



Israel and Me: A Savannah Project Whose Time has Come

The state of Israel as a modern political reality will be 60 years young next May. Yet here I live in Savannah Georgia. So what, I started to think, is my connection to that land and all things Jewish.... what does this fact of Israel as a country have to do with Savannah's Jewish Community—celebrating our own 275th birthday and what if anything can I do to help mark these wonderful milestones?

I am neither a born Savannahian nor an Israeli—yet I feel a strong connection to both. So I started to think as a Savannah Jew, does the birthday of the State and the anniversary of our presence in Georgia relate to me?

I remember someone recounting how her Sylvan Terrace backyard became a “kibbutz outpost” when she and her friends played “pioneer” in the 1940’s. She explained she was too young then to think about this as an act of solidarity with the idea of Jewish statehood, but because hearing about the activities of the Jewish teenagers in Palestine captured her imagination, and it sounded like fun, she played the game, too!

So many different stories from different perspectives we Savannah Jews must have about our memories of Israeli Independence or our connections to the land since that historic UN vote! Wouldn’t it be nice to share some of these as our legacy to mark both occasions?

Okay so what could I possibly say worth remembering? I have been to Israel a half dozen times—on a Confirmation tour, as president of and then as a young leader for Hadassah, for my children’s Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, for a family wedding, but that hardly makes me an expert about what it must be like to be an Israeli.

I raised a family in Savannah and stay relatively active in volunteer work to benefit my city, my country and my community. But that does not make me a Savannahian—rich in traditions unique to this coastal area.

So, I reflected on my last few days in Savannah. Pre-Shabbat I picked up my father from his Jewish residence home to get a hair cut. The woman working there was a Persian Jew. I told her that just two weeks prior I had met a Persian Jew wanting to move to Savannah and told him I would explore and find some people with similar backgrounds. I went to one synagogue looking for some study materials and was helped by a Kollel Rabbi, then picked up two trays of cholent donated by Alan Gottlieb Caterers, then thirteen trays of brisket from the JEA to be used Sunday for the *Shalom Y'All Jewish Food Festival* with the help of Rabbi Gold, Adam Solender and his staff. I made a donation to Rambam Day School and paid for a Federation luncheon to hear an actress portray Golda Meir and her travels from America to Palestine—and much later becoming Israel's Prime Minister. I went to Shabbat services and dinner at another synagogue and sat with two Savannah police officers and heard Israelis who were part of the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange (GILEE) talk about what they have in common with our police and strategies to solve crime. I attended Shabbat services at a different synagogue and witnessed a brit milah. Following havdallah at home, I attended a cultural event in downtown Savannah and the next day worked at the food festival where both of my new Persian friends were—one as a patron and one as a worker!

I often escort Jewish visitors to the area who are considering a relocation because they have heard of how beautiful Savannah is. Often, they sheepishly ask if there are Jews here too? But they ask the wrong question: not are there Jews—but is there Jewish community? In that way Savannah and Israel have a lot in common—we are a socially diverse group of Jews from many different places and circumstances with a long, shared historical prominence which has created a culturally rich community which is enhanced by the presence of all of the members of this community. In this context maybe I am Israel. and Israel is me.

In honor of Israel at 60—and Savannah at 275—won't you add a story of how you, your relatives, your businesses formed or are forming a connection with Palestine—later Israel and her people? Starting mid- January, MorningStar Cultural Arts Group in conjunction with the Jewish Educational Alliance and Southern Oral History Company will be providing an opportunity for you to tell this story in a videotaped interview to be saved with your permission and used as our gift, as part of our community *Israel at 60* festivities starting in May and then donated to the Savannah Jewish Archives. To help sponsor this activity or for more information on how you can get involved, call Carol Greenberg at 912-927-9922 or email MStarArts@aol.com. Donations to MorningStar are tax deductible and most appreciated.