

Jerusalem: There's Nowhere Else I'd Rather Be - by Maria Bennett

I've been living in Israel for over a year and a half now, and my favorite thing to do here is go to the grocery store. I know, not the most exciting response from someone living in Jerusalem these days. But going grocery shopping here - selecting the best olive oil and delighting in all of the kosher products - as well as filling up my dog's cleaning, scanning in long lines at the bank and waiting in the windy mob at the bakery - means that I live here. I am not a tourist; I deal with Israel and all of its complexities, confusion, joy and pain every single day. And I love it.

I got the "real thing" during my junior year, when I studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I had traveled in Israel before, but living here was a qualitatively different experience. I left thinking I would return, I was not sure whether I would study or work, but I know that my love for Israel, its people and this country, and my desire to learn more about Judaism were not yet satisfied.

I came back to Israel a year and a half ago... and what a year and a half it has been. In September 2000, I began studying at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, where I have been learning traditional Jewish texts from master teachers, with other students who represent a broad range of Jewish backgrounds and perspectives. I have learned more in my year and a half of study at Pardes than I learned during my entire undergraduate career.

But my learning is a result not only of the course I am pursuing in a nushta in the Beit Mikraich (Jewish house of study), but also of my life in Jerusalem. Here in Jerusalem I have found a community of wonderful people and like me who want to try living in another country, who want to know more about Judaism; people who are trying to figure out exactly what they want their lives to look like. The air is charged with our debates and discussions as we try to see where we fit in all this upheaval - and life here is magical.

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It's also been difficult... just a month after I arrived the sun and "bitzafon" began. My sophomore has been dramatically affected by both the security situation and by the events happening around us. I am extremely cautious about where I go and where I avoid crowded areas and after my routine when I feel at all threatened. But I am fueled and energized by the opportunity to support Israel during a difficult period. This is undoubtedly an important historic moment for both Israel and for the Jewish people - I have the privilege of reacting to my friends and family in the US about the realities of living in Israel at this time and also having the honor of being an American choosing to remain in Israel and witness, however minimally, its people's triumph.

I remain in Israel this year as part of the Pardes Laureate Program, a joint program between Pardes and the Hebrew University. As the Hebrew University I am completing a Master's Degree in Jewish Education and I continue to study classical rabbinic texts at Pardes. I receive a stipend each month from The AN CHAI Foundation, which is funding the program and after I complete the degree in June 2002, I have made a commitment to teach in a Jewish school in North America for three years.

As I look ahead to the next year or a half that I will spend in Israel, I feel excited, worried, but more than anything else, lucky. I am excited that I can spend another year and a half in a place that truly feels like home, a home in which I am surrounded by an amazing community of Jews and interested friends who consistently help me to question and define myself. I am worried for Israel - a historic moment this is, but also difficult and unpredictable. I feel lucky because the excitement always wins out over the worry. The exhilaration of Torah and Talmud study, close friendships and a lively community help outweigh the fears. Still, it is a hard life in Jerusalem and I need only go to the supermarket to be struck once again by how lucky I am to be here.

There is no other place in the world where I would rather be right now.

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Marla Ann Barnett ז"ל זכרה כ"ב טבת ה'תש"ס
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Marla Barnett moved to the Berkeley Bayit in the fall of 1997 as a sophomore. After her year abroad in Israel, Marla returned to the Bayit for her senior year, graduating in May of 2000. Marla brought the Bayit such innovations as the "tuffio bar" and "breakfast for dinner." She created the Bayit with teaching us to cook, and enjoyed putting her new Bayit-acquired culinary skills to the test making Shabbat dinner parties for friends. Walking through the Bayit brings so many memories of Marla: the rooms she painted - washing with juice on her nose, the flowers in pictures she affixed to the door of the library-bedroom (whose previous occupants of a pferred "danger - chemicals" sign did not meet with her aesthetic vision), the kitchen table where she often patiently chipped some one else's perfect or not, the hallways and stairwells whose covers feature her artwork; post-anthip; the hallway and rooms where she talked, and laughed, and dreamed about the future.

Marla always had a smile ready. She did the email thing that made such a difference - she would always greet you with a warm hug and a bad word. Marla raised the now shirt and the heart, and the compliments where they were least expected, and she never forgot a birthday. She had friends, and she made each of them feel special and important.

While at Col, Marla was very active in the Jewish community outside of the Bayit as well: she was a board member of Hillel, Conservative Minyan, and helped to found a Jewish Women's Group and a Beit Midrash (house of study). Marla taught religious school, and played a major role in the success of Camp Shalom. When she graduated, Hillel honored Marla with the Hinech award. Hinech honors those who whenever their community needs them answer "Hinech" - here I am, ready to do all that is required.

After graduation, Marla traveled to Israel to study in the Spruce Institute of Jewish Studies. She was enrolled in a three year program earning a masters in Jewish education. She planned to return to the United States after completing the program, to teach in Jewish Day Schools. Marla was a gifted teacher. The children who sought her religious school and camp loved her and were instantly drawn to her warmth and bubbly wit. Her disarming good nature and fierce sense of order made her an amazing resource to her students and all those around her. Marla loved the program at Pardos, and the opportunity it provided to live in Israel. She had an incredible time in the country and all of its complexities.

On Wednesday July 21st 2002, 22nd Av 5762, Marla was eating lunch in the cafeteria of Hebrew University of Jerusalem before her final exam of the summer. She planned to fly to the United States days later, and to be in Berkeley within two weeks to visit with Bayit alumni and attend the Berkeley wedding of a close friend. A few weeks following that she planned to be in Los Angeles for the wedding of her dear friend and boyfriend, the Bayit roommate. As Marla sat chatting with friends and eating her lunch, a terrorist bomb exploded, killing tens of people and wounding more than eighty others. Our beloved Marla Ann was among those lost that day. Marla is survived by her loving parents Uriah and Milla, sister Lisa, and boyfriend Michael.

In Marla's memory, the Bayit has purchased either Shabbat candles or Shabbat candles. The candles are set out because they serve as a living memorial. Marla loved Shabbat, and the beauty of this day of rest. She especially loved Open Shabbats at the Berkeley Bayit, when she opened her home to the community, creating a warm and friendly Shabbat atmosphere for all. It is our hope that the light of these Shabbat candles will brighten Open Shabbats at the Berkeley Bayit for many years to come. The candles are engraved with a line from Marla's favorite poem, psalm 30: "Tears may linger for a night, but joy comes with the dawn." That Marla had a favorite poem at all speaks volumes about this type of committed Jew. Our friend was. The text of the poem captured the optimistic optimism with which Marla approached all things in life. In our time of grief, this poem is a comfort to us as well. We may lie down in tears, but the joy of our time with Marla will shine over the pain of our loss.

ה"י זכרה ברוך

May her memory be for a blessing