

CELEBRATE LIFE AND THE BEGINNING OF SUMMER

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SUNDAY, JUNE 24, 2007

Mass at 11AM
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SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW

Woman spent nine months studying in Israel

by JESSICA L. FINCH

How many people can say they have had a life-changing experience? Arielle Seidler, 18, can.

For the past nine months she has traveled throughout Israel, exploring the country and returning home with a new view on life.

"I feel more connected to my religion and understand it more," Seidler said. "I want to live more of the Jewish life."

Her experience ended when she returned on June 7, less than a week before leaving to work at a summer camp. On June 8, she spoke about her travels at Temple Sinai, where her father, Jerry Seidler, is the rabbi.

Seidler said the community was very receptive to her presentation, and she was greeted by some Israeli natives who conversed with her in Hebrew — which she improved during the months abroad.

The program, called the Young Judaea Year Course, had three stages. During the second stage she lived with a family who did not speak English.

"It was the best experience of the whole year ... it was amazing how they welcomed me into their home," Seidler said, joking that the family was always trying to set her up with the boys in the neighborhood so she would stay.

The homes are nothing like the Williamsville suburb where Seidler's family lives, she said. She estimated that they are three times smaller than the average homes in Western New York.

"They have minimal stuff ... it's a different lifestyle. They are not about luxury at all," she said, adding that it influenced her. As she packed for camp she noticed she had a lot less "stuff" than in previous years — especially the number of shoes.

"The Israeli attitude is about living life in the moment ... there was always some party going on," she said.

Visiting Israel in person, Seidler learned that the national news stories on war do not depict the actual nature of the country. For the most part, she was out of harm's way, but during a visit with a friend near the Gaza Strip, she was startled by a "big boom" from a bomb, which those living at the home were used to and thought nothing about.

Seidler was one of 450 students to take part in the Young Judaea program, which includes American, British and Australian residents.

For as much as Seidler took from the program, she also gave back. During two of the sessions, she was assigned to a school where she worked one on one with students who needed help learning English. One day at school, the students were visited by two Arab women who were guest speakers. Seidler said the children had only known Jewish people and didn't know how to react to the guests.

When not in school, Seidler visited various parts of the country, as well as surrounding countries. She said there are portions that are very Western and developed, as well as those that are underdeveloped.

There are Western restaurants — fast food and pizza, for example. But along with the more modern lifestyles, Seidler learned about the older generation of Israelis. She said men often sit in the parks, playing chess, and she would sit and talk to them about their experiences in war and their history.

Her final three months were an interesting experience — she lived with four other girls in an apartment in Batyam, which means mermaid. The girls were from London, Scotland and Canada, as well as the United States.

It was there she volunteered at her second school and learned that many students are taught three languages — Hebrew, English and Arabic. The street signs are usually in two languages if not three, she said.

All of her experiences, more than can be shared in one article, brought her to the conclusion that she is more informed on Jewish society, culture and politics. Until then, she had really only known about Zionist beliefs, which is how she was raised.

Upon returning, she said she did miss the comforts of living at home.

This summer she will spend five weeks at Camp Young Judaea Sprout Lake in Verbank, N.Y. She has also been selected as a Masa intern, recruiting teens to study in Israel.

In the fall she will enter the Honors College at the University of Pittsburgh. She said she plans to continue her Hebrew studies. She is a 2006 graduate of Williamsville South High School.



Arielle Seidler

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If you have a suggestion for someone to feature in this column, send it to Jessica L. Finch, Amherst Bee, associate editor, P.O. Box 150, Buffalo, NY 14231 or call 204-4917.