

The Strength of a People. The Power of Community.

The Talmud teaches, "The world is too heavy for anyone to carry alone." With these words, we are reminded of the importance of collective responsibility; wherever a person is in need, there is an entire community ready, willing, and able to provide assistance, care, and support.

Here is a personal account of that sense of solidarity and Klal Israel and the power of our Jewish community.

By Becca Gerger

When I first moved to Israel, I felt like Israel was special for its land and history, especially as it connects to Judaism and the Jewish people. I would feel my hands shaking at the Western Wall, and I would see Jews from all over the world living in this vibrant place together. Through those unforgettable experiences, I realized why I decided to move to Israel and serve in the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces). Over time hummus also became a huge part of the equation - kidding, sort of. Eventually after a struggle to understand Israeli culture, I began to love Israel for the warmth and love that radiates within people and their families. No matter how much all the soldiers on my team argued, at the end of each encounter awaited a silent forgiveness as we forged a transcendent unity that took me - and is still taking me - years to understand.

My name is Rebecca Gerger and I moved to Israel (made Aliyah) in 2010, and enlisted in the IDF. I served in the IDF as a female combat soldier in an infantry team on the border of

Egypt. During that time I was known as a "Lone Soldier" (an Israeli soldier, often times from outside of Israel, who has no family living in Israel to support them). I grew up in Charlotte and spent my youth in BBYO and USY, and graduated in 2008 from Providence Day School. I currently have been released from the army and live in Jerusalem, where I am a student at the Hebrew University.

Living in Jerusalem this past summer was difficult. Rioting and nationalistic crimes occurred throughout the city, while an IDF ground operation began in Gaza. Rockets were intercepted over my apartment as I studied for my final exams.

When the Operation expanded in July, many of my friends were called to serve. I will never forget the morning of July 20 when I found out that at least 16 soldiers had been killed the night before in Gaza. When I learned that two of those soldiers were American lone soldiers, one of them an acquaintance named Max Steinberg, my chest dropped. Max was from California serving in the Golani Brigade. Like my family, Max's family was a typical American Jewish family who loved their son, and supported him when he decided to move to Israel. The losses that night really hit home for me, and I didn't know what to make of them. I couldn't stop thinking about how horrible it would be if something had happened to me in combat, and my family finding out thousands of miles away. I remember calling



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my dad that night and telling him how alone I felt.

Max's funeral was held on July 23 at Mount Herzl. As I was sitting on the train towards Mount Herzl, I remember trying to hold back the tears. I wondered who would show up to these soldiers' funerals? How would their families cope with what had happened, when there are so few people they could turn to who had been through what they were about to go through?

To my surprise, by the time I arrived to Mount Herzl there were so many people I could not even see the burial site. The heavy feeling in my chest left my body when I raised my head and saw thousands of people in all directions gathering to lay Max to rest with his family. Instead of crying, I smiled. I was in disbelief. More

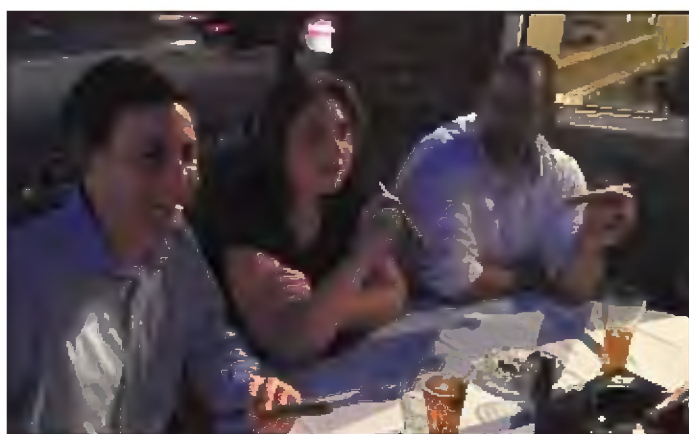
than 30,000 Israelis from all over the country gathered to be with Max's family and show their love and support on this one occasion. I realized that all of Israel was there for Max, and for all the lone soldiers who had ever decided to leave their homes abroad to come and defend the state of Israel. It was the first time in my life that I knew with certainty I was in the right place, and that just as Max had been there for the Jewish state of Israel, Israel was there for him. No matter how alone I had felt as a foreigner all these years, I was never alone.

So when asked what is so special about Israel, I have a new answer. What's so beautiful about the Jewish state is not just its culture or its place in history, it is the Jewish morals that drive society from the inside out. From the

most secular Israeli to the most religious, there was no Israeli who did not feel the heavy burden of every single person who died during the military operation this summer. I can think of no other country in the world where tens of thousands of people with no connection whatsoever to a young soldier from another country would show up to his funeral with heavy hearts and a true sense of appreciation for this one human being. Israeli culture values life, and the life of one matters to all, no matter who you are or who you know.

The connectedness between Jewish people, and the support between us all, has made me more grateful than ever to be a Jewish Israeli American living in this world. ☆

Jewish Federation Impact 365



Impact365 hosted a Scotch & Cigars Tasting this past October. Participants sampled a selection of scotches, partook of hearty appetizers, and finished the evening with cigars on the patio.

Save the date for Impact365 Annual Comedy Night: Saturday, January 10.

Impact365 is a giving society for young adults donating a dollar-a-day (\$365) to the Jewish Federation Annual Campaign.



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Join us on December 11 as we present our new look.