South African family journeys to Haifa to start anew

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By Mordechai I. Twersky

From Haaretz 12/4/12

In Anglo circles, it is a name as central to the Passover experience as Moses and Pharaoh are to the biblical narrative.

The arrival of the new-immigrant Manushewitz family from Johannesburg, South Africa, only days before Passover brings to mind wine, matza and gefilte fish. "I always used to ask my father and my late grandfather if we were related," says Clive Manushewitz, referring to the founder of the U.S.-based Manischewitz kosher product company renowned for its matza and wine. "My father doesn't know, and my grandfather used to say 'maybe.' For years I've been meaning to sue the company for royalties," he jokes.

Manushewitz, 46, an upbeat, 15-year veteran of the photo-finishing industry, arrived in Israel on March 26. Joined by his wife, Michele; two sons, Jarred, 13, and Liam, 9; and 8-year-old daughter, Taddi, they are now thoroughly in absorption mode.

The family has been living in a temporary apartment in Haifa that is partially subsidized by the municipality. In the coming days, they plan to sign a lease for an apartment in the city. By the time the shipping container with their belongings arrives in Israel and clears customs later this month, both parents will have begun their intensive, six-month-long Hebrew ulpan. The kids have been accepted to the city's Nofim School.

Previously the owner of three photo-processing stores in South Africa, Manushewitz says he is looking forward to being "vocationally retrained." Speaking to Haaretz a day after the owners of Facebook purchased Instagram - the company that developed the popular photo-altering app by the same name - for $1 billion dollars, Manushewitz says he knows all too well that his old industry is "dying."

"When was the last time you gave in a photo to be processed?" he asks.

Manushewitz's wife, an IT specialist, is applying for jobs at several of Haifa's hi-tech companies. Though he is concerned about the prospects for launching a new career in Israel, Manushewitz - who credits his Eastern European grandparents for imbuing him with what he calls "the Zionist bug" - appears to remain confident. "Of course there is a fear, but I have to remain strong, for my family and for myself," he says. "I am a very positive person."