

After the Syrian Cease-Fire

I walk down the street and one of the small green-groceries in our area is closed, out-of-business, finished as the phrase goes. No, the owner thank God wasn't killed, nor wounded either. But he was one of the reservists who had served forty days before the Yom Kippur War. *"Was released on Thursday, October 4th"*, he comments wryly, *"wrenched out of 'shul' on Saturday and am now back home"* - after six months of service, almost five more than he had anticipated.

## Job Looking

His wife, mother of their four children, the youngest born last November, couldn't run the business alone. She couldn't even begin to contemplate how she would get to the "shuk" (*open-air market*) in practically the middle of the night to buy the fresh fruits and vegetables her husband used to get. *"We had no choice: we had to close up. Now, our customers have gotten used to buying at other places. It is going to be hard to get our clientele back."* So hard that this ex-green-grocer is thinking of looking for a job. *"I've been an independent businessman long enough. And, as a result, we have lost practically all our life-savings."* He will recuperate some of it back via sale of the store, but it doesn't compensate him for the six months the store was closed.

There is the fellow who ran a small color-processing shop in Jerusalem. Many photographers used him. *"He was good, conscientious, prompt - a delight to work with"*, said one of Israel's leading photographers. But this small entrepreneur also served for almost six months and photographers have to make a living too, so his clients had to go elsewhere. Will they now return to him? It is a moot question. He is going to have to start again from the beginning to build up his contacts, to re-establish his reputation and to make enough to pay for the many months when he was serving and the shop was closed. There was compensation from the government, but nowhere near his actual earnings. And the loss of contacts is the hardest obstacle to overcome.

### Fortunate

In my neighborhood, the man who runs our hardware store has been in service more than out. His oldest son, seventeen and a half, has been running the store in the afternoons when he returns from school. But Uri's biggest business came from the home repair work he did, installing everything from screens to shelves plus plumbing and garden repairs. *"You don't make money from just selling nails"*, is the way he puts it. But he is cheerful and realistic about his fate. *"At least the store was open part of the time."* And Uri spends every spare minute of his leaves working, out on jobs which pile up as his clients wait patiently for his return, for his days off, for his "free" time. He really is fortunate. He has no competition in our neighborhood. There is no other all-round general handy-man. So when my son locked himself in the bathroom or the shutter got stuck or we wanted extra shelves, it was always Uri we called - and still do. However, not all small businessmen enjoy the dearth of competition which Uri does.

Some stores will never open up again. There is a small grocery near one of the offices in which I work. It was a family business in every sense of the word. Although the old couple served customers or sat on chairs waiting for their 'regulars', it was the oldest son who really ran the store. And he was killed on the first day of the War although his parents didn't learn of this until a few weeks after the event.

This old couple has never re-opened the store. They closed it the day they were notified of their son's death. They had practically not been able to keep it going those few weeks he had been away - dead, but they didn't know that then. When the Army officers came to tell them the sad news, they just locked the door of their little grocery, went home, sat "shiva" and never returned to the small store set in a lane between high buildings. It is a relic of the past, their little store, but it was theirs - their life, their income and, with their son's aid, it still served well the residents of the area who appreciated the hot fresh rolls sold in the morning and the small amounts of cheese the old couple were always obligingly willing to sell. Their hallmark was their friendliness, their willingness to serve.

### Path to Normalcy

Israel's towns and cities are a maze of small stores. It sometimes impressed one how so many of these small business can survive. But they are almost all family business - a man, helped by his wife or son. There are no labor costs really, little overhead. These people make a living, small as it is. But this year many of those stores have been closed. Some will re-open, some are already open again. But too many are closed for good. Their owners cannot afford to re-open. Their losses have been too great. They need to find steady employment to help them re-coup their losses, pay back their debts, get started again on the path to normalcy which may eventually end in possession of another small business. And please God when that happens let them be allowed to make their living, meagre or substantial as it may be. This is peace when men get up in the morning and go to work and come home at night - from work.

*(by Ruth Seligman, reprinted from WZO Press Service)*