

## Israel Trip, 2014

Five of Glenn's relatives met us at the airport in Tel Aviv, which was the beginning of a wonderful set of new connections for me. Glenn's mother's cousins and Glenn's own first cousin make up this family for the most part. Right away I saw the yellow Jerusalem stone rough-cut and beautiful mosaics on the walls at the airport, but I was warned not to take photos inside the airport.

Tova, Glenn's cousin, had us stay at her house in Kfar Sava, a smaller city north of Tel Aviv about 20 minutes. Tova had visited us in Penn Yan last Thanksgiving and it was wonderful to see her again. We were comfortably situated at her home 6 nights during our 2 ½ week stay in Israel. She made sure we met her immediate family; she fed us, and gave us such a friendly welcome.

Purim celebrations were permeating the atmosphere with excitement during the whole of the first week with costumed children and adults, lots of happy noise and fun all around. Young children at a nearby school woke us up with their shouting first thing in the morning on our first full day in Kfar Sava. Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> was Sabbath and the round of social events began.

Our first day however, Tova and her friend Aryah drove us along the Mediterranean coast north to Haifa with a stop at ancient Caesarea on the way. Caesarea is a small seaside town with ancient Roman history and ruins to walk and contemplate. On the way we saw a distant hillside Arab village. I learned that many Arab villages within Israel are separate communities. In Haifa we walked down the 800 steps of the Baha'i Gardens to the Baha'i Temple. For the 6 million

followers of much persecuted and relatively new Baha'i religion, this is the holiest place in the world. The Baha'i central belief is equality, unity, world peace, education and the sciences. Haifa is a beautiful city with a high-tech aspect. I saw Microsoft, Intel, and Google written on buildings. An old friend of ours, Agop (Jack) Tashchian, was born in about 1934 in Haifa when it was still Palestine.

I had hopes that all the walking would offset the eating, but I soon learned that the abundant food in people's homes and Arab restaurants would be very tempting. My birthday dinner was at the lovely home of Glenn's mother's best friend Tutza and for the occasion she made two large cakes about 14" in diameter. We met her two granddaughters, one of whom is in the Israeli Army. Every young person, boys and girls, serve in the military, boys for 3 years, girls for 2 years. The Israeli military is referred to as the IDF, Israeli Defense Force.

On Sabbath, we walked to the strawberry fields near Tova's apartment. Later we had the family gathering where we met Tova's daughter Hila, her two little sons, and later her husband who works as a stand up comedian. Tova's sons Ofir and Ron also came. Tova's parents Minutza and Melech were there and Melech wanted us to see his photos in an album. He came from Romania as a young person.

We took the train the next morning with our bags, and met Ofra and Herzl in Tel Aviv where they took us in their car to Jerusalem for the first leg of our travels far and wide in Israel. We stopped at the birthplace of John the Baptist, and Mary's well, then Kibbutz Rachel with views of the city. Herzl explained the 1947 war and the Moshav where Herzl and Ofra live are named for 7 fallen Israeli soldiers who were guarding the supply line road to Jerusalem.

We stayed in a B&B overlooking the city wall of old Jerusalem. Where we were staying was the target in the 1950's and 60's when the Jordanians occupied the old city until the 6-day war of 1967. Now this is a beautiful residential area. Glenn and I had a long evening walk around the parks and the big windmill landmark in that area while Aaron rested.

On our own the first day in Jerusalem we started early and entered the Old City through the Damascus gate, walked through the Arab quarter and out the lower Dung gate to the City of David. We had a 3 hour guided tour of this ruin where I learned more about the temple periods of ancient Jerusalem. Solomon built the 1<sup>st</sup> temple, Herod the Great the second temple. The Babylonians (Iraqis) destroyed the 1<sup>st</sup> temple. The Romans sacked the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple in the year AD 70 under Titus. Later we saw a very fine replica of this 2<sup>nd</sup> temple.

I had a chance on that first day to visit the Western Wall, so meaningful to the Jews. They have divided the viewing area into the women's side (1/3) and the men's side (2/3) and I had 2 notes to insert from friends in Venice Florida. This foundation wall is all that is left of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple and above it is the ancient mosque built over the "Dome of the Rock". This site is sacred to Muslims, Jews and Christians as it is the site of the rock on which Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac.

I also learned the difference between Sephardic Jews and Ashkenazi Jews. Sephardic came from Spain and settled in Africa and many Middle Eastern countries, and Ashkenazi was from Germany, Russia and Eastern block countries such as Romania, and the Baltic States. The British left Israel in 1948. Between 1948 and the 1970's 600,000 Jews left Arab countries to resettle in Israel. One of the people I met was a Yemenite Jew named Oded.

We hired a personal guide for our second full day in Jerusalem. Dvir met us at our B&B and right away proved why he is top rated. He took us to a tomb in the corner of a nearby park. He explained that only a rich man could have such a tomb. This ruin where no one bothers to look showed us how a stone could roll away from the entrance and we understood how this could easily have been available at the time of the crucifixion. He took us to the King David Hotel, where in 1946 a blast killed 91 people. The hotel today is Jerusalem's signature hotel and was about 2 blocks from our B&B. We caught a cab to the Mount of Olives. This is located in an Arab neighborhood and we began to see throngs of pilgrims (tourists).

Christians, Jews, and Muslims from all over the world visit the Holy Land. We started walking from the Mount of Olives down to the Garden of Gethsemane. The view of the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem was visible across the small Kidron valley. Gethsemane is the Hebrew word for olive press, and some of the oldest olive trees in Israel are found there dating back over 2000 years. The Hebrew word for Christian is "fresh branch" as a new shoot from an old olive tree. Along the way was the teardrop shaped chapel, Dominus Flavit where Jesus wept.

We entered the Old City through the Lion's Gate where Jesus may also have entered. A quick right into Bethesda (pools) and we entered a church with wonderful acoustics. A group of Nigerian pilgrims were trying out the sound with a lively song. A round plaque with the Roman numeral 1 on it began our walk along the Via Dolorosa. We stopped for a juice drink at stations III and IV and climbed to the roof of the 150 year old Austrian Hostel (hotel).

On Fridays at noon 50,000 Muslim people pass through here for prayer.

We tasted knafe and shwarma. We bought spices at the Arab market, and bought halva. Station 7 is where Jesus fell the second time. People can rent a wooden cross and carry it along the route through station 9. The remaining 5 stations are within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. We entered through a remote rooftop door where we saw the residences of Ethiopian monks. That people were actually living on the rooftop of the site of Calvary was amazing to me, but I witnessed more than one entering or leaving his residence. Between 50 to 200 people a year suffer from something called "Jerusalem syndrome". The sufferer thinks he or she is a prophet and becomes overwhelmed by the significance of the Holy City often thinking the Apocalypse is near. These people are taken to a nearby psychiatric hospital in West Jerusalem. Usually they return to their normal self in about a week.

Several Christian denominations share the operation of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Eastern Orthodox is however the predominant one. Long lines waited to see the very spot where the cross was placed and more long lines waited for a look at the tomb, which isn't more than 20 feet from the site of the cross. Our guide took us around a corner to an unkempt chapel with another tomb and who is to say this wasn't the tomb, or even the one way outside the old city that we had seen earlier in the day.

At the end of our day of walking and eating, we stood on a rooftop overlooking the Western wall, where our guide pointed out the gold domed mosque just above the devout and unaware praying Jews.

That evening we went to the Israel Museum for a look at the Dead Sea Scrolls and also learned about the Aleppo Codex. We saw the oldest masks in the world, and a took a quick look at a most amazing small copper scroll 400 years older than the

Dead Sea Scrolls with the passage from Numbers written on it, “May the Lord Bless You and Keep You and Make His Face Shine Down Upon You and Give You Peace”. This was found in a grave.

The Old City of Jerusalem is like a crossroads of the world, a microcosm of the faithful. Christians, Jews, Muslims, of all cultures – African, Eastern European, South American, Russian, Middle Eastern, Sub Continent, all come there to follow in the footsteps of their ancient prophets.

### ***Israel at Large***

We rented our car and left Jerusalem early for our drive to the Dead Sea, Kibbutz Ein Gedi, and the Negev desert further south. We saw groves of date palms growing near the lowest body of water on earth, 400 meters below sea level. First stop the Essenes community ruin, with a good look at the caves nearby where in 1947 a Bedouin boy found the first of the 2000-year-old Dead Sea Scrolls, containing for one thing the entire book of Isaiah. Kibbutz Ein Gedi is itself a botanical garden overlooking the Dead Sea on one side and the Ein Gedi National Park on the other. We took the scenic route to our B&B with a stop at another Kibbutz where David Ben Gurion lived after he retired from first Prime Minister of Israel. He believed the future of Israel was the desert, which comprises 50% of Israel’s landmass. In Israel, most people lease their land and don’t own it. The government owns the land.

Our desert B&B was run by Dutch immigrants who grow grapes, board horses, plant gardens, and provide lodging in separate cabins around the property. From there we traveled south to Ramon Crater and hiked in a gorge to a waterfall at Advat National Park. As we traveled we saw signs saying

“Beware of Camels Near the Road”. We saw the Bedouins and shantytowns that were established for them in the 1980’s. They are the poorest segment of society in Israel. Advat National Park reminded me of Zion National Park in Utah.

The IDF (Israeli Defense Force) was evident as we traveled. We heard what may have been air force maneuvers overhead, complete with sonic booms, and saw military camps along our way. We could see military personnel on street corners and at bus stops, in restaurants, and near camps. Most were young men and women dressed in their fatigues and boots, carrying their guns, and on the move. Later in the Galilee area we saw tanks moving on trucks towards the Golan Heights. There was the feeling of constant vigilance and readiness.

We had dinner at the lovely little town of Yeruham about 15 miles from our B&B. At least 9 items of salads and vegetables were placed on our table before the meat course arrived. Breakfast at the B&B was fruit, finely chopped vegetable salads, unsweetened granola, yogurt, breads, eggs, and other wholesome goodies.

Aaron drove us back by way of Be’er Sheva (7 wells) through the desert to Tel Aviv and many social engagements that Glenn had been planning as we traveled. We toured the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, a world famous science and research center. Merod, a colleague and friend of Glenn’s, treated us to lunch with her family. Then it was off to the Moshav to Sipi and Oded’s for a rest before the evening party at Ofra and Herzl’s. Here we saw about 18 family members and met children and grandchildren of Ofra and Herzl.

*I have never been in a more culturally diverse country than Israel with the various lifestyles, religions, nationalities, and minorities.*

Ofra and Herzl's son Dror (name means freedom) is a lawyer in Tel Aviv and that night after the party he took us into the city and up the towering office building where he works so we could see the view from all four corners. Google had the next several floors below his office. He and his wife Tali and their young children have a new home also in the Moshav. They can live there because he grew up there and a boy. Today the Moshav is a gated community, but at one time it was an agricultural way of life. Tali is in charge of scheduling flights at the Tel Aviv airport.

Another day of visiting family members and also friends in their homes including Bootsie and Benny, Mordacai and Seri, Shay, Netta, Micahl, and later a friend. Foods I saw on the table every day included cucumber, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, chickpeas, cabbage, avocado, bread, chicken, beef, fish or lamb.

I heard again of the "Jerusalem Syndrome" when someone arriving there can go deep into being an ancient follower. This can last for days or weeks. There is a psychiatric ward at the nearby hospital that can treat people who often come out of their trance embarrassed and fly home.

### *More Israel Travel*

Megiddo (Armageddon) was a stop on our way to Nazareth. This ancient ruin overlooks the Jezreel Valley. Over 20 times sacked by the enemy, and rebuilt, the 15<sup>th</sup> time by King David. Most history happened here between 4000 BC and 400 BC. The 900 BC well was dug 30 m. through solid rock down to a 70 m. tunnel similar to the one we walked at the City of David outside Jerusalem.

Nazareth is predominantly an Arab city, with about 1/3 Christians also living there. Because it was Sunday, the Christian restaurant we had planned on was closed, just behind

the Church of the Annunciation where Mary received the good news. We found an Arab restaurant serving knafe and also baklava. We drove on to Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee.

10 miles north along the Sea of Galilee and in Korazim was the Frankel's B&B and Mr. Frankel met us at the end of the drive and invited us in for a snack and a drink. Mrs. Frankel served us home made cordial and cake. After getting acquainted, we drove to dinner at a nearby Arab restaurant. A table with over a dozen young IDF military personnel sat nearby. They all had their big guns. We are very close to the Golan Heights here and troubled Syria.

The Frenkels had a wonderful breakfast prepared, with all of her homemade items and his breads. Olives came from their 81 trees. Mr. Frenkel had been the editor in chief of the Jerusalem Post, and in retirement had a hobby of making breads. Aaron had mentioned a certain book on pastries and Mr. Frenkel had ordered it online the night before. He was from Erie PA originally and she was from Chicago. Life in Israel in the 1950s and 60s was very hard, with barren land and a lot of physical work. Only 10% of the people who moved there to build the country stayed. Money poured in to build Israel. Some of the money was used for equipment, and to build houses, clear land and plant olive trees, crops, etc.

This day can hardly be measured for its significance to a former Sunday School teacher. It's like a dream to visit sites such as the Beatitudes, Capernaum, Korazim, Tabgha, and all located right on the Sea of Galilee. The old synagogue in Korazim is somewhat intact, and the olive press could be seen. Jesus most certainly visited that synagogue. School children were here on a field trip. I heard a noon whistle or siren go off and watched if the school children ran for cover which they did not, so we went on with our leisurely sight seeing.

Capernaum is even closer to the sea. The local stone used for the buildings was basalt, a porous black stone. 1500 people lived in Capernaum. We sat by the water and pondered Jesus being right there, preaching, walking on water, and healing. Jesus made Capernaum his teaching headquarters. He called Peter, Andrew, James and John by saying, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men". Jesus calmed the waters.

We went a few miles back towards Tiberius to see the ancient 2000-year-old boat housed in a museum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee at Kibbutz Ginosar. During a drought in the 1980s two amateur archeologists saw the wood showing above the sandy shore and in 11 days the boat was excavated and preserved. The exhibit exceeded our expectations.

We drove Route 90 to Rosh Pina where we had a hamburger lunch and salad at a restaurant with the name "Amburger". We visited a bookstore and I saw the books that were displayed looking as if they were flipped over. The back of our book is the front of a Hebrew book. The book is read from back to front and each page from right to left. Aaron and Glenn stayed here in Rosh Pina on their visit 6 years ago. There is a beautiful view of the fertile Hula valley from the upper streets here. We went back to a favorite pottery shop and visited with the artist. Aaron showed her his photos from Facebook with her pottery displaying his baked goods in those photos. He bought a few more pieces.

The next stop was Safed (Tzfat) an ancient Kabbalah city on the top of a steep hill. We walked the cobbled streets and descended the steep alleys to the market. I bought mezuzahs here for my friends in Venice, Florida. I visited the small Caro Synagogue of deep spiritual significance dating from the middle 1500's. Rabbi Yosef Caro is the author of the Shulchan Aruch, the code of law that remains a foundation of Jewish

religious interpretation to the present day. The inside is like a schoolroom, small, but powerfully important. As we walked the market street we saw the works of many artists. More school children were on a field trip here. I bought a colorful map of the city. Many Americans came here to study Kabbalah, which means “receiving”, and many stayed.

As we criss-crossed the Jordan River within the Golan Heights, we spotted 3 mine sweepers in a field, and saw signs like posted signs warning about the dangers and mine fields. We saw bombed out buildings as we drove back towards the Jordan. Our destination is a couple of National parks. One features a gorge and waterfall, and the other one is Nimrod’s Fortress on the top of a mountain, visible from a distance. Few people were visiting the fortress that day, which dates to the 1200’s. It was built to guard the area from invading crusaders. The fortress has spectacular views of the valley below and secret passages, trails and interesting places to explore. A Russian family was exploring near us, and later we saw them in a nearby Druze village having lunch in the same restaurant.

According to the Lonely Planet Guidebook, Druze is a distinct social and religious group who speak Arabic and practice a secret religion considered to be an offshoot of Islam. Unlike Muslims, the Druze believe in reincarnation. There are Druze communities within Syria and Lebanon and many in Israel. The Israeli Druze boys and girls serve in the IDF. There is an all Druze regiment.

We returned to the lower Galilee, but within the Golan, we stopped at a lookout and could see over into Syria, and saw the UN peacekeeping base sprawling in the fertile valley below. This is a major grape growing and fruit-growing region.

We returned to the Frenkels’ B&B and had one more restful night with a great breakfast chatting with Mr. and Mrs. Frenkel

about making orange marmalade, olive oil, cured olives, bread baking and journalism. We left for the Mediterranean coast and Akko, an ancient port city.

We parked in Akko along the promenade. The Akko tunnels were built in the Crusader era by the Knights Templar. Pilgrims to the holy land were hidden in the tunnels right off the ship and secreted away to the Christian quarter for safety. We had to find the best hummus place and Abu Said is that place. We walked around a labyrinth of narrow cobbled streets and to the market in the old city. Later we found the best restaurant called Uri Buri located right on the harbor. We had a reservation there. Akko goes back at least 4000 years BC as a harbor city.

We headed south along the coast past Caesarea and into Kfar Sava where Tova lives. We were not far from the West Bank in this area and could see Arab towns on the hillsides to the east. We had a date to take Tova to dinner. This popular Italian restaurant was about 20 minutes north of her apartment in an upscale neighborhood with big houses.

This is our next to the last day and we had a very full walking day in Tel Aviv and Jaffa. We met Tutsi's daughter Hanita for the morning and she walked with us. The old British train station is now a park with shops. We had met Hanita's sister Merona when Sylvia Coleman's friend Tutsa had a birthday dinner for me almost 2 weeks earlier. At that point Hanita was out of town, but today we enjoyed her company as we had pita at the most famous pita place, Abulafia. This was our biggest walking day yet. There were the winding streets of Old Jaffa, the port, markets, and seaside promenade. About 1:00 p.m. Hanita left us to go to her job, but we kept walking and ended up back in Tel Aviv at the Carmel market. I was quite tired by this time and kind of dragging, so when I saw the name of a

street I couldn't pronounce I called it Chocolate Benjamin Street. This is the day we have to return our car by 5:00 so we dropped Glenn off at his appointment with a colleague in Tel Aviv, and Aaron and I took the car back to El Dan, then we enjoyed coffee for an hour or so at the Sheraton Hotel lobby across the street right on the beach.

Our last day Tova, Aaron, Glenn and I walked with Tova's elderly parents Minutza and Melech to the downtown area of Kfar Sava. We had a wonderful breakfast. I had shakshuka, which are eggs poached on top of a sauce of tomatoes and peppers. Aaron had his with sausages. Tova walked us around the shopping area of her small city. From there we took a cab to meet another elderly relative for coffee, Uncle Hiam. We had a nice visit with him, then met Ofra and Herzl, Sipi and Oded in Jaffa for a huge Arab lunch with 20 + dishes of salads and meat. We had malaby for dessert, which is custard with rose syrup on it.

Ofra and Sipi (Tzipi) drove us back to Tova's and then Minutza came with gifts and Hila came with Tom and Liam to say goodbye, bringing bread. Hila is such a beautiful young woman, just stunning. Tova drove us to the Tel Aviv airport with our luggage to catch our plane. The airport was fairly quiet as we were there after sundown on the Sabbath.

After arriving at JFK, I got on standby for an earlier flight to Tampa on Jet Blue. I began to think this might have been a mistake when we entered a big storm around Tampa and flew and landed in some very rough weather. It was very good to see Peter.



