Perfectly Write In God's Vineyard: Death Throes for Karmiel?

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Savouring the Fruit of the Vine from the heart of Israel's Galilee



Natalie Wood יעקוב אחרי 6+

I moved from dank, dark North Manchester, U.K. to Karmiel, Western Galilee, Israel in March 2010. It is, believe me, one of the sunniest, loveliest towns on earth. With a background in local Jewish journalism I continue to write freelance. I manage several blogs, have appeared on Technorati and Blogcritics and now contribute to the online magazine, 'Live Encounters'. My main blog is Alwayswriteagain (http://wwwalwayswriteagain.blogspot.com

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TUESDAY, 4 JANUARY 2011

Death Throes for Karmiel?

This piece was first published as "Death Throes for Karmiel?" on Technorati.

Is the Northern Israeli city of Karmiel in its death throes?

Still less than 50 years old and with a boom industry in residential property building to meet the demands of the constant influx of immigrants, Mayor Adi

Eldar has nonetheless admitted that "we have had a retreat in recent years".

His confession came during a crisis meeting in Jerusalem last week with Israel's Minister of Industry, **Benjamin Ben-Eliezer M.K.**, who warned: "Karmiel is in the process of dying slowly - although we have done everything to maintain it as a strong city".



The meeting was called to discuss an emergency package to restore the city to health, with the possibility of an Intel Research and Development Centre on the the table.

Mr Ben-Eliezer said: "Karmiel was founded with a mission, but has failed to meet

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it in recent years ... Today, with modern transport one may be in Tel Aviv in less than and hour ..."

Responding, Mr Eldar admitted: "We have been in retreat since the Second Lebanon War. We need serious employment assistance. We sense a good relationship with manufacturers, and have forums and discussions, but we urgently need your assistance to bring people, including young couples to the city."

Other issues aired included small and medium businesses, civic programmes to promote employment and aid to textile manufacturer, Tefron, which has suffered long-term financial difficulties.

Later Mr Ben Eliezer said:" Karmiel has an important role in developing Israel's northern periphery. The city should be seen as the commercial anchor of the Galilee region."

He noted that successive Israeli governments had failed to cultivate the city's potential and that this attitude was reflected in the unemployment rate and the need to give young immigrants a promising future.

"Now I hope we are in for change. The tools are available to the Ministry of Industry and together with investment and the determination of Karmiel's Mayor and his council, we will provide the impetus for growth. Today we examined a number of measures to promote employment and to industrialise the city and I am sure these will bear fruit soon ripen into action".

> Meanwhile, Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer has seen "preliminary signs" that the growth in Israel's housing market

is slowing.



Fischer, speaking to the **Knesset's** (Israel's Parliament) Finance Committee, warned that it was too soon to say whether the trend would continue and noted that "additional steps" would have to be taken if prices *did* continue to spiral.

Many anxious Karmiel residents will be relieved to learn this as only days earlier, a representative from the local **Remax** Real Estate franchise had declared it that a five-roomed

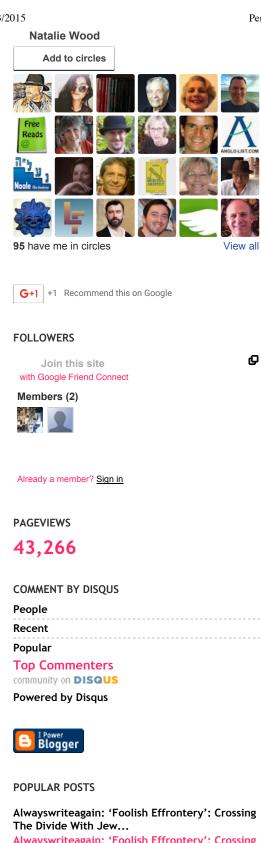
apartment in the Rabin Neighbourhood may soon cost 845,000,000 NIS (about £153,000.00; US \$239,000.00).

As a **Rabin Neighbourhood** resident renting a property, 1 consider the Remax figure to be the exception as reasonable properties may still be acquired there for about 570,000.00 NIS (about £104,000; US \$161,000.00).

But local property owners and rental landlords must beware of pricing themselves out of the market. For every affluent family making aliyah (immigrating to Israel) for example, there are a dozen living on benefits. Only this week I learned of an apartment ('flat') for rent with an absentee landlord managed by a local cousin which had been empty for about 18 months. The property required a fair amount of work to make it habitable and the potential lessee wanted to negotiate a fairer price before considering signing a contract.

A walk round town and both indoor shopping centres reveal many empty shops and too many selling similar products like jewellery and shoes. The basements of both indoor centres are shabby and neglected as the emphasis is thrust on the "BIG" retail park on the city's outskirts.

Since I arrived in March, an upmarket stationer and a jewellery outlet at 'Lev Karmiel', the new shopping centre, have closed down while more 'useful' businesses like cobblers and dry cleaners are hard to find.



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Perfectly Write In God's Vineyard: Death Throes for Karmiel?

I have met only one person - a car dealer - who travels from out-of-town to work in Karmiel. As there is relatively little employment in town, most people commute long distances to their work each day.

This is against a backdrop of regular price rises for all basic goods from food to petrol and a row about the civic authorities' plans to increase rent and rates by up to 5 per cent. Many residents also resent the absence of a local hospital - the nearest being in Nahariya, Tzfat or Haifa - while the authorities pour money into projects which maintain the city's beauty.

Technorati Tags: Karmiel, Unemployment, Industry, Mayor Adi Eldar, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer M.K., Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer, Knesset, Remax, Rabin Neighbourhood, Lev Karmiel, BIG Retail Park, Nahariya, Tzfat, Haifa

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