

Hi everyone,

First of all, I want you to know that WE at UCLA, are the leaders in college sport in many fields, nationally. WE are really the greatest. You can understand that my contribution to this "WE" thing is close to zero but Amnon (my flat mate) claims that I should feel more involved and see all the UCLA glorious triumphs as mine as well. "Az ani shutaf"!

Here in LA there are two rival universities that hate each other for 60 years: UCLA and USC (University of Southern California - a private institute). We went to a women volleyball game between them that took place here in the outstanding stadium of UCLA. The UCLA team is no. 1 in USA. UCLA indeed won, but after a very tough game. We sat beside USC fans. I'm telling you - they really hate our guts (and I guess that we hate them too). There's no point in trying to describe the cheers from the cheer leaders, the fans and the huge electric screens; amazing! But that was nothing comparing to "THE BIG GAME". This "derbi" football game between USC and UCLA took place on Saturday 2 weeks ago in the stadium of LA. It was the talk of all southern California. TV, radio, newspapers - as though there's no famine or wars in the world! We had to suffer here in the campus the noisy trainings of the orchestra. I went to take a haircut 2 hours before the game, in a very big barber-shop here in Westwood (the neighborhood of UCLA, where I live). You should hear those live discussions there. Even at the food store, the newspaper store - everywhere - the big game was the issue! We defeated those bastards!!! That night, Westwood looked like Rio de Janeiro in February (well, not quite, but I like this metafore...). By the way - in the same day, there was another "BIG GAME", a football derbi, in California. It was between Berkely and Stanford (the former won). However, "our" game was in a totally different league, as UCLA and USC are much better in sport than Stanford and Berkely -- so I was informed.

I now realize how different are Northern and Southern California. The north simply hates the south, mainly because the south takes a lot of water from the north. When I visited friends in Stanford, near San Francisco, I got a lecture from the local natives about "why should California be divided into two states". The "war" between SF and LA (the unofficial capitols of the two parts of California) expresses itself mainly in electing the governor. In fact, it looks to me that LA has a terrible image all over the USA: You should see the overwhelming new movie of Altman - "Short Cuts". More than 3 hours, no plot, but fascinating. LA is described there as living hell (as it was in other recent films, such as "Falling Down", "Grand Canyon" or "The Boys in the Hood"). The economic situation is bad and people are moving to other states. Since I live in a wonderful area, have a well paying job and hardly use my car, I don't feel those many bad things that LA has to offer.

I visited the North twice in the last month. In the first visit I flew to San Jose (the center of the Silicon valley) and met Gadi - a friend who just moved to Stanford from New York University and is very happy about that. I was very much impressed by the amazingly beautiful campus of Stanford. We returned to LA in a slow drive along beautiful route no. 1. In my second visit, during Thanksgiving, we were joined by Gilad - a friend who just recently moved from New York to Bar Ilan (and isn't happy about that at all). We spent 4 days in charming San Francisco and the area. My post-weekend depression after returning to LA lasted for 3 days!!! The north is charming and I know there so many Israeli friends who work in either of the two famous universities or in the high-tech industry. However, my last weekend here in LA proved that I should feel very lucky. I live in one of the most charming neighborhoods there is: Westwood is small, clean, quiet and has a beautiful Mexican architecture - white buildings, red roofs, exotic shapes to some of the buildings and those tall palm trees all over. There are about 20 cinemas here, theaters, concert halls, dozens of coffee houses, restaurants, fashion stores, book stores and hundreds of students in the streets.

On Saturday I walked (5 minutes), with Bach's *Matteus Passion* playing in my ears and people looking strangely at me (since I also sang with the music), to the Armand Hammer museum (a very good one) and then to a movie ("The Piano"). At night I went with a friend from USC (Sarah) to a Hanuka party at the "Hillel center". It looked like a disaster at the beginning, but it developed into a great party with great music and dances. The next day we went to a breakfast followed by another movie and then a visit to the Israeli quarter in LA (like china-town, but with Israelis). After a good Jachnon, Melawach and Yemenite soup - I took her home to USC area. That area looks worse than your nightmares. Helicopters are flying in the sky and sometimes they even shoot escaping criminals!!! Oh, how I appreciate now my good luck.

So LA has a lot to offer (it's also the 75th year of the LA-philharmonic, Glenn Close is going to be Norma Desmond in Lloyd Weber's version of "Sunset Blvd", and I have tickets to a recital of the best pianist in the world here in my own neighborhood). Besides, the weather here is dreamy: Sunny all day with warm temperatures at daytime and cool at night. How can you compare that to the constant clouds, rains and freezing temperatures of the North?

And with that I'll conclude.
Hanuka Sameach,
Tamir