

Birmingham Girl Brings Touching Message From Russian Jewry: 'We Shall Meet in Israel'

Because she made a promise, a pretty Birmingham girl is ready to tell the pitiful story of Russian Jewry to whoever will listen.

Karen Goren, 17, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Goren of Stony River Dr., was in Russia this summer on a six-week study tour of Eastern Europe. One of three Jewish students out of 44 teen participants in the Foreign Study League tour, Karen was profoundly impressed with what she saw and heard while visiting the Leningrad and Moscow synagogues on free time.

Although she met no Jewish young people ("because the young people don't go to synagogue"), Karen learned of the intense feeling for Jewishness among the older generation on her brief visits to the two synagogues.

Prior to her trip, Karen, a student at Bloomfield Hills Andover High School and a congregant from Shaarey Zedek Hebrew school, had only a passing interest in the problems of Soviet Jewry. But following her summer experience, "I'd like to speak about what I saw. Only pressure will help them now."

Following are excerpts from Karen's Leningrad and Moscow "diary":

"Our venture to the only synagogue in Leningrad was not as difficult to find as expected. The service extended from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. (Saturday). We were welcomed as soon as we stepped in the door and were directed where to go. Men came up to us, curious as to where we were from. They were also surprised that some of those who came with us were not Jewish. 'Why should they be interested?'"

"There were roughly 150 people attending the Orthodox service. No young people were present, and the average age of the congregation was 65. I met a red-haired woman from Baku, where there are various nationalities in that section of Russia. She said that Bar Mitzvas are rare. The youngsters are not interested and, therefore, do not attend. It is through no fault of the parents, because they keep a Jewish home."

"The men wore either caps or hats, but there were few yarmulkas. Some of the men did not have a talis. After speaking to . . . some of the non-Jewish portion of my group, I found out that few young people attend church services either. . . . The Baku woman said only the older people attend services except on holidays when everyone comes and they dance in the streets."

"Some of the women spoke Yiddish. Their prayer books were worn and tattered. One woman covered hers with newspaper. When we arrived, the service seemed slightly disorganized. Everyone was walking around forming separate groups to converse or pray. About an hour later, they all took their places and held a familiar home service. (The synagogue had been built at the time of the Czars. The altar was lit up electrically with a huge Star of David)."

"The Baku woman was interested to know if my parents were religious and if they keep the Sabbath. I told her of the Russian Jewry protest gatherings and of Hebrew and religious classes we take at home. She seemed to be glad that I could read and write Hebrew. They were interested in my mezuza. Later, a man was very eager to show me his, which he wore hidden underneath his shirt. They are not familiar with mezuzas as ornate as mine (hand-made in Israel)."

"The feeling I received was not distant, as is felt with most Russian people. Instead, I felt as though I belonged to one, universal people. Ten per cent of the Leningrad population is Jewish, and

yet 150 people attended services this Saturday morning of our visit. Judaism is sure to die out in Russia, maybe as near as the next couple decades. When the old people die out, so will they take Russian Judaism to their graves."

"The congregation for the Saturday morning service in Moscow was approximately 400 people. . . . The women were in the balcony, and the men on the main floor. More men wore hats or caps; yarmulkas are rare. The prayer books were extremely worn, yellow with age, with crumbling pages."

"The service started at 10 a.m. and went to 12:30 p.m. In the middle of the service, a couple of tourist women took four flash pictures with their cameras. At the end of the prayer, the rabbi (Yehuda Leib Levin) turned around and blew up at the women. It disturbed the service greatly. He said something to the effect, 'In New York you can use your cameras but not in our service.'"

"There are 700,000 Jews in Moscow. All Soviet citizens carry identification cards, but only the Jews and gypsies have special stamps on their cards. When asked why, they say it's because Jews and gypsies are considered nationalities with no homeland. . . ."

"Things began to change for the Jews beginning about three or four years ago when Russia opened her doors to tourists. Religious people came to see what was actually going on over there. Jews didn't even have matzo for Passover, but with demands and outside pressures, the situation has changed."

"The average age of the congregation was again 65-70 years. There are three synagogues in Moscow, one main one in Moscow and two in the suburbs. The two in the suburbs have no rabbi. During the service, when the rabbi walked around with the Torah, those who did not have a prayer shawl kissed the Torah itself. The men at the end of the service folded their shawls up in newspaper tied with string and carried it under their arms if they did not have a talis bag. The synagogue wasn't much to look at from the outside but was beautiful inside. It was decorated in gold and green."

"After the service, everyone wanted to talk to us and ask us questions. One of the girls who came with us was not Jewish, and they again wanted to know why she is interested. Everyone asked me if I spoke Hebrew or Yiddish. I told them I could read and write it, but only spoke a few

phrases. It was then that I wished I had a better education in the language. . . ."

"On our way out, there were four or five men in particular who wanted to talk to us. One man stopped a couple girls in our group to give addresses of relatives at home whom he wanted us to contact. It must be difficult to write relatives living in the U.S., because this was not the first time we were approached like this."

"We walked with the men to a nearby park and sat down to talk. The particular man with whom I spoke must have been in his 50s. He told us tomorrow the secret police will ask them what we talked about. He and three of his friends spent 10 years in prison because they applied for visas to go to Israel. He was not allowed to live in Moscow and was there, Saturday, visiting. He asked me why I wished to study the Russian language, 'the language of beasts.' 'Why do you want to come to Russia, it's a prison.' Everyone wants to know why I haven't been to Israel or when I am going. 'Why don't you go, we can't. Don't come to Russia, go to Israel.'"

"They asked why I didn't speak Hebrew fluently. He said that we have books in the United States and I should use them. They asked why we brought no books for them. We tried to explain that it was against the law to bring religious materials into Russia. We told them that things had been sent, but the government does not forward it to them. He asked us to go to our Jewish agency at home and tell them they need books. This man has never been outside of Russia, never seen how free countries live, yet he knows Russia is a prison. These men were the only Russian citizens I spoke to who said things against their country."

"The synagogue is not for us to pray in, but for you and tourists.' He meant that it is a front to show tourists that Russia allows Jews to worship."

"He also asked: 'And please, will you remember when you are in Israel, get down on your knees and kiss the ground for me and my friends. Will you remember?' 'With the words 'We shall meet in Israel,' he, reluctantly, left us and went to the airport with his friends to see off two other friends who were going to Israel.'"

Karen told The Jewish News that the Russian Jews with whom she

spoke wanted the young people to sing Hebrew songs in the park, and there, despite the obvious dangers, the American Jewish teen-agers and their Russian elders sang together. She came to The Jewish News with her story, said Karen, "because I owe them something."

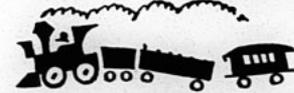
But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.—Psalm 37:11.

Calling All Scouts!

Boy Scout Troop 135 sponsored by the men's club of Cong. Bnai David is now holding its 33rd annual fall recruiting drive. All boys 11 years and older are invited. The troop meets 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays at Bnai David.

Jules Fayne

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Synagogue Youths Bring Rabbi Levin's New Year Greeting

NEW YORK (JTA)—Rabbi Yehuda Leib, chief rabbi of Moscow's Central Synagogue, sent his New Year's greetings to American and Canadian Jewry through a group of teen-agers who visited him in Moscow. The group has just returned from a trip to the Soviet Union, Romania and Israel under the auspices of the United Synagogue of America.

The 76-year-old rabbi, whose visit to the United States a year ago provoked a storm, expressed warm appreciation for the visit of the youngsters who were led by Rabbi Arthur A. Chiel of Woodbridge, N.Y. He described the meeting as a gladdening encounter.

The Institute for the Study of Hebrew Poetry was founded in Berlin by Salman Schocken in 1930. Its purpose was the study and publication of medieval Hebrew poetry. It moved to Jerusalem in 1934.

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