

## A Long Distance Hug

"What matters more than being here, is that your heart is here" explained Pancho Kol, who with Amit Amar runs Tzevet Paamon. The organization was founded in memory of their friend Major Chaggai Bibi, who was killed in the line of duty 12 years ago and always assisted those in need.

Elad Amedi, local secular radio host, invited *chayalim* to one of Tzevet Paamon's refreshment stands. Yossi Goldberger who is a listener of the show contacted the host, and conferenced in Rabbi Pesach Lerner, Executive Vice President Emeritus of the National Council of Young Israel. They told him to make a BBQ for the soldiers and they would provide the funds. The weekly Barbeques took off. On the fourth night of Chanukah, in an area near the Kotel, towards the exit at Shar Ashpos the 6th weekly BBQ took place. I was visiting Israel for a family wedding, and knew I had to attend the event.

Growing up, I had the privilege of watching my father, Shlomo Mostofsky, then, President of the National Council of Young Israel, and Rabbi Lerner, work tirelessly on behalf of *am Yisrael*, and *eretz Yisrael*. Coat and Purim costume drives for former Gush Katif residents, *shalach manos* baskets and letters for the *chayalim*, trips to Sderot, advocacy for Jonathan Pollard, their work was endless. Their dedication, particularly to the land of Israel and the *chayalim*, had a tremendous impact on me. While learning in Israel, I would attend the Conference of Presidents of Major North American Jewish Organizations yearly conference with my father to learn more about Israel's current events. My best friend was in Gaza during the last war, while his wife and newborn sat home waiting to hear from him. So I understand the importance of supporting the *chayalim*, and Israel, and showing we care. But despite all my time spent in Israel nothing prepared me for the Barbeque experience.

When I first arrived, I noticed boxes of grilled hamburger sandwiches, neatly wrapped. Yossi proudly told me 300 hundred burgers were headed to the soldiers stationed in and around Chevron. I then spent the next hour with other volunteers, cutting buns and stuffing them with tomatoes, pickles, onions, ketchup, mustard, and burgers. At first only a few *chayalim* attended. But suddenly, there was a sea of uniforms heading our way. One commander walked over and asked me for 15 burgers for his "guys". People were making orders

as if it was a regular 5 star restaurant. They were singing, joking, and having a great time.

As I walked around asking them if they ate, I thanked each soldier individually for their service. One *chayal* asked me about the sign noting the barbeque was sponsored by the *charedim* in America. I told him that everyone loves them, and people wanted to say, "Thank you" He looked at me puzzled, and asked, "But are they from one area in America?" I explained that while many of the current supporters are from the New York area, *charedim* throughout the entire America support and are sponsoring past and future barbeques. (Rabbi Lerner later told me that BBQs have been sponsored by a shul in Canada, individuals in Maryland, in addition to shuls and individuals in the greater NY area.) I told him: "You risk your life daily so we Americans can live comfortably in America and come here for vacation. We like to imagine our love for the land is enough, but without you, we wouldn't have a land to love." He was visibly moved.

At one point, I pulled Pancho aside to thank him and to let him know what a *zechus* this was for his friend's *neshama*. He refused to take any credit, again thanking us. He related that at the last BBQ, in Har Gilo, the *chayalim* couldn't understand why American Charedim would make a BBQ for them. They literally would not believe him. He told their commander, "The *charedim* in America can't be here to hug you, so they sent this food as their hug, to let you know they love you." I also tried to thank Elad for his commitment to these BBQ. It is rare in Israel to see a secular radio host so committed to the *chayalim*. However, he too turned it back on us. He said that



he never imagined these BBQs would become a weekly event, and he sees firsthand the joy it brings the *chayalim*. He lets the *chayalim* know, with Yossi and Pancho that this is all being done by the *charedim* of America.

As I worked with the other volunteers, two of whom were grandchildren of Rabbi Jonah Gewirtz, another

## "My Extended Family" Hosted Hundreds Of Children For A Fun Filled Chanukah Celebration At The Jewish Children's Museum"

Excitement was palpable at the Jewish Children's Museum, which was entirely occupied by hundreds of single parent children on Monday evening, December 7th, the second night of Chanukah, as they and their parents enjoyed a great evening hosted by My Extended Family.

After browsing through and enjoying the museum's exhibits with their parents, children enjoyed The Live Game Show, do arts and crafts and watch a demonstration of ancient oil making techniques. Dinner, donuts, and dancing were enjoyed by children and parents alike, as the staff of MY Extended Family and their families mingled with the crowd.

As the children were leaving after a fun filled, delicious and exciting evening, they could barely manage to hold their stunning new Chanukah toys, their custom professional family photos that were printed on the spot, and of course the \$5 of Chanukah *gelt*, given to each child by Rabbi Yoseph Vigler, Rav of Mayan Yisroel, the parent organization of MY Extended Family.

Just as the small flame of the Chanukah miracle lit up the darkness of the Greek oppression, so too MY Extended Family lit up a difficult chapter in the lives of these single parent children.

As one parent wrote, "Thank you for making this time in my life more manageable and special." And a special thank you to the sponsors, Riverside Abstract, and to the Chesed and Community Volunteers who made this possible.

For more information about My Extended Family and Mayan Yisroel, please visit their website: [www.mayanyisroel.net](http://www.mayanyisroel.net)



supporter of the initiative, it became apparent this would differ from any experience I had in Israel. Although we all spoke fluent Hebrew, many of the *chayalim* used the opportunity to practice their English on us – one soldier referred to a tomato as a cucumber. Some asked for plain rolls, some just wanted *sufganiot*, but everyone

patiently waited their turn, and "ordered" with smiles on their faces. At one point Daniel Meyer, Director-General of the International Young Israel Movement in Israel singled out one of the *chayalim*. He told me that the prior week, that *chayal* killed a terrorist. These brave men and women, many still in their teens, are our friends, our neighbors, our cousins. They put their lives on the line so we don't have to.

As the night wore on, and the temperature continued to drop, the *menorah*, having been lit surrounded by the *chayalim*, continued burning

bright. It was a reminder that no matter how bad things may look, Hashem will always stand with those who fight for us, whether they are the *Maccabees* or the *chayalim*. He will continue to strengthen them, and us against our enemies.

It was a night I will never forget. Mi K'amcha Yisrael, who is like Your nation, a nation of brothers and sisters, who love one another and will risk their lives for one another. I left the BBQ knowing I helped bring joy to these people's lives. We can never really thank them enough for what they do, but this is a great start. Pancho, Yossi, Amit, and Elad have taken it upon themselves to be our representatives, it is upon us to help with funding. What was started as a way to remember a fallen friend, has become a way to show our brothers and sisters that we, the *Orthodox Jews* of America love them, and support them unconditionally. I urge all those reading my article to visit the website [www.idfbq.org](http://www.idfbq.org), to sponsor a BBQ and to volunteer on your next trip to Israel. You will be forever changed.