

February

It's only been a month but so much has changed! It stopped raining, I moved to a new place, met new people, started classes, learned more words in Hebrew, and I think I have a dog....

::REWIND::



The first Shabbat of February was filled with activity. A bunch of us woke up at 4 AM to head up north to the Golan Heights for a Jeff Seidel Shabbaton. Jeff Seidel programming is for students studying abroad in Israel. Part of the program is Monday night classes with two wonderful women: Rachel and Shoshana. For example, this month we had challah baking and a speaker discussing Nazi Doctors and medical ethics. Really fun and really interesting.

On the Shabbaton we went ATV-ing. Somehow I ended up not going on an ATV but instead I hopped on the head tractor leading the way with the guide. It was super rainy, cold, and worth it.

We then went rappelling into a cave that took us 10 seconds to go down and around 30 minutes to walk out of-- most of the hike out consisted of mushing around in goat poo. The best part was seeing the actual goats – the baby ones nuzzled against me and gnawed on my fingers.

After our cold, wet, slippery, exciting activities we trudged our way to the hotel in super foggy, white, thick air, where we took hot showers mmhmmm

We got ready for Shabbat—there was a group Shabbat service where our group, over 200 students, sang and danced together. The room was full and warm. Over Shabbat dinner there were good conversations, wine, and happy bellies. A few students made le'chaims--standing up on a chair and sharing some love and appreciation. I made one as well 😊

On Shabbat day we all had lunch together and a tour around the village Chispin, where the hotel is located. The sky was clear and we could see how wonderful the place really was.

The following week I went to Jerusalem for Shabbat to visit my friends at Hebrew University. It was so neat seeing how different it is at a different program. It seems incredible in Jerusalem as well!

Back in beer sheva we were finishing up Ulpan, which for me meant that my dorm contract was finished. It was time for me to move.

Howevrrrrr...I was supposed to move the day after my exam but I received a phone call saying that it would be a week later... a week after my contract was up at the dorms...making me technically homeless for a week. Additionally, in a phone call not long after I was asked if I had a bed...the room did not come with furniture. And then I found out that a cab would cost an unaffordable amount of money to bring my things to my new home. (????)

Within the next few days, it all worked out perfectly NOT according to plan, which I soon learned was the motto of my new dwelling.

Two wonderful students drove me the day after my exam and I was able to borrow a bed until I found one of my own.

So where did I move? I moved to an Ayalim student village in Ashalim, 40 minutes away from Beer Sheva. I am the only American and am speaking more Hebrew than ever before. I live in a caravan with one other girl named Jacqui. We have a yellow lab mix named Snoopy who is mesmerized by shadows. The only thing surrounded by our neighborhood is open desert and passion fruit trees. The sky is HUGE. The sand is everywhere. The wind is fresh. The air is dry. The people are amazing, super friendly and love teaching me Hebrew. We have bonfires and community service activities with neighboring Bedouin villages.



Here is a video about the organization:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y96SO593xwA>

If moving wasn't enough excitement...my sister Debbie came to Israel! The next weekend I went to Jerusalem to meet up with her. Once I was in Jerusalem I also met with a bunch of friends who I hadn't seen in a while and that Shabbat I went to my dear friend

Chagit who lives in Shovei Shomron.

This small incredible country contains so many wonderful people and places!

After Shabbat, I got back to Ashalim just in time for a birthday party with a big bonfire, desert, smiles, warmth, new people, fresh bread, dancing, and music. A great night in preparation for the next morning: my first day of school!

Classes have just begun and it has never been so easy to decide. I am taking Arab Israel conflict (a Masters program class), YS Agnon's love stories (taught by Amoz Oz in Hebrew!), desert ecology (field trips around the desert included), Arabic language and culture, Hebrew language, and holy wars: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

After a long first week of classes, I return home to Ashalim where I am greeted by a few dogs wagging and happy to see me. February was truly a month filled with moving, traveling, acquainting, and learning. Comfortable and excited, I have a feeling that so much more is on its way.

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