



# BECOMING AS 'ONE'

With the help of OneFamily, victims of terrorism found each other and, as a result, are learning to live life again



**OneFamily**  
Overcoming Terror Together



(All photos courtesy of OneFamily unless otherwise stated)

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**In these difficult times, show your solidarity with the people of Israel  
Go to #onefamilystrongerthanterror and upload your selfie and your message!**



(Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

# Dear friends,

**T**o everyone at OneFamily, to bereaved families and their beloved children and to my personal friend Marc Belzberg - who is doing such holy work, the work of God.

I know how difficult it is to lose a loved one, and how painful it is.

Recently I met with a group of orphans. One of the kids asked me how I handle the loss of my own brother (Yoni z"l) and I said to him, "each person and each family copes in a different way."

Each person – bereaved brothers, children or widows.

Everyone is coping.

Every person copes in a different way.

But knowing that we have OneFamily, the family of the Jewish people, hugs us and gives us a source of strength. It provides us a tremendous amount of strength.

May you continue to do this important work. May these children continue to grow, develop and flourish.

*Benjamin Netanyahu*  
Prime Minister of Israel



MARC BELZBERG, Co-Founder and Chairman, OneFamily. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

# It's all about family

• By DAVID BRINN

Walking into the lobby of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, Marc Belzberg seems to know everyone – a couple chatting in the plush, oversized lobby sofa, the doorman, the maître d' in the dining room and the cab driver out front, all of whom he greets with a warm handshake and personalized repartee.

Unassuming, slender and casually but neatly dressed in a button-down shirt topped with a black kippa, the 61-year-old Belzberg doesn't exude the bravado one would expect from a wealthy businessman who made his fortune in his native Canada before moving to Israel in 1991.

In fact, the only boasting out of his mouth during a 90-minute talk last month emerges when Belzberg describes the impact that OneFamily – the organization that he founded in 2001 with his wife, Chantal – has on thousands of Israelis who have experienced the devastating weight of terrorism invade their families.

With almost 50 staff members, dozens of volunteers and an annual budget of some \$4 million, OneFamily provides emotional and financial assistance to terror victims and the family members of victims killed in terrorist attacks.

"I don't come here that often, Chantal runs the place," says Belzberg after a short cab ride to the OneFamily national headquarters that takes up an entire rambling three-story house in the capital's Greek Colony.

"The first year or so, I was very active, but it became too much to handle, too painful. This place is a disaster. My wife has more emotional strength than I do – she can cry and laugh, cry and laugh again. I cry and I can't laugh after that."

The office space is bustling with staffers and volunteers, and Belzberg leads a visitor up the winding stairs to the empty clubhouse on the top floor (he doesn't have a private office in the building), where he recounts his unlikely journey from secular Canadian teen to one of Israel's leading philanthropists.

"I GREW UP in a Zionist environment, not a religious

environment," says Belzberg of his upbringing in Edmonton, Alberta, and later in Vancouver. His father is Sam, one of three renowned Canadian Belzberg brothers who made a fortune in real estate, oil and gas investments.

He took up his parents' offer to study for a year in a boarding school and chose to go to Israel at the Hadassim school near Netanya, due to its connection with Hadassah Women, which his mother was actively involved in.

"I was very moved by Israel during that year I spent there. I don't know why, but it parked inside my heart," says Belzberg, who returned to Vancouver to discover that many of his friends he had left behind had become religiously observant during his absence, due to the arrival of a young, charismatic rabbi from Baltimore named Pinchas ("Pinky") Bak.

After resisting any contact with Judaism for a couple months, Belzberg was convinced by his friends to attend a Shabbat morning service.

"I arrived late, sat in the back, and left as soon as it was over," he recalls. "Pinky ran after me up the street and asked me to stay for lunch. He was the kind of guy it was hard to say no to. I told him okay, but that I would need to borrow his phone to call my parents and tell them where I was going to be. Unbelievably, he said yes. And because of that, my life changed forever."

Belzberg spent the entire day with Pinky and at the end of havdala, he went home and told his parents, "I want to be Jewish."

Embarking on a path of observance and learning, Belzberg attended Yeshiva University in New York and, for his junior year, returned to Israel to study at the Har Etzion Yeshiva in Gush Etzion – another pivotal moment in his life.

"Pinky changed my life religiously, but the rabbis in the Gush changed my life Zionistically," says Belzberg. "I knew at the end of that year that Israel was going to play a big role in my future."

But life got in the way, as Belzberg spent the next decade working in his family's business in Canada and then moving to New York, where he worked on Wall Street for Salomon

Brothers and Oppenheimer & Co. and later served as the first president of First City Capital Corp. from 1983 to 1990.

At age 31, he was an unmarried workaholic. However, a friendship with the chief rabbi of Antwerp resulted in a series of blind dates whenever he would call Belzberg and tell him an eligible Antwerp Jewish woman happened to be in town. Belzberg was just about ready to give up the endeavor when the rabbi insisted that he meet one more arrival.

She turned out to be 20-year-old Chantal, fresh out of college. Within a short time, the two were engaged. At their official engagement party in Antwerp, Belzberg received the shock of his life.

“We had never discussed the idea of moving to Israel before, but Chantal was introducing me to her high school friends, and said to them: ‘We’re going to live in Israel,’” says Belzberg with bemusement.

“I said, ‘Where did that come from? In fact, I do want to move to Israel, but maybe in 25 or 30 years.’ And she said, ‘We’ll move in five years.’ I didn’t want to get into an argument at our engagement party, so I just said ‘Okay.’”

After their marriage, Belzberg continued to work around the clock, but after five years, he felt ready in his life to make the move. Now it was Chantal’s turn to demur, having finally gotten used to maneuvering through life in New York. Still, a plan was a plan, so on Christmas Day, 1991, the Belzbergs arrived in Jerusalem in the middle of a snow storm with three small children and 15 pieces of luggage.

THE NEXT FEW years saw the couple have four more children, as Belzberg delved into various hi-tech ventures and investments. He also started on his philanthropic path by backing the MiBereshit organization and the Masa Yisraeli program, which provides Jewish identity educational material to more than 10,000 secular elementary and public school kids in Israel and holds six-day seminars on Jewish identity for over 130,000 high school students and 20,000 IDF soldiers in commander courses.

“Masa Yisraeli is very powerful, and addresses issues like ‘Why are you here? What are you fighting for?’” says Belzberg. “It has a major impact. One tough Russian-born soldier came up to me crying and said, ‘Now I understand why my parents moved to Israel.’”

As gratifying as that philanthropic venture was, it was only a prelude to the mission that was born out of a bat mitzva project for the Belzberg’s daughter Michal.

“Her bat mitzva party was scheduled to take place soon after the Sbarro suicide bombing on August 9, 2001, in which 15 people were killed and 125 wounded, including children in my kids’ school,” recalls Belzberg.

“With Michal’s input and a little prodding from us, we decided that instead of making a bat mitzva party, we would use the money and the money that family would have used to come to Israel to create a fund for a project – Michal would go to visit children in the hospital and visit homes in [the] shiva [mourning period] and decide what she could do to help, financially or otherwise. It was a one-time bat mitzva project.”

The project, while a little beyond a 12-year-old’s scope, admits Belzberg, proved successful, with help from her parents. When more attacks with many casualties took place a couple weeks later, Belzberg and his wife looked at each other

and made an instant decision to expand the fund beyond its original scope.

“The idea was to take care of the needs of the victims and their families, no matter their age,” he says. “The family put in \$100,000, we did some Internet advertising and hired a firm to help figure out what the name should be, and within half a year we had \$2m. from an outpouring of support from Jewish communities around the world. The world was waiting for some way to help Israel, and this provided the mechanism.”

Chantal took over the reins of the new organization ten years ago – dubbed OneFamily – and it has evolved over 14 years into the benevolent angel for terror victims and their families – providing everything from cash, furniture and toys to therapy, psychological assistance, day camps, retreats and friendship to over 3,500 clients and their families.

“When we made the decision to really take on this responsibility, we knew that the OneFamily name would be the guiding principle from which every plan and every difficult decision would flow,” says Belzberg.

“At every turn we ask ourselves, ‘Are we taking care of every person in the same way we would, if they were our brothers or sisters?’ We and everyone at OneFamily drag that thought process to the forefront of our minds many times every day. They’re part of our family.”

Belzberg describes the process OneFamily went through to help the family of Beduin taxi driver, Amin Shaaban, who was killed after the Hasimta pub terrorist attack by Nashat Milhem in January, leaving behind three wives and 15 children. After identifying the age of each of the kids, the coordinator for the project, along with Belzberg, is going to visit them this month and present each kid under 17 with a new bicycle and each youth over 17 with \$1,000.

“Being aware of ourselves as part of the family of mankind, the offspring of Adam and Eve, led to our decision to help everyone struck by Arab terror – Muslims, Druse, Christians and foreign workers. They are integrated fully into our adult programs,” says Belzberg.

“The call of the generation is for Jewish unity in Israel and around the world. Rich and poor, black and white, Religious and nonreligious, Orthodox and Reform, can all join hands against our common foes who seek our destruction. That’s why we called the organization ‘OneFamily.’”

“It symbolizes that the Jewish people are all one big family. We are all the children of Abraham, and as such, we are all responsible one for the other. We also know that the Jewish people are part of the universal family of all of mankind, which carries with it a responsibility as well.”

As he looks over the office, bustling with staff and volunteers, Belzberg expresses pride in what his wife has created.

“Taking on a field that we knew nothing about was a daunting task. I know that, today, there is no other organization like OneFamily anywhere in the world. Psychologists are approaching OneFamily to learn the methodology that we’ve developed and implement across the board to rebuild lives shattered by terror,” he said.

“When you live your life, you have to decide what you’re living for – for yourself or for something bigger than yourself? Chantal and I both have the philosophy that life is short and that you have to do as much as you can for the people around you while you’re alive.” ●

# ONEFAMILY GIVES **HOPE for a NEW LIFE.**

We are devoted to all **victims of terror in Israel** – from the **moment** of the **terror attack** for as long as they need us... even if it is for the **rest of their lives.**

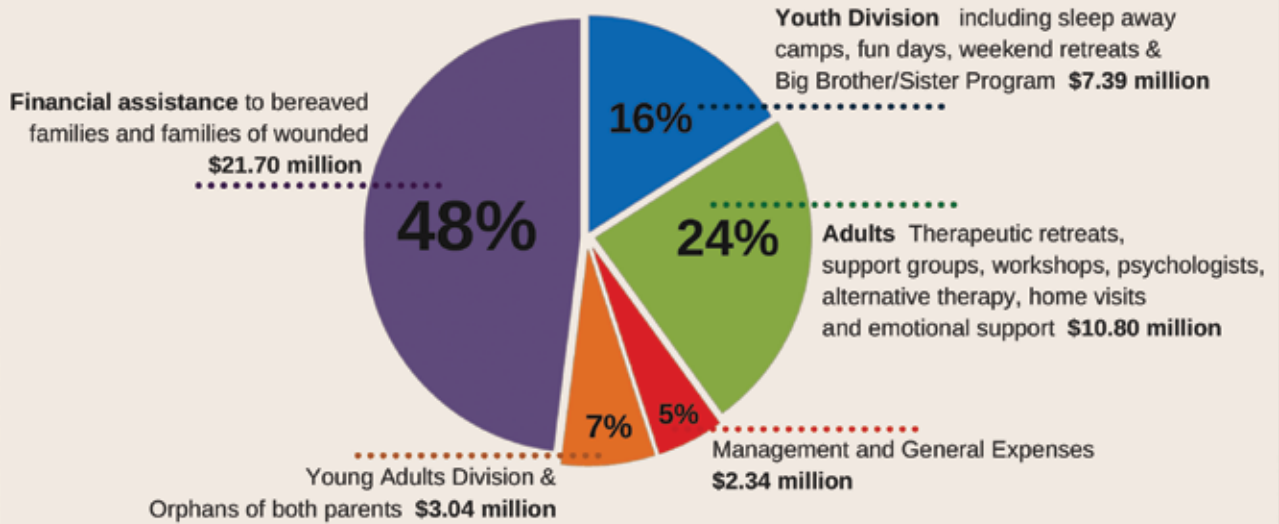
We currently **support: 1,344** injured families, **1,465** bereaved families, **983** bereaved, maimed and traumatized youth and young adults. Since our inception in October 2001, OneFamily has worked with **3,395** families in whom we have invested **\$45.5 million** dollars over the last 15 years.

Our annual budget runs at approximately **\$3.5 million** dollars. OneFamily was awarded the Presidential Citation, given by President Shimon Peres, for volunteerism in 2011 and is a founding member of the newly created International Federation of the Associations of Victims of Terrorism.

## ONEFAMILY DOES



# One Family Fund Distribution of Funds from the Past 15 Years in Dollars: **\$45.5 million**



Hours of OneFamily Psychological Assistance

**12,200**

Adopt A Family **455**

Bereaved People Cared For By OneFamily

**2,841**

Educational Grants

**680**

**IN THE LAST**

**15 YEARS...**

Bar and Bat Mitzva  
Twinnings **356**

**15,600**

Hours of OneFamily  
Alternative Treatments

**11,000**

People Participated in OneFamily  
Activities in the Last 15 Years

**3,263**

Wounded People  
Cared For By OneFamily

**418**  
Big Brother  
pairings

# OneFamily

## WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE UK:



OneFamily UK was honored to host Israel's Ambassador to the USA, Ambassador Ron Dermer at their 2015 Gala Dinner which raised over \$1m for OneFamily. Over 450 guests attended the dinner at the Grosvenor House hotel and heard Ambassador Dermer speak of the important work that OneFamily undertakes in Israel and about the rise of militant extremists around the world. UK Chairman Naomi Nevies explained the vital role that OneFamily in Israel undertakes and how the support of the UK community is critical to the organization. Naomi introduced the OneFamily band, a group of musicians all of whom have lost an immediate family member to a terrorist attack in Israel and who have found a way of rebuilding their lives through music. The band played a moving rendition of Sarit Hadad's "Shema Yisrael" receiving a standing ovation.



OneFamily UK has brought 24 groups to London encompassing almost 500 participants. The impact on these trips has been huge with friendships being gained for life. Participants talk of their life before London and after London and how it has given them the courage to carry on. Their counsellor says that their week in London is like 2 years of psychotherapy.

With the help of the "Care for Kids" committee led by committee chairman Sally-Ann Thwaites, almost \$500,000 has been raised through the annual Kids, It's a Knockout event. Over the past 7 years, more than 5,000 children ages 7 to 14 have participated in the event, which sees them jumping over hurdles, climbing huge inflatables and sliding through foam filled obstacles. Every year the event becomes bigger and bigger as more children look forward to a day of fun while at the same time raising money for young children affected by terror.





# Around the World

## WHAT IS HAPPENING IN CANADA:



50 Canadian Hikers start their Sea-to-Sea hike on the shores of the Mediterranean in 2015. The annual hike, started by OneFamily Canada in 2007, has raised over \$1.5 million. Since its inception over 450 Canadian's have participated in this unique event, hiking across Israel alongside victims of Terror, showing their support and solidarity.

Over 30 Israeli youth from OneFamily participate in a powerful evening program at Camp Timberlane, North of Toronto. For over 10 years, Canadian donors have raised funds to bring hundreds of Israeli youth to Canada to spend three weeks at camp, experiencing its magic, sports and activities, forging lasting friendships and giving them a break from the pain that they have experienced through tremendous loss and grief.



Young Israelis from OneFamily enjoy some sightseeing in Toronto. OneFamily Canada, runs several programs each summer where bereaved youth participate in camping and cottage programs in Canada. The Camp Moshava and Canadian Cottage Experience welcomed young victims of terror to Canada for a few weeks of respite in a warm, caring and nurturing Canadian country setting.



Canadians join 25 OneFamily couples from Sderot at a therapeutic retreat in conjunction with the 4th Annual International Dragon Boat Festival on the Sea of Galilee.. For 4 years OneFamily Fund Canada has sponsored teams at the Festival, funding a unique therapeutic healing retreat which has proved life changing to the participants.



# Crawling out of a dark abyss

*After enduring unspeakable trauma, Inbar Azrak and Puah Palmer – through the help of OneFamily – have learned that through hope and faith life really does go on*

• By TOVAH LAZAROFF

**M**other cannot stand up, she is in pain,” four-year-old Tal Azrak told her doll.

It’s the kind of line Tal never would have said before her mother Inbar, 28, was wounded in a firebombing attack.

The Azrak’s family life has not returned to normal since the moment in August 2015 when Palestinians torched the car of Inbar and her husband Uri as they drove through the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Beit Hanina.

Before the attack, Inbar said, she was the kind of person who was busy every moment. Now “I sit on the sofa and give orders.”

The hardest part has been the impact of her injuries on her role as a mother to her three children: Tal, Yishai, five and Shahrar, two.

“I did everything for my children, and now I need help,” said Inbar.

Since the attack she has relied on OneFamily and its coordinator Mind-ee Levinger.

As Inbar spoke, Levinger sat next to her and held her hand. Levinger, who herself lost an older brother in the Lebanon War in the 1980s, remembered how she first met the Azrak family in the hospital.

Initially most of her conversations were with her husband Uri, because

Inbar was sleeping or unconscious from the pain.

Uri, whose experience of watching his wife almost burn to death was possibly more traumatic, kept saying that everything was fine, recalled Levinger. “Finally I said, to him, ‘Uri, everything is not fine.

“You have to understand what you went through. I want you to cry, I want you to feel.’ I was very rough with him.

“He didn’t know his wife was going to survive; she was black from the fire when she arrived at the hospital,” said Levinger.

The trauma from an attack doesn’t just impact one person, it touches all the people around them, Levinger explained.

Inbar’s parents suspended their lives for five weeks. They did not budge from the hospital. “Her mother is a very strong lady. She picked that girl up and said, ‘Stop feeling sorry for yourself.’”

However, Inbar’s children were initially too scared to go near her.

“Post trauma is like a disease,” said Levinger. “Everyone is affected.”

It is precisely in those moments, Levinger explained, that she or one of OneFamily’s 40 staff members enters the lives of the terrorism victims to stand with them as they go about picking up the pieces of their shattered lives.

The rest of the Israeli public moves

on, but for the victims, life will never be the same, she said.

This current wave of terrorism has been particularly difficult, because news of each new attack over the last months often awakens traumatic memories for the survivors or bereaved relatives of past attacks, she said.

OneFamily’s founder and director Chantal Belzberg said that her staff are “professional friends” who walk into the victims’ lives and say, “We are here for you, when all your friends have walked away.”

They look at the situation from a holistic perspective and assess the family’s overall needs, whether it is help paying bills, child care or battling the medical and insurance system, Belzberg said. In Inbar’s case, the organization provided her with a rental car when she did not have one.

Inbar said that the firebombing attack “was like falling into a deep black hole, from which I am slowly climbing out.

“It was as if someone took my old life and threw it away,” she said.

At the time of the attack the couple were on their way home to the Samaria settlement of Kida, after a two-day vacation in Jerusalem without their three children.

“Thank God they were not with us,” Inbar said as she thought of how much worse the situation could have been.

It was such a fun day, she recalled. She and Uri had gone shopping, eaten in a restaurant and seen a movie in Cinema City.

They left for home around 7:30 p.m. It was August, so it was still light outside.

Uri drove and she sat next to him on the front seat. They had stopped at an intersection in the area of Beit Hanina. To their right, a truck was parked in such a way that half of the vehicle was on the sidewalk.

“The light turned green and then there was an explosion and the car burst into flames,” she said.

Since then, she has seen video footage from security cameras that showed three Palestinians hiding behind the truck, and a fourth on lookout duty. They threw three Molotov cocktails at the front window of the car, next to where Inbar sat.

For a few seconds, everything went black. Her mind couldn’t take it all in.

She could only hear and feel.

“Get out quickly,” Uri yelled as he jumped out of the car. For Inbar, the only way out of the car was through the door, which was now on fire.

“I could already feel the fire on my legs.” She steeled herself for the moment after she jumped through the flames.

“I told myself I would have to roll on the ground to put out the fire.”

She opened the door but the seatbelt held her back.

“It took me another second to undo the belt. Then I jumped and rolled.”

Inbar’s next memory was the way she lay on the ground with her cheek on the pavement. Uri stomped on her skirt to put out the rest of the flames.

She had one very simple thought. “I’m alive.”

The relief lasted for just a moment.

“Then the terrible pain began. I never felt anything like it. I sat up and screamed like an animal,” she said.

They couldn’t call for help because their phones were in the car.

Palestinians surrounded them, some seemed to gawk and others took snapshots on their phones. Fearful of the growing crowd, Uri kept everyone away



INBAR AZRAK was severely injured when terrorists torched her car in August, 2015. OneFamily has been an anchor of support ever since. (Mark Israel Sellem)

with his gun, Inbar recalled.

To handle the pain, she told herself the situation was temporary and that soon she would be in an ambulance.

“In a year, you won’t remember this,” she told herself. Many strong emotions burst through her in those few short moments. She felt a strong sense of God’s presence and the lines from the well-known psalm ran through her brain.

“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear because you are with me.”

They were saved, Inbar said, by a Jewish couple, Denis and Nadia, who stopped to help. They called for an ambulance. Then the two of them lifted her up and moved her further away from the car, which exploded moments later.

Then the ambulance arrived and she was finally given morphine for the pain. Her mother came down from her home in the north and stayed by her side in the hospital until she was released.

“The five weeks in the hospital were more traumatic than the attack,” she said. Inbar had burns on her arms and legs. Twice a day she had to take a show-

er to make sure the wounds remained free from infection.

Initially, she said, the pain was so great she could not endure it, so doctors had to put her to sleep.

She smiled often as she spoke, even as she recalled the painful moments during and after the fire. But in the hospital, she said, she had moments of deep despair.

She recalled one Friday when she spiked a high fever and endured waves of intense pain that was off the charts.

“I felt like I was going to die,” she said. In her mind God spoke to her and said, “There is another choice, you can come to Me.”

She told God, “I got the message I will fight, for myself and my children.”

FOR PUAH Palmer, the scars are all emotional. She felt her husband, Asher, and one-year-old son, Yonatan, were in danger, hours before she received any actual news of the attack that killed them on September 23, 2011.

She and Asher spoke briefly in the morning while she worked as a nurse in the Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem. He was packing their car to drive to Puaah’s parents’ house in

Jerusalem for Shabbat.

“It was a quiet shift,” said Puah, 31, as she recalled that fateful morning four years earlier, when she was six months pregnant.

“We talked about what to bring, what to leave and when to pick up Yonatan from day care,” said Puah.

“At 1:55, I called him again. He said, ‘Everything is fine. I have Yonatan.’ I said, ‘Okay, I will see you in an hour,’ she said.

Half an hour later she called him again to see when he would arrive at the hospital to pick her up at the end of her shift, but he didn’t answer.

Initially she thought nothing of it and assumed he was somewhere without phone reception. She went to the parking lot outside the emergency room to wait.

When he didn’t show up within a reasonable length of time, she called again. This time, his phone was not on.

“It was strange. I felt that something

had happened,” said Puah. She called emergency services to see if there had been an accident on the road. They said, “Yes, but the road was open.”

Panicked, she called her mother who told her, “Take a taxi to our house and we will figure it out.”

Together they phoned hospitals in Jerusalem to see whether they had received wounded people from the car accident.

Their search ended when a friend called to confirm that Asher and Yonatan had been killed. That was followed by a visit from the police, who explained that a car accident caused their death.

“In my heart I knew it was not true that he died that way,” said Puah. Already she feared it was a terrorist attack because Asher was such a careful driver.

“We had a black Shabbat,” recalled Puah.

It was only during the seven-day shiva mourning period that the Shin Bet (Israel Security Service) came to explain that incident had now been designated as a terrorist attack.

A Palestinian in a car heading in the opposite direction threw a large stone at the windshield of Asher’s car. The stone flew at a much higher speed as a result, making it more deadly than a bullet as it hit Asher in the head, killing him instantly.

The car overturned, crushing Yonatan to death. Other Palestinians came and stole her husband’s gun.

Nothing was the same after that.

She quit her job. It was half a year before she walked back through the door of their apartment, and then it was only to pack up her things.

“I had nothing to return to,” said Puah, who explained that those hours in the house where she had been so happy were more painful than the funeral.

“It looked exactly as it had that morning when I left,” she

said. Puah moved into her brother’s house in the Efrat settlement until the birth of her daughter. Then she moved to a house next to him and eventually to the Tekoa settlement nearby.

She named her daughter Orit, for the light she brought into her life in a dark time. It was a name she and Asher had already discussed as a possibility.

Orit is now old enough to know that she had a father and brother who died. “I told her they are in heaven and will not return.

She knows them through me,” Puah said.

“In the beginning I lived just for her. I got up in the morning only for her. With time, I learned to live for myself.

“She is a light and a present unto herself,” said Puah. Time has not erased the pain, but as the years pass she has re-framed her future; including a return to school, where she is studying art, with a focus on drawing.

Since the attack, OneFamily has been there with Puah offering endless emotional support, as well as help that addresses her specific needs when they arise. OneFamily provided a volunteer to help with her daughter. Mindee remains in constant touch to provide ongoing support.

WHAT IS it that OneFamily does that makes it so cherished in the hearts of thousands of victims of terrorism? Chantal Belzberg explained that just knowing they can turn to OneFamily whenever they are in need gives them a sense of confidence to face the future and continue their recovery.

OneFamily is not limited by the strict government rules that lock them into providing a uniform solution for all. OneFamily is the exact opposite. Each family receives a tailor-made program based on their unique circumstances.

“Friendship,” she said, “is not about who you have known the longest. It is about who has walked into your life and said, ‘I am here for you and proved it.

“We do not wait for people to approach us. We tell them we are here for you and we want to look after you.” ●



PUAH PALMER (left) poses with OneFamily coordinator Mindee Levinger. Puah’s husband Asher and infant son Yonatan were killed in a terrorist stone throwing attack in 2011. (Courtesy)



FROM LEFT, Miriam Peretz, Sara Rosenfeld and Rachelle Fraenkel are three courageous women who like the proverbial phoenix, have risen from their own ashes.

# Girl power

*Three courageous bereaved mothers reveal their pain, their optimism and their indebtedness to OneFamily*

• TAL ARIEL AMIR  
Photos by ARIEL BESOR

For a brief moment Miriam Peretz, Rachelle Sprecher Fraenkel and Sara Rosenfeld appeared to be happily reunited old friends. They were smiling and laughing, as if everything in their lives were happy and in order. Only their eyes, which had shed endless tears, hinted at their deep sorrow.

All three of these women have experienced the most excruciating pain possible, familiar to all women who have lost a child. Peretz lost her sons Uriel (22) and Eliraz (32) while they were serving in the IDF, Rosenfeld lost Yitzhaki (22) – a pilot who died in an accident, and Malachi (26), who was killed in a brutal shooting attack. Fraenkel lost her 16-year-old son Naftali, one of the three kidnapped teens from the summer of 2014.

Like phoenixes, these three courageous women have risen from the ashes of their despair. Despite the fact that their beloved sons were plucked out of their arms, they have managed to navigate their way towards a new vitality to lift them up out of their anguish, out of the darkness and into the light.

As these bereaved mothers meet up at

OneFamily, an organization that supports victims of terror and their families, each one feels her own private grief, yet at the same time is empowered by the support she receives from the others. Each has other children to raise, is cultivating an impressive career, cries, laughs and misses her loved ones – and yet somehow still finds time to speak in front of youth groups and soldiers about her values, faith and will to go on living despite the pain.

Peretz, Fraenkel and Rosenfeld all feel that motherhood is the most important aspect of their lives, and as a result, the loss of a child hit them so hard that it practically left them without the ability to breathe.

“The fact that I’ve suffered the loss of a child twice now is painful beyond words,” Rosenfeld says quietly. “I feel like I failed to keep my children safe. Even though Yitzhaki and Malachi are far from me now, I am still their mother just like I’m the mother of my other children who are physically close to me.”

These feelings are not foreign to Peretz, a veteran educator and mother of six. When her firstborn was killed in Lebanon in 1998, she also felt like she’d failed to keep him safe.

“When I was told he’d been killed, I immediately began fantasizing that I was there at the time when his unit was ambushed and that I’d stepped in and been killed by the six roadside bombs instead of him. When I was told that Eliraz had been killed, I felt like everything had been taken away from me, including my status as a mother.”

Fraenkel, a mother of seven and dean of students at Nishmat as well as a teacher at Matan (both Jewish studies institutes for women), talks about how painful it is to think about all the things she’ll be missing.

“I miss Naftali so much, and it pains me to think that he’ll never mature past 16, that he’ll never have the chance to get married and have a family.”

From where do you draw your resilience?

Fraenkel: “Our large families are our mainstay. We chose to have large families, which has brought us great amounts of joy and endless blessings.”

The entry hall at OneFamily is full of activity. Young volunteers are bent over red plastic containers, wrapping sweets and other treats in transparent cellophane that rustles as they work. These boxes will be sent to thousands

of families who have lost loved ones in terrorist attacks.

Peretz recalls the moment at which she received the devastating news.

“When I saw the officers walking towards me, I yelled out, ‘Uriel!’ as if I could warn him about the impending danger,” Peretz recalls. “I felt his death inside my body. I wanted to turn back the clock so that I could jump out in front of him and absorb the blow that killed him, and thereby keep him safe. Since that day, whenever I hear fireworks on Independence Day, I think I’m hearing bombs exploding. I had a very unusual request of the Engineering Corps soldiers – I asked them to blow up six roadside bombs so that I could feel what Uriel went through.”

How did you react when IDF officials came to announce that Eliraz, your second son to fall, was killed in the Gaza Strip?

“I was completely crushed. By then I was already a bereaved mother and a widow. My husband, Eliezer, passed away after Uriel was killed, so I didn’t have anyone to lean on.”

Rosenfeld, the mother of nine children, from Kochav Hashahar, can relate to that sense of missed opportunity.

“When Yitzhaki died, I accepted his death as a painful decree from heaven,” she says, her voice cracking. “My husband was sad that Yitzhaki hadn’t gotten married, but I just kept thinking how awful it would have been if he’d left orphans behind. When Malachi was killed, I said to God, ‘This time you’ve gone too far.’ I was very sad that we have nothing left of Malachi and Yitzhaki’s wonderful DNA.”

For 18 days after her son Naftali was kidnapped on the night of June 12, 2014, together with Gilad Shaer and Eyal Yifrach, Fraenkel was hopeful that he would come home.

The boys’ parents vacillated between hope and despair until they received the bitter news that the three boys were murdered on the same day they were kidnapped. In an unusual and inspirational move, Fraenkel said kaddish over Naftali’s grave. “This isn’t a big deal in the world in which I live,” she says modestly. “There’s no halachic problem with women saying kaddish, it’s just not socially acceptable in some communities. It’s much more common outside Israel.”

Peretz interjects: “If my husband were to rise up from his grave, he would kill me if he heard me saying kaddish. It’s very innovative, but I guess it’s normal in Rachelle’s world.”

Rachelle, how did you survive all those days when you didn’t yet know what had happened to Naftali?

“We were very focused on bringing Naftali home. I told myself that I’d have time to let myself fall apart later. And then, after we found out, I felt like crawling under my blanket and staying there for six months, but my young son climbed up on my bed and tugged at my hair – he needed me. That brought me back to life...I can feel sorrow, but I don’t need to let that sorrow define who I am. I can feel pain without letting it overcome me.”

Rosenfeld was only six when she lost her mother during the birth of her only sister. As a result, she has striven to be the mother she always fantasized about when she was a child. After Yitzhaki’s death, she became pregnant with Avraham-Avia, and when her next child, Elyashiv, was born she was already a grandmother.

“After Yitzhaki died, I chose to keep on living,” Rosenfeld says.

What was the hardest moment for you after the *shiva* ended?

Peretz says: “My husband was overcome with sadness and wouldn’t go to work, but I had no choice but to continue functioning because I had a daughter in third grade. It’s incredible how much strength it takes just to prepare a sandwich for your child to take with her to school. I had to be strong for her. A home that smells of good food is a home that’s alive.”

Miriam, how do you keep from breaking apart every morning?

“My faith keeps me strong. I’ll never have an answer as to why Uriel and Eliraz were taken from me, but I’m happy to see Jewish boys and girls enjoying themselves on the beach and at the mall. And Eliraz’s four children are growing up happy. My boys did not die for nothing – if we did not go on living, what would have been the point of all this bloodshed?”

Sara and Rachelle, do you feel the same, even though your boys were killed in terrorist attacks and not during their military service?

Fraenkel: “In today’s reality, there is

no difference between dying in a terrorist attack or on the battlefield. The battlefield is everywhere.”

Rosenfeld: “My situation is a little bit more complex because Yitzhaki was a pilot in the IDF, and he wasn’t killed in battle, but in an accident. At Remembrance Day ceremonies, I felt like hiding in the shadows when they would talk about the soldiers who sacrificed themselves. But every death is significant.”

Did your families or communities suffer a crisis of faith following the death of your loved ones?

Rosenfeld: “The only way I’ve been able to survive is by having faith. And even if when I die and go to heaven I find out that God was just something invented by psychologists, I’ll still feel happy that I was a believer. I don’t know how I would be able to live if I didn’t have faith. My mother, Yitzhaki and Malachi were all taken away from me suddenly. It’s as if I was lifted up really high and then knocked down hard to the ground.”

Rachelle, has your faith strengthened following your loss?

“Before Naftali was killed, my faith was already intact, even after seeing terrible things happening to others. So why should it be any different when something happens to my family? My faith is vulnerable and exposed, and I have no control. This has been a lesson in retaining my humility and faith. I made the decision not to be angry, since it’s just a waste of energy. Anger and hatred just eat you up from within.”

Peretz: “Every Rosh Hashana I prepare a list of all the things God has done for me over the past year, and what I’ve found is that the positive always well outnumber the negative. Yes, sometimes, I’ve gotten quite angry, but that doesn’t mean that I’m not also grateful and that I still have faith. I’m a mother who has had her children taken away from her, so I reserve the right to react this way. We are all human.”

All three women have demanding careers and bustling families, and yet they still find time to speak – as volunteers – across the country to tell their stories.

Do you dream at night about your sons who were killed?

Peretz: “Not long ago, I dreamed I was sitting on the windowsill at home next to Or Hadash, Eliraz’s son, and we were looking out over the green wadi that

was blooming. Suddenly, Eliraz passed by right below us. He was wearing a white shirt and he had a large stone in his hand. He walked right up to us and then pushed Or Hadash with the stone and told him, 'Get moving!' Then I woke up. I felt like Eliraz knew that his son was having a hard time getting motivated to prepare for his bar mitzva, which was only a year away. When I told Or Hadash about the dream, he began making an effort, and he learned everything by the time his bar mitzva came around."

Rosenfeld: "In my dreams, I know that the boys are about to die. My husband and I debate whether we should tell Yitzhaki that he's about to die, and I ask him to choose a sign that would let us know if something dangerous is about to happen. Yitzhaki laughs and then we embrace. The dream about Malachi, though, is crazy. He was able to hint to me about things that would happen in the future through numbers – and some of them have come true. I am a skeptic at heart, and so it's important for me to examine the dreams fully before I let myself believe they're true."

Fraenkel: "I feel like my dreams are a wonderful way to let me connect with Naftali. I'm always so happy when I see him in my dreams."

Peretz breaks the seriousness by wondering aloud whether Uriel would even

recognize her if he were to come back to life suddenly, which causes Rosenfeld and Fraenkel to burst out laughing.

"But he's watching you all the time from up above," Fraenkel tells her. Rosenfeld says that she spends a lot of time reading books about what happens to our souls in the world to come, and then Peretz interjects merrily that she'd rather make an effort to enjoy this world first.

Have you found that you deal with the death of your sons differently than your husbands have?

Peretz: "In my experience, they're much weaker than we are. My husband developed diabetes following Uriel's death, and on the first anniversary of the death he had a heart attack while we were visiting his grave. I think God loved my husband dearly and realized that he would not be able to survive the death of a second child, and so he took my husband away before Eliraz was killed."

Rosenfeld: "Women are stronger than men."

Fraenkel: "Women might be stronger, but this does not reduce the amount of pain and suffering we feel."

How has the organization OneFamily made you more steadfast?

Rosenfeld: "Like its name says, it's a family. OneFamily volunteers and staff are always around and ready to help,

and they give me the feeling that whatever it is I need, they're happy to give it to me. The trips they organize for bereaved mothers are a godsend, and they help me relax and let my guard down. I can cry with the other mothers and let myself feel like a little girl because there are so many others to hug me and take care of me."

Peretz: "OneFamily is like a home. We don't have to wear any masks here. The organization understands the complications of each family – to them we're not just a list of bereaved parents or widows. They offer support for children, grandchildren and siblings, too."

Peretz: Shlomit, Eliraz's widow, had a member of OneFamily assigned to her for a year. That was incredible. OneFamily volunteers and staff are able to identify what each family needs, and help everyone with the specific things that are hard for them."

Fraenkel: "What's amazed me the most is how OneFamily figured out what we needed even before we asked for anything. Mindy, the Jerusalem coordinator, pushed me to take part in a psychodrama group, and I met an incredible group of women there, with whom I both cried and laughed. OneFamily has provided me and my family with a tremendous amount of support." ●

*Translated by Hannah Hochner.*

## One big family

• CHANTAL BELZBERG

**K**nowing that I'm making a difference in people's lives makes me jump out of bed in the morning and work until late at night, 100 percent on a volunteer basis. It started with a desire to give, to help those whose lives have been shattered by terror, but I found that I receive, in fulfillment and inspiration, a lot more than I give, in time and money.

Doing kindness for others is a contagious and addictive activity. This reality has lured every member of our family to volunteer their unique talents to further the mission of OneFamily, by fund-raising, working as camp counselors, befriending kids their own age and maintaining long-term relationships with those who most need their love and attention.

The OneFamily organization is a result of the unfortunate needs our society has evinced. As the expression goes, "necessity is the mother of invention."

Israel has suffered more terror attacks than any other Western country, leaving painful physical and emotional scars on every segment of its society, from the north and south, Jews and non-Jews, rich and poor, young and old, men and women, black and white, religious and non-religious and everything in between.

Each attack raised new needs that OneFamily hadn't yet provided for, and that I believed we needed to offer solutions for as well. Today, the solutions OneFamily provides include financial, medical, emotional, psychological, legal, educational, job transitioning and every other need for which help is requested.

The tragedies in OneFamily include



not only children who have lost one or both parents, bereaved parents, spouses and siblings, but also those wounded by terror and their families. ●

*The writer is CEO of OneFamily.*

# The Orphans Division



THREE HALEVI siblings with their children with OneFamily. (Sarah Levin)

*An island of understanding (and escape) in a sea of heartache*

• BY DAVID ADLER

**N**eta Halevy first heard about OneFamily's Orphans Division, when she was sitting shiva for her parents Rafi and Helena. On March 30th, 2006, both of Halevy's parents were killed by a suicide bomber disguised as an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva student. Shortly before the bomber detonated his explosives, Rafi and Helena picked up a group of hitchhikers near Karnei Shomron, including the bomber.

"Out of the thousands of people who came to the shiva, there was this one point of light - this feeling you can carry on, that someone understands you," Neta said, describing meeting a member of the orphans support group who came to the shiva on behalf of OneFamily.

In a short time, Neta and her sister Naama joined the group. "It's the only place where people really understand me and what it's like not to have parents. It's a group of people where everyone understands you."

Chayuta Rozman, coordinator of this division, said the orphans are deeply connected by the enormous scope of their loss. "They have lost their solid ground, the foundation of their lives in the blink of an eye," she said. "It means being walked down to the chuppah by siblings, being drafted into the IDF accompanied by relatives, aunts and uncles and cousins, giving

birth to children with no grandparents who would have been so excited and happy. It means never again getting a kind word or a warm hug that you can only get from a parent.

"They no longer have a home to return to at the end of the day, no more mother or father for emotional support and encouragement," she added. "There will be no more family Chanukkah candle lighting and of course no more Seder night with mom's delicious food and dad's special traditions. All they have is the feeling of being all alone."

The division was formed nine years ago for OneFamily members who were already receiving support from the organization. When the number of orphans tragically grew, a special division with its own coordinator was established, to cater to the specific need resulting from a loss of both parents.

Sadly, the group has grown to 53 orphans today. They meet with support counselors who help them talk about their tragedy and help them find the tools to cope. They hold regular meetings and dinners where they discuss their loss and their process of coping on a daily basis. The support group also includes retreats for the orphans - many now parents themselves - and their spouses and children, spanning from local outings to retreats abroad to Europe and North America.

Chayuta said the group has adopted for itself the name "Sayeret" - which

refers to the most elite unit in the IDF which is given the most difficult tasks, in reference to the fact that they are OneFamily's Elite unit, having survived the most difficult consequence of terror.

Sayeret member Tzvi Yehuda Dickstein, whose parents and younger brother were killed on July 26th, 2002 in a road shooting, said he joins the group every chance he gets. "After every meeting I feel as though something in my soul has been strengthened, I feel like the dedicated staff of OneFamily really helps me rehabilitate and rebuild myself and my family."

The size of the group and the sense of unity the members share has also given the orphans a level of political clout. When the group was formed, Israeli law, unbelievably, granted government aid only to orphans who lost one parent, but not for those who lost both parents. Those circumstances had never occurred.

But once OneFamily established the group, the orphans were able to work together to push for new legislation that would grant aid to orphans of both parents as well. After a lengthy battle, the group succeeded in getting the law changed in 2008, something that would have been impossible for any of them on their own to accomplish.

Yeshurun Gavish's parents, older brother, and grandfather were killed in a single attack on the second day of





YESHURUN AND Dikla Gavish with their five children with OneFamily in Romania. (Sarah Levin)



THE DICKSTEIN SIBLINGS don helmets while on a OneFamily retreat in Romania. (Sarah Levin)

Passover in their family home on March 28th 2002. Yeshurun credits OneFamily for making it possible for the group to face the government bureaucracy. “Thanks to OneFamily and the meetings that took place, a group of people found the strength and the will to turn to the Knesset and work hard lobbying for a law change that would recognize and properly compensate victims of terror from both parents.

“For all those years [before 2008] we received close to no assistance from the state,” he said. “All we had was the emotional and financial support we received from OneFamily, which helped us get back on our feet and to believe that things will get better.”

With the passage of the law, the large financial burden on OneFamily was greatly reduced without the orphans losing the financial support they needed, allowing the organization to focus on their emotional needs.

The tragic attack that killed his family members was not the last time Yeshurun faced the threat of terrorists. On March 9, 2016, a female terrorist with a knife infiltrated his community in Kedumim. Yeshurun’s wife, Dikla spotted the terrorist, and called to her husband. Yeshurun ran out with his gun and diverted the terrorist long enough for her to be captured by security. Four years earlier, a similar event took place, with Yeshurun running toward a terrorist with his gun to prevent an attack

Yeshurun said the group trips organized by OneFamily have provided a much-needed respite. He lights up describing a trip to Romania this past August. The trip was held for 87 members of the orphaned sons and daughters and their families, including Yeshurun and Dikla and their five kids. The group also included very young orphans who are also members of the OneFamily Youth Division.

They visited castles and synagogues, hiked mountains and soared down zip lines in the Romanian countryside. Describing the trip, Dikla pulls out her cellphone and finds a video of her riding a zipline across a wide Romanian river, an experience she said she won’t forget.

Yeshurun had also been on a trip to New York in July 2010 to compete in the New York Triathlon representing OneFamily.

Yeshurun and others describe the trips as being a treasured relief, and that with the support of the organization they have the ability to experience things they probably wouldn’t otherwise ever experience in their lifetime. Away from it all, they develop the courage to cope with fear and anxiety, something that’s no small order when you’ve been through such heartache. For some like the Gavish family, the unease can be even more powerful because tragedy struck within their home, the place where people are supposed to feel the safest, and they saw it

happen right in front of them. A vision of your parents, brother and grandfather being murdered right in front of you is an image in your mind that you can never forget.

Tzvi Yehuda said the retreat in Romania had a profound effect on him. “I was able to reach emotional goals which I had not been able to achieve in a very long time. It also shook up my inner-self.

“I rediscovered myself,” he continued. “The retreat provided the space I had not experienced for many years – to look deep within myself and rejuvenate.”

He said he decided to go on the trip in order to bond with the group, but also with his kids and his siblings. “We never have a real opportunity to come together, because we don’t have a home to come back to and none of us have a place big enough to host all of us. Each gathering requires so much planning,” he said regarding his brothers and sisters. “We had been on local retreats with the group in the past, but nothing added up to this experience.”

Chayuta said the hands-on involvement from OneFamily founders also contributes to the success of the program. “We are all privileged that Marc and Chantal accompany us at every activity, family celebration, and therapeutic retreat, and host us for Chanukah candle lighting in their home each year,” she said. ●

*Ezra Schwartz died the way he lived: helping others.*

*During his gap-year before college, the 18 year-old yeshiva student from Boston was murdered in November at the Gush Etzion junction while delivering food to soldiers stationed there. Below is an excerpt from a moving speech his older sister, Mollie, delivered three months after his death.*

# Remembering my brother

*He was deeply bothered by tragedy and found happiness in innocence, my brother Ezra was my best friend and so much more*

• By MOLLIE SCHWARTZ

At 9:20 a.m., on Thursday, November 19, 2015, I left my dorm, heading to the library for an early morning start. On my way, I texted my dad: “No need to call, I’m up.” I had overslept my alarm two days in a row. Then, time was my biggest problem.

Within a half hour of a father texting his daughter to have a good day, an ocean away, his first son was taken away from him.

While I sat quietly in the library editing grammar and citing sources, I lost the only person in the world I couldn’t live without, my just-barely baby brother and my best friend. He was both and so much more.

He still is – my summer playmate, vacation buddy, shoulder to cry on, boy to complain to, a person to share happy moments with, someone to look up to, but also to take responsibility for – the person whose happiness genuinely made me happy.

There are a million good things I have to remember Ezra.

For example, I have this very clear image of him in my head at my side repeatedly tapping my shoulder, hopping from one leg to another shouting in my ear, “gréy, gréy, gréy, gréy!” Gréy was the bizarre nickname he came up with for me, spelled G-R-É (with an accent) Y.

“I won’t bother you gréy, I promise, I will just lie here and be quiet,” Ezra would say to me as he cuddled himself up in my bed while I sat at my desk doing homework. That’s an-



THE WRITER hugs her younger brother, Ezra, while on a family cruise last year.  
(Remembering Ezra Schwartz Facebook page)

other image I have of him – sleeping so deeply and peacefully that not even the loudest sirens could wake him up.

When I left for Israel last year, I got a text from Ezra that said: “Bye gréy! Shmez loves you soooooo much and shmez is gonna miss you every day you’re gone. Doesn’t know what he’s gonna do without his gréy. Love you and have a great year.” That might have been the sweetest text I’ve ever gotten. Not only because it was adorable but also because it IS Ezra. Behind his cute humor was a serious, loving boy.

He did what made him and the people he cared about happy. He wasn’t afraid to take risks, be judged, or befriend the “uncool” kids. He was deeply bothered by tragedy and found extreme happiness in innocence.

He loved the purity of life itself, for what it was, and the opportunities it could give him.

I remember telling a friend, Aliza, how lucky I was to have my best friend also be someone I trust and love unconditionally. How lucky I was that our relationship was perfect and there was nothing anyone could possibly do to improve it. And just how happy I was with that simple, but influential part in my life.

On November 19, a part of me was taken away and I couldn’t comprehend it. I kept repeating “It can’t be real”



MOLLIE SCHWARTZ (far right) poses with other bereaved youths, along with OneFamily's newest staff member Michal Belzberg (far left). (Courtesy)

and “But it’s EZRA.” Three months later I still have hope I can wake up in the morning and this will all have been one long, terrible nightmare.

Three months later feels like three years later because of how much changed in one day. Three months later feel like three minutes later because of how shocking and painful it still is. Three months later, and I still think about him 24/7. But three months later, I’m at school. To most of the world I seem to blend in, but the world feels different to me, and I don’t feel like I blend in.

At the funeral, I promised Ezra that I would be happy for the both of us from now on. But what is the point of that promise if I only seem happy to everyone else? I hope that someday I’ll learn to live with the heartache and let myself be fully happy again.

He would say: try to have some fun. And I am truly trying to do just that because I don’t want to disappoint him. He would understand that happiness is unachievable right now, and he would understand that his gréy misses him terribly.

I also don’t want be someone that people pity. However, the more strength I show the world, the less strong I feel inside. The more alone I become since my emotions are mine alone.

This where I feel OneFamily comes in the most. When my family and I were in Israel attending a number of commemorating ceremonies, Chantal and Marc Belzberg

suggested I attend a retreat for 18 to 22 year olds in Acre.

A week later, I was flown back to Israel for this special weekend. When I arrived, there were 60 or so other siblings and children of terrorist victims.

Spending time with others who understand what I’m going through provided me with inspiration and companionship. Inspiration came from those who lost their loved one years ago. I saw their hope and joy. I saw that maybe I can achieve the same.

Everyone was extremely welcoming, despite the language barrier. That weekend offered me a sigh of relief, where I felt a weight was lifted off my shoulders.

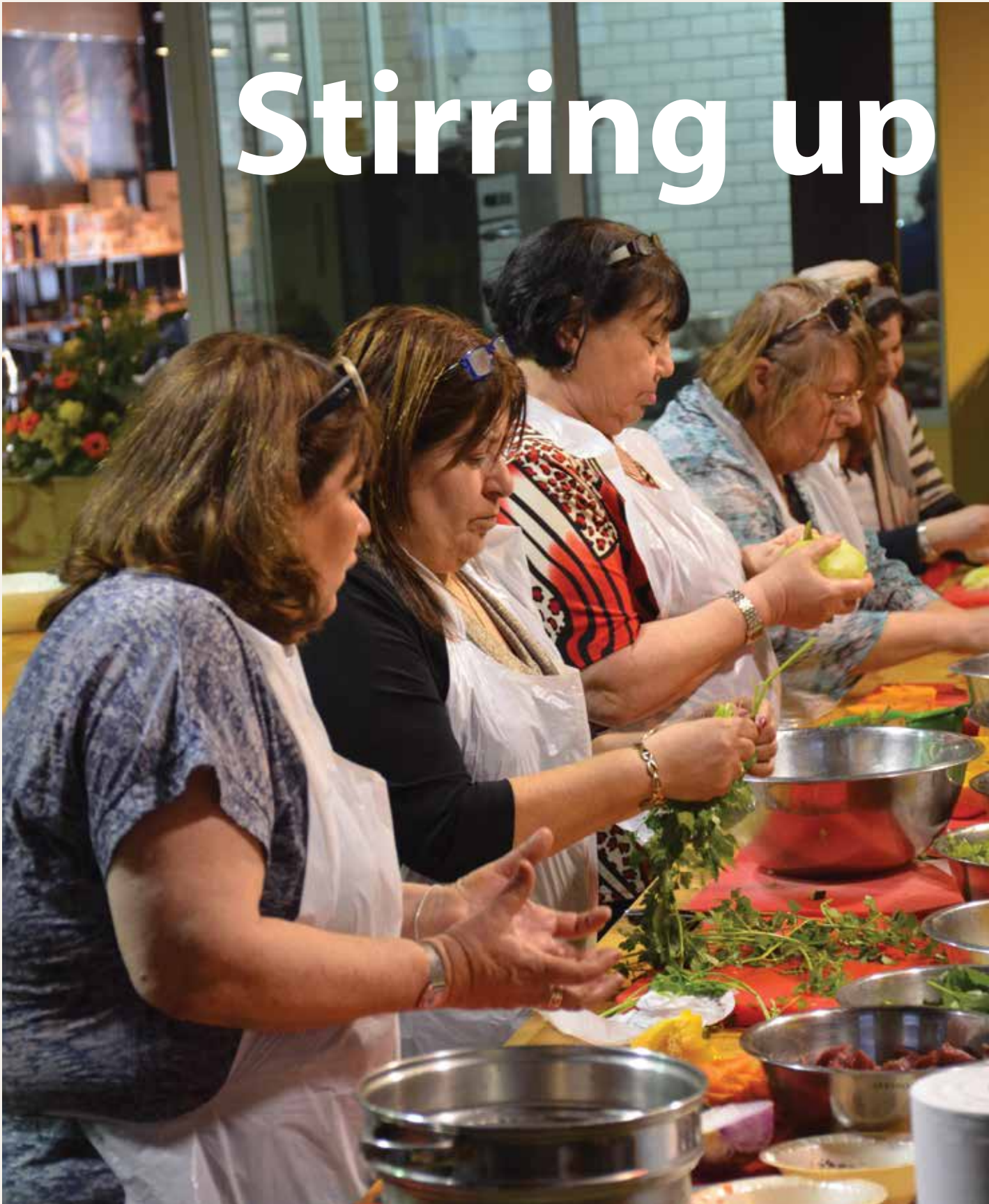
It was also nice to simply feel “normal,” again – to truly be just like everyone around me. To know that while we were doing activities, playing games or hanging out, we were also all connected on a much deeper level because we were all going through the same thing.

I was no longer subconsciously singling myself out and wondering who in the room knew or who didn’t know of my tragedy.

Instead of getting the sympathy that made me feel uncomfortable, I felt a true kinship from these people who were suffering with me.

Should I partake in another OneFamily event – which I hope I can – I know I will be welcomed by friends because of this indescribable bond. ●

# Stirring up



(Sarah Levin)

# lasting bonds

*Through day-to-day activities like cooking, yoga and meditation classes, these women come together at a OneFamily widows retreat and realize one simple, yet profound fact: they are not alone*

• By LIDAR GRAVÉ-LAZI

The room was filled with the sound of mixers, clanking dishes, shouts of encouragement, chitchatting and even laughter, as a few dozen women all hurriedly prepared meals in a MasterChef cooking workshop.

Taking a break from their daily routine, these women – widows of the victims of terrorist attacks – came together in Tel Aviv as part of a three-day retreat organized by OneFamily.

Following nearly two hours of preparations and cooking, the women sat down together relishing their dishes, offering each other second helpings and exchanging recipes.

At the end of one table sat two young women – Netta Lavi and Odell Bennett – inextricably bound by fate and brought together by OneFamily’s annual retreat.

“It was during Succot. We were eating in our succa in the Old City [of Jerusalem] and we finished and went into the house and then heard screaming from the street,” Netta told *The Jerusalem Post*. “My daughter looked out the window and saw the screaming was coming from a Jewish woman – Odell. My husband took his gun and ran downstairs and he went to help her but he didn’t notice the terrorist. He saw her bleeding and ran to help her and when he leaned down to help the terrorist stabbed him in the back.”

Odell had been walking through the Old City with her husband Aharon and their two young children when they were attacked by a terrorist. Odell’s husband was stabbed to death in the attack.

Odell was also stabbed in the neck and without the help of Netta’s husband, Rabbi Nehemia Lavi, would most likely not have survived.

“He fought with the terrorist really hard, but in the end he was also stabbed to death,” Netta said, barely able to complete the sentence.

Only four months had passed since that horrific day, and yet the two women were sitting together, smiling, talking and raising a joint toast to usher in a “joyful” month of Adar.

“Shortly after the event, I received a call from OneFamily and they said they would give me some more time, and whenever I was ready they would sit and talk with me and help me with whatever I needed,” recalled Netta.

Netta, who was left alone with her seven children – the youngest only 2½ years old – was overwhelmed by her new reality.

“There are a lot of difficulties, most significantly the sense of loss – the loss of a father figure at home, who was such a wonderful dad, a spiritual figure that is very missed,” she said, holding back tears.

“There are also the day-to-day difficulties, to be able to manage on your own...” she said trailing off.

Netta credits OneFamily with their tremendous help and generosity for her and her family.

“We had to move apartments and OneFamily helped us. They made sure each of my children had a big brother to look after them, they helped us at all sorts of crossroads and with therapy workshops and psychologists and everything that a family in our situation needed,” she said. “They are always helping – from the very beginning and until this very moment.”

Regardless of the tremendous help the organization provides, Netta said four months later she is still in a very difficult place in her life.

“It doesn’t become easier day to day. You begin to understand the reality better, but the more you accept it, the more you understand the magnitude of the loss,” she said.

The retreat, she explained, has given her a short respite from her daily reality.

Providing relaxing activities, from cooking workshops to yoga to meditation classes, psychotherapy, tai chi, massage therapy, Zumba, art therapy, singing, touring and bonding, Netta is happy to just meet other widows who know and understand what she has been going through.

“The feeling that you are not alone and that there are a lot of other people like you really helps. We tell each other things and share feelings, difficulties and just talk,” she said.

“OneFamily really does create a feeling of one family for the people of Israel and when one hurts there are those who will help.”

While for Netta the experience of the OneFamily widows retreat was a new and sometimes overwhelming one, she was surrounded by a roomful of other women, “veterans,” for whom these retreats have become a happy and welcomed annual tradition.



NETTA LAVI and Odell Bennett, whose husbands were killed in the same terrorist attack in the Old City of Jerusalem in October. (Sarah Levin)

would go just for the children,” she recalled. “The children saw only pain and suffering, I thought I would take them to enjoy themselves a bit.”

“They passed out popsicles and my children were content, but I sat at the edge of the pool and I didn’t know what I was doing there – I was completely disconnected,” she explained. “That was the first time I left the house and it was because of OneFamily. Afterward we had many more retreats and events and have had events just for the widows. And I don’t want it to end.”

She explained that the friendships she has developed through the organization have become a joyful part of her life.

Corrine Ben-Aroya, who has been widowed 14 years, told the *Post* she looks forward to these retreats every year.

“This retreat is like air to breathe – it’s not that I can’t go anywhere, but when I do, I go by myself,” she said. “This is not the same. I come here and I see friends – women who unfortunately are all in the same boat, part of the same destiny – and it’s very comforting and also very fun and it is all thanks to OneFamily who made it possible.”

Corrine lost her husband 14 years ago at the bombing of the Park Hotel in Netanya on Passover.

“It was March 2002 during the Passover Seder. We were at the hotel, the entire family – my husband, in-laws, children, brothers, sisters – the men went to synagogue and came back and when we entered the hall people were going to the right and to the left. We went to the right side,” she recalled. “My dad said to my husband: ‘Why are you standing up?’ and he replied that he was standing and waiting for a friend to come in.

“My husband died on the spot and my daughter who came for the Seder who was an intelligence officer in the Air Force was left paralyzed on half of her body. We were all injured, me and all the children,” she said closing her eyes as if reliving the event.

When asked if she needed a minute, Corrine declined and said: “It has already been 14 years – to say that I have gotten used to it, no, but I have accepted that this is the situation.”

Corrine said that since the tragic day, OneFamily has become an integral part of her life.

“OneFamily came into our lives when we were at the bottom of the bottom. We felt that our world flipped over on us and OneFamily along the entire way, supported us, invited us to take part in events, activities, and retreats,” she said.

She recalled her first time at a OneFamily retreat.

“I got a call from OneFamily out of the blue inviting me to the Dead Sea,” she said.

“I was a shadow of my former self at the time but I said I

“When we don’t see each other for a long time and we reunite at these retreats, we hug each other and are so happy to see each other,” she said. “At family events and milestones we all invite one another to share and take part in our joyful moments.

“I know people who don’t want to open old wounds, but I don’t feel I am opening a wound when I am here. I feel like I am healing the wound. When we meet we don’t sit and cry, we do fun things and we enjoy life,” she said.

Corrine said that as a widow of 14 years she doesn’t see herself as a role model to the newer widows but rather feels that being together and having shared similar experiences strengthens all the women.

“I remember a few years ago that one of the women who became a widow a few years after me came to me and asked me: ‘How will I survive?’” she said. “We had many conversations throughout the retreat and afterwards one day she came to me and she told me that I had been a model for her and that she felt that she was not alone in the world and unfortunately, she is not the only one going through this.

“It helps when you have someone who can help and if you are a person who is willing to receive the support, then it really helps,” she said. “I really don’t want this support to ever end. OneFamily has become a significant part of my life.”

Another participant, Chaya Wasserman, said she benefited greatly from the experience.

“This was truly a therapeutic and soul healing retreat,” she said. “Thank you to OneFamily for sending me on this retreat and for the unconditional dedication.”

She was moved by the bonding that took place at the retreat.

“I loved the retreat,” she said. “It was a pleasure seeing frowns turn to smiles, heavy hearts melting away while singing, dancing, making new bonds and reconfirming friendships.” ●



# Youth Division provides support programs for bereaved youth

• By Jerusalem Post staff

Several months ago, a terrorist infiltrated a community of Eli and carried out an attack. A 12-year old boy, whose family had already lost a loved one to terror, was afraid tragedy could strike again.

Stuck at home and worried, he called the counselor assigned to him by OneFamily for reassurance and support during the stressful situation.

The phone call, and the calming effect it had on the boy, underscores one of the many ways OneFamily serves the emotional needs of bereaved children through its Youth Division.

“When a connection is made between the child and the counselor, then they know that there is always someone there to help them,” says Rachel Ben-Menachem, a clinical social worker responsible for training the staff and volunteers.

“The counselors really get to know the children they are

responsible for and so, in this particular case, when the child was in distress, he knew that there was someone he could speak to, to tell him how he was feeling and he knew he would always be there for him, day or night.”

The OneFamily Youth Division serves the needs of children and young adults ages 8-22. There are usually around 300 kids in this division, and every year the oldest group moves on to the Young Adults division, but tragically, there have always been more 8-year-olds who are just starting OneFamily camp. It fosters the development of personal relationships between the kids and their counselors and amongst the kids themselves, both of which provide emotional support throughout the year.

The 40 counselors, each in charge of 5-10 children, commit to stay as counselors for at least a year and half so the children don't lose another important and loving person in their lives. Onefamily's therapeutic camps bring the kids together three times a year, during the Passover, Chanukah, and summer vacations, and in between camps there are

weekend retreats, holiday programs, as well as a Big Brother/Big Sister program for those who need weekly visits, to play with them and help them with their homework.

The counselors speak on the phone with each child in their group at least once a week and visit them at their homes periodically. They make a point of being with each child in their group, on their birthdays and on the day of the anniversary of the death of their family member, to provide additional support.

The counselor's goal is to build a genuine relationship with the child in order to serve as an additional aspect of the child's support network. The counselor becomes someone who the children can relax with and confide in about their loss or anything else weighing heavily on their minds.

Mikey Porat, a member of the IDF's most elite unit, served as a counselor for four years. He said the children he worked with would eventually open up because they sensed that they were talking to someone who really care about them and spoke to them on their own level, not as an authority figure.

"We're not psychologists or teachers, or the professionals they go to with their trauma. We are their peers."

He said he tries to enter the child's world. "I would visit his home, go to the kids' room, play computer games with them, go outside and play ball. Whatever they want. After a while, once, twice, three times, a bond forms. It happens without words. Kids don't always know what to say, but they feel very strongly."

Ronit Tzur, who served as the director of the Youth Division for three years, said every child knows that he has someone "who worries about me and cares about me. Often times, in a bereaved family, the surviving children barely get attention because the parents or one parent are so involved in their own mourning."

She said the overall program – the counselors, retreats and camps - give the children a group of friends who are facing exactly the same challenges.

"When they go to school every day, they feel different. But at OneFamily, they feel comfortable since everyone there has suffered a loss, just like they have. OneFamily kids strengthen each other and get ideas from each other about how to deal with their situation.

"The OneFamily circle allows them to be open and live their story. And together with all the other kids who also have this pain, they allow themselves to laugh and cry with everyone. They know that everyone is sad, but together they can also be happy," Ronit said.

Some of the most intense healing takes place at the camps and retreats. Michal Belzberg explained that the setup is designed to allow the children to make a place for their pain.



Arriving at OneFamily camp, a young camper gets the warmest of hugs from her counselor.

Younger campers during a "meaningful session" sharing their deepest feelings with one another.







Boys division in trust building activity at Boston Community Chanukah Camp



Raft Building workshop for older coed division at OneFamily summer Camp.



Oldest group in the OneFamily Youth Division known as "Sabim and Savtot", share their personal stories.



"It's structured for kids to come together and relax and to be comfortable with their bereavement," she said, adding that the experience is often difficult for first-timers because they naturally suppress their pain, because in the rest of their daily lives they have no one to talk to about it. No one understands them.

Ben Berdichev, one of OneFamily's clinical psychologists said the experience at the sleepaway camp three times a year, is crucial to the process, they need

to go through, both on a social level and a therapeutic level. "These kids not only need to attend our camps in July, on Chanukah and Passover, they absolutely need to be with each other," he said. "No one can hold back what they feel inside forever. The fun part of the camp is important but just as critical is that this is the ONE place where they can expose and express their emotions to other kids and us the counsellors, who understand what they are going through and will always be there for them, even after their camp days are over.

Yishai Weinberg, whose father Dror was killed battling terrorists in Hebron 13 years ago, summed up what the summer camp had meant to him over the years. "For everyone in the camp, OneFamily has been like a home. A home that radiates freedom and lets you be who you are. It's a home where it's OK to cry or laugh...a home where it's OK to engage in black humor, a place where it's perfectly fine to fall apart a bit," said Yishai.

"Years go by and we all grow up. Some of us have reached the age where we will be leaving our 'Home'. ●

# 15 Years of OneFamily

2001



Over 1000 people attend the first OneFamily retreat for victims and their families.



2002

President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Ehud Barak were guest speakers at OneFamily's first fundraiser in New York. Between them (R to L) are BenZion Schijveschuurder, who lost his parents and three siblings in the suicide bombing of the Sbarro Pizza shop, and Simcha Schumacher, 18 year old American who survived the terror attack on his yeshiva in Atzmona in which five of his classmates were murdered.



2003

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg meets with the participants in the first OneFamily Mission of Anguish and Hope for victims of terror. The group met with world leaders and Jewish communities.



Then-New York Senator Hillary Clinton listens to participants of the OneFamily Mission of Anguish and Hope sharing their tragic stories.



**2004**

OneFamily support group for Arabic speaking women.



**2005**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressing donors from overseas at a OneFamily event at the King David Hotel.



**2006**

A victim visits the site of attack for the first time with help of OneFamily support group.



**2007**

Giving out laptops to injured victims after the Lebanon War 2010.



**2008**

Harvard professor and renowned lawyer, Alan Dershowitz, OneFamily Chairman, Marc Belzberg, a hospitalized terror victim and his mother, lead and participate in a worldwide virtual solidarity demonstration against terrorism broadcast from Sderot.



**2009**

Retreat for bereaved young adults.



**2010**

Team OneFamily participates in the New-York City triathlon. "The model of our program provides a win-win situation for everyone involved," said Sammy Zack, Team OneFamily director.



**2011**

Photo-therapy for wounded soldiers.



**2012**

Yom Hazikaron Ceremony for children at OneFamily Jerusalem Center.

**2013**



OneFamily Big Brother Program with Israeli Master Chef Winner Tom Franz.

**2014**



Rachel and Avi Fraenkel, at OneFamily sponsored Solidarity Rally to "Bring Back Our Boys" at Rabin Square, Tel Aviv. The next day they found the boys murdered.

**2015**



Miriam Peretz and other bereaved mothers dancing joyfully at the Eiffel Tower during a weeklong healing retreat.

**2016**



OneFamily's young adult division accompanied by a psychologist, clinical social worker, and two OneFamily counselors, on a six day trip, with half-day skiing, half-day group therapy.

# A collection of memories and miracles

• By Jerusalem Post staff

## EXTREME FLEXIBILITY

**MEMORY:** Three different mothers lost a child; were paralyzed by grief; swore that nothing but a new replacement child could restore their sanity; all three were past child bearing years.

**MIRACLE:** OneFamily paid for in vitro treatments. Two of the three women bore a child, started life again.

## UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

**MEMORY:** A 25-year-old young mother returning home from work. Arab driving a tractor rammed into pedestrians and crushed cars. The woman was killed. A young working husband was left alone with a nursing baby.

**MIRACLE:** OneFamily stepped into his life, helped pay for a nanny and house cleaner. The bereaved husband was mourning but was able to keep his job and keep the living gift that his wife saved for him.

## PAYING OFF DEBTS

**MEMORY:** A middle-aged woman's husband was murdered in a terror attack; left her strapped with one million shekels in debts. Creditors came to seize her home and personal effects.

**MIRACLE:** OneFamily's in-house counsel was assigned to settle the claims for as little as possible; negotiations took over a month. A settlement was agreed with all the creditors at a discount of 90%. OneFamily paid off the 100,000 shekels that remained and gave her back her dignity and her life, to start again.

## CURING DEBILITATING TRAUMA

**MEMORY:** A tour guide, 58, was on a bus blown up by a suicide bomber. The man had multiple surgeries in three hospitals over 2 months for head injuries and more. He was released with impaired vision, reduced hearing, memory loss and without the ability to talk. Two years later he was still not talking. His wife wanted a divorce.

**MIRACLE:** He and his wife attended a three-day OneFamily retreat for married couples with one seriously wounded spouse; on an afternoon break from sessions they toured Masada; his memory started coming back. He remembered the explanation he'd give to tourists. He started talking; giving an explanation. The OneFamily social worker gave him the microphone and encouraged him to lead the tour. He did it brilliantly. He always thanks OneFamily for giving him back his life and his marriage.



MARC BELZBERG with Eyal Neufeld, who was left blind and deaf in a terror attack and OneFamily coordinator Batia Weinberg (center), present Eyal with a donation. (Courtesy)

## FAST DECISION MAKING

**MEMORY:** A woman who had lost her brother to terror had been part of the OneFamily Youth Division. Now, she is part of the young adults division. She aspires to be a famous Israeli singer and composer and to be self-sufficient. She started a crowdfunding campaign to raise money for an album. Her OneFamily peers helped raise a lot of money, but she was still 10% short just two hours before the deadline, or the money she raised would be returned.

**MIRACLE:** Her OneFamily friend called to ask if the organization could help. We said yes; and immediately filled in the gap so she could pursue her dream and stand on her own two feet.

## SENSITIVE TO PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

**MEMORY:** At various simchas, OneFamily has been asked to pay for guards to ease the paranoia of the hosts, who'd lost a child or spouse

**MIRACLE:** Though statistically their fear may not be justified, OneFamily always provides this. The simchas of victims of terror should be as complete as anyone else's.

## PROMOTING SELF SUFFICIENCY

**MEMORY:** A young man loses his only sister and is devastated. He wants to be a physiotherapist but could not get accepted to university in Israel.

**MIRACLE:** OneFamily found a sponsor who paid for his four years of education in Holland as well as his living expenses so he could put his full attention into his studies. He has completed his studies, returned to Israel, married, had two children; and a job at one of Israel's biggest hospitals. ●



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ONEFAMILY  
AND THE  
PEOPLE IT SERVES**

**JOIN THE FAMILY  
TO HELP ISRAEL'S  
BEREAVED AND WOUNDED  
IN TERROR ATTACKS**

**WHY?  
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# The Taste of Life

• BY GREER FAY CASHMAN

‘T here’s always going to be the yearning and the heartache,” says bereaved mother, Dina Kit, “but we can’t allow ourselves to wallow in self pity. “Life goes on and we have to go on with it.”

Kit and her husband Omer became bereaved parents twice over. First they lost their son Israel, who died from cancer at age 13. Israel’s death had been expected, and difficult as it is for any parent to lose a child for whatever reason, they were to some extent prepared and were able to psyche themselves into carrying on as normally as possible for the sake of Israel’s younger brothers.

In 2001, eight years after Israel’s death, their second son Ofir, then a soldier in the Givati Brigade was killed when he and a fellow soldier had been lured to a jeep by a small group of Palestinians who claimed that it had malfunctioned. The jeep was booby trapped and when the two soldiers approached it, one of the Palestinians pushed the detonator button and the two were killed. As difficult as it had been for the Kits when Israel died, it was much more so when they lost Ofir.

There was nothing to prepare them for the emotional pain, and at Ofir’s funeral on Mount Herzl on June 24, 2001, Dina collapsed on top of his grave. Ofir had been 19 years old and had hoped to study law. It became increasingly difficult for the Kits to cope, even though they knew that they had to make an effort for their remaining son Yair. But the mind and the heart are not always in sync, and in the course of time they realized that they needed help.

One day Dina was so clinically depressed that she tried to commit suicide. It wasn’t the first time. She survived this time, too, but only after a hospital stay. Her husband Omer was looking for solutions to Dina’s extreme depression. He had heard about OneFamily from other victims of terrorism, and he placed a call to Chantal Belzberg.

Chantal offered him a brave but ideal solution. Dina would start to work as a daily volunteer at OneFamily,



A TASTE of Life, a OneFamily cookbook containing the favorite recipes bereaved mothers used to make for their children lost to terror. (Courtesy)

filing papers in the office. Dina subsequently became a central member of the staff at OneFamily and has conceived of and implemented many successful OneFamily programs. Putting Dina in a position of giving to others, helping and managing others gave Dina a reason to live, and with her life she has profoundly impacted the lives of thousands of others.

She found her place in OneFamily in relatively short time, but it was harder for Omer. It hurt her to see the sadness that engulfed him, and she wracked her brain to find something uplifting for him to do. Omer loved to sing, but he hadn’t been doing much singing since Ofir’s death.

Dina discovered that there were other bereaved fathers who had loved to sing. She brought them together and formed The Bereaved Father’s Choir, which has been therapeutic not only for Omer, but for all its members. He not only sings with the choir, but also plays the piano accompaniment. The 17 bereaved fathers in the choir meet weekly to prepare and practice songs, to sing together, to record songs but most importantly, to support each other emotionally and to overcome their grief, through song. The choir has performed at significant events at the President’s Residence, at memorial events, in front of 5,000 people at Israel’s salute to its wounded warriors day and on tour in the UK.

It was important for Dina to do something unique to preserve Ofir’s memory. He was a constant presence in the family circle, but she wanted other people to know who he was and to remember him. She was quite certain that other bereaved parents also wanted their deceased sons and daughters to be remembered beyond the immediate family circle.

She reasoned that parents who like to cook, could not help but think of the foods that the lost son or daughter loved most, when they were preparing a meal, and many deliberately refrained from preparing such foods because these dishes conjured up painful memories. It bothered Dina that she had stopped cooking Ofir’s favorite foods,





PRESIDENT REUVEN RIVLIN and his wife, Nechama, with Dina Kit, OneFamily office manager, at the Taste of Life book launch at the President's House. (Courtesy)



ONEFAMILY BEREAVED Men's Choir performing at the President's House. (Courtesy)

and she began to think that a way to honor his memory and memories of other young victims of terrorism would be to publish a cookbook featuring recipes for their favorite foods, plus mini biographies and photographs of the deceased.

When she first proposed the project to Chantal Belzberg, the CEO of OneFamily, Belzberg, who usually encourages creative ideas, thought it was a great idea but worried that most mothers would find it too traumatic an exercise. Indeed, Kit did not initially encounter much enthusiasm. But she was persistent, and gradually the idea took hold, and the book became a reality.

Some of the mothers who contributed recipes for the book overcame reluctance because they realized the importance of the project, to coming to terms with the death of their child. For most of the mothers, it was the first time they had prepared their child's favorite dish, since he or she was murdered.

The book was launched in April 2015 at the President's Residence and contains an aubergine and tomato recipe contributed by Nechama Rivlin, plus a foreword by President Reuven Rivlin. A draft copy of the book had been shown to the Rivlins in advance, and the president wrote how deeply moved they were to read its contents.

Early in the day, on the date of the launch, Nechama Rivlin hosted some of the mothers for a private cook-in, and in the afternoon all 123 contributing mothers and their families gathered in the large reception hall of the President's Residence for the official launch.

Since then according to Kit, 13,000 books have been distributed. Most were sold, but others were given to various organizations, museums and other institutions. The book is currently on sale, and its profits will be dedicated to OneFamily activities. The book has proved so popular that it's being translated into English with an initial print run of 1,000 copies, but Kit is certain that the demand will be much higher.

"Every household in Israel should have this book," she

says, "and it should be distributed as widely as possible abroad."

Aside from its original purpose, the book really does contain an interesting collection of recipes representative of Israeli home cooking, bearing in mind that Israel is a society of immigrants who came from more than a hundred countries and brought their culinary traditions with them.

Kit says that she often uses the recipes of other contributors, especially those for pies and cakes, and she knows that other people are using the recipe for Ofir's favorite dish which was meat kebab on a bed of mashed potatoes and spinach.

Nechama Rivlin's own copy of *A Taste of Life* has been signed by all the mothers who contributed to it.

At the launch she said: "Taste buds appear to have a special way of touching our hearts. When a disaster occurs, food becomes a memory, an essence, a longing. The cake, the schnitzel, the salad, the fish, the meatballs – everything suddenly takes on a new meaning. Food is love. The tastes, the smells, the colors, the clatter of the plates and pots are the sounds of music of life. And choosing life isn't always easy. Society often expects you to withdraw into yourselves, to choose to be alone. *A Taste of Life* revives the memories. It's a book full of yearning, comfort and love – love that continues, that assumes a taste and form."

In retrospect, Kit agrees wholeheartedly.

"I knew in advance what I wanted for and from this book – something sad, but beautiful, strong and uplifting at the same time."

She is complimented on the concept wherever she goes. People tell her it was a brilliant idea.

"It was difficult to get it going," she says. "People didn't believe it would happen. It's proof that we have to let life continue. Cooking was an important part of my life and has become so again.

"We must learn to take life in proportion and to overcome tragedy, though the yearning will always be there." ●



THE LAUNCH for,  
*Longing for a Hug*, in Tel Aviv

# Learning to move forward

• By ASael SHABO

On Fridays there was a smell of hallot. Every Friday my mother would bake hallot for us and the community. For every celebration, there was a huge table set up for each of us. When the dough was ready, we would all take a small piece and make all sorts of shapes. I remember a snail, complete with eyes and antennas. We would make holes with forks, smear them with egg yolks and sprinkle them with sesame seeds.

We loved them.

My brother Tzvika and I were our mother's helpers in the kitchen. We washed and dried the dishes.

On Shabbat we would sit around the table. My father had selected a round table so we wouldn't hit our heads on any corners. Each of us would have his own specially-shaped halla that he had made on Friday.

We had a shack next to the community sports field. We raised ducks and swans and rabbits and all sorts of animals. All the kids would come to our "zoo" to pet the animals. At home we raised hamsters and in the garden we had geese. The geese would squawk whenever anybody passed by, and they had a special noise just for when my father would come home.

We were seven kids—a readymade band unto ourselves. We—Aviah, Tzvukah, Avishai and I—would all

come home at the same time. As soon as we opened the door, the smell of the lunch prepared for us was intoxicating. We would sit down to eat, and then zip off outside. We would go to the playground with our odd scooter—it had three wheels connected to a blue triangle.

In second grade I jumped over a fence in school and hurt my hand. They took me in an ambulance to the hospital, and picked up my mother on the way. She brought my favorite book, *Children Talk About Themselves*. I read it the entire way there. I let my mother hold the hand that hurt and held the book with the other. I wanted the driver to use the siren, but he didn't; it really wasn't such an emergency. For half a year I couldn't write, so I didn't go to school.

Instead, I went with my mother to her job in Yitzhar, where she worked for the local council. I would help her arrange papers and do all the little jobs she gave me. My mother was always

calm when she answered the phone or when people came to the office. She knew how to help whoever came by or she found someone who could get them what they needed. In Itamar she worked with women who had given birth. She would feed the babies, stroke them, calm them.

When I was with her at work, I would hold her hat. It was bright purple with a flower on the side. I remember that I would wear it and it felt nice on my head. My mother just said, "Be careful with it." I would run around the office, throwing it up in the air and catching it, like a Frisbee. I had a small head and the hat would dance on my head. I remember that feeling even today.

When I was nine, terrorists broke into our house in Itamar. They ran up the stairs to the second floor den where I and my three brothers, Avishai, Tzvika and Neriah were watching TV. They started shooting. I closed my eyes tightly. I only opened them once and saw the TV screen was shattered. I pretended to be dead but I heard all the shooting and more shooting elsewhere in the house. I bled quietly for 40 minutes until they came to save us. Four days after the attack I woke up and found out that my three brothers who were watching TV with me were all murdered and the terrorists also ran to the third floor, to my parents room, where they found and murdered my mother.

I lost my left leg.

It's been six years since the attack, and today, with my prosthetic leg, I can do everything. I ride horses, water-ski, volunteer for MDA, ice skate and roller blade.

One day, I hope to compete in the Para-Olympics.

I know that my mother wouldn't have wanted me to get stuck—she would have wanted me to move forward. And that's what I'm doing. ●

From the book, *Longing for a Hug*, published by OneFamily in Hebrew in 2013. The book features 150 children sharing their personal experiences and memories of parents and siblings lost to terror. The project helped the children process their memories and choose those that will continue to accompany them throughout their lives. The book was launched together with an impressive art exhibit in the presence of the Minister of Education. Thirty-three major Israeli artists contributed artwork inspired by the stories. Asael was 16 when he wrote this story and part of OneFamily's Youth Division since 2002.

# An unexpected love story

• By NOA AMOUYAL

Observing the infectious laughter and inside jokes of newlywed couple Osnat and Hallel Shapira, it's difficult to fathom that these two have faced unspeakable tragedy.

It seems more plausible that the couple, both 21, are likely to tell an optimistic story of their whole lives ahead of them, rather than a tale of loss.

Their two-fold story of quiet bereavement and hope signals that joy can spring out of even the most horrific tragedies.

Osnat's brother, Noam, was on kitchen duty serving Shabbat dinner at the Otniel Hesder Yeshiva when he was gunned down by two M-16-wielding terrorists.

Hallel's father, Rabbi Elimelech Shapira, was shot and killed by Palestinian terrorists on his way to an early morning Torah class.

Osnat was 7; Hallel was 8. Both were too young to comprehend the tragedies but too old not to be impacted by them.

Each of them decided to join OneFamily to find solace and comfort. Little did they know that what brought them to the organization would lead them to finding the love of their young lives.

But like most love stories, it wasn't a smooth trajectory to the chuppa.

"He wanted me, but I didn't want him," Osnat giggles as the two sit side-by-side at The Jerusalem Post office, one month after their February wedding.

Their three year courtship was marked by plenty of bumps along the way, including a year and a half of silence where there wasn't even a hello exchanged between the two.

"For a year and a half, we didn't speak at all. Once when I was working near the Central Bus Station, she passed by me and didn't even say hi," Hallel says, now chuckling at what was probably a painful memory for the lovestruck teenager.

However, after frequent meetings at OneFamily-coordinated events – especially a trip to London for bereaved young adults – Osnat found herself falling in love with the one person she resisted.

Now, Osnat acknowledges that OneFamily played an important part in her adolescence.

"It was a huge presence in my life. I went to every meeting, activity and retreat. They helped me through difficult phases in my life. They taught me that I'm not alone, that there are other people with similar stories," she says.

With the help of OneFamily she was able to speak to people who understand what she was going through in ways those outside of the organization couldn't. "I have spoken about it with my girlfriends outside of OneFamily. But even with them, I don't think they really understood. They don't really know how to react, or they do react and are embarrassed by what they've said," she acknowledges.

Hila Israeli, who served as their designated counselor, has seen many couples like the Shapiras fall in love with help from OneFamily.

"You really see young adults opening up. It's emotionally intimate, and most of them are not accustomed to that," she explains.

She also points out how vulnerable and exposed the participants feel when they wear their heart on their sleeves. As such, the walls that these kids have learned to put up come tumbling down with every OneFamily retreat, session or activity.

Despite finding each other through loss, they don't think the circumstances through which they met are exceptional. "It may not be comfortable to say this, but almost everyone in this country has experienced what we have to some extent," Hallel explains.

"To us, it doesn't seem unique," Osnat



THE YOUNG COUPLE happily hold their ketuba at their wedding last February. (Courtesy)

agrees. "I married him, and it doesn't seem that unique to me that my brother and his father both died in a terror attack. Just when you see the story from the outside, are you like, 'whoa.'

"He's a human, I'm a human and we're living our lives."

Today the two young aspiring musicians (Osnat plays the flute and Hallel plays bass guitar), are hopeful for a calm, tragedy-free future, but are hyper-aware of the terror attacks that continue to wreak havoc on the Jewish state.

"I think just being a teenager in Israel – even if you haven't lost someone – is difficult. Because if you haven't personally experienced a loss of someone in your family, then you know of someone else who has," Hallel explains.

"It's the idea of, this happened to me, and now I can only imagine how this family will cope for the next few days, months and years. It doesn't matter who you are or what age you are, this is something that just happens in an instant and you're expected to cope," Osnat says sadly.

"The pain fades with each year," Hallel reveals, his eyes conveying a quiet strength belying his 21 years.

With their, compatible personalities, joint tales of grief, and love for music, a hopeless romantic may wonder if these two are soul mates who were destined to be together, even if they hadn't met through OneFamily.

Osnat, though, is unequivocal in her belief that OneFamily has brought them together.

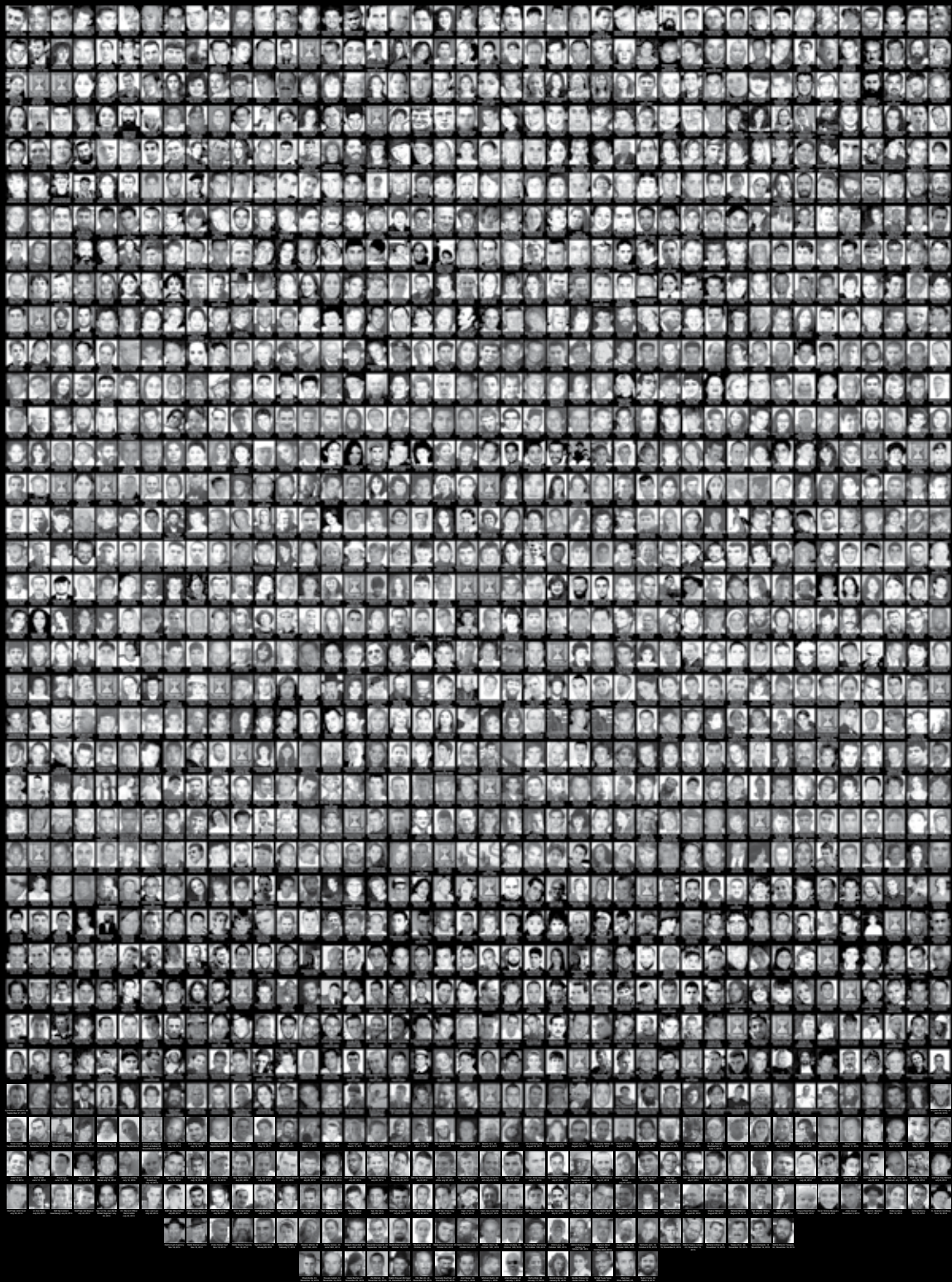
"I give credit to OneFamily. If it wasn't for them, we would not be together. Yes, we had mutual friends. But only through OneFamily could this have happened." ●

# 15 Years of Terror - 1,556 Murdered



OneFamily takes care of their bereaved families and the wounded left behind.

\*As of 3/8/16



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