

SPECIAL VISITORS FROM BRAZIL

Jos. 6

„Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams horns in front of the ark!“

I did not want Sarita and Arnon Thalenberg to go back to Brazil! For me it was really a great blessing to host these two special visitors last fall in my house. I had shared with you about my wonderful time in Brazil. So much of it was: Thanks to Sarita and Arnon! Now came my turn to bless them! I have only one „complaint:“ That they live so far away...I miss them a lot!

ARNON THALENBERG SHARES:



Arnon and Sarita meeting Bella the first time

This story starts in October 2009, the day my wife received a phone call from my mother telling her that a German lady called Inge, who lives in Israel and is good friends with Tuschka (Bella), my father's cousin, - came to Brazil. With this phone call also came a request to help show the country to this visitor who came to spend one month among us.

The only thing I knew about Bella, this cousin of my father's is, that she had never been to Brazil and that she was the only one from the big family in Poland who survived the Nazi persecution. (Except for my grandfather, who was still able to leave

Europe before). In 1982, I spent two months in Israel, but somehow I did not contact Bella at this time. It took us a few short days to learn who this Inge Buhs is and to understand her relationship with Bella Steiner – whom we call 'Tuschka.' We soon learned about the wonderful work Inge has been doing through Ner Yaakov in offering assistance to Holocaust victims.

We were amazed with Inge's vision; in a short time she had received the admiration of many from the Sao Paulo Jewish Community. Inge made new friends and her work captured the interest of everyone she met. Why all this interest? We are familiar with organizations that help needy Jewish people, but the support we knew comes from Jewish organizations. We never heard anything like the work Ner Yaakov is doing – being financed by non-Jews and Christian volunteers who are full time, dedicated to this cause. In this month Inge spent here in Brazil she definitely earned her well - deserved place as 'a member of the Thalenberg Family'.

When she left we said goodbye with a promise to see her in Israel and to visit Ner Yaakov. This promise became a reality the following year! Thanks to my parents-in-law who took care of our children, 7-year-old Felipe and 9-year-old Rafael, we could spend three weeks in Israel! We travelled in October 2010 over 10,000km, but it felt as if we never left home, so warm and familiar was Inge's reception to us in Jerusalem. Her home became our second home! Her apartment became our home base in Israel.

Our first visit to the Ner Yaakov house was after dark. Still, we were very impressed with the building. What captured our attention was, that the place did not have the cold setting of an institution. The home décor is lovely and makes the place warm and welcoming for people who live there permanently. It was that night that we met the 'permanent residents' Sachar and his wife Raja. My wife and I speak Portuguese, English and some Hebrew. With some degree of difficulty and Inge's help we managed to communicate in Yiddish, a language my parents would use when they did not want us children to understand their conversation. Sachar sat down in the living room with us and he was very nice. We later found out that he showed his best disposition in spite of his many health problems.

Spending time in Jerusalem gave us an insight into Inge's daily tasks. When she was not at Ner Yaakov she would manage via cell phone, from a distance, the tireless work of her volunteers. Even before we met her two volunteers personally we already respected and admired their dedicated efforts caring for the survivors. Chana is a Dutch lady, who has already lived many years in Israel, and another young lady, German, named Simone, who came for a shorter volunteer-term.

We accompanied a few on-going programs Ner Yaakov offers outside their home base such as visiting survivors who are living in their own apartments, to care for their basic needs, to offer them companionship and comfort, and sometimes to give them financial help.

The first visit we made was to the home of Sima Skurkovitz, who is originally from Lithuania, a survivor of several Concentration camps, including Bergen-Belsen. Considering her painful, horrific past, we found Sima to have an amazing joy in living. Sitting around the table we listened to her telling us the trials she had endured. She told us stories and she sang. Sima found refuge and comfort in music and in songs and so received strength to live through those horrific times.