



The Central Arava Regional Council Journal Arvot Newsmagazine

Issue 5 - June 2011



Living the Vision of Ben Gurion's Israel

.....
Stories of families
from the Central Arava
who are bringing the dream of Ben Gurion alive



"In the Negev the people and State of Israel will be tested. For only a united effort of a people volunteering and a State planning and implementing will we accomplish the great mission of populating the wilderness and bringing it to flourish. This effort will determine the fate of the State of Israel and the standing of our people in the history of mankind".

David Ben Gurion

from the speech "The Significance of the Negev", January 17, 1955

Over the years, the Council, in various materials and purposes has "used" Ben Gurion's speech. But what does it really mean? Does the fate of Israel really rely on the Negev? I think most of the residents in southern Israel are convinced. How do we convince Tel Aviv!?

I moved to the Arava over 5 years ago for very selfish reasons. I was ready for a family and was looking for a "good" nesting location.

Does that make me a Zionist? I lived a good and happy decade prior to living in the Arava in Cental Tel Aviv,

trust me you couldn't get any more central than that. Was I ever aware of the difficulties of Israeli residents in the periphery, I daren't say no, because I was, did I ever consider doing something about it?

Today, as a mother, I reflect tremendously on the life I'm creating for my child, and the ones to follow... My father, whose parents were among the founders of Kibbutz Kfar Blum (on the other end of this small country), had moved with his family to live in the US. It's easier there, he says. Having a British citizenship

from my mother's side I guess I have more than one option of where to live. But more than ever, the more I reflect, as a Jew and an Israeli, I know, for me there is only one option.

Is living so far away from the center of Israel, with all the hardships, really worth the high quality of life? Am I really "choosing" a better future by doing so? Am I a modern Zionist? What is Zionism nowadays?

In the 5th issue of the Arvot Newsmagazine I interviewed Arava residents, from most of the communities, of all ages and in different stages in life to try and understand the reasons behind their choice to move to the Arava valley and expose a little about the people who make the area into what it is.

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Words From The Head Of The Council

Open Day 2011 at Yair R&D Station

On January 19-20, 2011 we held our annual Open Day Agricultural Exhibition, the largest and most impressive agricultural event in Israel. During those two days we hosted over 30,000 visitors from all over the country, who joined our festivities focused on agriculture and settlement in the Central Arava. This year we also held the Negev Conference, a professional scientific conference with the participation of dozens of researchers and farmers.

The event opened with a ceremony hi-lighted by Mr. Shimon Peres, the President of the State of Israel, planting an Acacia tree. Children from Moshav Hatzeva, who participate in the Regional Acacia tree restoration project, also took part. During the ceremony Yair Station was declared as the location for the 2015 International Agritech Exhibition by the honorable guests Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Industry, Trade and Labor together with Agritech Association.

The implications of this decision are enormous for the area; preparations will now get underway for development of

the infrastructure and accommodations to host an international exhibition of this caliber. The move brings great potential for the local agriculture and tourism industries, for the region as a whole and for the State of Israel.

Demographic Growth in the Council

Since the establishment of the Central Arava Regional Council in 1978 the main target and issue of concern by all the Council Heads and managers was increasing the region's population. Sixteen years ago, while I was the Head of Arava R&D I was exposed to a Master Plan called "Arava 2002" that aimed to reach a threshold of 10,000 residents by 2002.

Today, the region has just above 3,000 residents, far from the goal we set

ourselves. So we are obliged to use some dramatic moves that will attract more people to the region.

We have to be able to offer our residents a good education system that can handle everyone including secular and religious, Bedouins, gifted students and those with learning disabilities. We must further upgrade the basic health services we offer today including services for the elderly. It is our duty to those pioneers from the 1960's to allow them to stay in the area as their medical needs increase.

Recently we have initiated, as part of our plan to increase the region's population, a program to attract engineers and other professionals employed in the various plants within an hour's drive of the area. These non-agricultural



Mr. Shimon Peres planting an Acacia tree with children from Moshav Hatzeva during the Open Day 2011 opening ceremony. Photo by Gilad Livni.



Ezra Ravins speaking at the KKL-JNF World Leadership Conference 2011 that took place in Eilat in March 2011. Photo by Ancho Gosh.

families will be absorbed in Sapir and Zuzim. The Success of this initiative depends on the level of basic services the Council will be able to offer the new residents.

According to the Council's Master Plan we are preparing to absorb over 2,000 non agricultural families and we have to create additional employment opportunities in tourism, education, services, entrepreneurship and other areas that may be developed.

JNF-USA Central Arava Mission

At the beginning of March we hosted a JNF Mission whose purpose was assisting and promoting the Central Arava Regional Council development plan for 2020. The mission was conceived by Mr. Russell Robinson, JNF-USA CEO during one of his visits to the area when I presented him with the Council's profound need to promote regional development. Russell agreed to the

challenge and recruited Ms. Rebecca Fischer, who has past experience with issues concerning the development of the Negev while she led Makor Mission. We toured the area for several days introducing Mission participations to the many challenges we must deal with in agriculture, research, education, culture, the senior citizens, health, tourism and more.

I am hopeful that the partnership with JNF - KKL will lead us towards development of the area. During Mission tours in the Arava the personal encounters and brainstorming will often result in creative solutions to the difficulties the Council faces with regard to major regional development and doubling the population.

Zuzim

I'd like to put into historical perspective the establishment of new communities in the Negev in the 21st century. In the past, preceding and during the establishment of the State of Israel, the Moshav Movement would send Nahal groups to settle communities in the young state, and setup the foundations for a Moshav or Kibbutz. The first steps of staking out fields and

lifting a flag were done by these para-military units. Today, the procedure is vastly different and requires dealing with complicated statutory regulations and bureaucracy.

In 1995 Ariel Sharon, then the Minister of Infrastructure, during a visit to the area declared the establishment of Zuqim. It took a long nine years until construction commenced on the first houses. Today, the community includes 48 families residing on Zuqim and total of 75 plots already sold, which comprises 50% of the final 155 planned lots. The families who chose to build their house and raise their families are still suffering the labor pains of a new community 16 years after its establishment.

The community of Zuqim is composed mainly of young families that migrated from the center of Israel to build their home in the Arava and earn their living by managing tourist projects. Some are employed as teachers at the regional school and work in agriculture.

Zuqim is a young community, and as such has many children. Up until a year ago the community's kindergarten was located in a mobile structure. In September 2010 the

community inaugurated a new kindergarten that was built with generous assistance of the Ministry of Education and JNF-USA and the Sapphire Society.

Thanks to the new kindergarten two new families from Zuqim found employment as kindergarten teachers and once again we witness the great support of JNF-KKL in their steadfast assistance developing the area and attracting new families. For that we are greatly indebted to those organizations, their volunteers, donors and employees who support the State of Israel in their actions and projects.

We are very optimistic with regard to Zuqim's future as a leading eco-tourist destination in the Arava and in the whole of Israel. We still have much work ahead of us as far as diversifying employment possibilities in the area, along side agriculture and tourism, and are working diligently with our partners towards the all important goal of bringing new population to the Arava.

Sincerely yours,

Ezra Ravins
Head of the Council
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The new kindergarten in Zuqim. Photo by Michael (Levko) Lavie

Rabin Family - Moshav Ein Yahav

Interview with
Nesya and Shmulik Rabin,
by Keren Rotem

In November 1959 the first Nahal group settled Ein Yahav, at its former location west to the Arava highway. Half a decade later, against all odds and with plenty of hard work, sweat and determination the Central Arava today is one of Israel's leading agricultural areas. With 6% of the land of Israel and only 0.04% of the country's population, the region produces over 60% of the fresh vegetables exported from Israel and 10% of the cut flowers.

Nesya and Shmulik Rabin have been residents of Moshav Ein Yahav since 1970. Shmulik was actually part of the second Nahal Group to arrive in December of 1960. Shmulik, from Moshav Kfar Netter, was drafted to the Nahal group during his last year of studies in an agricultural school and completed his military service at the new settlement.

"At the time the Moshav Movement had just established Moshav Ram-On. Ein Yahav was next in line for settlement" says Shmulik. *"We were a group of graduates, mainly of*

agricultural schools from all over Israel. At first we were called for monthly gatherings that turned in to meetings every other week, including field trips, and a work camp in Ein-Gedi.

Eventually we were taken to Ein Yahav in its former location which is today a military base. Of our Nahal group of 35 youngsters, the boys were drafted to the army around August and went through basic training and the girls went through a shorter training course and joined us about 6 weeks later. We arrived at Ein Yahav on the 25th of December 1960".

Keren: "I guess you, like me, were also brought here in the winter thinking you will enjoy this incredible weather all year round?"

Shmulik and Nesya laugh and nod their heads.

Shmulik recalls *"We were brought by truck through Ma'ale Aqrabim Road (Scorpions Accent Road) with military escort. In those days that road was used only with an escort; cars weren't allowed to drive alone until the completion of the highway at about 1964-5.*

We arrived at Ein Yahav and immediately started

working in agriculture with the first Nahal group that was already here. It felt like the Wild West. We were completely disconnected from the rest of the country since there where no roads, telephones and no connection other than once every 3 months when we drove up north to visit our families.

The drive up north in a command car packed with vegetables, mainly onions, up the Ma'ale Aqrabim road lasted hours. During those years once in a while when we heard a car passing by on the dirt road, which today is the Arava high way, the entire settlement would wake up and shout 'a car, a car is passing by'".

"Did you ever reflect on what the Moshav will develop into?"

Shmulik: *"We were very young and didn't wonder so far in our thoughts and plans. No one really considered so far in to the future. Towards the release from the army, after 3 years, we were asked to come to a decision. Our Nahal Group had the option of staying in the Ein Yahav or move to Moshav Almagor (then Korazim) North of the Sea of Galilee. Half of the group did take the offer and moved there."*

Keren: "Why did you stay?"

Shmulik: "Why did we stay? Good question. I fell in love with the area, the desert, the distance, the isolation. I truly believed it a good place to live and loved what it had to offer. After 5 years in Ein Yahav I left for my studies and to travel the world."

Shmulik continues "Nesya and I met again and got married. After our wedding we had to choose where we would settle. We had the option of returning to my parent's farm in Moshav Kfar Netter, which Nesya wasn't in favor of".

Nesya: "Between moving to

Kfar Netter or to Ein Yahav I preferred Ein Yahav. By then Ein Yahav had already been relocated to its current location, streets and houses were built, it wasn't so Wild West as in its previous location. Never the less, life then was far from easy.

The seasons were shorter since in those days it was open field agriculture. We would work intensively in the fields, with the children, and any family that could come and stay during the season would come to help in the field. Although the distance from our families was hard to endure, since I was quite close to my parents, the social setting here was great."

Shmulik: "We were easily settled. We had our few friends and family. Nesya's sister had already been living here with her husband. I felt like returning home and being an equal partner from the beginning. I also loved being a farmer. It was a package deal, engaging in agriculture, being a part of the close community, succeeding financially and loving the surrounding desert.

If you didn't have all of the above you couldn't live here, and over the years some did leave. The fact that two of my children came back to live here with their families is a source of great pride".

The extended Rabin Family, Nesya and Shmulik in the middle with their 4 children, their spouses and six grandchildren. Photo by Michal Cohen-Malhi.





Keren: "Were you ever aware of the need to increase the population?"

Nesya: "Along the years we were always committed to assisting new families who joined the Moshav or even from other Moshavim in the Arava. Every new family was adopted by a veteran one, receiving professional counseling in agriculture and even partnering for the first one or two years until they stood on their own. It was very important for us that the general population of the area will grow."

Shmulik: "One of the most important issues over the years was increasing the population. It led to bigger schools, larger society for our children, better community and culture activities, more options for the younger generation, better services as a municipality."

Two decades ago, as our older children matured we were anxious whether or not Ein Yahav would end up like some of the Kibbutzim



up north. Today, living in a Moshav in central Israel is considered a life style. Two decades ago we were afraid that Ein Yahav will turn in to a Moshav of old people while the second generation stayed in Tel Aviv after the army and studies. We encouraged our children to study, get a degree and see the world and hoped they would choose to return on their own.

We were quite amazed when the first sons expressed their wishes to return with their young families and degrees and start up in agriculture. We were surprised and proud of the sense of continuity, especially considering the isolation of the area."

Keren: "Are you familiar with the Council's vision of doubling the population within a decade?"

Shmulik: "Amen, so be it. The big dilemma will be means of making a living."



We know that the crucial factor is water and the area's water limitation is the same throughout the country. I see that second generation families return at a pace of no more than 2-3 families a year because of water limitations. The markets are also limited and although the forecast foresees that the world's population will increase faster than it's ability to produce food I still believe the markets are limited. I would be very happy to see a significant increase in the population. I also think that it is dependent on government support and funding, establishment of clean industry and new communities where residents will engage in areas of livelihood other than agriculture."

The Rabin family residing in the Arava includes Nesya and Shmulik, their oldest daughter and husband with three children, and second son with his wife and two children. Their younger two daughters live in central Israel with their families.

Cohen Family - Moshav Tzofar

Interview with
Arza and Emanuel Cohen,
by Keren Rotem

Moshav Tzofar was established as a Nahal settlement on September 3, 1968. It was first located where Zuzim is today and moved to its current location in 1981. The full name is Beer Tzofar and is derived from the nearby Wadi Tzofar and also refers to one of the "friends" of Job (f.e. Job 2:11).

Emanuel and Arza both arrived to Tzofar at the beginning when it was still a Nahal settlement. Emanuel manages his fields with his oldest son and Arza today is a sculptor.

Tell me about your background and how you ended up in Tzofar.

Emanuel: "I'm 55 years old. I was born in Persia and was brought to Israel by my parents when I was 2 years old. We lived in Beer-Sheva until I was 13 and then I moved to Eshel HaNasi agricultural school and youth village, there I was in charge of the cowshed and always wished to have my own farm in the future. Towards graduation I joined, together with other agricultural school students, a Nahal Group formed by



Tzofar 1987, agriculture in open fields.

the Moshav Movement intended for either Moshav Eliad in the Golan Heights or Beer Tzofar in the Arava. The group eventually decided to settle at Tzofar because we thought it was true Zionism to establish a Moshav from nothing. Moshav Eliad already had a few settlers".

Arza: "I was born in Rehovot. My father, who was an academic and an ex-Nahal settler among the founders of Kibbutz SaSa and my mother, was from Moshav Kfar Yedidya (and a holocaust survivor). Although at home

Arza and Emanuel with their first born, who was also the first baby to be born on Tzofar



I absorbed Zionism and the importance of establishing new communities all over Israel we ended up moving from city to city due to my father's academic career".

Emanuel: "We were full of ideals and extremely motivated to settle the country. We never really discussed Zionism. My parents came to Israel out of Zionism and it was our state of mind and daily routine at the time. Then I met Arza who kept after me relentlessly".

So how did you meet?

Arza: "I had joined the army and arrived at Tzofar at the same time with the 3rd Nahal group. I spotted Emanuel and knew I would have a baby with him. Eventually we got closer and married. Our first born, Avioz, was the first baby to be born on Tzofar. He was everyone's baby. The whole atmosphere was

cooperation and sharing".

Emanuel: "I remember we had to vote among ourselves on the families who would get to move to the new location. We had no paper to vote on. One of the members said 'bring what ever paper we have'. Another one brought toilet paper and that's how we voted".

How did you find the Moshav's way of life?

Emanuel: "it was idealism. Waking up at 5 in the morning, working the land, producing food and returning home some times even at 11 at night".

Arza: "Although my father was among the founders of Kibbutz Sasa, my parents were academics and my entire life we lived in the city. Coming to Tzofar, working in the fields and being outdoors all day, together with the atmosphere of Zionism, the idea we're helping to build our young

country and living our life according to our ideals - I felt in heaven".

Emanuel: "We also had a lot of support from Moshav Ein Yahav. Amnon Navon guided on social issues and Uzi Gadish was our mentor for agriculture and farming. Even today we occasionally continue to consult with him".

Arza: "After we moved to our current location and were declared a Moshav, the landscaping was non-existent - we had no sidewalks or lawns. Each family was adopted by a family from Ein Yahav.

I remember one Friday, we had returned from a days work in the fields and the Ein Yahav families had come to Tzofar with cakes for us. We were very moved by the gesture".

Life in Tzofar in the 1980's.
Photos courtesy of the
Cohen Family



What did your families think about it?

Arza: "Emanuel, do you remember the first time your brother came to visit us? We came to pick him up from the bus stop. He was shocked it was so desolate and asked if we had running water in the showers".

Emanuel: "Yes, people were quite shocked. This was during the beginning of the 1980's. Most of us were from the city, very few in Tzofar came from other Moshavim or Kibbutzim. When our families came to visit they were absolutely shocked by our living conditions. For quite a while I was asked 'so, when are you planning to come back to the city?'".

Arza: "We used to take our guests to see Ein Yahav, which was far more developed, with sidewalks, public lawns and beautiful gardens. We wanted to show what will be achieved eventually."

Emanuel: "Nevertheless, the whole family, and friends from Eshel Hanasi, came during high season to help in the fields. Anyone who could come for the weekend and helped pick in the fields."

What about the second generation?

Arza: "We have three boys and a girl".

Emanuel: "Avioz, our eldest recently returned with his wife and child and was accepted as a returning son to the Moshav. His wife recently started to teach in the regional school".

How does that feel?

Emanuel: "Amazing! Amazing! Our second son also returned with his wife. He isn't engaging in agriculture, his dream was managing a horse farm. His wife, Orit, is head of Partnership 2000 program in the Central

Arava. They're waiting for a house to be built within the Moshav's expansion plan. The younger two are still in the army".

In my Editor's Column I mention Ben Gurion's speech. Do you have any comments on that?

Emanuel: "I completely agree. I think in the very near future, land in the Negev that won't be settled by Jews will be settled by Bedouins. The Israeli Government has to support and develop Jewish settlement of the Negev and the Arava. It doesn't have to be financial support but rather not make it difficult for the farmers, is good enough. Even during 'good' years for the agriculture industry, living here has its hardships. If the residents of the Arava will begin to feel it is too hard and not worthwhile they will choose not to. Most of the residents of the area are farmers, and those who are not, mostly





Interview with Yair Bilenski and Rinat Bashan, by Keren Rotem

engage in supplying a service to the agriculture industry. The agriculture industry is the backbone of the area, without it nothing else will hold the communities”.

Arza: *“the developing tourism industry is also dependant on the local agriculture and isn’t getting an easy break as well”.*

What do you think about the Council’s vision of doubling the population with in a decade?

Emanuel: *“With G-d’s help. When I first arrived at Tzofar, in the late 1970’s, we were told to establish the new Moshav away from the main road because in a year or two the train was planned to pass there. I’m still waiting for it”.*

Arza: *“I think it is a completely practical and positive plan. I also think that doubling the population isn’t enough. The Central Arava has to develop a community with urban dynamics. The Council has to develop Sapir to be at least 10,000 residents. With the right urban design it could happen. Basic services,*

employment possibilities, additional fields of agriculture, research and education, and everything a city can offer its residents”.

Emanuel: *“That will all happen after the train arrives”.*

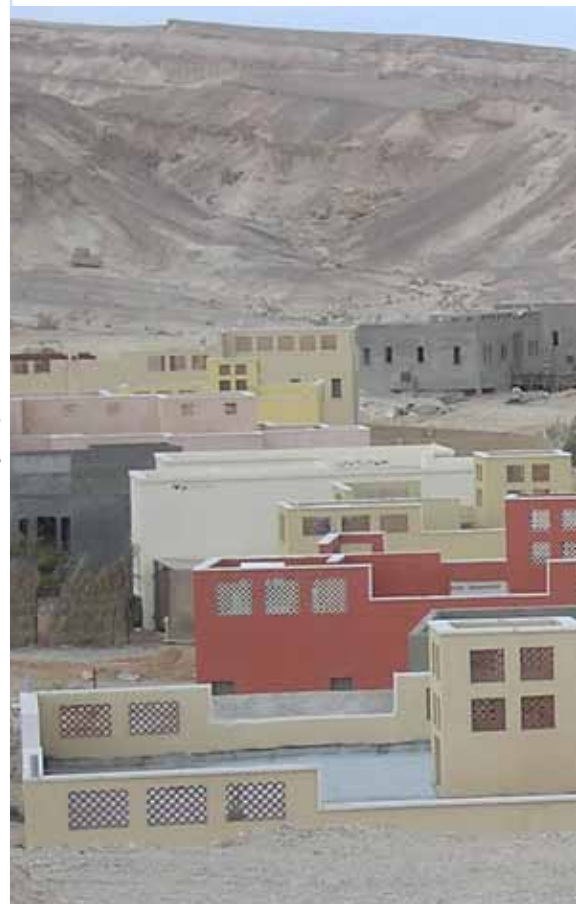
Arza: *“The area today has reached a point where it has to develop itself and rise above the current level. The growing population requires a minimum standard of Health services and with 10,000-15,000 residents we could easily have them”.*

Emanuel: *“I am full of confidence it will happen. I see our children. After the army they leave to live in Tel Aviv, study, spend a few years, raise a family and most of them express their wish to return to the Arava and raise their family here”.*

Arza: *“I feel very grateful for having the privilege of being a part of a group of people that established a community in Israel. It’s not something to be taken for granted”.*

Emanuel: *“Satisfaction. Nachat”.*

Zuqim, the newest community in the Council, was established only recently with placement of the corner stone during a ceremony in January 2004. Residents began to arrive in May of the same year. The concept behind Zuqim was formulated in 1996 by a group of people from all over Israel who shared one thing in common – making a change in their lives and occupation and realizing their dream to live in the desert. At about the same time, American woman, members of the Sapphire Society were looking for a meaningful project in which



Family -Zuqim

to invest. The Community was established with assistance from KKL-JNF (USA and Sweden) and the Sapphire Society. The driving idea behind Zuqim was establishment of a small community near to a tourism complex and run by enterprising family businesses. The community growth plan will be completed in 3 stages, and currently the community is at the 2nd stage with 48 families.

Rinat and Yair have been in Zuqim since May 2005. The couple lives in a mud-straw house built with their bare hands and they manage an ecological B&B site. They came to Zuqim with their two children after living several years in Tel Aviv.

Rinat: "I'm originally from Haifa and Yair is from Tel Aviv. We started the conventional life of studies, marriage, work and kids. I studied graphic design and worked in the field in advertising and Yair majored in business administration and was a business consultant.

But some how we never felt it was the right thing for us. We decided on going on a 'cleansing' trip to South America and India that lasted 7 months. Towards the end we came to the understanding that we want to disconnect ourselves from the consumerist way of life. With our return we moved to the rural town Karkur and begun establishing our own business of woodwork. We

both worked on handmade the wooden art and Yair managed the sales in fairs and stores in Tel Aviv".

Yair: "We began a process of returning to nature. We had a house with chickens and goats, we had our two children and were looking for a piece of land to be ours. Our original dream was establishing an isolated settlement in the western Negev but we felt it was a bit over our heads. We were looking for a land we could develop on and that could provide us and sustain our family".

How did you end up in the Arava?

Rinat: "We approached the Or Movement and were



referred to a group of several families looking to establish a new ecological community. At first we inquired about establishing the new community in the Gilboa area. Most of the group made it very clear that the Arava was out of limits for them because of the distance from the Center of Israel and the heat. Nevertheless, we decided to check it out and in 2003 we came here to check out a possible location for us to move to".

Yair: "At the time the Council had Paran B on the agenda, on paper, and Zuqim was at the preliminary stage of construction of infrastructure. Meanwhile the settlement group had dispersed but we were already taken with Zuqim as the place we chose to establish our home".

Rinat: "We were among the last ones to sign up for the first stage. We had to wait for 8 months until a mobile home was vacant for us to move to and start building our own. During the first 6 months Yair still drove once a week to Tel Aviv to sell the woodwork items we made. After that we realized it was just too much for us and we stopped and fully engaged in setting up our home and business".

You live in a mud and straw house how do your kids deal with it?

Rinat: "Ido, our oldest complains the house is too dusty. We see him in a decade or two becoming a high power attorney living the fast lane in Tel Aviv. Gil, our youngest, associates more with the family's way of life".

When ever I escort guests and visitors to Zuqim one of the first question people ask is if you are all connected to the Internet or have electricity. Do you have a computer in the house?

Rinat: "Yes, three".

Keren: "Three? You live in a mud-straw house with no tiles on the floor but you have three computers?"

Rinat: "Yes. In fact, today we actually decided on disconnecting from satellite TV. We feel we've been over drawn to it and are trying to regain the balance".

How did your families deal with your new way of life?

Rinat: "My father was shocked at first. As far as he was concerned I was still in some sort of a rebellious stage... it took him a good half hour to overcome his shock the first time he arrived. But one year later, after spending some time with us at the B&B he came up to us and told us he was very impressed".

Yair: "Our parents took Feldenkrais lessons to learn how to squat correctly. Although, we did

Yair and Rinat and their two children overlooking the Tzofar river



compromise, bringing in a bed base for my mother to sleep on during her visits”.

How do you relate with Ben-Gurion’s speech? Do you feel like a pioneer of the 21st century?

Rinat: *“I have dual feelings to that quote. On the one hand we are pioneers in a way, dealing with the difficulties of establishing a new community. But on the other hand I don’t completely relate to the Zionist aspect of it. We chose to come to Zuqim out of ideology, connecting to nature and to a place.*

I also think that today a new form of Zionism is surfacing - the middle class city people looking for a way to return to nature and a more simple way of life, in search of what’s lost in today’s hi-tech life style.



Photos of Zuqim courtesy of the KKL Archive.

I chose Zuqim because we aspire to values of nature, isolation, peace and to best suit my family”.

Are you aware of the Council’s vision of doubling the population? What do you think about it?

Rinat: *“Again, duality. On*

one hand we experience great difficulties because the population is so small.

On the other hand the area’s uniqueness is its sparse population and non-urban nature. The area does require further development, as always it’s all a matter of balance and not going too far”.



Galili Family - Moshav Idan

Interview with
Ofri and Roy Galili,
by Keren Rotem

Moshav Idan is the most northern Moshav of the Central Arava. It was established in 1980 and settled by new immigrant families mainly from the US and Canada. Today, out of the original group of families only one has remained. But over the last decade or so accelerated absorption of young settlers has boosted Idan to a population of over 65 families.

Ofri and Roy Galili came to live in Idan some 10 years ago from northern Israel. Ofri was born on Kibbutz

Gvat in Emek Y'izrael. Roy was born in Midreshet Sde-Boker. They met while Ofri was stationed during her military service in Sde Boker and Roy was in his last year of high school. They have four children, two of whom moved to the Arava and two were born here. Ofri is a psychologist, involved in a therapy program for the local kindergartens and in addition drives twice a week to the Ramat Negev region. Roy manages the farm.

Ofri: "We lived in central Israel for several years while studying and afterwards moved to Merkaz Hever which is a community similar to Sapir but in the

Jezreel Valley. We planned to provide community services to the neighboring Moshavim of the Ta'anakh region. Unfortunately, as a community it never succeeded to develop and wasn't socially united. During our 10 years of living there we never succeeded in recruiting enough residents to make a change and eventually felt we had to move elsewhere".

Roy: "During that time I had my own business - a metalwork studio - and felt I had already made the most of it and was looking for a change in my occupation as well. I have very good friends from the Arava with whom I served in the army.



I love the desert and was hoping all along to have the chance to move there”.

Ofri: “we started a process of looking for a new place to relocate to. I always loved the Negev and was pushing for the area of Ramat Negev which has great weather and beautiful scenery and isn’t so far away from the Center of Israel. Roy really wanted to move to the Arava while I was quite against it. I was stationed in Hatzeva for a very short time during my military service, over two decades ago, when there was no air conditioning and always remembered it as a traumatic experience. In addition, my entire family lives up north and I was reluctant to move so far away from them.

We had applied to Kadesh Barne’a and to Moshav Idan and were accepted to both. After thinking it all through we felt we would have a harder time succeeding financially in Kadesh Barne’a and eventually decided on Idan. We were accepted through the absorption process of the Jewish Agency, sold our house and business and moved to Moshav Idan”.

Roy: “All the years I really wanted to move to the Arava and even though I agreed to apply to Kadesh

Barne’a I really wished we would move to Idan”.

Keren: That’s a big move, selling your house and business, how was it in the beginning after the move?

Ofri: “I was very anxious for the first two years, which were far from easy, but we managed to pull through”.

Roy: “Yes, it wasn’t easy establishing the farm. I really feel a great sense of gratitude to the Reis family from Ein Yahav. Oren Reis is my friend from the army service and Yona Mazor, also from Ein Yahav and families from Idan as well, who guided us and helped us along the years”.

Ofri: “Other farmers really wanted to help us. It wasn’t just professional information but like they really went out of their way to help us get on our feet. This is something I think is very special here. Also, socially, people make an effort to help and support, especially with the difficulties in the beginning”.

How are you handling the heat?

Ofri: “The old folks always say that on September 15 there’s always a relief with the heat. I disagree. A



slight relief is felt maybe in mid October. It isn’t easy. I’m also still having a very hard time with the dust and the flies but nevertheless, I do think that with all the difficulties we managed to set ourselves a good life here”.

You had two kids already when you moved here. How did they handle the change?

Ofri: “Our oldest son didn’t find his place here. At the time, there were 7 other children here in his age group and out of them he made friends with one who moved away after one year with his family”.

Roy: “He did have other friends from his class that lived in Moshav Paran (50 minutes drive away) and had a hard time here socially”.

Ofri: “That is a great disadvantage of this area compared to other areas of Israel. Either you make friends at school or in your

neighborhood, in after school activities and youth movements. Here, there are very few children of the same age group, and either you get along with them or you don't. In addition, he was diagnosed as being gifted and felt he wasn't satisfied at the regional school. After two years he asked to move back north and today he lives with my parents in Kibbutz Merhaviva and doing very well there, coming home every other weekend and holidays".

What do you think about Ben-Gurion's speech "In the Negev the people and State of Israel will be tested"?

Roy: "I was born on Midreshet Sde-Boker. My parents were among the first pioneers to establish the community, yet I think my generation, including me, is cynical. We weren't molded during the age of establishing the state of Israel. Not for a moment do I scorn Zionism which I absorbed at home. But even so, it's not something I would speak about out loud as well. I came to the Arava in search of a better life, a change in life style and to reconnect to nature.

I think Ben Gurion's speech is still relevant today as it was 60 years ago I just think



Family photos courtesy of Ofri Galili.

the test has changed. Israel has to develop the Negev and itself while protecting its natural attributes. Israel, and the entire world for that fact, has gone through several incredible decades of development in all aspects with a huge price of damage to the environment, worldwide.

I think the biggest test for the settlement of the Arava will be to reconnect to nature as opposed to robbing the land of its treasures, its natural resources and water.

After that I hope you are an organic grower...

Roy: "Yes I am. I'm also a board member on the Moshav's management committee and considered one of the 'green' ones. As I said the settlement in the Arava is incredible but also has caused some damage to the environment. I'm aware of it and invest a lot of effort and resources to diminish the impact on the environment as much as possible. I'm also not a big believer in restoration projects although I'm very involved in the Acacia tree restoration project and planted many myself. Nevertheless, it will take dozens of years for the trees to fully grow and overcome the ecological damage".

How do you feel about the Council's vision of doubling the population?

Ofri: "I personally think it won't be possible unless it is based on non agricultural development".

Roy: "I agree. I think the Council has to develop industries, hi-tech, tourism anything that won't consume the region's resources. I believe that harmony with nature and ecology has to dictate the direction of development".

Bloom Family - Moshav Idan

Interview with
Niva and Eyal Bloom,
by Keren Rotem

Niva and Eyal Blum are also new residents of Moshav Idan. Eyal was born on Moshav Hatzeva in 1974 and today is the General Manager of the Arava Development Company and Niva was born and raised in Ra'anana. Eyal's parents moved to Hatzeva in 1973 from Kibbutz Ein Gev and had a rough start. His father was sent to Sinai during the Yom Kippur war leaving his mother pregnant with a small infant to take care of the fields. Niva and Eyal met during a concert show in

the desert and got married at the lookout point above the Idan Reservoir in 2004.

Niva: "I was in love with the area ever since my military service during which I was a hiking guide in the south. It was somewhat of a natural course to move here after we got married."

When we met we were both in the midst of our doctorates in the Weizmann Institute located in Rehovot. Eyal in Plant Science and I began my doctorate in Molecular Biology. We moved to Hatzeva after completing our degrees and our first son Be'eri was born. Eyal was accepted as

Moshav Hatzeva's Manager. In 2009, our daughter Yaheli was born, and we were accepted as members on Moshav Idan in 2010".

Keren: Eyal, was it always clear to you, that you would find a wife and return to the Arava?

Eyal: "Finding a wife no, returning to the Arava yes. When I met Niva the first thing I told her was 'we will live in the Arava, are you in for it?'"

Niva: "From all the stories Eyal and his friends and parents share I understand they all had an incredible childhood here. Eyal's entire





"Mazal Tov" ploughed into the dry Idan reservoir by the couple's friends on their wedding day

class, except for maybe two or three, all returned to live here with their families. They're all involved in agriculture, some helping on their parents farm, some starting their own farm in Hatzeva and a few, like us, were accepted to Moshav Idan to establish our own farm".

Is there any difference between the two Moshavim?

Niva: "I'm very satisfied here. As I said before, I really like the area and even more so I'm loving it in Idan. In Hatzeva every one knows Eyal since birth while on Idan we started out equal as a young couple. I also appreciate the mutual social support, when moving in to the new house, after child birth and while establishing the new

farm. The community's support is amazing. What's still very hard is the distance from my family and the long drives to Beer-Sheva twice a week for work".

What do you think about the Council's vision of doubling the population?

Niva: "I'm very much for it. I think the more people the region will have, the more employment possibilities and jobs will develop, more resources for services, more friends for my children, better schools, more of everything. I am very lucky being able to work as a researcher at the Dead Sea Arava Science Center. Although it is strenuous driving twice a week to Beer-Sheva it's also very significant for me

to 'step out' of our isolated surroundings and meet other people in an academic environment. I also know there are quite a few other residents here, returning sons and daughters and their spouses, with degrees who hope for a job in research and sooner or later the area will have to be able to offer such positions to a growing demand.

In the past everyone in the region was a farmer, the husbands, wives and children in every spare moment during the seasons. It is vital for the area to create alternative work places in research in the Arava both in agricultural R&D and the scientific one".

What is your research about?

Niva: "I'm completing my post-doctorate, in Ben-Gurion University in Beer-Sheva, about the involvement of the immune system in degenerative diseases such as Parkinson and Alzheimer. I established a Zebra Fish laboratory for medical research in the scientific R&D in Yair Station".

Eyal: "First of all I think that the most beautiful thing that happened in the Arava is its biggest problem today, which is agriculture.

The entire area is stuck in the agricultural concept and engages solely in it. Everything centers around agricultural expansion and growing peppers. I think we have to start thinking about what's going to be our next move.

Agriculture, in the Arava and around the world, is going through globalization. Big industrial farms will swallow the small family ones. The area has to find other employment alternatives in the Arava. Other than agriculture and some tourism we have nothing else to offer. The Council has to attract industries to the area. The Central Arava has a 400 dunam industrial area which is deserted. Nowhere else in Israel is there any space left for industrial areas, certainly not left abandoned.

We also have a magnificent agricultural R&D and a scientific R&D that has to be developed and leveraged. When discussing the Council's vision of doubling the population it has to refer to non-agricultural population. Agriculture is limited in resources: water, land, working hands especially foreign workers. The vision for doubling the population includes an agricultural master plan, which will be



Family photos courtesy of Niva Bloom.



eventually completed and a non-agricultural community expansion of 120 housing plots for each Moshav (600 families all together) as well as developing Sapir from 140 families to 1,500. All these families will have to have work places and be self sustained”.

What do you think about Ben-Gurion’s speech?

Eyal: “I don’t agree with it, I don’t think the future of the state of Israel will be tested in the Negev. I think it has no meaning today”.



Niva: “There is no doubt that it is harder living here because of the difficulties and the distance. On the other hand it is easier making a meaningful mark where there is a need and shortage”.

Eyal: “One amazing thing about this area compared to other areas over Israel: Most of the people who grew up here wish to return and raise their families here. I think no other area in Israel has it in the scale we have. Never the less, I think sometimes it is easier establishing something than continuing it. In the past, while establishing new communities the whole country used to pitch in and help. Today, we are taken for granted by the government and have to be very creative in leveraging the area towards development. I think the Arava’s second generation has a crucial role in the development of the area. I’m quite curious to see what will turn out in one or two decades.”

Niva: “I wish for my children a free choice from a wide range of possibilities and equal opportunities in relation to other children in the center of Israel, where to live, what to study and what to do when they’ll be older. Anyway, I hope they’ll be happy and healthy”.

Snakes!!

Everyone is afraid of snakes, but H. (his full name is withheld by the editorial board) has a particular deep seated fear of them.

The Desert Horned Viper or as we used to wrongly call it - the Field’s Horned Viper, is a rare venomous snake. It feeds on rodents, who are quite rare in the Arava region. During the first years of settlement in the Arava, the mouse population increased near our homes and fields, which in turn attracted snakes.

In the early mornings, we would often spot a viper in the sandy fields. This snake lurks, waiting for its prey, with its body hidden in the sand and only its eyes and nostrils peeping out. In many cases, we would follow its unusual tracks in the sand. This snake advances by springing forward, leaving an S shaped mark on the ground.

The Biological Institute located near Tel Aviv University offered a 100 Pound reward (a huge sum then) for each captured Desert Viper. The Institute used the snakes to research and produce anti-venom serum. With promise of

Amnon Navon's column



A smile worthy of a hundred pounds

a nice reward and the important goal at hand, (we were, after all, the target audience for the antidote) we provided the Institute with as many snakes as possible.

We designed hand-made snake-hunting devices, such as a sealed container from a one meter long pipe attached with a double string to create a lasso. When we detected a snake we held it to the ground by a stick, and then pulled it through the lasso head first. After the lasso is tightened, the snake is safely placed in the sealed container.

However whenever my neighbor H. would detect a snake, he would quickly call me and watch my actions from a safe distance.

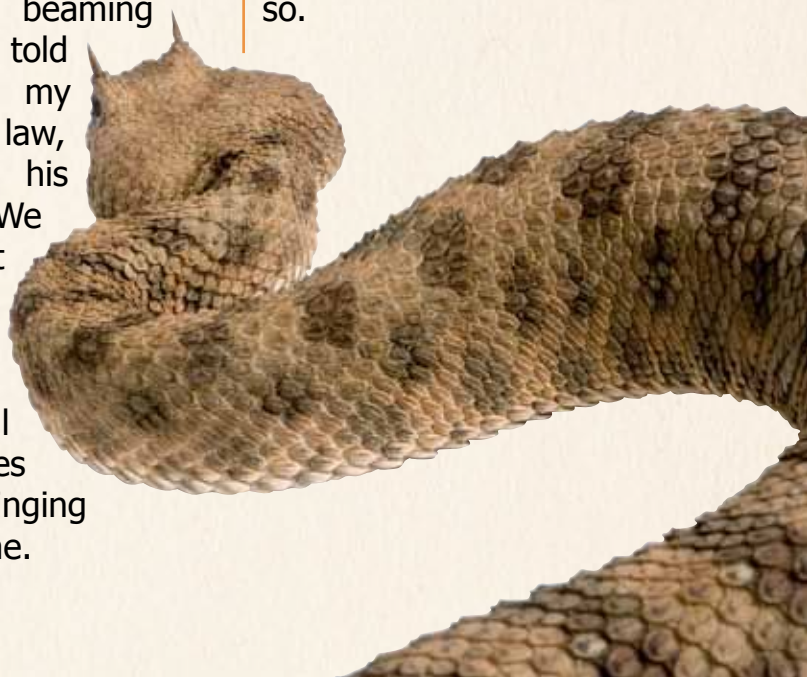
This is how he learned the technique. One day H. came upon a Desert Viper when I was not around. He bravely snared the snake and placed it into a plastic container, using my technique. With all due respect and care, he brought the container home and hung it from the roof of his garage above his tractor.

Later H. beaming with pride told Shmulik, my brother in law, and I about his experience. We could not bear the thought that H. was so successful hunting snakes and infringing on our income.

One hot afternoon, with everyone at home taking their noon siesta and no one around, Shmulik and I sneaked into H.'s backyard. We replaced his snake and plastic container with a similar empty one but with a hole punctured in its side. We then took an iron spring and molded it to an "S" shape. We used the spring to create "Viper prints" in the sand around his tractor. Our mission accomplished, we quickly left the scene.

When H. woke up from his afternoon nap and saw the punctured container, no snake, but snake prints all around the tractor, he jumped and ran away. It took him two weeks before he dared to approach his tractor again.

H. does not mess with snakes anymore. He's quite afraid of them and rightfully so.



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