I wanted to share some of my recent travel experiences with Ventures readers. My wife Sara and I were honored to be invited to visit Israel for a week in May 2014 with about 30 other travelers from Maryland, Alaska, and Hawaii.

The trip was sponsored by The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, one of the largest private foundations in the United States. The foundation has sponsored opportunities for diverse leaders to visit Israel for many years. Our trip included visits to unique and sacred places such as the Dead Sea, the Western Wall, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as well as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Our visit to Yad Vashem, the Jewish National Memorial dedicated to the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust, was an especially powerful and emotional experience.

Yet perhaps the most touching visit was to a preschool in the city of Ashkelon—a sister city to Baltimore—located by the Mediterranean Sea. We visited a class of four- and five-year-old Israeli and Ethiopian students who were working on craft projects, playing games, and singing songs for us. As you would expect, they were cute, earnest, and playing happily but also paying careful attention to their visitors. It was delightful and reminded us that children are all the same regardless of where we are in the world.

There is one distinct and haunting difference between Israel and the United States we noticed wherever we went: the immediately visible security and safety protocols that are part of everyday life in Israel. Of course, we in the United States have our own security challenges as well; even Stevenson University experienced a three-hour lockdown this past spring on the Owings Mills campus. Our event was thankfully not a real gun incident but frightening nonetheless. However, the security issues in Israel are very different—the Israelis are stoic about the dangers in their lives. They want to be in Israel because it is their home, and things happen but life must go on despite years of ongoing terrorist activity. Israeli issues are clearly in the news almost daily.

One of the instructive opportunities we experienced regarding the security issue was visiting the Moshav Netiv Ha’asarah on the Gaza Strip. A moshav is an agricultural collective where the individuals own the land. We had lunch at a community center where we were served by a lifelong resident. The speaker that day was a young mother, Moran Shmilovich, who had brought her six-month old child. A resident of Mushar, she described her family’s life near the Gaza Strip. Her husband had grown up on the moshav and she told us they had two other children. The children attend an elementary school where they are subjected to frequent air raid drills, sometimes as many as 20 per day. She noted that rockets are launched to and from the Gaza Strip and have lethal capacity. We learned that about five years earlier a nearby house was directly hit by a rocket, killing a woman inside. (Note: Not long after our return in July 2014, there were numerous and ongoing rocket attacks connected to the tragic deaths of the three teenagers on the West Bank and a subsequent major insurgency.)

Shmilovich went on to say that she and her family get psychological support to deal with the constant barrage of air raid warnings. It was clear to our group that this was a stressful experience for the parents and especially the children. Yet through the years, the residents have grown to accept these security dangers because this is where they want to be. Life must be lived, enjoyed, and cherished regardless of the dangers.

I want to again mention and thank The Weinberg Foundation, which sponsored and coordinated the trip. Led by President Rachel Monroe, the foundation focuses its funding in Baltimore and Israel to provide support to organizations that work with individuals who are the most vulnerable in our society in the areas of education, career services, health care, and social services. The Foundation’s work, including sponsorship of the Israel trip, adds significant value to not just the Baltimore community but also worldwide.

We were incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to visit Israel. It is a beautiful country where many energetic and exciting things are happening. We grew to admire and appreciate Israel and its people and at the same time appreciate even more the relative peace and security we enjoy in America and often take for granted. The trip to Israel was one that Sara and I will long remember.