvellous job of reading and studying with Aaron. It was a unique chance for Aaron to study one to one, not just for “his” *Haftorah* and *Torah* portion but to study week by week the portion of the week... the traditional way. This was truly a wonderful opportunity for him and it will remain very special in his Oxford memories.

Having had to change houses each year (thanks to squatters’ rights... it was the one annual trauma I grew to detest), we were definitely tested in the resilience and flexibility departments. Amazingly, each year we found an interesting place to live, each different from the one before and each unique in many ways. From the Old Barn in Great Haseley, to a row house in North Oxford, to the Old Vicarage in Headington, we came with our ever increasing number of books, paraphernalia for new sporting endeavours, collected “antiques”, and the handful of Jewish objects we had brought over with us that made “vacation rentals” our home. Environments and neighbours changed but on Friday night it was the same. Through each move and change, our Jewish friends were there to celebrate *Shabbat*, the holidays, and life in general—constant reminders of how rich and incredible our tradition is and what a stabilizing force it is no matter where we roam. The Jewish Network works!

Letter from America

Elaine Hyams

OUR visit to Oxford in summer 1991, Deborah's participation in the Liberal service, and the Kiddush we hosted, all reconfirmed my feelings about the 14 years I lived there . . . it's home. Of course, in one sense, it isn't any longer, since we are now living in Ithaca. But Deborah said it best, "I have two homes now". It was lovely to see so many of our friends in the Congregation, and to resume conversations where they were just before we left in 1989. Naturally there was news of family and events in the interim, but there was no interruption of the warmth we always felt, with and through the Jewish community in Oxford.

I think back to my arrival there in 1975 . . . new to marriage, new to England, and fairly new to Judaism as well. It didn't take me long to learn that proximity to an expert like Miriam or Barbara Lewis helped me to follow along in the *Siddur*. (The realization that more frequent attendance at services would help, too, came somewhat later).

As in most things, I wasn't really drawn into actively participating in the community until Deborah started *cheder*. But the Community accepted that, and I never felt pressurized to join or do or make or bake. I still value that flexibility and tolerance which characterise the Oxford Jewish community.

My only other reference point to English Judaism was the occasional trip to my in-laws up North.

Warmth did not exude from their *shul*; instead, it was hierarchy (designated seats), where external appearances mattered so much, and the values implied thereby. Paul and I used to joke that if he ever took a Chair there it would be grounds for divorce! In-laws aside, the northern Jewish community I saw is one in which I would not have been comfortable.

Anyway, now we're settled into Ithaca. We do miss Oxford's physical beauty. But even more, we miss friends, particularly among the Congregation. Perhaps Penny Faust and I will set up an Ithaca-OJC exchange program for kids! Our new Congregation doesn't do a "talent show" at *Chanukah*,

and for the last two years on the appropriate Sunday, Deborah and I have said to each other, “I wonder who Lizzie has got lined up for this year...” And this year, at second night *Seder*, we recalled the times we’d attended the communal *Seder* in Oxford. So, you aren’t forgotten. *Mazel Tov* to the Community in the upcoming celebrations.