

## The VFI PLUS ADVANCED Program

### Reflections upon our VFI Journey on December 7 - 23, 2018

Our journey to Israel was complete in every way. Accommodations in each of our hotels were excellent. Meals were tasty and rooms were quite comfortable.

In Haifa the hotel clerk (Bay View Hotel) was somewhat reluctant to give us quarters until he phoned local VFI personnel. At which time he realized that indeed we were registered.

The next morning we boarded a small bus and returned to the Tel Aviv airport where we had just arrived the evening before. Pam Lazarus efficiently directed each volunteer to their respective base. Ours was an Air Base.



Quarters there were suitable. The hospitality of the military was amazing. Because the commandant was in Russia, his assistant welcomed us onto the base. Our work clothes were issued, neatly pressed with a tee shirt to keep. We changed into our new garb and off to work we went.

My husband and I and another couple were assigned to a large warehouse where we assembled and reassembled boxes and supplies to be distributed to other bases. We worked together for the entire two weeks. It was amicable even though John, our volunteer colleague, was an industrial engineer and somewhat questioned their efficiency with the system in place to handle these boxes, crates and containers.

Our *madrichot* young ladies were delightful. They were and very efficient, kind, helpful and concerned for our well-being. Emma left after the first week with a generous send-off from our group. Shahar was a beauty from Yemen and very poised and efficient. Dany returned from a respite in Milan, Italy and was also able to join us without missing a beat. She was present when Shahar presented us our certificates of service during a farewell party.



Their activities in the evening were game-like and informative. On two evenings Ross, a lone soldier from New Jersey, spoke to us. His insights were memorable. He recognized five traits that one automatically learns in the IDF: organizational skills, responsibility, timeliness, how to follow and how to lead. We all wished our American young people could get such training at this age.



Our weekends were filled with amazing activities. Sharona was our second substitute guide while we visited Gush Etzion. We ate lunch at Jerusalem train station and then took a long walk through Yemin Moshe housing complex, now an art center.

Next day Julia surfaced and with such style. She led us through the Machane Yehuda market tasting and eating amazing foods including: Burekas, sahleb, kube, dates, knafe and halav. That was certainly a lot to take in during this cold and cloudy day. Fascinating and delicious all in all.

Back to the base where our room suddenly received large box holding a television set. Hardly room for 4 girls much less a TV. The three in my room were grateful for the extra bed to use to pile things. The rooms were generally unkempt and likewise the bathrooms. After our inspection and personal attacks our room shaped up somewhat.

Weekend sightseeing was so worthwhile. We visited the outside of the American Embassy and shot photos. The Knesset was so interesting. Visiting Bethlehem was good. The Church of John the Baptist was lovely and visiting Mary's Spring and finding a spot with ice cream was an added plus. Lunch here in Ein Kerem was delicious and my chicken livers were wonderful. Our main guide, Julia was at the top-of-her-game at every minute. She arranged, rearranged and organized such a wonderful experience for our small group. Seeing the political, the religious, the scientific and the cultural aspect of this land and people created a very well-rounded tour each weekend.



Our parting days on the base were easier since we knew more of the routine and which dining room to enter for which meal. On the final day in the midst of a torrential rain we finally met with the commander of the base who thanked us profusely for our service and awarded us certificates of memory. This was our second certification of appreciation. We did indeed feel appreciated. This base was home to the most gracious group of soldiers and leaders. What a pleasure to be in their midst. Often during a meal



random soldiers would wander over to our table to join our meal to exchange ideas, practice English or just extend a friendly outreach. How we appreciated their welcome.

Our group of eight seemed to bond together quite well. Our seventeen- year-old, tentative initially, grew more comfortable with the elders as the days passed. Those in the eighty category kept the pace with all. We shared many experiences of mutual interest from the States and learned from one another. Our final dinner was bittersweet that we

were parting, but we did celebrate Diane's birthday in fine style. The last days of Hanukkah passed with little mention as we were entirely immersed in our new life.

This was a wonderful trip. Even though the tasks were repetitive we felt that we were helping the State of Israel in some small way. To have this opportunity to serve what is spoken of as G-D'S Land is in some way supernatural. Upon returning home to the USA the fallout of blessing continues and with each story we share we are happy to give a good word about The Land of Israel, the VFI program and the partner Sar-El.

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