

Comment

Live from Kiryat Shmona: Moment by moment with Barry Silverberg

Former Winnipegger describes life in northern Israeli city during and after war with Hezbollah

By BARRY SILVERBERG

In the last issue of *The Jewish Post & News*, I described fasting on Tisha B'av during rocket attacks on Kiryat Shmona, and summed up what this town has been through since my wife and I moved here in 1982. I promised to keep you up to date with reports from the town which has become the major urban target of this war.

August 17, 2006: It's a bright sunny day in Kiryat Shmona; we're onto a major heat wave, heading towards 40 degrees, but the town is bustling. The majority of the 17,000 residents who left during the bombing are back. Those who still have houses are setting them in order. Many are dealing with estimates, contractors, the property tax people who will eventually reimburse them for most of the damage. Glaziers and aluminum window people are working around the clock as people replace shattered windows, and rib them about giving kickbacks to Hezbollah leader Nasrallah. On the third day of the cease fire agreement, the Home Front Command announces a full return to routine life in all parts of Israel.

The siren walls.

All along the street, people either fall apart, run for a shelter, or just keep on walking with a rueful laugh.

I stop and walk quickly into the nearest building. I can tell who are the people who just returned and I explain what to do. The siren only came into use three weeks ago; we never had one in all the 30 years of rockets. For years, we had an announcement for emergencies that sounded exactly like department store paging: Except one hundred and fifty times louder: "DING dong!!!!!! All citizens. Go into your shelters or security rooms." The siren means business, as it's tied into the National Defence Radar System. If a rocket falls on you a minute before the siren, there's not much you can do. But if you've waited five minutes or so, it's safe to move. Probably.

The minutes pass. No explosions. I offer a lift to a startled woman, and then continue on my way. Maybe it was just a false alarm. But the messages is clear: We're "back to normal", but this war is far from over.

The following are Frequently Asked Questions that we hear from outsiders and news people:

Why did your family stay in Kiryat Shmona?



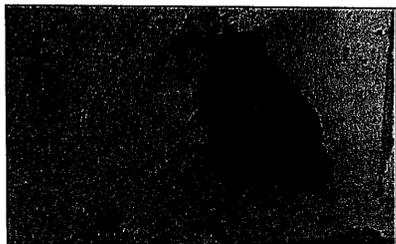
BARRY SILVERBERG



Here's a typical neighbourhood shelter during the month-long war. Most of Kiryat Shmona's families were no longer in town; but those that stayed were pretty miserable. The kids kept busy, often with the help of "soldier teachers" but the young woman on the right looks terrified. You can go upstairs if you want, but with up to 200 rockets PER DAY hitting the town, what would you do?



Inferno: A rocket lands near the Stress Prevention Centre. Immediately, the surrounding fields are on fire. Hundreds of fires in the forests of the north set the scenery and wildlife of the country back 100 years.



Breaking up for summer: A hole in Metsudot Elementary School (just down the street).

The straight answer is that my wife Masha is a school psychologist for the city. During times of emergency, the psychologists are expected to report to work. There is always a psychologist or school counselor on duty at the "HAMMAL", the communal volunteer centre, and psychologists visit shelters to deal with emergency situations which arise.

Do psychologists and other professional volunteers receive protective clothing when moving from place to place?

Not really. The army, electric company workers, and the police get flak jackets and helmets. But most of the volunteers scorn such frippery. In my last article you can see me wearing a flak jacket that says Kiryat Shmona on it; I took it

from a pile six years ago and I used it when I went outside during rough hours.

Was it fair to subject your kids to such danger?

We did not force our kids to stay. They all have lots of friends outside the danger zone who invited them to stay over. In fact, each of them spent several days away as guests.

But they always preferred to return. Having the family together for a late, hastily cooked dinner and a midnight TV show in the shelter was extremely important for my wife Masha, whose work is extremely stressful, and for the rest of us as well.

What do kids do in such an emergency? Watch TV all day?

Not at all. Elisheva, 17, and Yisrael, 15, were part of a team that answered phones in the HAMMAL HQ, dealing with the varied needs and problems of the

families who remained in shelters, or who appeared in person, often distraught or angry. My youngest, Miriam, 11, helped me deliver food and supplies to people stuck in shelters and security rooms.

What problems did the kids deal with?

Someone might need a particular type of medicine or food. People had no money, no way of doing shopping. There were family squabbles. Families with disabled, elderly or mentally ill members all had special needs. The volunteers on the phones had to be caring but firm, and up to date on all the services and supplies that were available in town. If a plan arose to take several hundred people to hotels for a week, hundreds of phone calls and endless preparations were necessary. New volunteers, young and old, from all sectors of society poured in, offering to help. They had to be placed, fed, housed and cared for.

As a Winnipegger, what was your most moving moment from the war?

Two weeks ago I was delivering food and supplies in a low income neighborhood. We stopped in front of a house where a Lebanese family lives. (At least 100 Lebanese Christians live in Kiryat Shmona. Until forced to flee their homes when the Israelis retreated from Lebanon in May, 2000, they were part of a fighting force that worked side by side with the Israel Defence Forces.) As we swelter under the hot sun, with the imminent threat of Katyushas very real, as noon is peak rocket time, we see a mural painted on the wall only a few months ago:

"Barry was born in Winnipeg and his bris was performed by the Great Mr. Kharlof, Z'L. He graduated JWC after Grade 11, and made a speech in Hebrew, confident that he could insult whomever he wanted because nobody would understand. He then did Grade 12 at Garden City, which he describes in the word: Neeeeaaaat."

You can reach Barry at: barisil@netvision.net.il. Please do not confuse him with Barry Chamish, who was a year ahead of him at Winnipeg's Talmud Torah. To read more articles about life in Kiryat Shmona, teaching English in Israel and much more, try <http://www.etni.org/teachers/barry/barry.htm>. Have a peaceful two weeks, and a Hodesh Tov, a good month of Elul!

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Not even war can deter singer from peacenik concerts in Israel

By PENNY SCHWARTZ

BOSTON (JTA) – Neither war nor the cancellation of the WorldPride parade in Jerusalem, where she was scheduled to perform, could keep Sonia Rutstein from Israel. The award-winning American singer-songwriter, who generally uses only the name Sonia, brought her message of love and tolerance to a series of concerts throughout Israel during the first few weeks of August.

Sonia was scheduled to perform in a variety of locations, including on a moshav in northern Israel and at a free outdoor concert in Tel Aviv. She also was expecting to perform at events associated with the WorldPride gay pride celebration in Jerusalem.

With 10 CDs and a Grammy nomination, Sonia often is compared to singer Ani DiFranco and is firmly established in the folk music world and on the gay and lesbian cultural scene. Her lyrics range from boldly political to tender and personal; her musical style ranges from folk, bluegrass and blues to pop-rock and rap-like rhythms, all infused with rich, melodic harmonies. On a recent, sweltering summer weekend Sonia performed in Worcester, Mass., at a peace concert organized by the Healing Light Institute.

Between talking with fans and autographing CDs, Sonia told JTA she was aware of the controversy and threats of violence around the WorldPride parade in Jerusalem. The parade ultimately was canceled because of the war with Hezbollah, but not until Israeli Jewish, Christian and Muslim clerics had lobbied aggressively to prevent the march from taking place. "What better place" to hold a gay pride march than Jerusalem, a focal point for three major religions? Sonia asked. "The whole essence of my music is that when you disappear fear between people, you have love."

This was Sonia's fourth trip to Israel. The first



SONIA RUTSTEIN: War in Israel couldn't keep her away this month.

breathing. It's unlike anywhere else I've been."

Sonia caused a controversy in the Israeli folk music world when the editor of a folk newsletter criticized her for being openly gay, according to Larry Rosenfeld, a fan who has followed Sonia's musical career over many years. Rosenfeld is a resident of Moshav Shorashim in northern Israel, an active member of the Folkstuff Society and director of the Carmiel Folk Club. In a phone conversation from Israel, he says that Sonia left a lasting impression on some Israeli youths during her 1999 tour.

After performing one night for 200 adults on the moshav, Sonia added a free show for moshav teens in Rosenfeld's living room. "She won everyone's hearts forever," Rosenfeld said. She also lent a

time came on a United Synagogue Youth tour in 1974 when Sonia was 15. In 1999, this time toting a guitar, she returned to perform for the Folkstuff Society at clubs in Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Sonia recalls an evening outdoor concert with 800 women dancing against a backdrop of splashing waves as a magical moment. "I love being in Israel, the energy," Sonia enthused after the Worcester concert. "There's something hard to describe that resonates when I'm there, walking,

hand with musical notation to a budding 16-year-old composer who impressed Sonia with one of her own compositions, for which the teen eventually won a finalist award in a national competition.

Rosenfeld, who has arranged all of Sonia's Israel performances this year except the WorldPride events, was eagerly anticipating her arrival. "People in the North could use this concert" as relief from the anxiety of war, he said. "Sonia's music appeals to a young audience and really gives them an example that people are still out there writing political songs and being active, and living out their principles," says Kim Harris, who, with her husband Reggie Harris, shared the stage with Sonia in Worcester.

Sonia's 2004 CD, "No Bomb is Smart," was nominated for a Grammy. Recorded in Nashville, the CD boasts an impressive cast of musicians, including members of the Dixie Chicks. In the cut "I am the Enemy," a post-September 11 commentary, Sonia uses the imagery of color, weaving in verses from "Hinei Mah Tov," a well-known Hebrew folk song. At the Worcester concert, Sonia poured out "Won't Let Go," a song of encouragement and love dedicated to her father.

After the concert, asked if she's concerned that her peace-and-love lyrics might be out of sync with an Israel at war, she laughs and shakes her head. "I just feel as if I'm walking with the real heroes, like Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach or Martin Luther King or Gandhi," she says. "As Jews, we're supposed to leave this place better than we found it, right? We've got a lot of work to do."

Announcement:

Gayle Waxman, Executive Director of Rady Jewish Community Centre is pleased to announce that Sheldon Mindell has joined the Rady staff as Director of Marketing & Membership Services as of July 1, 2006. Sheldon has been active in Winnipeg's Jewish & general community for many years.

A former educator, administrator and fund-raiser, Sheldon will be responsible for overseeing membership services and marketing activities at the Rady JCC. The Rady JCC, located in the Asper Jewish Community Campus, is an award-winning multi-service community and fitness centre open to Winnipeggers of all ages and interests. Sheldon is anxious to hear from present, former & future Rady members. For information contact: Sheldon Mindell 477-7546, by e-mail at smindell@aspercampus.mb.ca



ROSE AND MAX RADY
JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTRE

Jewish Musical Choral

The Rady Jewish Community Centre is inviting expressions of interest from vocalists interested in joining a choral group.

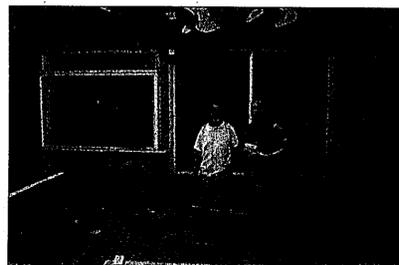
This top-level performance group will be under the direction of **Richard Yaffe**

Renowned Choir Director and Cantor

Participants will be accepted by audition only

Expressions of interest should be directed to the Rady Jewish Community Centre at 477-7510

The generous support of the I.L. Peretz Folk School Endowment Trust and the Tikun Group is acknowledged.



A reporter from a German radio station (at right) hears from me about the ceasefire against a backdrop of a shattered storefront right next to where I was working.