



Amnon and Alis Zohar on the University of Tel-Aviv campus

Living in Israel (after 40 years of absence) for nine months in a tiny rented flat in the heart of Tel-Aviv as full time students at Tel-Aviv University, at our age, sounds like a dream. For my wife and me it was a dream come true. As a business entrepreneur and a part-time political science student at York University in Toronto, I became aware of the Canadian Friends of Tel-Aviv University (CFTAU) and its Overseas Student Program (OSP). When I contacted CFTAU they were not only extremely helpful and accommodating but also facilitated my receiving of a

scholarship through the Center for Jewish Studies at York University. It has been a lifelong ambition of mine to continue my studies at the university level and this was the perfect time and as it turned out, a once-in-a-life-time experience. Imagine us, at our ripe age, getting up in the morning and getting ready to go to school. My wife and I, we met at grade school in Israel, we fell in love in high school in Israel and we've been together ever since. Back then we used to fool around in school, now we are as much in love and this time we love school. We are first to arrive on campus, we read the daily paper while sipping on a second cup of coffee, we take a breath of fresh air on the terrace overlooking the gorgeous campus and pinch ourselves to make sure that we are not dreaming, before we go to our respective lectures.

The University experience, well, this is what we came here for and it has been everything we expected and much, much more. The intellectual challenge, the learning experience, the campus atmosphere, the young, energetic crowd, the lectures themselves and the lecturers were for the most part first rate. As senior citizens we were not invited to any of the parties on and off campus, so we likely did more studying than the average student. As a result getting excellent marks was a rewarding feeling especially when we did not study for the marks. My wife who accompanied me registered for Jewish studies in Hebrew, which has for many years been the pinnacle of her learning aspirations. As a native Israeli I had the added benefit of taking both the OSP courses in English as well as regular university courses in Hebrew and of course transfer my credits towards my degree to York University.

When we decided to live and study in Israel after being away for more than forty years, we knew that we were in for a totally different experience than what we remembered. We prepared ourselves mentally to take it all in stride, as it comes, the good the bad and the ugly. In fact we

vowed not to complain, not to compare but only to absorb and to observe. After all we were living in this privileged, some say enviable position of immersing and engaging in Israeli day-to-day life without the stresses, tensions and anxieties that characterize the daily lives of most Israelis. In other words we were temporary residents on an observer status without full membership. We kept our promise and any reporting from Israel has been delivered in the spirit of observation. This has been by far the most fantastic experience of our lives.

There are likely more cultural events going on any day, evening and night in Israel (or more accurately Tel-Aviv) than anywhere in the world. From the world renowned Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra, the theaters, museums and art exhibitions, open space sculptures, street art, jazz, dance and international films. Culture in Israel is virtually an industry and we have taken more of it during our stay than in any other period in our lives. This was also the only period in our adult lives where we did not own a car, did not rent a car and travelled only by public transportation (buses, taxis, trains). But most rewardingly we walked the city, miles and miles of it. Strolling along the beach, in quaint neighborhoods, to farmers markets, on the streets of the “White City” Tel-Aviv and its non-homogeneous architecture (some fascinating, some great and some awful). We walked to the theater, we walked to the Laundromat (yes indeed), walked to the supermarket, walked to and on campus. You might say that we walked the walk.

If you are a student or if you are a senior citizen as we are, and if you have an attachment to Israel and wonder what it would be like living there for an academic year, contact CFTAU. It was not easy for us to be away from our children and grandchildren (as much as we travelled back twice during our breaks), but there is always Skype and it was well worth it if for no other reason than the admiration of our grandchildren for our courage and for being cool.