



Will and Jimmy plant new trees at the entrance to a village about a mile from the Gaza border. The yellow flags behind them are flown in honor of the hostages still held by Hamas.

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MAKING ISRAEL GREAT AGAIN

By **Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson**

“I’ve been here for a week, and the only kids I’ve seen are these statues,” Will explained in one of his first online live posts as he walked past a metal cutout of children playing.

Will had arrived in Israel to volunteer in Kibbutz Nir Am, the only village near Gaza that is said to have survived October 7th without a single injury. A young woman named Inbal was in charge of the civilian security team in the kibbutz (village). Almost in Biblical Deborah fashion, Inbal’s decisions are credited with saving the hundreds of residents who were there that day. The only active resident

from Nir Am who was murdered that day, was killed because he *hadn’t* been home. He had gone to the Nova Music Festival.

It being Will’s first time in Israel, let alone at the Gaza border in wartime, he spent his first few days exploring the kibbutz property. Of the 650 residents, only a handful stayed behind when the rest were evacuated to hotels across the country. The rest are reserve soldiers stationed there to guard and help rebuild the village.

Today’s report is the first-hand account from a volunteer who has joined Maoz to help rebuild a kibbutz in Israel.

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Will had a printing company in the US and traveled with his dog while working

“I’m walking through this playground and I see this bomb shelter here,” Will posted as he explored the first few days, “And I’m wondering what it would’ve been like as a kid to play on a playground with not one, but two bomb shelters close enough that I could get from the top of the slide to the entrance in 15 seconds if a siren went off.”

“So, what are you doing this summer?” was the line in the Maoz email that set it all in motion for Will. It was our invite for volunteers to come to Israel and spend at least a month rebuilding the villages devastated by terrorists last October.

Before Israel

Will’s childhood wasn’t a walk in the park so to speak. His parents met at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in California. His dad, Bill, was homeless and so they moved in together. His mother had had multiple abortions and had been told at her last one that she would never be able to carry a child due to the damage her womb sustained from the abortions. And so it was, that when she became pregnant with Will, her heart began to be stirred by the Lord. This would be her turning point to get her life back on track.

Will was miraculously born a healthy child, but Bill’s years of drug abuse left its scars on his own mind. Bill would be diagnosed with drug-induced schizophrenia. This meant he would be his incredible self and then suddenly turn violent for no apparent reason. It was when he began to be violent with Will that he and his mother fled California and moved to Alabama.

Over the next decade, Will’s mother made multiple attempts to build a family out of the three of them. But her final attempt ended the day she walked into her newly furnished apartment. The house was empty of furnishings. Bill had traded everything in the house for drugs and was sitting on the floor with a bottle of beer in his hand. Will’s mother promptly bought Bill a bus ticket to send him back to California and the two watched him board the bus. A few hours later, they received a call from the hospital. Bill had gotten off the bus and sold his ticket for drug money but was then violently mugged. That was the last time they spoke. Will was 12 at the time.

Summer Breakthrough

“So, what are you doing this summer?” was the line in the Maoz email that set it all in motion. It was our invite for volunteers to come to Israel and spend at least a month rebuilding the villages devastated by terrorists last October.

“I saw that line in the email and thought about it for a few days. The logistics. The commitment. The possibilities. Then I clicked the response button.

“It took a bit to go through Maoz’ vetting process. Apparently, they had a lot of responses from people of all ages and walks of life. And they wanted to give each interested person the personal attention they deserved to see if they would be a good fit for coming here. For one, the village is just about a mile from the Gaza border and the nearest hospital is an hour drive away—if you can find someone available to take you.

“As for me, ever since I heard what happened in October, I wanted to come help rebuild the ruins. I’d grown up with a special place in my heart for Israel and always thought I’d visit the ancient sites. Suddenly, I had a chance to not just have the concept of Israel be a part of my story—I wanted to be a part of Israel’s story.

“I had a printing business so I would lay my fleece before the Lord, so to speak. As soon as He would open the door for me to sell it, I would go. It could take time. The equipment is specialized and very expensive. But five minutes into my zoom meeting with Maoz, I got my first offer to purchase my printers. I immediately purchased a ticket and gave myself enough days to pack up my life and board a plane. This may seem like an extreme move for a guy in his thirties. But I am not exaggerating when I say it feels like everything I’ve been through in life has culminated in my coming here. I may be here for months; I may be here for years. But I have never felt so strongly the sense that not only am I where I am supposed to be—I was made for such a time as this.”



Maoz team from Jerusalem joins volunteers down south for a day of work and fellowship

Sounds of War

“At this stage in the war, sirens aren’t as common where we are as much of Hamas’ capabilities in northern Gaza have been destroyed, but we do get them occasionally.

“In one sense, they explained, Israelis are very deliberate in trying to live normal daily lives. In another sense, it’s a very real war and at any given time a siren can go off anywhere in the country and you have to run for shelter. ‘You wait a few minutes, and then you go back to your normal everyday life.’

“The first day I arrived we had a code red siren. I was so tired from the flight I actually slept through it. About a week later my neighbor had taken me to the nearby grocery store and I was unloading milk and eggs when I looked up and saw the Iron Dome intercept a Hamas rocket.

“Because of the Iron Dome’s ability to intercept most rockets, attacks happen and pass so quickly you can kind of see how Israelis just absorb it as momentary pauses in their ‘everyday life’. It wasn’t until Jimmy, the newest Maoz volunteer, arrived that I had my first chance to even react to a siren.

“I was outside listening to worship music and he was indoors when we heard explosions. The sirens kicked in at that point and Jimmy ran out of the apartment to find me.

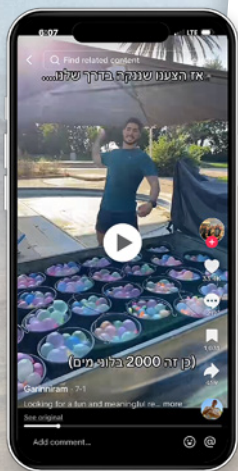
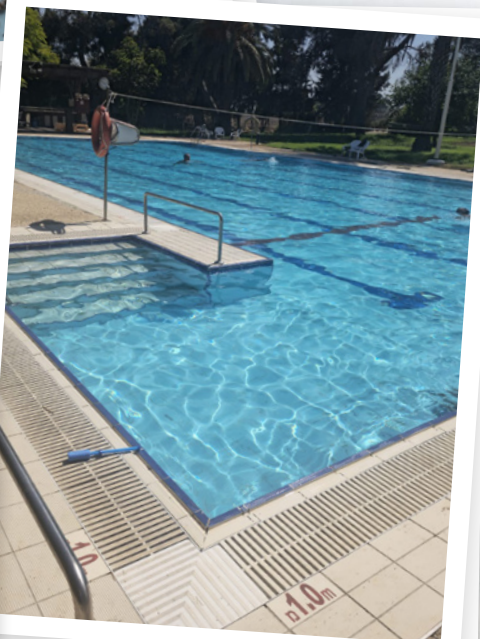
“‘Get back inside! That’s where the bomb shelter is!’, I said as we both ran into it in time to hear the additional booms from the safety of our own personal steel and concrete saferoom.

The soldiers stationed near Gaza were so grateful for the non-combat supplies we provided them, they gave us a rare picture with their tank.



“The explosions were so loud we thought the rockets had landed inside the kibbutz. So when everything quieted we went out to look and saw what looked like smoke where the horses were. As we walked up we realized it was just dust the horses had kicked up while running wildly in their gated area. They were

so terrified they were sweating, so we spent time calming them down. Later the locals explained that all rockets had been intercepted and the booms were loud because Iron Dome interceptions in the sky are louder acoustically than if they land on the ground.



This pool project was just one of the many cleanup jobs—except that this one ended up with a viral video on social media

“Hearing booms in the distance from Gaza is routine here. It sounds a lot like thunder—just with a bright blue sky. It took a few weeks, but I can now tell the difference between the Iron Dome, distant explosions in Gaza and the gunfights that often breakout when the IDF attacks a location where the rockets are fired from.

“I know this will sound strange, but even with all this going on, the atmosphere is strangely peaceful. The sunsets are gorgeous and the evening breeze captivating. You realize why people would want to move down here despite being so close to this hostile border.”

No Guns, Just Balloons

“Perhaps it is this tension between peaceful and volatile that makes you want to work hard and then play just as hard. The reserve soldiers stationed here guard the village but they are also tasked with restoring and rebuilding Kibbutz Nir Am. So our job as volunteers is often to work alongside them. We’ve taken on all different types of projects. We built a community kitchen, trimmed and planted landscaping and even dug a grave.

“A couple of weeks ago we were tasked with cleaning out the community pool. It had been neglected since the October attacks and it was imperative that it be cared for during the hot summer months so that it didn’t sustain long term damage. I had this idea to make it fun for the soldiers so I bought a thousand water balloons to add to the experience.

“It was epic. They even loaded some clips on Tik Tok and the video went viral—hundreds of thousands of views in just a couple of days. And the best part about it was people’s comments like, ‘This is what rebuilding the south is like? Where do I sign up?’ Meaning, the exposure gave the soldiers the publicity to recruit reserve soldiers to come down and help with the rebuilding of the villages!

“But there are also the more sobering projects. We’re in the process of setting up a memorial to the four family members who were originally from Kibbutz Nir Am but were killed in nearby Kibbutz Be’eri.

“They were a family of six. Terrorists spent hours trying to break into their bombshelter. Eventually they set fire to the house and the family was forced to open the window to the bombshelter to escape the smoke. The two youngest jumped out first. The two older kids

jumped out and covered them with their bodies. Then the parents jumped out and covered the four with their bodies. When the terrorists saw them they fired at the pile of bodies. The parents were killed as were the older brothers. But the two youngest at the core survived and will carry on the family line.”

How Do You Explain

“I’ve had multiple conversations with locals here and they have the hardest time understanding why I, an American who’s not Jewish would drop his life and come help them. For me it’s the most obvious reaction I can have as a Christian when I see Israel in need.

“On the other hand, from my point of view, I’ve only been here a month now and can see how only when you’re here, can you grasp how much you didn’t understand before. You can see the news and you can read stories in the Bible and hear sermons about ancient Jewish culture. But how do you describe walking through an entire village that has been evacuated and you’re tasked with caring for it in their absence?

“How do you explain the moment you see a dad at a park with an M16 and a stroller and no one—kids or adults—even thinks twice about it? In the US everyone would be running for cover. If anything, people here smile to themselves—knowing that the dad is a soldier who is probably enjoying a few days at home with his kid before going back out to fight for his family’s right to exist.

“How do you process a reality where you see farmers pick their crops with weapons strapped to their hips? Maybe the closest thing would be Nehemiah 4 when the Israelites rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. Back then they wouldn’t even go to fill up water without a spear.

“Maybe when people read that and see what life is like in Israel right now, we can realize what is happening here is nothing new. From the moment Joshua first led Israel into the Promised Land, the Children of Israel had to fight to be here.

“From the Philistines to the Assyrians to the Babylonians to the Palestinians, God’s promise has always had a challenger. God has always provided an answer to the challenger—sometimes immediately and sometimes eventually. But always definitively. The Bible’s history clearly defined nations and rulers and individuals based on their treatment of Israel. I for one, want to go down as a friend.” ■



Joan and Carrie arrived earlier this summer from the US. They braved the sirens and rockets and scrubbed clean the kindergarten and children’s play areas—preparing for the day families will return.



Shalom from Jerusalem!

His name is Hezi. The Hebrew nickname for Ezekiel. He and his wife, Shlomit, of 32 years have four children. They have a son and son-in-law fighting in the war. One of their grandchildren was already born into this war and a second one is due this month.

Hezi runs a local grocery store and Shlomit is a kindergarten teacher near the Lebanese border. Life before the war was all about home. **They didn't need vacations overseas.** They lived for the evenings with their kids, grandkids and friends.

We met Hezi and Shlomit **when we were giving out vouchers from Maoz to evacuees to cover the cost of food and clothes.** Often the evacuees share their stories when they meet us. It's as much an act of appreciation as well as a therapeutic experience for them to sit with someone they feel cares about them as individuals. Hezi, like all evacuees, had his tale of how October 7th affected his way of life. But it was just a **few weeks before we met him that the daily attacks from Hezbollah hit home—literally.**

They say like lightning, rockets don't hit the same place twice. That's why Hezi couldn't believe it when a friend sent him pictures of not one but two rockets that landed on his property. **One in the living room and one in the yard.**



Hezi stands in what remains of his living room
Right: View of destruction from the outside



The good news was that by some miracle the one that landed in the living room didn't blow up and so the damage was "limited" to the roof and floor. **The bad news** was that the government would only cover the **tens of thousands of dollars it would cost to fix the damage once the war was over and paperwork could be processed.**

Hezi understood winter is only a few months away, and **if he didn't fix the damage now the moisture and mold that would build up inside the home would increase the damage tenfold.**

Just sealing his roof for winter will cost **almost \$20,000.** He was considering taking out a loan, but there is **no one to buy from his grocery store right now** and Shlomit has been volunteering her kindergarten services to evacuee children stuck in hotels across the country.

It's these moments that we at Maoz love to be able to say, "We can help!"

And it is Maoz partners that have been supporting the war-relief efforts that have given us this strength—Christians and Messianic Jews from all over the world who want not only to see Israel win this war but see the people of Israel standing on their feet – spiritually, emotionally—and physically—when it's over.

And so **we'd like to say thank you for every effort** you have put into this cause and mission.

Please don't let up. Keep your prayers fervent. We're here able to fight because of people like you.

Honored to partner with you,

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

Kobi & Shani Ferguson



Celebrating children and grandchildren—before the war. Before the evacuation. Before the rockets hit their home.



Kobi Ferguson
President & CEO

Shani Ferguson
Chief Creative



LIMITED TIME OFFER!

For your gift of \$50 or more, we will send you the shirt our Maoz team and volunteers wear when serving in the war relief efforts!



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