

Joice studies in his school lab

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ISTANDWITHISRAEL STORIES

From Lebanon to Israel's Negev Desert

Joice

Joice was less than a year old when his parents fled Lebanon and settled in Israel. His family was just one of several hundred families Israel allowed to move to the Golan Heights when the IDF withdrew suddenly from Lebanon in 2000. As part of the Southern Lebanese Army, they had been Israel's military allies. The change in culture, however, wasn't easy, but the alternative was being captured and tortured by Hezbollah.

A year and a half ago, as Israel was enjoying a particularly rainy winter, an intense storm knocked down many trees all over the Golan

Heights. Joice, who enjoyed the pastime of collecting wood for their fireplace, went out with his father to chop up the fallen trees. Their car was tiny so they took a load home and then went back to get the rest. By the time they returned for the rest of the wood, however, it had been taken.

Joice's father said he knew of a guy named David who also liked to gather wood for his fireplace so they drove to his house and found the missing wood still in the man's vehicle. When confronted, David was not only apologetic for the misunderstanding, he brought all the missing

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wood to Joice's home and even added some of his own. Then they sat down for coffee and David shared his story. He was a Messianic Jew and there were others like him in the area. Having grown up a nominal Maronite Catholic, Joice was stunned and

intrigued to hear that a Jew would believe in Yeshua. "I didn't know people like this existed," Joice explained when he tried to describe meeting the Messianic Jewish members of David's congregation. Within a few months of attending and learning what they believed, he gave his life to the King of the Jews. "Growing up, I never encountered discrimination as an Arab living among Jews. I had always felt comfortable in my school and my community. But I have never felt such a strong sense of belonging as I do in my congregation. We enjoy hanging out with each other during the week and we make a point to witness to people everywhere we go."

Joice was first exposed to and fell in love with advanced science in high school. He dreamed of getting a Ph.D. in Physics and Biotechnology. But the nearest college was a good distance away. Undeterred, he applied and was accepted into the pre-med

biotech program. "I would hitchhike to get to school every day but I'd often arrive late and sweaty from running. Then I would juggle homework and my job. It was a lot to handle—I was already well into my master's degree, but I had years of study ahead of me to get a Ph.D., and I didn't know how much longer I could keep up the pace."

"I asked my pastor if he knew of any organization that helped believers and he told me about **I Stand with Israel**. ISWI's gift has helped me focus on my studies without the distractions of wondering where my next meal or ride to school would come from. I don't know if 'thank you' is a big enough way to say it. Israel is big in the field of R&D where my interests lie. Who knows what things I can discover if it is God's will? I put His dreams first and hope that in them He will want me to discover things that will improve people's lives." ■

Joice, in Israel, overlooking his hometown in southern Lebanon



Children's Village

"These are new? And you're leaving them here with us?" the kids asked with sheer wonder in their eyes. We had brought them board games—dozens of our favorite ones so there would be enough for the 280 at-risk and orphaned kids who live there. They were ecstatic. You'd think we had bought them computers and Nike shoes.

While **I Stand with Israel** helps strengthen believers in a variety of ways, caring for widows and orphans is at the core of why ISWI was established. As such, we are always looking for opportunities to serve the underprivileged in Israel. So, when hospital visits were out because of COVID restrictions, we found the Children's Village that welcomed our group visits with open arms.

This Children's Village was first established in 1943 to help care for those separated from their family or orphaned in the Holocaust. It has expanded since, adding an emergency shelter for women, a crisis center for teen girls, a counseling center for at-risk families and a dozen family homes that can give personal attention to some of the hardest cases.

When we visited the first time, the principal told us because

of COVID and the lockdowns, the kids had not had visitors in over a year. Our team, who had gone up to spend some time and bring some joy, came back both elated and heartbroken. Most of the kids are there by court order—having been pulled out of homes where they were neglected by drug-addicted mothers, abused by alcoholic fathers and even tortured by their own parents. We went to give them love and they had so much more love to give back (thanks in large part to the dedicated caretakers who have made it their life mission to nurse wounded young hearts back to health).

Despite the pain, the success stories that come out of this place are incredibly encouraging. The village boasts a list of thousands of graduates who have gone on to live healthy successful lives including nurses, doctors, teachers and company directors. Most recently they graduated an Ethiopian boy who is now making his way through

law school. It's also not uncommon to have graduates return to work at the village to help heal the next generation of abandoned kids.

"If I had not been brought to this children's home, you'd be interviewing me in some dark alley somewhere. Instead, I have finished high school, learned how to play an instrument with excellence and have been accepted into the IDF's prestigious orchestra," Gabi, also a recent graduate shared.

Quality time is often more valuable to kids than money, so that is why we didn't just drop off the board games but spent the day between soccer and the Settlers of Catan. As is often the case, we felt like we received more from them than they did from us and are thankful for the open invitation for us to continue to be a part of caring for orphans in a practical way, just like the Lord instructed us. ■



Some of the Maoz team addresses the kids before heading out to play with them

Aya

Aya and Vasily were already married with a just-turned teenage daughter when they arrived in Israel 19 years ago. Back in Latvia, Aya worked in the fashion business and Vasily, who was a military aviation engineer by trade, ran his own advertising company. But making aliyah has a way of making everyone start again at ground level, so she would spend their early years in Israel learning Hebrew and paying the bills by cleaning houses. Those early years were challenging for more than one reason, but time after time they witnessed the guiding hand of the Lord in their lives.

It would take more than a decade of studying Hebrew and working odd jobs, but when Vasily landed a job in a hi-tech glue factory, Aya would get up the courage to take the leap into opening a clothing store. One store led to two and things were going well. “We started in Israel with nothing, so we took out a loan to open the business and were paying it off as planned. There was even enough left over to cover our son’s music and English lessons,” Aya shared. Aya heard about Maoz’ *Music Making for Kids* program through a friend, but didn’t think to apply at the time. “We had enough money for the lessons and I didn’t want our son to take the place of another child who really needed it,” she explained.

selling almost identical clothing. At the time, the decision to close was a painful one. In hindsight however, closing that shop would help save the other one. Because a few months later, when COVID hit, malls were closed much longer than regular shops. Holding on to two stores during this time could’ve collapsed the entire business.

Still, Aya’s business was hit hard when the lockdowns paralyzed the marketplace. She had just received her spring collection and written checks for tens of thousands of dollars with the understanding she would make a profit by the time the bills came due. She never got the chance to sell any of it.

For Aya, running a clothing store was never just a business; it was her ministry. “I make it a point to share about Yeshua with the customers who come into my shop. I also have a section in my store for books about the Lord that they can take home to read and then come and trade out for another one.”

In late 2019, Aya would be faced with a difficult decision. One of her stores was located in a mall and was struggling because a nearby store was

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Their dreams for the future included owning their own business, and longing for another child. But with their only child now just short of 20 years old, some dreams weren’t realistic. Unless, that is,

God is your God and He can do whatever He wants—which in this case was to give them a son who would be born 5 years to the day after they set foot in the land of promise.



By the time shops were allowed to open again, the season had changed and no one was interested in spring clothes. Determined to save her business, Aya and Vasily took out a loan to cover the payments due. They sold what they could at a loss—but mostly gave the clothes away to anyone who would take them.

The markets eventually opened up again and Aya ordered new stock, but the backed-up bills were suffocating. **I Stand with Israel** approved closing out her debts so she could run her business (and ministry) from a place of strength and continue her son's music and English education.

“My son is developing beautifully in his music and has now qualified for a specialized English program. As for me, the next step in my business will be to expand the space in my store dedicated to books I give out about my God of miracles!” ■

Making Music for Kids

If you take it at face value, the *Music Making for Kids* program can sound a bit simple. Maoz gives out music scholarships to dedicated kids in the hopes of giving more believing children an opportunity to become excellent

on an instrument to worship God. But the reality is, when believers are empowered to fulfill the dreams God has given them, it's natural to see them bear fruit for the Kingdom. Every year Maoz gives scholarships to about 60 children from around

the country to receive musical training from the most qualified teachers in their area.

Musically, we are pleased with the results. The *Music Making for Kids* program that has been going on for 10 years now has seen many of the children (who are now teens!) join worship teams,

As part of the program, music students are encouraged to play together as practice for their future participation in a worship team

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orchestras and even compete (and win!) in international competitions. But we are even more excited by the spiritual impact from these kids and their families. Music teachers have been led to the Lord through this program and doors into the very secular music world have been opened to those being raised up to become modern day Levites.

Raising up an army of worshippers takes time, patience—and a lot of pastoring. But we are raising them up to fight for the Lord. If they aren't trained to use their talents for the Lord, they may waste thier talents on the world. ■



Music Making for Kids filmed this holiday song as part of its program



IDF Soldiers

The military operation this year was *Watchman on the Walls*. We at Maoz not only kept abreast of what was happening so we'd know when to go down to our bomb shelters; we had staff members and children of staff in the IDF who were on the front lines fighting Hamas.

Among the prayer requests our soldiers sent us during the operation was a request for the people of Gaza. It's a heavy place to be, when, as a believer, you feel a love for people as God's creation—but you're fighting against a dangerous enemy who hides among those very people. Even in their unsaved state, Israelis wrestle

with wanting to defend their homeland—and having to take lives in the process. Many have come home with PTSD, suffering for years after having to make that terrible decision. Former Prime Minister Golda Meir is said to have once lamented, "One day when we have peace, we may forgive them for killing our sons, but we cannot forgive them for forcing us to kill theirs."

The whole operation was over in just a few weeks, but everyday felt like forever. There was so much they couldn't tell us until the operation was over. Once they were safe at home, however, we got a better picture of their experience (excluding sensitive information they weren't

allowed to share, of course). While **I Stand with Israel** does not involve itself with any military activity, we know IDF soldiers are people with basic needs just like all of us. Most of the soldiers on the field fighting these Hamas terrorists are under the age of 20. Among the riveting war stories they shared, was the side note that when they came back to their bases from their missions, they had nowhere to sit and rest. The lucky ones could claim the handful of plastic chairs lying around. The others would have to make do with blankets on the ground, covered in desert dust.

As far as we were concerned, this was not how we wanted the men and women who just took out rocket launchers aimed at our homes to be greeted when they returned from the battlefield. We called up the manufacturer, negotiated and ordered as many sitting corners as we could within our budget.

Sometimes being able to rest properly can be just as critical to doing a good job as the proper training.



IDF soldiers in the desert enjoying the seating areas I Stand with Israel provided

So, we not only funded the sitting corners, but also sponsored special days of rest off the base. Providing “rest” between missions felt like such an insufficient way to support our troops—but the soldiers couldn’t have felt more grateful. They sent us tons of photos and

video clips of their time off base (we can only share a few) and on each bench they placed a plaque so Israeli soldiers (many who have heard of I Stand with Israel) would know they are being cared for by lovers of Israel from the nations. ■

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IDF soldiers enjoying special days of rest

Shalom from Jerusalem!

Of all the topics we cover throughout the year, **I Stand with Israel** stories are the **most fun to share!** The journeys of pain and suffering on the road to overcoming bring tears to our eyes, **joy to our hearts and thanksgiving to our God.**

This year alone ISWI was able to help hundreds of individuals and families from dozens of Jewish and Arab congregations across the country. In the process we passed the **\$8,000,000** mark of investing in believers all over Israel. From emergency medical needs, to education to housing to transportation and rehabilitation,

I Stand with Israel has **transformed the lives** of people from a troubled path to a new path. **A better path!**

Still, you should know, honor is an important aspect of our Middle Eastern culture. It is simpler to tell the **moving stories** of people you get to help in third world countries because there is little chance they or their acquaintances will ever see a computer – **let alone what may have been shared about them online.**



Israel on the other hand, is very connected online. And these stories will be read by friends, family members, and those who are “not so friendly” to believers. We would be doing a disservice to **those who we are looking to strengthen** if we help them **overcome a financial hurdle** only to weaken their place among their loved ones and their circle of influence.

As such, some of those miracle stories will **never be publicly shared.** But we believe you understand the **truly magnificent impact your gifts to I Stand with Israel** bring to this country!

I Stand with Israel stories are written by you! Without your gifts, these stories would still be just prayers for miracles. **With your gifts, they become miracle testimonies of breakthrough and deliverance.**

Help us write the next **MIRACLE STORY** with your gift to I Stand with Israel this month. **Lives will be changed forever!**

Shalom,

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

Kobi and Shani Ferguson





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