

SINCE 1976

 **maoz·israel**

REPORT

Valentin in his auto repair shop.

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Seven Stories in a Year of

Famine & Plenty

Valentin

Back in 2006, my business partner and I opened an auto repair shop together. Around 2014 things were going poorly and my partner abandoned the business. I looked at the mound of bills that he left me and knew I would have to choose between running from everything or facing this mountain in faith.

I was an associate pastor at the time and when I shared my struggle with the head pastor he told me about **IStandwithIsrael**. When we put in a request for help, I didn't want to ask them to pay off my debts as I felt that was my responsibility. I asked them to help care for my family's needs as I handed over the shop's profits to chip away at the debts. But ISWI was thinking even beyond our immediate needs. **They wanted to see me succeed in the**

long term. So, they sent me a financial advisor that helped me budget both my business and family life. There were several months where I don't know what my wife and children would've eaten if ISWI hadn't helped us.

I have now spent almost six years repaying and rebuilding the business and even with a difficult year like this one, we are doing well! Knowing that we have been called to do everything as unto the Lord, I only buy quality parts and have built a reputation of excellence and integrity for our shop. **I can look back now at that difficult time and see that it has only done me good as a father, a husband, a businessman and a pastor.** And I am thankful for the role ISWI played in helping me get here. ●

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Dimitri

I grew up in a family of artists in Ukraine. My mother was a theatre actress. My dad began as a painter and then found he was very good in ceramics. He was so good, in fact, that he opened his own ceramics factory. I joined my dad in running the factory for several years until I could no longer resist the desire inside me to move to Israel.

My brother was happy to take over my role in the factory so I felt that my father's business was in good hands.

Soon after I arrived I met and married the woman of my dreams. We both agreed we wanted to have many children and so I began working towards a place of financial strength. I opened a ceramics workshop in Israel but the rules, culture and market are so different in Israel that the business failed miserably.

I spent the next several years working for various art-related companies as well as Israel's most renowned art school Bezalel (named after the craftsman who designed the Ark of the Covenant). I learned a lot about the business and made many friendships and connections in the field. Then I tried again.

The first year I barely made a profit. I have no idea how we even survived that year, but I stayed with it. I knew with a large and still growing family, I would never be able to afford feeding my family without running my own business.

The second year, my business began to grow and our family continued to grow. In our now 20 years of marriage, my wife and I have brought 13 amazing children into the world.

As the business became more established, repeat orders would come in and we were able to depend on a steady stream of income. However, when COVID hit this year, everything abruptly halted. Stores could not open to sell our products and restaurants couldn't serve meals on our dishes.

But we still had to keep feeding our children, and covering the basic costs of the business.

We teach our children that apart from God there is no purpose or meaning in what we do. Our family motto is from Joshua, "*As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.*" Whether our kids learn math, cook a meal, play a song or make a ceramic cup, our family does everything to glorify God. We've always believed that He cares both for little birds and big families.

We didn't reach out to **IStandwithIsrael**; they found us. Just before the holidays this fall, as we were told we'd have to shut down our businesses for almost a month, ISWI representatives came to my workshop and handed me a check to help care for my family. It helped so much! And what a tangible lesson to share God's provision with our children. ●

A YEAR OF FAMINE & PLENTY

Ludmilla

Ludmilla has always been the social butterfly type. Even at 82, she's known for being the life of the party in the assisted living home where she now resides.

Ludmilla was born in Ukraine just before WWII broke out. **As the threat against Jews rose, her mother and grandmother fled with her to the Soviet Union.** They returned to rebuild their lives in Ukraine once the war was over. Ludmilla completed her schooling and took an admin job. However, she quickly discovered how much she enjoyed working with people and would spend the next 37 years in commercial sales. These years, of course, also included getting married and raising two kids. Years later after her children were grown and began raising their own families, her husband died.

One year as they were celebrating a holiday in a Jewish community center they heard about an agency that helps Jews immigrate to Israel. **Her children both decided to move with their families, and though she was now 70, there was no way Ludmilla was going to miss out on watching her grandkids grow up in the Holy Land.** Once they were established, her son found a job in manufacturing and her daughter took a job as a nurse at the hospital.

Though she was retired and began experiencing physical ailments that come with age, Ludmilla continued to be involved with her family. That is, of course, until COVID hit and everyone was ordered to isolate at home. At 82, life alone at home was proving difficult, but it was when Ludmilla was discovered this past summer on the floor of her apartment five hours after taking a terrible fall that her two children knew they needed to find an alternative for her—and fast. Ludmilla's medical condition was worsening but the slew of news stories in Israel about the terrible care the elderly receive in such places left her kids feeling at a loss over who they could entrust with the woman who gave them life.

With her background in the medical field, Ludmilla's daughter was able to find a facility that met all their requirements of medical expertise and personal care.



However, even if she and her brother pooled all their monies together, they could only come up with about half of the initial costs to get her in. When their pastor found out about their dilemma, he told them of **IStandwithIsrael's** mission to care for the needs of Israeli believers. Before the summer was out ISWI had approved the full amount requested and Ludmilla was moved to her new home. She has now been there five months and the staff just can't get enough of this woman they refer to as a "bright light." It is beautiful to see God's faithfulness, that was so apparent to King David, just as apparent today. *"I was young and now I am old and I have never seen the righteous forsaken..."* Psalms 37:25 ■



Ruslan & Yael

I've lived in Israel since I took my very first breath. Ruslan arrived about a decade later at the age of 12 when his family immigrated from Azerbaijan. We met as kids as both our families attended Melech Hakavod congregation. Within 2 years of arriving in Israel, Ruslan would join the worship team and has served there for the past 15 years. I joined the youth worship as a teen and continue to serve the youth group even now.

While Ruslan was in the army he and I began courting and soon after he was released, we were married. That was seven years ago. We started out our married life together by renting a quaint little apartment just like most young Israeli couples. Ruslan got a job at an electronics company producing computer components. In the meantime, I grew a clientele for my custom cake business. Baby number one arrived and things were going as planned.

The plan was to work hard and save to be able to one day own our own apartment—and perhaps even one day, our own business. It's an ambitious plan for young couples as a down payment for an apartment in

Israel can be as high as the cost of an entire apartment in other countries. Recognizing this monumental barrier for young families, the government set up a program that requires contractors to price a number of apartments in each new building at a discounted rate and then draws a lottery from the tens of thousands of names submitted.

Obviously, Ruslan and I couldn't guarantee we would be among those chosen for this, but we were determined to be prepared for the day should it come. Even at a discounted rate, the only way we would ever save up enough for a down payment would be to live off a fraction of our income. My parents were very supportive of our dream and agreed to let us move in with them so every extra shekel could be set aside in anticipation of one day being able to raise our kids in a place we could permanently call home.

Around the time 2020 arrived, everything good and bad seemed to happen at the same time. First, we found out we were expecting our second child! About that time, Ruslan's work made cuts and he lost his job. And then—we received the call informing us that our names had been drawn! We had two weeks to sign for an apartment in a new building project—in the exact neighborhood we'd requested!

What should've been a joyous occasion—that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity we'd been waiting for—couldn't have come at a worse time. Still, Ruslan was able to get another job and we signed in faith believing we'd find a way to earn the rest of the amount for the down payment by the deadline. And then COVID hit. Those precious months before our second baby was born were lost to lockdowns and six months later Israel was still trying to figure out how to handle the crisis. We were running out of time.

Several friends in our congregation told me how **IStandwithIsrael** had helped them in the past and encouraged us to apply. This whole year has been so difficult for people, it seemed a strange time to put in a request for help buying an apartment. But even in difficult times, life still moves ahead, families still continue to grow and important decisions for the future have to be made now. We're so thankful ISWI was able and willing to help us with something that means so much to us as a family. **It's incredible to witness a moment when you've done everything you can and suddenly God is there waiting at the end to make up the difference. ●**



A YEAR OF FAMINE & PLENTY

Gideon & Suzi*

In a little village near the Egyptian border lives a family with five children. Gideon, the father, was born and raised in a kibbutz in northern Israel. At some point after the army, most Israelis will leave the country for a few months to get some fresh air before they settle down for studies or work. India is a favorite place for Israelis mostly because it is affordable to soldiers who just received their payout of \$100 a month for their 2-3 years of service.

Gideon chose India too. There he met two people who would change his life forever—Suzi, his future wife, and Yeshua his eternal Savior.

Gideon returned to Israel with Suzi a changed man and they moved to northern Israel near the Sea of Galilee as he was a fisherman. About the time their third child was born, they felt God calling them from the plush greens of the Golan to be a living testimony in the arid sands of the Negev desert.

Living in the middle of nowhere has its benefits as the cost of living is very low. The biggest downside was that the village is so rural there it has no proper school. So, for 12 years Suzi homeschooled while Gideon guided desert tours and worked in security.

Three years ago, however, they discovered one of their children was in need of special education and the only place it was available was a boarding school in the Jerusalem area several hours away. By now the two oldest kids were of army age so Suzi began working in agriculture to help cover the cost of the boarding school. Farming is an all-consuming job, so this of course meant she would no longer be able to homeschool the other two children. Though the only “proper” school in the area was a private school, it was doable. Tourism has only grown in Israel in recent years, and as long as the usual crop buyers kept buying, they could afford it. Any other year, and these two occupations should’ve been fine. But 2020 isn’t any other year and the school payments were suddenly overwhelming.

ISWI approved their pastor’s request to help cover the cost of their children’s education and they wrote us to share their overwhelming gratitude. But we were the ones left smiling as we witnessed how God takes care of things that matter to his people when they are busy taking care of things that matter to Him. ●

*Names have been changed to protect family privacy.



Ariel & Yael

Yael and I were already married on the day I saw this visual picture in my mind of us and our children living in Israel. I told Yael about it and she was mortified. America maybe, she said, but Israel would be out of the question. However, as each year passed and we didn't move, I felt more and more empty inside.

Yael finally agreed to start the process of immigration which requires an enormous amount of paperwork. Perhaps in her mind, it was such a daunting task that only an act of God would've brought it about. In Russia, original documents proving Jewish roots are difficult to find especially after the catastrophe of WWII and the collapse of the USSR. **That's why the Israeli embassy in Belarus was shocked when I showed him our originals that were found deep in some KGB vault of archives.**

I had been an atheist a good part of my life, but soon after arriving, things changed for me. Before Israel I'd spent 20 years in graphic design.

But when we arrived in Israel, I was done sitting at a desk. I wanted to be a light in a place where it would matter.

Eilat is the southern most city in Israel—on the edge of the Red Sea and sandwiched between the Egyptian and Jordanian border. I saw that in Eilat we could both be a spiritual light, ministering to people—as well as being a tour guide in the desert and helping connect tourists to Israel in a unique way. Less holy sites—more Holy Land.

IStandwithIsrael paid for my training and our business has thrived. It is estimated 80-90% of Eilat's economy is directly related to tourism. But then, when COVID hit, our entire city came to a standstill. We know this land will forever be a place that will attract people from around the world. The history here is simply too rich to ignore.

In the meantime however, ISWI was there to help us hang on financially, and this means we are still able to minister to the locals during this time of seemingly endless struggle. It will probably take a bit, but when the time comes, we plan to be ready and waiting to once again show internationals what makes this land so special to the One who made the universe. ●

A YEAR OF FAMINE & PLENTY

Gedalya

Most of my family was killed in the Holocaust. **The ones who survived only discovered that the others were alive after they immigrated to Israel separately.** It was 1957, and I was an eight-year-old boy when my parents moved to Israel. My father always had a great speaking voice, even when he spoke Hebrew as a second language. Soon after arriving in Israel he was hired to read texts for Kol Israel national radio and worked there for 40 years. Though my family survived, the Holocaust left permanent scars so our home life growing up wasn't such a great story. I spent most of my teen years on my own—as an atheist I was convinced I would always be on my own. When I was drafted into the army, I served three years in the Air Force and then continued working for Israel's Ministry of Defense for the next 20 years. That's the short version. There's a lot more to this story and they made a movie about my life some years ago.

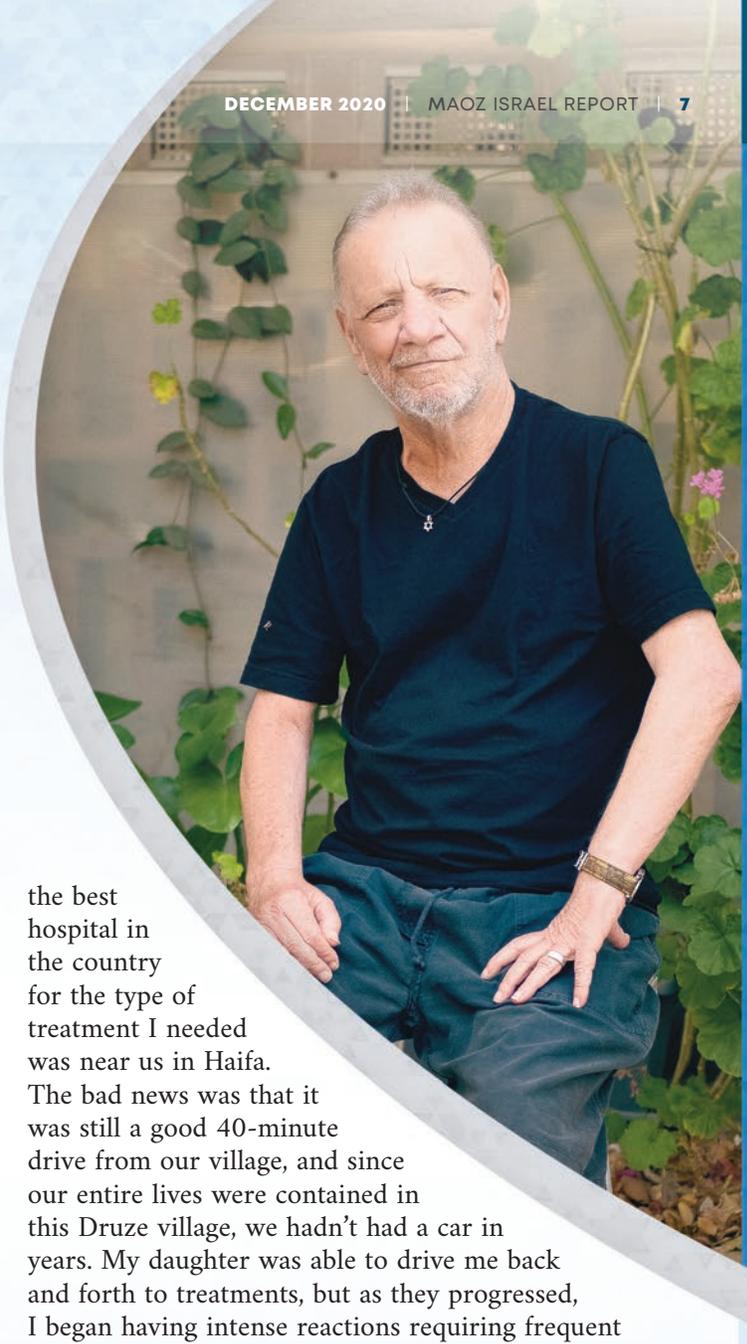
I left the Ministry of Defense to be a business owner and opened a pub. Unfortunately, I struggled with alcohol, so my business choice wasn't the greatest fit for me. At some point someone told me about Yeshua and I embraced it full on. I changed so quickly that my family was convinced I was on drugs. I would smile, dance around the house—and share the Good News—the best news I'd ever heard to people on the street. My family that stuck with me through my alcoholism turned hostile when they couldn't explain my sudden joy. However, one by one, my entire family experienced and accepted Yeshua as their Messiah.

I eventually opened a café. It was so successful that I opened a second one. **Then in the early 2000's the intifada hit and things got bumpy. Terror attacks targeted restaurants and buses and it crippled many businesses. We lost everything, even our home.** Thankfully, by this time my wife was on board with me and we both felt from the Lord to move north and serve in a congregation on Mt. Carmel. We found a quaint little home in a Druze village that was walking distance from the congregation and I was hired to run their coffee shop. It was a best-case scenario for me—a simple life where I could both enjoy running the café and my success would bless the Kingdom of God.

Last year the doctors discovered I had cancer at a stage that was still treatable. The good news was that

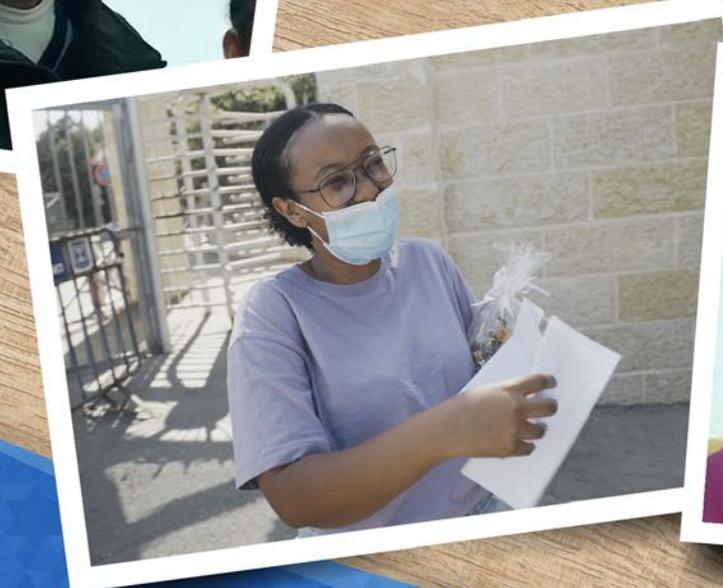
the best hospital in the country for the type of treatment I needed was near us in Haifa. The bad news was that it was still a good 40-minute drive from our village, and since our entire lives were contained in this Druze village, we hadn't had a car in years. My daughter was able to drive me back and forth to treatments, but as they progressed, I began having intense reactions requiring frequent emergency visits to the hospital.

"You'll have to move closer to the hospital," they told me. I didn't want to. I loved our village, the shops, the neighbors. We knew everyone and everyone knew us. Moving to a big city like Haifa where you paid twice as much to live as a speck among many did not appeal to me at all. But the doctors told me there was hope if I completed the treatments, and the move would be temporary. I told our congregation's leadership about our dilemma and they supported the idea of a move. They knew of a fund that could help us cover the extra costs of moving closer to the hospital, and that's when they contacted **IStandwithIsrael**. Within weeks our request was approved and here I am, just seven minutes away from where I get my treatments. The results, so far, have been very encouraging and I am optimistic that I will beat this and get to watch my grandkids bring in the next generation of believers in our family's line into the world. ●





So Many



Stories...

IN A YEAR OF FAMINE & PLENTY



Shalom from Israel,

HOPE. COURAGE. STRENGTH. A MIRACLE!

This is what you give a family, a widow, a business owner, or a student...**when you give to *IStandwithIsrael!***

You've read the stories. You've seen their faces. You have felt their heavy hearts, weighed down with doubt, fear, or distress.

But you have also seen their THRILL when we have knocked on their door, or wired funds to their bank accounts, or we paid for the training they needed to provide for their families!

THIS is ***IStandwithIsrael***. And THIS is the difference you make in lives when you give!

This past year, our plans for ***IStandwithIsrael*** changed dramatically when the world changed. But ***IStandwithIsrael's*** ability to adapt to conditions on the ground is why it has been so effective in Israel for decades. **And it is why we were able to help five times as many families this year as we helped last year.**

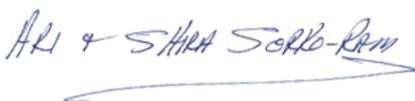
Last winter, even before the pandemic hit, 49% of Israelis were unable to afford proper heating for their homes. Most homes in Israel do not have central heating and cooling and rely on expensive fuel. **Many families will make do with an hour of heat in the morning and an hour of heat in the evening.**

Winter 2020 is coming, and the cold does not take into consideration how difficult this year has already been. Working together with the Joseph Project, this winter **we have the opportunity to distribute 20,000 coats to those who will need it most.** We need \$7,600 to get the coats into Israel and disbursed to 30 locations across the country. **YOU can put a coat on their back!**

Yes, this year is one for the books! And as we begin the countdown to 2021, we all look forward to brighter days ahead. God is faithful! And He is working through YOU to perform miracles in the lives of people, both Jewish and Arab, all over Israel. Together, we will continue into 2021 with hope, courage, and strength, to **make believers STRONG in Israel.**

For the future of Israel,

Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram & Kobi and Shani Ferguson



P.S. This month, along with your regular gift, be sure to include a gift for ***IStandwithIsrael***. You can expect it to make a difference in someone's life...and keep them warm, too.



Celebrating the
Festival of Lights

HAPPY HANUKKAH FROM MAOZ ISRAEL