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News

Israeli au pairs

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Bringing a piece of Israel to Connecticut families

By [Stacey Dresner](#)

When Sally Rosenberg and her husband Eddie Rosenblatt of Glastonbury take their children to Israel this summer, they plan to look up Hofit, the young Israeli au pair who took care of their children several years ago.

Hofit was just one of the au pairs the Rosenberg-Rosenblatt family used when their three children were small. Au pairs are generally young women from foreign countries who live with host families to look after the children and sometimes provide light housekeeping. An au pair typically stays with a family in the U.S. for about a year or two and often becomes part of the family.

"We had au pairs for a hundred years," Sally Rosenberg said.

But Hofit was special, Rosenberg added, because she was from Israel.

"It was really a wonderful experience to have someone who was so comfortable with being kosher, being Jewish and speaking Hebrew," Rosenberg said. "There was more commonality, less cultural differences, and it was really very enriching."

When Hofit arrived on the scene, Rosenberg's youngest child was six months old, and her two older children were three and five. Rosenberg is a dentist and her husband is a radiologist.

"The whole concept of having au pairs, first of all, was a great cultural type of exchange," Rosenberg shared. "The tremendous benefit of having Israeli au pairs was more of a cultural enhancement in the language and also the customs. I remember Hofit taught us that in Israel they eat fish on the first night of Rosh Hashanah. It was wonderful. I wish in a way we had her when the kids were older because they would have gotten even more from her."

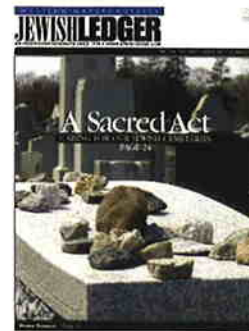
'Like a cousin taking care of your kids'

Merav Ohana, a 22-year-old Israeli, has been the au pair for the children of Sharon and Josh Hasbani of the Westville section of New Haven for the past year. The Hasbanis' daughter Maya is 9, their son Jacob is 6, and they recently added newborn Leo to the brood.

With their busy schedules, Sharon, a child psychiatrist, and Josh, a neurologist, have appreciated the obvious benefit of having a live-in caretaker for their kids. The Hasbanis have had six other au pairs in the past and two who have been Israeli. Having an au pair from Israel in where Sharon was born makes it even more beneficial.

"We had a Polish au pair and three South Africans," said Sharon, who said that she sought out Israeli au pairs through the Au Pair in America agency when she heard that they were available.

"I think I wanted to feel like my au pair was more like a family member, and I feel like that connection in the Jewishness, the Israeliness, and the warmth, and the Hebrew" which Merav



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often speaks with 9-year-old Maya, who is learning Hebrew in school.

Sharon described Merav as “very warm, she really loves kids n which is always what you look for in an au pair. She is very positive and easygoing.”

“For me, having an Israeli au pair really feels like you brought your cousin to come take care of your kids,” Sharon concluded. “I mean it is always a stranger in your home in a way at first, but they feel more distant when they are not Jewish and Israeli.”

‘Worldlier and savvier’

With their busy schedules, Drs. Sharon and Bryan Goldberg of Farmington found that having an Israeli au pair made their lives much easier for them and their three children, ages 10, 8, and 4.

“What was especially comfortable was knowing that this was someone who didn’t need us to explain our cultural events,” Sharon explained. “For example, we build a sukkah every year, so of course the Israeli au pairs would decorate the sukkah with the kids to get it ready for Sukkot, which is really nice, as opposed to saying, ‘What is that thing that you guys built in the backyard?’ And when Chanukah would come around, they would make decorations better than us. I could say, ‘Could you light the candles with the kids,’ and it would be no big deal because it was something they had done at home.”

Another advantage to having an Israeli au pair, Sharon Goldberg said, was that they are, for the most part, a little older and worldlier than some other au pairs.

“One of the things that makes them superior to most au pairs from other countries is that, first, they come over and are a little older. They come after [serving in] the army and that makes them savvier,” she said. “Second, just living in a country like Israel, where you have to be more aware, these are girls who don’t have a very nonchalant or laissez faire attitude when it comes to taking care of kids. They are very vigilant, the doors are locked, they are aware in parking lots, like if they have to bring the kids to a birthday party at the mall they are aware that bad things happen sometimes, so they are not just walking around with their head in the clouds, and that is the kind of thing that sometimes happens when you have young girls taking care of kids, because they have this kind of naiveté that comes with being young.”

Goldberg noted that the Israeli au pairs she has used have been “more sophisticated. They were in general brighter n they were amongst my brightest au pairs.”

Goldberg admitted that one of her Israeli au pairs left after a week in her home because she was not used to driving.

“I am originally from Israel and am more from the big city are so it didn’t occur to me that there would be girls who would be terrible drivers,” Goldberg explained. “Some of these girls are from very small towns. The ones who have been successful with us think driving in Connecticut is a piece of cake because they are more from the central areas n Tel Aviv, Haifa. But we had one girl come from the Negev and she didn’t drive anywhere... She lasted about a week. She actually said, ‘This is not working out.’”

Another Israeli au pair kept a higher level of kashrut than the Goldbergs and feeling uncomfortable, decided to go back home.

But overall, the Goldbergs’ experience with several other Israeli au pairs was exceptional. They keep in touch with a few n Hannah, who recently got into The Technion, another who is studying business in Israel, and another who was recently married.

Values are reinforced

Miriam Udel-Lambert had been speaking Hebrew to her now three year old son, Isaac, since he was born.

“As he grew into toddler-hood, I found it more and more difficult to achieve the subtlety of

communication necessary to continue in what is, for me, a foreign language," Udel-Lambert explained. "I knew my relationship with him would benefit if I could switch to English, but my husband and I were both very committed to fostering Hebrew fluency for him. We plan to spend substantial amounts of time in Israel, and we would like the transitions between America and Israel to be as smooth as possible for him. Feeling confident in the language is a big part of that."

Udel-Lambert, who has been finishing a doctorate in Comparative Literature at Harvard, and her husband, David Lambert, who teaches Jewish studies at Yale, decided to bring an Israeli au pair into their home.

"Our top priority was to have a native Hebrew speaker, and we knew we were unlikely to find full-time, Hebrew-speaking childcare unless we had someone live with us."

But Hebrew is not the only thing Avital brings to Isaac and the family.

"Avital reinforces many of our values and religious ideals," she added. "Whether it is the encouragement to recite blessings before and after eating, or the lively recounting of the weekly Torah portion or the singing of holiday related songs, she enriches the Jewish atmosphere of our home and of Isaac's day-to-day experience."

Avital plans to stay with the Udel-Lamberts for a second year.

"We were extraordinarily fortunate in finding someone who is not only nurturing and intelligent with our son, but who also sees us as mentors," Udel-Lambert said. "We learn so much from each other. Furthermore, Avital has brought a piece of Israel to our home and renewed our sense of immediacy about what is happening there."

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