

My 'Life' in Israel by Harry Friedland

I have a virtual life in a virtual country. I wish I could get a passport for it.

This is a thought that I have been meaning to share for some time now but never seem to have got round to.

At this stage of my life, all things considered, and despite the fact that I am one of the remnants of a dying Jewish community in South Africa I think that I know more people in Israel than anywhere else (there should be a category of passport for a "virtual citizen"). If I think of all the years, and all the goodbyes, and all the tender feelings, and all the anxiety and concern that I have put in to focusing on those people and that country then passport or no passport, I jolly well am an Israeli citizen. I speak the language, follow the news, talk to friends there (and about them to mutual friends elsewhere). I know the roads, the streets, the beaches, the shopping centres, the monuments, and all and all. I can see them in my mind when I talk about them. I have a great fondness for the land, the people, and my religion.

People say that the internet is a many-faceted thing and there's both good and evil in it. Of course that's true. But some people find travel to be a mission, and to them it's a blessing. So many people would simply have disappeared out of my life - but I can now take them with me wherever I go. I have not lost them. They are in my laptop and in my phone. It's not perfect, but it's OK. In the last month or two I have made a campaign out of hunting down old friends and colleagues and contacting them.

There was a time when I had a very perverse attitude to friends and family who emigrated. My feeling was, well, they didn't want to be here, they have cut themselves off, I'll never see them again - so what's the point? - And on the odd occasions when they wrote (do you remember those cheap airmail letters made out of thin blue paper which were actually the letter and the envelope and the stamp all-in-one?) - I just used to ignore them until they stopped writing. I was such an idiot.

But nevertheless, I managed to track them down and made amends - going right back to my school years! And, lo and behold, they forgave me, and now we communicate.

All except for one guy. And for the life of me I cannot track him down. I'm going to name him here: he was Barry Glaser, from Oranjezicht. He lived up the road from me and we were truly best, best buddies. But in 1969 (when we were in Standard 8 (grade 10) his family emigrated to Israel. He was a very bright boy, a top-marker. We actually corresponded quite energetically for a while after he left (the last time I ever did that with anyone) and then one day I thought,

screw this, we're never going to see each other again, it's over. And I stopped writing. He wrote a few angry letters to try to lure me into action but I didn't bite.

And then he stopped, and I never heard from him again.

And then one day I heard that he was one of the pilots who flew for the Israeli Air Force in the famous Entebbe Raid, but I never took the trouble to find out whether that was true. And then he was gone. I have searched high and low. No-one can tell me anything. At this point it is even possible that he may have died.

And then ten years later it become possible to access this wondrous thing, "The Internet" from one of those early desktop computers. And two years later I got my own first computer and I commenced my own search. But Barry - was gone..

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