

# OUR days



## Sight Unseen

It was an offer we couldn't refuse

By Ann Goldberg

**W**ould you buy a house without looking at it first? Not very likely, and if you asked any normal person he'd probably agree. So my husband and I ignored the Jerusalem real estate agent's warning that if we didn't buy the apartment he had just described in great detail *now*, while we were sitting in his office, we would probably lose our chance. "There are hundreds of people waiting to buy it if you walk out of here without signing the contract."

Yes, really. But what would you expect him to say if he wanted to make a quick sale?

Well, we did walk out, and immediately caught a bus to Ramot, where the house was located. It was a relatively new neighborhood in those days, 30 years ago. When we got there we couldn't believe our eyes. It was everything the agent had

said—and more. It was what the Israelis call a "cottage" and consisted of two floors plus a small garden that was beyond our wildest dreams. It was also bigger than we had ever imagined being able to afford in Israel. Truth be told, it was even nicer than the house we had sold in England when we made *aliyah* the year before.

The one thing that made us hesitate, however, just for a second, was that it was situated in a totally ultra-Orthodox neighborhood. Although many observant families prefer living in a completely religious environment, where no immodest sights are seen and no non-kosher influences have a chance to infiltrate the home, this would be a first for us. We were both used to being the rare *frum* Jewish family among many non-religious and even non-Jewish ones in our hometowns in England. After we married, my husband had been the *rav* of a community. *Kiruv* had been an important

part of our daily lives, and we had learned our own methods of minimizing detrimental influences. But compared to all its other positive attributes this was nothing, and we knew we could get used to the change in environment. And of course, there were many advantages to bringing up our children surrounded by like-minded religious families.

I looked at my watch. By then it was already too late to return to the real estate office, so we returned home and set the alarm clock for early the following morning.

The next day we got to the office just as it opened. We sat down excitedly at the agent's desk.

"We'll take it," we said, almost in unison.

"I'm sorry, but it's already sold. I warned you."

We couldn't believe it. We had called the agent's bluff and lost.

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Dejectedly, we got up and turned to leave. As we reached the door the agent said, "But there is another possibility."

We spun around.

"Would you be prepared to live in a mixed neighborhood?"

"What do you mean?"

"Where not everyone is religious."

"Of course. We'd even prefer it."

"Well, I wasn't sure," he said, looking at my husband. "Seeing as how you're both dressed, you know, you with a hat and your wife with a *sheitel*. I thought you'd only be interested in a *chareidi* neighborhood."

By then we were back at his desk, eagerly awaiting more information.

"It's a few minutes away from the one you saw yesterday," he said, pointing it out on the map, "but aside from that it's virtually the same—except for one thing."

We waited to hear the drawback.

"The house has three floors instead of two, and a basement as well. But don't worry; it's not just a storage room. It has a proper staircase leading to it from the inside, and flooring and a window, and it's connected to the central heating."

I sighed. This was too good to be true. It was bound to be way beyond our price range.

"So how much is it?"

"Oh, it's the same price as the first. Some Israelis consider a basement a disadvantage and don't like them. But they can really be quite useful."

We looked at each other in disbelief. The agent was apologizing because the house was much bigger than the previous one, and cost the same amount of money. We almost laughed aloud.

We turned around and saw dozens of people sitting and waiting to speak to the agent. And a quick glance through the window revealed a long line forming outside.

My husband and I looked at each other. Who needs to see a house before he buys it? What's wrong with sight unseen?

"We'll take it." ■

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