

Our First Year In Israel

By Lawrence Stone

(WZPS) — Arnie and Carol Bender of Philadelphia, USA made aliya shortly before Rosh Hashana last year, settling into the absorption center in Mevasseret Zion just outside Jerusalem.

WZPS correspondent Lawrence Stone spoke with the Benders on how they have fared over the past year, both in terms of finding jobs and a home as well as in coping with the problems of everyday life in Israel.

"There's probably never been a worse time to come on aliya," admits Arnie Bender. "But I think we're going to make it." And the 33-year-old teacher has every right to feel optimistic about the future. Arnie and his attractive wife, Carol - they have two children, Nomi, 4, and Ari who is just 16 months - are justifiably proud of their first 12 months in Israel. "We were told that our two biggest goals should be to find work and leave the absorption center," recalls Arnie. "Well, we will have achieved both within our first year. And we're very pleased," he adds.

As we spoke in their apartment at the Merkaz Klita (Absorption Center) on the outskirts of Jerusalem, the couple looked back on their first 12 months in the country and their life ahead as they prepare to move into their new home in Jerusalem's Ramot neighborhood. Says Carol,

29: "Now we can begin to live as 'real' people and become regular working members of Israeli society."

She recalls that life was a little scary when they arrived just a few weeks before Rosh Hashana last year. "It doesn't matter how much you think you know Israel or how much you prepare for your aliya things can still be pretty tough," she adds. They underwent a traumatic farewell from the United States, where both Arnie and Carol left saddened parents, family and friends. "They knew we were firmly committed to living in Israel - but when the time came for us to leave I don't think it had really sunk in," says Arnie.

Carol adds that the hardest decision had been to leave their parents. Just before we left it was emotionally very difficult and there were lots of tears at the airport, she says. But Arnie quickly points out that both sets of parents have given them 100 percent support. "They've been behind us all the way and we couldn't have achieved what we have without them. We know many couples whose family keep giving them guilt feelings about living in Israel."

Arnie and Carol both grew up in the predominantly Jewish suburb of Elkins Park in Philadelphia. They met through their local United Synagogue youth movement and both graduated from Philadelphia's Temple University - Arnie as a teacher and Carol specializing in organizational social work. Arnie began teaching remedial students at a local high school as well as Jewish Studies at Gratz College. But already the seeds of their aliya had been sown. They both agreed: "We always knew we wanted to make our home in Israel. It was just a question of when." "We saw it as a natural outgrowth of our Jewish upbringing," says Carol. Then finally, three years ago, we sat down and said: "Right, it'll be 1984 in Jerusalem."

Both arrived with a working knowledge of Hebrew - the result of having led youth groups on summer camps from Philadelphia. "I think knowing the language is the key to a successful aliya," stressed Arnie. "It certainly helped me," he adds. And within a matter of days Arnie landed a full time job. "I simply went along to the Ministry of Education and was told to contact the principal at the Evelina de Rothschild Elementary School in Rehavia. "I came away from the interview as a fully-fledged computer teacher with

some English thrown in to fill up my hours. I was thrilled, particularly having been warned that the best time to get a teaching job in Israel is springtime when the schools are recruiting staff for the new September term."

Arnie admits he was very fortunate to land on his feet so soon. But he puts it down to his knowledge of Hebrew. "While I've been lucky enough to find work there are other teachers at the absorption center who are still looking." Meanwhile, Carol completed her five-month ulpan course and then began searching in earnest for an apartment. "Eventually we found what we were looking for in Ramot. Now I hope to find work in a Hebrew environment and in a way look forward to the grind that Israeli women face with rushing the children to playschool, work, shopping, running a household and picking the kids up again."

But while they are both optimistic about the future they also realize the difficulties that lie ahead. "To live in Israel as a salaried worker is very difficult," says Arnie. The couple considered that as new immigrants a car was a luxury. But when we thought it's also a necessity and it's important to have the means to get about." Not that they've had much time for sight-seeing. "But we've both seen most of the country during our earlier summer trips. Our favorite spot is Rosh Hanikra and we very much want to explore the negev," she adds.

Arnie sums up their first year of aliya as an undoubted success. "The whole family - especially the children - have adapted very well and we're settled." And as for those in the Diaspora that are thinking: "Next year in Jerusalem," Arnie has this message: "Come. But don't come unprepared for the reality of Israel."

TEL AVIV (WNS) — An explosive-laden car was discovered in the Netanya central bus station and blown up by the police bomb squad before it could cause any casualties or damage. A worker at the bus station noticed a white Fiat car with West Bank license plates parked in a no-parking area of the bus station, with a cooking gas cylinder on the back seat. When no driver appeared he looked again and saw wires leading from the cylinder. He notified the police, who arrived at the scene with a bomb squad, which blew up the car after evacuating the area.

TEL AVIV (WNS) — Security Forces recently uncovered a terrorist group centered on the Druze township of Majdal Shams on the Golan Heights, army sources said. The gang is reported to have been responsible for a number of attacks against the Israeli Defense Force and the Golan Heights civilians and villages during the past six months. Their activities were said to have included the planting of a mine in a local vineyard. They also sabotaged water pipelines and stole arms from army depots.

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