

JEWISH DEAF ASSOCIATION TOUR TO ISRAEL AND FIRST WORLD
JEWISH DEAF CONGRESS - AUGUST 1977

On Sunday 31 July, 29 deaf people from many parts of England gathered at Heathrow Airport for the trip to Israel organised by the J.D.A., and led by Mrs Margulies and Mrs Jessie Jessel who acted as interpreter. We travelled in an El Al jumbo plane containing 400 seats arranged like a cinema and even had a special staircase leading to an upper deck.

At Ben Gurion Airport the Customs Officer seemed to confiscate one of our member's passport! (an Arafat's collaborator ???) After a gentle interrogation he was cleared through. A representative from the Travel Agency took us by coach to the Moss Hotel, in Tel Aviv.

The next day Beno (an old pupil from Nightingale Lane School) met and took us to the Hotel Pal where the Congress was to be held. The hotel was super with its own swimming pool.

About 1,000 predominantly Jewish Deaf people from all over the world - as far apart as U.S.A., Canada, England, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, South Africa and Rumania began to pour into the hotel.

An opening ceremony was held in the evening several speeches were heard. It was interesting to see how the problem of communication was overcome. The speaker faced the audience. There was a translator who sat in front of the stage and translated into another language. There were four interpreters on the stage - each signing in a different language! - Hebrew, American, French and another language.

After the speeches the Demama Dance Group gave a highly professional mime show.

During the next few days there were several speeches, film shows and lectures, of which one was provided by Mr Emil Stryker, the respected member of the J.D.A. Some gave several meetings a miss and went to the swimming pool.

A reception was given by the Mayor of Tel Aviv and later in the evening, we went on a coach tour to the old exotic city of Jaffa. It was very hot and humid in Tel Aviv.

On Wednesday we went on a private coach tour to Ashdod, the Israeli second biggest port, Ashkelon a popular seaside resort, Yad Mordechai, the Kibbutz of the Warsaw Ghetto survivors, a museum and to the Gaza Strip. We returned to the Congress in the evening in time for the closing dinner and dance.

A deaf man, trained by Marcel Marceau gave an excellent solo mime performance. An attractive Thai girl in her national costume gave a traditional country dance. A beauty contest was held and was won by a girl from Boston, U.S.A.

On the coach tours we were joined by Georges Lehrer, the Belgian man and Pino and Lana Paolillo (nee Senchal). We went to the Western Wall, Jerusalem. Rabbi Goren the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem gave a blessing to the Jewish deaf. The sight at the Western Wall was emotional. We saw many biblical and historical places in Jerusalem. We went to Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. Rachel's Tomb was also visited.

We stayed in Jerusalem Tower Hotel which was a beautiful hotel - but our sympathy went out to a poor bell-boy who had to go up and down to open bedroom doors with his master key. The trouble was - the bedroom doors had automatic locks. When a deaf person was in a bedroom and a colleague was outside. He could not open the bedroom door from outside and he cannot bang the door too loudly in fear of disturbing other people.

On Friday and Shabbot, many people walked through the alleys and the markets to explore the heart of the city. Some others went to visit their relatives. The climate in Jerusalem was bearable although it was very hot 90°F, the air was dry.

One of the most interesting and tiring days of the holiday was a coach trip to Sulphur Spring in Ein Gedi Oasis. We climbed a long steep and ragged mountain. Some of us were on the brink of exhaustion from the heat. As soon as the pool full of cool spring water appeared, we dived in. A cable car took us to the top of Massada, the most impressive 2000 years old ruins. Later we went for a swim in the Dead Sea. It was a wonderful experience to float on the sea which was dense with mineral salts. We were told that it is practically impossible to be drowned in the sea.

On a free day some went to Tel Aviv. A few mad members of the group rose at 5.00am. to take a six hours bus journey to Eilat. As soon as we stepped onto the Eilat soil, we felt as if entering an oven. The temperature was 105°F! Swimming in the clear Red Sea was our first action. Then we visited the unique underwater observatory. There was a long pier leading from the beach outwardly into the sea. At the end was a spiral staircase which led downwards into a stationary diving-bell, 12 feet below sea level. There was a window all the way around. The appearance of the natural environment was stunning. Different species of fishes, corals and sea-anemones were visible.

We ascended and entered an aquarium where more fish were shown. There was a section which specialised in deep sea animals. There was no light in the room only the fish eyes were illuminated and the attractive coloured fluorescent corals were exposed. The long trip to Eilat was worthwhile.

We went on a coach tour to Jericho, reputed to be the oldest city in the world, and along the West Bank towards Bet Shean. It was exciting to see the Jordan frontier. We also saw the prison where the nazi war criminals (including) Eichman) were kept. We visited Lavi Kibbutz. A deaf friend, a former pupil of Nightingale Lane School who now worked in the Kibbutz, showed us around the place. After passing through Afula (where a very co-operative Bank opened to exchange some money outside the sheduled hours only for Jessie (perhaps the Bank Manager liked Jessie) and Nazareth, we arrived at the luxurious Ganei Hamat Hotel in Tiberias.

After only one night in Tiberias, we went on to Rosh Hanikra, a small town next to the Leonese border. A cable car took us to the bottom of the cliff where we explored the limestone caves and the grotto. An old railway tracks through a tunnel from Israel to Lebanon was blocked off.

Returning to the coach, we moved along the coast through Akko, and stopped at Haifa to look at the panoramic view of the town. We toured a diamond factory which was very interesting. Unfortunately no free samples were provided!

We were amazed to see the Bahai Shrine garden which was most strikingly beautiful and saw three newly married Jewish brides in their white gowns and their bridegrooms posing in the garden to have their photographs taken.

We stayed for three days at Herzlia where our coach tour ended and we spent most of the time on the beach.

One evening we visited HOD, the Hard of Hearing Club in Tel Aviv. There were some discussions, mime and dancing. The Club was very hospitable and we enjoyed that visit.

Twenty-one of us returned to rainy England the next day. The rest of the group stayed on for an extra week in Netanya.

All in all the holiday was enjoyed by everybody. It was beneficial and educational. It went smoothly because of the untiring efforts of Mrs Margulies. She had the energy to interpret the guides during the tours and came with us wherever we went - even to the top of Massada. Where did she get the energy? I don't know ?? Mrs Margulies was assisted by Jessie Jessel, the capable interpreter.