

OUR JOURNEY DOWN UNDER



by **Dan Mariaschin, B'nai B'rith International Executive Vice President**

Months later, we're still talking about our visit to Australia and New Zealand.

Over my 26 years at B'nai B'rith, I've learned that our "global reach" is indeed, just that. Pretty much wherever you look on the globe, we're there. But as important as a "presence" is, what we are actually *doing* in all of these places – from the U.S. to Latin America to Europe to Canada and to Australia and New Zealand is where the real story is.

Thanks to Jim Altman, Jim Salinger and Morris Tobias, Michal and I received a gracious invitation to pay BBANZ a visit last October. Noting the distances involved, and the "losing a day, gaining a day" travel parameters, we settled on enough time to visit Sydney, make the District Convention in Melbourne, travel to Auckland and Wellington – and to do some sightseeing in between. I'm pleased to report that our limited time allowed us to do what we set out to accomplish, but left us knowing that another few days in both countries would have suited us extremely well – particularly as first time visitors.

I was deeply impressed by the dedication of B'nai B'rith leadership at every stop. I listened to the reports made at the Convention, about projects that are meant to serve both the Jewish community and beyond. I was particularly impressed – and noted this in my speeches and presentations -with the Courage to Care program. With the number of survivors and eyewitnesses to Hitler's brutality now sadly ebbing, the need to "educate and remember" is an obligation of history we must assume with increasing urgency. I was tremendously moved by hearing the testimonies of the school teachers who were able to spend some time at Yad Vashem, trips underwritten through the generosity of Courage to Care, as well as the descriptions of programs for school groups geared to hearing from survivors themselves or from videos that have been made in which they tell their stories. I was encouraged to learn of plans to grow the program; indeed, I took back materials with me to Washington to see if BBI can't engage in a similar program here in the States.

One of BBI's main programmatic thrusts centers on public policy issues. In that regard, I very much appreciated the opportunity to hear the report of Dr. Dvir Abramovich, Chair of the BB Anti-Defamation Commission, about its vital work. I had an opportunity to speak before members of the Commission, and it occurred to me that our agendas are very much in common. Today, the fight against the demonization and delegitimization of Israel, and its nefarious twin, the BDS campaign (boycotts, divestment, sanctions – against Israel) is one which we face together. Dr. Abramovich and I discussed ways our two organizations can work together on this and other issues we hold in common, and are already well along in furthering cooperation.

B'nai B'rith has a long and proud record of providing affordable housing to seniors. The B'nai B'rith retirement villages are a true testament to the biblical injunction of "honoring thy father and thy mother." I was impressed by the facilities, the program agenda for the residents – and the pastry and coffee I enjoyed after giving a short presentation! This is one of the most important aspects of what it is we do as a *service* organization, and I'm deeply appreciative that my visit to these facilities was high up on the agenda of my hosts.

Within the context of pro-Israel advocacy, I always try to meet with important government leaders, diplomats and parliamentarians when I travel abroad, and this trip was no exception. In Melbourne

we met with Josh Frydenberg, the Parliamentary Secretary of the Prime Minister and Bill Shorten, Leader of the Opposition (our meeting came just a couple of days before he was elected leader), and in Canberra, we met with the newly-arrived American Ambassador to Australia, John Berry; and with Dorit Herscovici, First Secretary of the Embassy of Israel (the ambassador's chair being temporarily vacant at that time).

In Wellington, I participated in a panel discussion with David Rutherford, the Chair of New Zealand's Human Rights Commission; and met with Charlotte Darlow, who heads the United Nations affairs unit at the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Dame Susan Devoy, the Human Rights Commissioner for Race Relations; David Cuniffe, the Leader of the Opposition; and Tracey Martin MP, Spokesperson for Education and Youth Affairs. We also had an excellent meeting with Israel's Ambassador to New Zealand, Yosef Livne, a longtime, and highly respected diplomat.

Additionally, in both countries, I met with key leaders of the Jewish community: in Sydney with Robert Goot, the President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry; Dr. Danny Lamm, the immediate past president of the group; Jeremy Jacobs, a longtime friend who is with the Australia/Israel Jewish Affairs Council; and with David Zwartz, Kaye Clark and Boris and Judi Lubetzky, representing leadership of the B'nai B'rith lodges in Wellington and Auckland. We attended religious services in the cities we visited, including a Bat Mitzvah in Auckland, and were reminded, once again, about all we share in common with Jews the world over.

I did mention we did a bit of sightseeing – not as much as we would have liked, but enough to have our touring appetites whet for another visit at some point. We visited the spectacular Sydney Opera House, and Sydney's historic George Street; as well as the major museums in each city, learning about Aboriginal and Maori culture, and the modern history of both countries. Of special interest: the excellent Jewish museum in Melbourne, and the very impressive war memorial in Canberra. And we were totally captivated by the natural beauty of the coastline just outside Auckland.

Michal and I came away from our visit with a deep appreciation of the vitality of the Jewish communities in both countries, and especially by the special brand of dedication that our B'nai B'rith brothers and sisters bring to their important work. The well-known secret to our success over these many years (BBI is entering its 171st year) is the hard work and the caring of our many volunteers. BBANZ is carrying on that tradition into the 21st century. Yes, the years on the calendar have changed, but the imperative to reach out to our fellow Jews and the broader community is the same as when we were founded in 1843, and when the first lodge was founded in Australia in 1944.

Michal joins me in thanking each and every one of you for making us feel at home, for sharing your work and experiences with us, and for all you do to engage in *Tikkun Olam* under the banner of B'nai B'rith. It's both a privilege and an honor to have you play such an important part in the work of our global family.



Dan Mariaschin & wife Michal with Morris Tobias (President BBANZ)



Dan Mariaschin, Faye Dubrowin (President BBVic) & Andre Dubrowin