By Edie and Mort Barr

Smiling Through Aliyah’s Bureaucracy

Edie and Mort Barr made aliyah from Atlanta on March 30. Part 1 of their story appeared June 3.

Making aliyah is much easier than it was even 10 years ago when we first left Atlanta. Nefesh N’Nefesh, based in Jerusalem, partners with the Jewish Agency for Israel (Sefarim) and is partly financed by the Israeli government. It is well structured to facilitate aliyah from North America and the United Kingdom.

We opened an online file with NBN in January 2015 and uploaded the requisite application information including proof of being Jewish (from our rabbi), U.S. passports, birth certificates and health declarations.

Further, to prove we no longer resided in Israel but left after two years in 1986 and lived full time in the United States, we had to supply a list of exis- tents and exits to and from Israel and evidence of continuous employment in the United States throughout.

We then contacted the Jewish Agency in Miami to manage the aliyah application and set up a personal interview. Although, Atlanta has an aliyah desk, we didn’t need to go to Miami, one of the Israeli representa- tives based at the Miami Jewish Community Center met with us.

Approval under the Law of Return should have been automatic and rapid. But after 30 months and numerous phone calls and emails to Miami, the only feedback we received was that because we made aliyah 20 years ago our files were classified as former A1 (a special category for immigrants returning to their father’s home country) to determine our new status and eligibility for benefits.

Ah, NBN to the rescue. We contacted NBN’s government relations office to investigate on our behalf, and within three weeks our approval was granted.

But NBN helped us to get an aliyah flight in March and greeted us at the Newark airport with special luggage tags, hats, flags and tallit carrying bags. What a country!

The two rights we needed most of all were citizenship and a health insurance policy. We had to provide many documents, including proof of living in the United States, to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

On every Yom Kippur and Passre- over, we fervently hoped the voice that next year would find us in Jerusalem.

Now we are here. What a lovely ring those words have. We are home.

At the kosher koutzone (my home) on our first Shabbat after making aliyah, Mort received the Lev aliyah to the Is- raeli, and when he finished, the entire congregation burst out in song with the verse from Jeremiah 31:10: “And there is hope for your future, says the Lord, and the children shall return to their own border.”

When we opened a bank account at PAGI (Bank Poalei Agudat Israel), part of the First International Bank of Israel, the banker with whom we spent at least 15 hours filling out paperwork said he had a gift for us. Where else in the world would that be a helpful talit carrying bag.

The Real Fun Begins

What to know about the first set of administrative duties of new Israeli citizens?

The ups and downs of Is- raeli bureaucracy.

We had our citizenship papers but still needed to pay hospital bills, called medicaid. That is the official recognition of new immigrant status and is partly paid for by the government.

As we left the Ben Gurion airport, we were greeted by a group of young people with big smiles and words of welcome and encouragement.

We were required to get an eye examination, the cost of which was covered in advance by NBN.

Morton, a 78-year-old college professor, was required to go to the city property office in Jerusalem and submit a doctor’s note that he is able to drive. We’re hoping it will not take more than a month to determine Mort’s status to get his driver’s license.

We had to provide many docu- ments, including a photo, where we live now and were forced to fill out a four-page application in Hebrew. Our application was sent to the main office in Ramat Beit Shemesh to be evaluated. A black hole was about to engulf our health insur- ance.

We thought this would be easy. Surprised no. 2. It was not easy.

Morton, who retired as the director of technology at Colgate Palmolive, is a for- mer executive director of Congregation Beth Israel in Atlanta and a founder and former CEO of the Jewish Internet Free Loan Association.

Finally, we applied for our senior discount car licenses. Some lecturers get discounts at museums and on public transport- ations by showing their senior cards. Of course, Israel is now modifying the card, so we anticipate a long delay before we receive our card.

All in all, we are doing well, and with the help of volunteers and the wonderful people at Nefesh N’Nefesh, we are on our way to a smooth klotzik (absorption).

Banking in the United States used to be a necessity for our foreign accounts. In Israel, this talk bag is the extension of our foreign accounts at Bank Pnai Agudat Israel.

We reminded ourselves that Israel’s success defies ra- tionality and by any benchmarks must be deemed miraculous. What a privilege to be able to do this at this time.

Morton, who retired as the director of technology at Colgate Palmolive, is a for- mer executive director of Congregation Beth Israel in Atlanta and a founder and former CEO of the Jewish Internet Free Loan Association.

Edie, who retired from a career as an activities director in assisted living, served on the Greater Atlanta Hadassah, served on the board of the United Jewish Appeal, is a former CEO of the Jewish Interest Free Loan Association.

We’re grateful to Edie and Mort for sharing their story of Aliyah and our Warm Welcome at Kehilat Shalom Temple in East Brunswick, where Edie now has an Israeli license.

Edie and Morton were the first to make aliya that week who passed before anything happened. To our pleasant surprise, in this year of aliyah, our first Shabbat after making aliyah, Edie told the entire congregation: “We are home. What a lovely ring those words have. We are home.”

The Barrs live here in Rezat, Beth Shemesh, and are under the same roof that we had in Atlanta.

The Barrs live in Rezat

Happy day!

Now we needed our Israeli driver’s licenses. We were required to get an eye test from an approved ophthalmologist and a doctor’s confirmation to verify fi- tness to drive. We anticipated the neces- sity to take at least one driving lesson and a road test, but we were hoping we would not have to re-test our license from 30 years ago and forgo the test.

Miracle of miracles, they did it for us.

How exciting it was to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Succot (the three days we had to wait for our senior cards). Of course, Israel is now modifying the card, so we anticipate a long delay before we receive our card.

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