Rebecca Torstrick of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Indiana University South Bend spent academic year 2003–2004 in Israel on a Fulbright Scholar Award to teach at the Ben Gurion University in the Negev in Beersheva and to continue her research in Acre, Israel. She returned in July 2004 and shares perspectives gained from her Fulbright year. She is the author, most recently, of *Culture and Customs of Israel* (Greenwood Press, 2004).

Last year, my nine-year-old daughter Maia and I spent 10 months in Israel on a Fulbright Senior Scholar Award for lecturing and research. I taught a course, the Public Sphere in the Middle East, for the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheva, located in the south. About half of the students were international, there to study in the International Master of Arts Program in Middle East Studies.

It was a transformative year for us both. In observing Israeli culture over the year—I was last there in 1998—I was struck by the relevance of situations and issues there to life in the United States post–9/11. I brought home with me to South Bend a number of questions and perspectives to share and ponder with my students, family, and colleagues. The security paradox is one—I felt personally safer there than I do in America, in the sense that I did not fear for my or my daughter’s personal safety, even when walking around at night. What I worried about more were random acts of political violence, watching for unmarked packages left in public spaces (a heightened awareness that has remained with me on my return).

So where, exactly, am I safer? And what would be needed to make me (and Israelis and Palestinians) feel safe in both senses? Over and over, I heard people there say they have no choices—no choice but to build the wall, live with weapons, live with overdrawn bank accounts, tolerate the conflict between religious and secular life, accept coalition governments that are ineffectual—what I’ve come to call the *ein brirah* mentality. Americans may be tempted to develop the same mindset post–9/11, but that can be dangerous because to say there is no choice is already to make a choice. At a time when people all over the world are fighting for their rights to choose, the developed countries of the world cannot retreat into this mindset of “there is no other choice.”

Yet I also found that other choices are possible in Israel. I spent the second half of my year up in the north, conducting research in Acre, where I had spent past years doing research. Acre is along the bay not far from Haifa and not considered a “frontline” city. In fact, it is a remarkably integrated city, where Israelis and Palestinians coexist and cooperate for the good of their community, sharing living quarters in some of the same buildings, fighting together for the same rights such as their children’s education, and where the current mayor is, for the first time, an independent, neither Likud nor Labor.

Over the past few years, tremendous changes have taken place in Acre, with new immigrants, new tourism and development, and a new vision of their future. In conducting interviews for a pilot project, I was struck by the vision I heard from both Jewish and Arab informants about their possible desirable future. It is a future of no borders, where once again the train runs from Rosh Ha’Niqra to Baghdad. Where Arab tourists flock by the thousands to Israel and Israelis can vacation in Beirut, Damascus, or Baghdad. Where goods and services flow seamlessly across borders in a Middle Eastern–European Union.

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“Dr. Finkel has fundamentally shaped, and indeed created, much of the International Programs structures on the IU Southeast campus,” says Jean Abshire, current director of international programs and assistant professor of political science. “Her outstanding contributions, dedication, and service... have brought... international awareness to this campus and the southern Indiana community.”

In conjunction with the International Studies Advisory Committee, Finkel proposed a new position to oversee international efforts at IU Southeast. It was approved in 1996, and she held the position from 1996 to 2002, a time during which she transformed the campus's academic and community programs.

Finkel quickly realized that IU Southeast could benefit from an international studies major that would incorporate existing courses from social sciences, humanities, and business and economics. The proposal for a B.A. in international studies was approved by the Indiana Higher Education Commission in 2003. Now, only into its second year of implementation, the major has nearly 30 students.

Meanwhile, Finkel worked on increasing awareness and visibility of the university’s international offerings through outreach activities. In 1997, she founded the International Speaker Series, a monthly forum designed to promote global perspectives, faculty interests, and international events on campus to the larger community. She was instrumental in creating IUS’ International Studies Web site and compiled a printed International Directory. In 1998, she helped organize the university’s first annual International Festival, an event that grew to become, in 2002, International Week.

“This marvelous, well-conceived, and well-articulated structure of international programs and activities has been put into place in an astonishingly short time, and mainly with the limited resources of a small campus,” says Eleanor Turk, professor emeritus of history at Indiana University East. “Clearly, through her initial service as the campus liaison for International Programs and Overseas Study, Deborah has listened well and moved mountains.”

Her contributions beyond campus are equally admirable. She’s strengthened international connections with her work on IU Southeast’s educational partnership with CARE-Honduras, and her development of the Office of International Programs/Chancellor’s Fund that supports faculty and students in their international research, teaching, and service. In the community, she’s served on the board of the Center for Cultural Resources, which helps K-12 teachers incorporate multicultural materials into their classrooms and has worked with the Clarksville Sister Cities Association.

In addition to her roles as professor, director of International Programs, and, from 2002 to 2003, president of the faculty senate, Finkel still remains active in her own research, behavioral genetics. She is currently participating in the Swedish Adoption/Twin Study on Aging at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm—one of only four additional researchers to be invited to join the research team since the program’s inception in 1984.

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nexus that leads the world in productivity and creativity. Where the union of Israeli technical know-how and Arab oil money work to create the world’s strongest economy. Where it is a democratic region and one’s ethnic or racial identity is no longer meaningful because diversity is the norm.

I’ve been struck by the amazing resilience of people in Israel—how they make lives for themselves regardless of the situations surrounding them or the barriers they must overcome. Their vision is a future they believe could be realized, a future they desire. It’s a tribute to the human spirit, and it is what keeps drawing me back to this region, as I, too, hope that one day people there will be able to realize this dream.