

Dear everyone,

Five weeks elapsed since I left Israel and it seems so much longer. This time I left Israel with Dafna (who is now, by the way, "officially" on my mailing list). We were both headed to the US, I - returning to LA, and she - going to Seattle for a two year expert program in dentistry. We decided to have a short lull in the hectic race that we were conducting separately, in the company of Ron and Shlomit in Lausanne, Switzerland. Yes, our world is a small village and some of us are scattered all around that village. Ron's story is a one year business school in that quiet and pleasant town on the borders of Lake Geneva. This weekend that we had the four of us was the right thing: so great, too short, amazingly expensive and in short - "douz points". Dafna and I were very lucky: we found Ron, as planned, at 6PM in MacDonald's restaurant in front of "le gare", 3 hours after he submitted a final project and just before his first free weekend in a long time. Hence, we could enjoy 100%-Ron-n-Shlomit. On top of that, the lousy weather that welcomed us changed in the weekend to a perfect one. Who could ask for more?

I was happy to return to LA and to be welcomed by Sharon and Tracy - two of my best friends here. I had one day of post-trip depression, but it was over very fast. Although I missed LA and wanted to return, this "diki" is simply inevitable. Besides, the improvement in the weather (from gloomy to sunny) and the great things that LA offered and I took - all these helped to soften the landing back. One of the great things that I enjoyed shortly after my return was a baseball game in The Dodgers stadium with Sharon, my patient sport-theory-instructor, and a friend of his from Israel. With all the terms that I learnt that evening, doing The Wave and singing The Seventh Inning Stretch (some baseball-related traditional rituals of the American tribe) - it was the almost ultimate American experience (I say almost, because I had a hamburger rather than a Dodgers-hot dog, something that, according to Sharon, is the politically correct thing to eat in a baseball game).

Two weeks ago I embarked on a trip to Chicago and New York. The reason for my trip (as though I need reasons...) was a talk that I gave at Northwestern university in Evanston, just north to Chicago. The beautiful campus which is situated along the shore of Lake Michigan, was almost empty of faculty members but full of graduating students in black gowns and their proud parents. Strangely, it reminded me very much of the graduating ceremony from "Bad Ehad". The weather was sunny and hot and people took advantage of the beautiful shore of the lake just behind the main restaurant building. The lake looks like a sea (goes for ever, waves, white sand) and the view of downtown Chicago in the south horizon is exciting. But not as exciting as being there. Chicago was all that I expected: a huge and busy metropolitan (surprisingly clean and safe), beautiful, amazing architecture, loads of culture (The Symphony Orchestra, The Art Institute, University of Chicago - all are truly world famous), lots of fun (festivals and more festivals), good and unique cuisine (Chicago pie pizza, for one example) and local-patriot people. I was lucky to meet in the university a professor who just moved there from Madison; since we got along fine and he was also eager to see the city, I enjoyed his company and the free rides. Also my friend Gilad from Israel was in the neighborhood so, altogether, I had a great company throughout my stay there.

I also liked the Grant Park festival which started in the weekend I was there. Grant Park is one of Chicago's central parks and it hosts every summer free concerts. Like in LA's Hollywood Bowl summer festival, people combine the music with a stylish picnic: blanket on the grass, straw baskets filled with gourmet sandwiches, cooled wine and elegant silverware and glasses. By some unwritten law, the distance between the blankets is at least 1 meter and people actually listen to the music and don't talk! With the nice evening weather, the illuminated skyline (dominated by Sears Tower - the tallest in the world) and the music - that is a true pleasure.

A few words about the Chicago architecture: it is not only pioneer, powerful and beautiful - it is even moving (emotionally, I mean). An example? The Chicago Tribune building: a Gothic sky-scraper built in the 1920s as "the most beautiful office building in the world". So, for one thing, it is indeed beautiful. Another thing is its outer wall, in which the architects have placed real pieces from famous buildings and places from all around the world and the US: The Chinese wall, Notre dam cathedral, David Tower, The Yellowstone park and many others (around 100). I found this idea marvelous.

And then came New York that was mainly for social purposes and less for math. New York is New York, but it is even more so in the summer when the heat wave hits, blond girls stand atop subway stations and expose beautiful legs while their white skirts are blown in the wind, and the entire city is swept in festivals. I, by mere coincidence, found myself in a jazz festival in Brynte Park (on 5th avenue and 42nd street) where the host was Bill Cosby and the band played electrifying Latin jazz which kept everybody moving. But the real story belongs to Harlem - the hard neighborhood in upper Manhattan "from whose bourn no traveler returns" (wow, how much I waited to use that sentence from Hamlet's "To be or not to be". Finally!). I decided to check that myself. So last Friday I took a guided tour of Harlem. The bus was filled with 5 people (including the driver, the guide and myself). So what did we see? Some ugly houses and poor people, that's true, but also the largest Gothic cathedral in America (still under construction) with arrogant open-tailed peacocks wandering in its garden, a wonderful Spanish palace with famous pictures of Goya and El Greko, charming streets with designed houses, a huge mansion with a big peaceful garden in which one can totally forget about the city around, and - most importantly - non black people in the streets who didn't seem to be out of context. We investigated the guide whether he's hiding the real Harlem. He gave not very convincing answers but, at least, we were convinced that it is safe to return again and that there are many reasons to do so. So I did. The next day I dragged Eddie who lives in NY more than 5 years and never stepped into Harlem. He was extremely surprised. The day after, Sunday, we went to "Mount Nebo" church for a Gospel service. Like in the movies - big mamas dressed all in white and old daddies with elegant black-n-white suits stood in a chorus, moving from side to side, and praised The Lord in soul music. Hallelujah!

That's all for now.

Lehishtame'a,

Tamir