



# Going to School in Israel

by Gina Hagler

**D**id you ever wonder what it would be like to live in Israel? Gabriel Stuart-Sikowitz had the chance to find out when his family moved there for his father's rabbinical program. They lived in the Bayit Vegan (buy-YEET ve-GAHN) community of Jerusalem. The first homes there were built almost 100 years ago. Bayit Vegan is known mainly for its many synagogues and dozens of religious schools, but several parks, a post office, and many wild pomegranate trees also are found there.

Gabe's family lived in a typical apartment. Lots of screenless windows allowed breezes to blow through, and the floors were made of stone. The windows and floors were designed to work together to keep the apartment at a comfortable temperature in the desert heat. Gabe's family had a washing machine, but no dishwasher or clothes dryer. Like most people in Bayit Vegan, Gabe's family hung their laundry outside to dry.

The school day in Israel has about the same number of hours as in the United States, but classes are held six days a week. Schools are in session Sunday through Friday. Students attend one of four

types of schools. State schools are like public schools in the United States. Students study math, language skills, science, history, Jewish studies from a cultural and national perspective, art, and physical education. State religious schools have the same basic subjects as the state schools but include daily prayers, accelerated Jewish studies, and religious observances. Arab and Druze schools provide an education in Arabic and focus on the religion, history, and culture of the Arab and Druze populations. Private schools of various types are also available. In all types of schools each year, a special topic of national importance is studied in depth. Some of the topics have included the Hebrew language, democratic values, immigration, peace, and industry.

Gabe attended sixth grade at a Tali (TAL-lee) school. These private religious schools incorporate family education and **egalitarian** religious observances into the state-school format. School was different in many ways from his public school back in suburban Maryland. Instead of walking to school or taking a school bus, he took a small van to school each day. He says, "There were 30 to 35 kids to a class. And the students called their teachers by their first names. The teachers felt more like big brothers or sisters than my teachers at home." His school

did not offer band or instrumental music, but after school the students played soccer or basketball,

Something that is **egalitarian** promotes equal rights or privileges for all.



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took classes in dance or karate, or headed for home to do their homework, just as in the United States.

The same teacher presents the majority of subjects at a Tali school. (The exceptions to this are physical education, art, Hebrew, and English.) Back in the United States, Gabe was used to changing classrooms and having a different teacher for each subject. Tali students bring lunch from home and eat in their classroom; the school does not have a cafeteria. For art, the older students go to a separate facility to work on various projects involving pottery, photography, and painting. As Hebrew is the official state language, all the teachers speak Hebrew to the students. However, "everyone learned English from third grade on," Gabe says, and this requirement made his job of communicating with his new classmates a lot easier.

The biggest difference Gabe found



**Basketball is popular in Israel, too. Schoolboys might learn basketball as part of their physical education. INSET: Gabe Stuart-Sikowitz enjoyed his time in Israel.**

between his Tali school and a U.S. school was that, because Judaism is the state religion, the schedule and holidays revolve around the Jewish calendar and beliefs. Most schools close early on Friday because the Jewish Sabbath begins on Friday evening and continues until after sundown on Saturday. Many businesses also close early on Friday, and families use the extra time to prepare themselves and their homes for the Sabbath meal and observance. Also, many of the holidays celebrated at Gabe's school were different from the ones celebrated in the United States.

Gabe's year in Israel was filled with good experiences. He found that he felt

safe, despite the violence he'd seen on the news. He could walk to lots of places on his own, and the people he passed were friendly. Many asked if he was an American and thanked him for coming to Israel. He says, "American news emphasizes the bad news about Israel. They don't have enough good news. It wasn't a war zone there. Israel was very nice." One of the most memorable things of his stay there happened the day his family arrived. It was hard to sleep that first night in their apartment, and he was still awake at day-break. He joined his family in the living room, and they looked out the window. "When the sun popped up over the old city of Jerusalem, it looked like city was made of gold. It was almost unreal. I'll never forget that," Gabe remembers.

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