

Jerusalem: A City of Heartaches and Dreams

An old saying has it that “home is where the heart is.” If that’s the case, then my heart has, at various times, and I guess always will belong in England, Australia and the United States, because these are the countries I have lived in. I also lived in Israel for 11 years, specifically in Jerusalem. But I wouldn’t say Jerusalem has my heart.

Israel has my heart, and my entire immediate family still lives in Israel. But I would say—unequivocally—that Jerusalem has my soul.

It’s because Jerusalem is just that kind of place. If you’ve never been, it’s hard to describe. If you have been, then you probably know what I’m talking about.

Jerusalem seeps into your pores and is impossible to shake. The sights, sounds and smells of a modern city clashing with an old one is nothing short of miraculous.

As a journalist whose job was to cover the city of Jerusalem every day, I had the extraordinary honor of learning about and interviewing everyone, from school children to volunteers to government officials.

I could do my job every day because there’s no real hierarchy—because your mayor and council members are in the phone book and you don’t have to go through 47 publicists to get an interview.

In Jerusalem you can rail against a corrupt municipality and, in the same breath, witness extraordinary acts of *chesed* (kindness).

I know of no other place where can you walk the streets

without a single car on the road on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) and chat with complete strangers.

Or you might have a complete stranger open their home to you for a Shabbat (Sabbath) meal because they met you in the supermarket and asked if you had somewhere to go.

It's in Jerusalem that your heart will break over and over when there's a suicide bombing and scores of innocent lives are lost, where your cell phone will give out because people around the country and the world will be calling to make sure you and everyone you know is OK.

And then your heart will break all over again when an ultra-Orthodox organization rallies its volunteers and they come out and collect every piece of shattered bone and tiny piece of flesh that used to be a person—collect them all and ensure that there is a proper burial.

In Jerusalem, you can also rail against those ultra-Orthodox people who curse those who travel on the Sabbath or who receive handouts from city officials who wield so much power in local government.

In Jerusalem, you'll dance in the streets on Simchat Torah and be proud to be a Jew in your Jewish homeland in the capital of the country. And you'll also awake to the unique sound of the muezzin call as the Muslims head to morning prayers.

You'll haggle in Hebrew with Israeli vendors for a better deal on a dozen apples at the outdoor shuk in Machane Yehuda. And in the Old City of Jerusalem, you'll haggle in English or Arabic in that market too.

In Jerusalem, you will find the best falafel of your life; you'll get up early just to head to the shuk to inhale the smell of pita with za'atar, to sample gleaming olives, to scarf down freshly baked borekkas and watch old men play *shesh besh* (backgammon), while drinking strong black coffee or

sipping tea with mint.

In Jerusalem you can walk to the Western Wall and touch stones that are thousands of years old; say a prayer; leave a note and then walk across the street to Sultan's Pool to see a rock concert or a movie.

In the Old City, you can simply walk a few feet and be in four different quarters. You can run your hands along the stones in the Jewish, Christian, Arab and Armenian quarters.

You can see the bullet holes in the walls from wars.

In Jerusalem, you'll watch in awe as highrises and new buildings tower over some of the most ancient structures in existence, and you'll whizz in your car down a major highway while struggling to negotiate the tiny one-way streets in the heart of the city (with cars parked on the footpaths), knowing that it's so much easier to walk to wherever you want to go.

And if you are sitting in your car, who else will stop at the light, hoot their horn and ask you if you want to sell your car? If you're in Jerusalem, the chances are that the person who asks will remind you that he saw you last week and asked you once before and do you have an answer for him yet.

Jerusalem is where you can be hospitalized and volunteers will show up during holidays and sing and dance for you and offer to say prayers for you.

Jerusalem is where an old world meets a new one and nobody blinks an eye.

Jerusalem is where a sunset over the Old City walls will stop your heart, where you know summer is on its way because vendors start selling watermelon on the side of the road.

Jerusalem is where people from all over the world flock to live, to visit, to pray and to play.

Jerusalem is not an easy city to live in. She will break your heart many times over. But she'll also heal it too.

Life in Jerusalem is an ongoing love affair of ups and downs and struggles and triumphs. You have to give yourself over to Jerusalem in order to truly understand the beauty that is hers and hers alone.

And that is why she has—and always will have—my soul.

For the original article, visit .