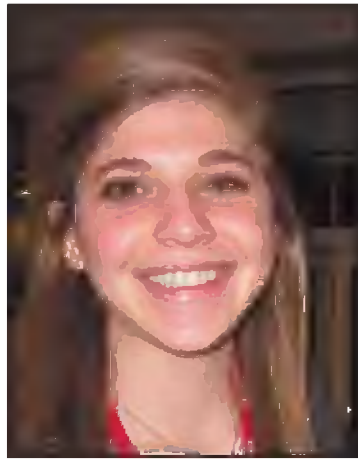


Youth Visions

Israeli Soldiers' Stories: A New Side of the IDF

By Sarah Fellman

Editor's Note: MZ Teens is a high school leadership program run by StandWithUs that prepares students for the challenges they may encounter regarding Israel in college and in their communities. Temple Israel member and Providence High senior, Sarah Fellman, is an MZ Teens intern. <http://www.standwithus.com/aboutus/mzteens/>



Sarah Fellman

I first heard of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) as a third grader when I attended Camp Mindy. Every day, at Israel Education class, we simulated IDF training and learned about Israel and its neighbors. But it wasn't until my involvement with StandWithUs as an MZ Teen intern this year that I learned about an aspect of the IDF beyond the training and wars.

In December, as an MZ Teen Intern, I ran a program at my BBYO regional convention about the IDF moral code, the *Ruach Tzahal*, which translates to "Spirit of the IDF." I wanted to educate my peers about the extensive effort made by the Israeli military to preserve human life on both sides. I opened up a fact-based discussion where everyone could add his or her thoughts on the IDF's morality. We discussed topics that ranged from its precautionary phone calls and leaflets before bombing a Hamas stronghold to Israel's promise of unconditional return for its soldiers, as well as the IDF's portrayal in international news and social media.

After conducting the research necessary, I was much more informed about morality during both war and peace in Israel, but

that was just statistics and trends. I still had little personal connection to the IDF. However, when I worked with Charlotte Teen Coalition to host StandWithUs "Israeli Soldiers' Stories" Shabbat, I had the chance to hear about and understand the genuinely good intentions – and importance – of the IDF.

StandWithUs "Israeli Soldiers' Stories" features reserve duty Israeli college students who talk about their backgrounds, interests, and life in Israel and share personal experiences upholding the *Ruach Tzahal*, even while facing an enemy that hides behind its civilians. Shay and Hen attended our event and put human faces to the IDF uniform. They shared incredible experiences.

In particular, Hen's story struck a nerve. Hen, whose grandparents were Jewish Iranian refugees who fled to Israel when his great grandfather was hanged by the Iranians for being Jewish, witnessed a suicide bombing in an Israeli ice cream shop as a young

boy. But he was not bitter about any of this hatred or anti-Semitism that had affected his life. Enlistment is mandatory in Israel at age 18, and Hen joined the COGAT (Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories) unit. For five years, Hen was a liaison among the IDF, the United Nations, and the Palestinian Authority. He and his unit worked to serve the Palestinian civilians and help outside organizations do the same.

One day in Hebron, the U.N. liaison office reported that two Palestinian kids had accidentally set off an unexploded device left for Israeli jeeps to drive over. The kids were hurt and the Palestinian medics were called, but they weren't coming. That left the IDF to take over and within five minutes an ambulance was at the scene and within 10 minutes, they were transported to the closest army base – Hen's base – where their care was taken over by IDF doctors. Hen then facilitated permits allowing the parents into Israel to visit their children.

This story exemplifies Israel's willingness to come to the aid of its neighbors and its unwavering commitment to helping civilians, regardless of nationality. It also inspired in me the hope for peace and understanding between Israel and its neighbors: Hen remarked that when he brought the parents of the Palestinian children to see their kids, there was no resentment of Palestinian against Israeli or Israeli against Palestinian.

Though I never heard of COGAT before, I now realize what an important role it plays. It gives me hope that the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict can be solved peacefully and makes me proud of my country's efforts to help innocent people everywhere. I wasn't the only one impressed and intrigued by the soldiers' stories. My peers from all denominations of Judaism jumped at the chance to ask questions about life in Israel, service in the IDF, and more.

It is this kind of experience – a chance for direct communication and interaction – that will bring Jewish kids from Charlotte (or any other city) close to Israel. StandWithUs "Israeli Soldiers' Stories" is about truth, teaching, and learning, and in order to cre-

ate a generation of Jewish leaders with a meaningful relationship to Israel, it is important to arm them with the truth.

The program also instilled something even more important than pure knowledge: curiosity. While Shay and Hen could only stay for about two hours, the desire to learn more about Israel and to take an active role in its future is something that lasts a lifetime. But even beyond curiosity, I believe that the most important message for Charlotte Jewish teens and for people everywhere is one of hope: hope for peace, hope for a time when the IDF is not needed, and hope for a better future for everyone. ✪

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Attention: Teens, Teachers, and Parents Is Holocaust Education Important to You?

The Levine-Sklut Judaic Library is currently exploring the possibility of establishing a Center for Holocaust and Tolerance Education to serve as a clearinghouse for the diverse and valuable Holocaust educational resources this community offers.

As the region's only Judaic resource center, the Levine-Sklut Judaic Library regularly fields inquiries from our community and beyond about the Holocaust, how to teach it, and how to make this complex topic relevant in today's classrooms. Currently there is no centralized source of information on local Holocaust resources; the creation of a Center for Holocaust and Tolerance Education would provide a single point of access for all things related to the Holocaust for the greater Charlotte community. By coordinating and consolidating information about the full breadth of the region's opportunities, the Library can do what a Library does best – connect patrons with the resources that most effectively meet their needs.

Thanks to a generous grant from Stan Greenspon, the Library has convened an exploratory commission that will investigate the possibilities and options of a potential Center for Holocaust and Tolerance Education in Charlotte. A Library Board Task Force will conduct the research, and an important part of the process is soliciting input and feedback from our constituents, educators and the public about how such a Center could be most valuable, accessible and useful to you. Please assist us in our efforts by taking a few minutes to complete a brief survey.

Please visit www.lsjl.org to fill out survey. ✪

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