

Your Federation Dollars at Work

Israeli Shlichah Teaches What Life is Like in Israel

By Michal Ra'anan, Israeli Shlichah

On September 6, four months ago, I arrived here in Charlotte. For those of you who do not know me yet, allow me to introduce myself - my name is Michal Ra'anan and I am your community shlichah, or emissary. My role for the year is to bring Israel to you through academic, cultural and educational programming for youth, adults and families. I came to Charlotte through the Jewish Agency's "Young Volunteer Emissary" project, and my stay and work here is sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte.

One of the agencies I work with is the Consolidated High School of Jewish Studies, where I teach the Post Confirmation class. Along with my co-teacher, Andrew Bernstein, whom I am very lucky to be working with, I talk about Israeli everyday reality as well as current events in the Middle East. We are working on leadership development as well as promoting the students' understanding of the conflict and their abilities to advocate for Israel.

The latest lesson with my Post Confirmation class was a personal one. We decided that both an interesting and effective way of teaching about Israel would be for me to tell my own story, simply as a person who grew up in Israel and



Michal Ra'anan

spent most of her life there. The lesson was a powerful one, both to the class and to me.

First, I told the students my grandparents' stories from the Holocaust. All four of my grandparents are Holocaust survivors. Each of them has a different story, varying from hiding in a Christian monastery to surviving Auschwitz concentration camp. Then, I spoke of my parents. I talked about why my father moved from Budapest to Israel at the age of nine, and what it was like for my "sabrah" mother growing up in the young state of Israel. She knew that something horrible had happened to her parents in Europe, but didn't know exactly what.

I showed pictures of my family and my street. I showed them where my hometown, the city of Ra'anana, is located on the map of Israel, and how far my quiet, cen-

tral-Israeli hometown is from a Palestinian village in Samaria. (It's a fifteen minute drive. Tel Aviv, by the way, is twenty five minutes away.) For every Israeli, even one like me, who lives in a center area of Israel, the conflict is extremely close to home, literally.

After that, I told them about the ten months I spent at "Nachshon" pre-army leadership academy.

I described my incredible experiences in the program, studying Judaism, Zionism, Philosophy, Leadership and Social Studies, and how my friends and I planned and carried out our own trips and social action activities throughout the year.

I continued with the description of my IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) service. I brought an authentic IDF uniform to the class, demonstrated proper military appearance, and shared a few anecdotes from army life, to give my students an idea of what it means to become military property, specifically IDF, for two to three years.

Then, I gave a quick review of a few of my closest friends. I acquainted them with the daughter of a former athlete who had escaped the Munich Massacre by jumping out of a window; another friend was the last Jewish baby to be born in Wales, Great Britain. The class also saw a picture of a



Michal with her family at the beach.

high school friend, who was one of the first female combat soldiers in the IDF, and another friend who tells the story of her father, an ex-combat pilot whose plane was shot down. Her father spent two years in captivity in Syria, and today is the founder and owner a major Hi-Tech company. I concluded the presentation with pictures of some of my favorite places back home - the beautiful Judean desert and the blooming Galilee.

I am confident that my students understood the point. They knew I was showing them all this in order for them to see that there are many faces of Israel beyond the conflict, as there are many faces of Israel behind it. That Israel is as diverse

and fascinating as it is beautiful, and at the same time it is a complicated place whose citizens make successful efforts to lead everyday lives, just as people do in the U.S.

After the lesson my co-teacher Andrew asked me: "Do you know how many friends with these kinds of stories I have? All of them." ☆

or have friends with stories similar to those of your friends'?"

"None," I replied. "Do you know how many friends with these kinds of stories I have? All of them." ☆

This lesson is the best I can offer. It is me, bringing Israel to you. And I sincerely hope you will bring yourself to visit in Israel.

Michal can be contacted at the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte at 704-944-6757.

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CONTENTS

Federation News.....	pp. 2-7	Yiddish Institute.....	p. 17
Community News.....	pp. 8-12	Mazel Tov	p. 18
Judaic Library and Resouce Center	p. 12	Jewish Community Center.....	pp. 20, 21
Youth Visions	p. 13	Dining Out	pp. 23-25
Women's Page	pp. 14, 15	Synagogues and Congregations.....	pp. 18, 19, 22, 25-28
Jewish Family Services.....	pp. 15, 16	Schools.....	pp. 29-31

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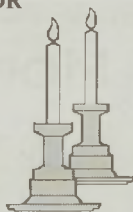
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