

Home again

Home again, after visiting you and the baby in your Latin America home. I am hiking the Burma trail climbing up towards Jerusalem. Following the same route used to supply the besieged Jerusalem during the War of Independence. The main route from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was blocked at the nearby Latrun junction by the British trained and officered Arab Legion. Jewish Jerusalem was being starved into submission. Many Jews died in several failed attempts to dislodge the Arab Legion. Amongst the dead were raw recruits fresh from the death camps in Europe. While the battle raged at Latrun the bypass road was used secretly to bring food, water, and fuel to Jerusalem. Jewish construction workers worked in the middle of the night to prepare the impassable portions of road for trucks. Until the road was completed mules and 200 middle aged conscripts carried 45-pound sacks to bridge the gap. Their story is immortalized in black metal sculptures along the way. As I maneuver down the steep path I think about the debt that I owe these men. But at the same time I reminisce about the many trails, like this one, that we hiked with you. At first I carried you in a baby carrier on my back. Later, we walked together. As you grew older, braver, you raced ahead. We constantly had to call you back to keep you in sight. You were always the first to jump into the springs and streams on the way. Fearlessly, your little legs climbed the hiking ladders in the Negev and Arbel. As a teenager you led the way to unmarked hiking trails and waterways. I wonder whether we will have the pleasure to witness our grandchild racing on those trails.

Home again, hearing Hebrew in the streets. Alive with children's innocent voices playing. I am struggling with an internal dialogue. Envious of my neighbors, chattering with their grandchildren. But, happy to live in this vibrant place overflowing with young Jewish

families. Wishing that you were amongst them. But, thankful that you found your own way out of your dark depression here to become a wholly fulfilled mother elsewhere.

Home again, the sun is bright and so intense that its glare hurts. I close my eyes and listen to my flapping Israeli flag and the traffic passing underneath the bridge. I am protesting the Judicial Overhaul. Sometimes approaching cars beep in support. Occasionally neighbors cross over the bridge and slow to look toward me. Some nod with approval, others glare with disdain, but most faces question my presence. My mind wanders, reflecting on what brought me to this place. My life is typical; I worked in hi-tech and am now retired. I live in a national religious neighborhood. My biggest atypical act was “making Aliyah”. It has not always been easy. We have no family here so we had to rely on friends and the goodwill of our neighbors to help us navigate Israel’s Byzantine bureaucracy. The wars and terror have been scary, but I always trusted that the IDF would protect us. Overcoming the hardships and our fears was worth it; we are proud that we had the courage to leave the ease and familiarity of the USA to do our little part toward building a Jewish state by raising our family here. Since our arrival in the 80s, Israel has become more affluent. We are making peace with more and more Arab countries. I expected these positive trends to continue and was optimistic about Israel’s future. That optimism has degraded into pessimism. Now I am haunted by apocalyptic scenarios: I’m concerned that the demonstrations will become violent or even descend into civil war. Volunteer reservists in elite air force units are refusing to serve. I fear that we are becoming so divided that we will not be able to defend ourselves against our enemies. I worry that our government will become so authoritarian and corrupt that many of our young people will choose to leave. But you left before all of this political dissension erupted. Sadly, I have to accept that you had to leave. There is something about Israel's

intensity, always present, usually seething between the surface, that is incompatible with your spirit.

Never again happened again, a pogrom here, on Shabbat October 7, 2023 Simchat Torah. A Hamas led invasion of thousands swarmed into Israel from Gaza transforming our Southern Border communities into nightmarish killing fields, massacre, rape, torture, abductions, wombs slashed, babies smashed. Over 1300 murdered, 240 hostages including women, children, and old people. Their blood crying out from the land. Waking us up to our harsh reality. Without a strong, alert, and united Israel we are still easy prey. The pogrom included a massacre at the SuperNova Sukkot Gathering Music Festival billed as a celebration of "friends, love and infinite freedom". There, they murdered 364 people, took over 40 hostages, committed multiple gang rapes, and injured many more. But thank God you weren't there. Instead, you are calling about our safety.

Home again, The reservists showed up in droves. Dispersed Jews are returning from abroad. Everyone is volunteering and donating. Groups that were protesting the judicial overhaul have repurposed themselves to help other Jews displaced due to the war. Right, Left, Secular, National Religious, Ultra-orthodox are working together for our common good. The very diversity that was driving us apart is now making us even stronger, bound by our shared desire to face our real enemies and help one another. But if you were not so far away, I'm certain you would be volunteering and probably using your unusual talents in dance and circus to bring some cheer to those traumatized by this war.

Home again, the streets are quieter. Still, the children's innocent voices are heard.

Mothers and grandparents are pushing baby carriages. Talking about the war, the hostages, and our mounting casualties. Worrying about their husbands, sons and daughters now serving on our various fronts. Our Iron Dome and Arrow missile defense systems are intercepting most of the missiles fired at us from the North, South and East. Our Navy is thwarting attempts to breach our borders from the West. Our ground forces are driving themselves deeper and deeper into Gaza to destroy Hamas. Our jets are constantly passing overhead carrying the war back to our enemies. Defense minister Gallant says “We are in a multi-front war. We are being attacked from seven fronts — Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), Iraq, Yemen and Iran,” he said. “We have already responded and acted on six of those fronts.” So much of the world is focused on Palestinian casualties, blaming it on Israel, ignoring that Hamas is using them as human shields. They have already forgotten the massacre and the hostages. Anti-semitic, anti-Israel protests and violent attacks are rising through-out the world. But for now your remoteness is insulating you from their hate.

Home again, living my life, as a Jew amongst other Jews; sharing our joys and sadnesses together. But at the same time extending my love to you and the baby in your new home.