



# A Time and a Season to **HELP&HOPE**

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By Shani Ferguson Sorko-Ram

**I**t seems every year has its own unique flavor when it comes to how **I Stand with Israel** disperses more than half a million dollars among Israel's believers, both Jewish and Arab, from over 100 congregations across the country. The best thing about how Maoz' benevolence fund, **I Stand with Israel**, is set up, is that it adapts to the needs on the ground in Israel and around the world. Some years **ISWI** aided those whose lives and livelihoods were crushed by waves of terrorism. Other years **ISWI**

sought out and helped hundreds of families struggling through lockdowns. This past year individuals, families and even nations were impacted heavily by the Russian-Ukrainian war. The turmoil meant thousands of Russian and Ukrainian Jews were suddenly applying for Israeli citizenship. It also meant those who couldn't move to Israel were living in a war zone. These are just some of the stories of how **I Stand with Israel** supporters changed the lives of those in need this year.

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A woman with grey hair tied back, wearing a bright yellow long-sleeved dress and red shoes, is smiling while cooking in a kitchen. She is pouring from a brass kettle into a cup on a dark countertop. In the background, there is a window with a view of greenery and a potted plant on the sill. The kitchen has white cabinets and a black oven.

***Though we needed money, I made it a point to only work jobs with flexible hours where I was free to leave and be with my kids when they needed me.***



STORY ONE

## Natalia

**W**hen I married a Jewish man in the former Soviet Union, I didn't care about his religious background at the time. After my first daughter was born I had a very powerful inner transformation and gave my life to the Lord. My mother also had no interest in religion and didn't take it well. "I'd rather you had become a prostitute than a (born-again) Christian," she told me.

Within a few years, we moved to Israel with two children and once here we had four more. By some miracle we were able to purchase a tiny apartment at a 92% discount because of our status as immigrants; it wasn't anything fancy, but it was a home!

I always loved working hard. Even during my pregnancies, I worked up to the day I gave birth—and then two months after each birth I was back in the workforce. I worked as a psychologist for young children and on the side did everything from factory work to ironing in a laundromat. I even pursued continuing my education and earned a higher degree. But as soon as I presented my diploma to the place I worked, they let me go. Apparently, they didn't want to pay me the extra hourly fee required when someone has a degree.



My husband was very talented as an artist but had no formal training, so he had no way of monetizing his giftings. He also struggled with depression which made a stable job difficult. On good days he was supportive of me and even encouraged me to pursue nursing, which I did. Then he would get into an emotional slump and would become violent toward me and the kids. I was studying for my finals in nursing when he flew into a rage about something and smashed my computer. A neighbor called the police and that was the last day we would be together as a family. I would never finish my nursing courses.

I continued raising the children alone and he didn't keep up with the alimony. Though we needed money, I made it a point to only work jobs with flexible hours where I was free to leave and be with my kids when they needed me. Working hard paid off and I remember looking at my bank account and seeing at the end of the month I was 2,000 shekels (\$650) in the plus!

It was a beautiful moment that lasted about that long. It seemed like the very next moment my

neighbors from the apartment below called me downstairs to show me a leak in their ceiling.

I brought a plumber over to seek out the source of the leak. He began chipping away at the wall to find the water pipes. The building we live in was built some 50+ years ago—when water pipes were made of metal. He quickly found the leak but showed me, as he kept chipping away at the length of the pipe embedded in the concrete wall, that the metal pipes were brittle like clay.

“You'll have to replace the entire length of the pipe all the way to the kitchen, or you'll just pay a lot now and find a new leak in a few months,” he explained.

He was a Godsend as far as plumbers go. Good, honest—and he believed me when I promised I'd find a way to pay him. I gave him my 2,000 shekels to get started, but he kept working well after that amount ran out.

The whole “renovation” experience was a journey of faith as I would walk outside praying for help and bump into a friend pulling out money from an ATM. “Can I borrow money and pay you back

in a few months?” “Of course!” they'd answer, and I'd run back with money to the apartment. The plumber (who knew I had no funds) would just stare at me trying to figure out how I kept coming up with chunks of cash.

It was strange to me. I found my friends who were barely making it would readily give me hundreds of shekels when I asked for help (I promised to work and return it, but in the end most of my friends wouldn't let me pay them back). I had other friends who were better off financially, and they weren't as eager to help. “Maybe tomorrow, another time...” they always had a reason they couldn't help right then.

When the amounts here and there fell short, the leaders in my congregation told me about **I Stand with Israel**. That was when I was able to pay off the amount I owed the plumber and end the water leak saga. I'm not only grateful to have received help from **ISWI**, but I love that God answered my prayers through His people. He brought us together—you an organization looking to help believers and I a believer crying out to God for help. ■

## YOU SHOULD KNOW

*Aiding people in Israel is a delicate art. In one sense people are excited for breakthrough in their lives, but our nation is small and the Body of believers in Israel is even smaller. As some of the stories cover sensitive topics, some names were changed to protect their privacy and dignity. Rest assured, however, the life-changing impact **ISWI's** aid has been able to offer them is entirely real!*



## STORY THREE

## Shlomit

I was born and raised in a German kibbutz in northern Israel.

The kibbutz was established by Germans who came after WWII to try and do good in Israel after the evils of the Holocaust, however, they were also very religious and controlling. As my father was Jewish, when I finished high school I naturally wanted to serve in the army. They were opposed to the idea and kicked me out of the community.

I met my would-be-husband while in the army. We were both volunteering at a women's shelter and were both believers. Because of my sheltered upbringing, I had little experience in the real world and he seemed to have everything I was looking for in a lifelong mate. So, within a year of meeting, we married.

My husband had told me that after his service in the Lebanese war he was diagnosed with PTSD, but I didn't recognize at the time that this was only the tip of the iceberg. We had four kids together (today ages 4-9) when his struggles began taking a serious toll on our marriage. His friends and family were always very forgiving of his behavior because of his PTSD, but this only enabled him. He became reckless with our funds, with drugs, alcohol and violence—and blamed it all on his PTSD.

I grew up conservative so to me there was no such thing as divorce—it was all about going to counseling and fighting for our marriage. I was ashamed to discuss the issue with my circle of friends. I was also scared to report the situation because he told me if I did, social services would see me as an accomplice to his violence against the children and would take the kids away from me.

One night I had a nightmare that still haunts me when I think of it. In it I was weeping over the graves of my children and calling out their names when I heard a voice in the dream say, "This is what will happen if you don't separate yourself from this man." Not long after that he got angry



Stories from  
ISRAEL

## STORY TWO

## Rodika

I grew up in a family with two deaf parents. Fifty years ago, they were able to purchase an apartment in Tel Aviv and have lived in it together ever since. We loved our home and back in the late 1980's gave it a nice update. My father has since passed and my 75-year-old mother now lives there alone. Because it's been some 35 years since we renovated anything in the home, the bathroom had become dangerous for my mother—the floor tile is broken and slippery. We put in requests to several organizations and were so thankful to hear that **ISWI** would take care of making our bathroom safe and accessible for my mother. ■





about something while we were at home and told me if I didn't leave with the kids right then he would kill us all. I packed everything up in an hour and fled to my parents' house.

His drug abuse only got worse; he followed us to my parents' and threatened all of us. I pray for deliverance, and one day I received a letter. It informed us that my husband had two weeks to pay off his debts or he would no longer be allowed to leave the country (a common restriction placed on Israelis with outstanding bills). To this he responded that he wanted to go on a vacation and left the country. The good news was, I knew he would never come back to pay those bills and my kids and I would finally be safe. The bad news was that I was left with all his debts—hundreds of thousands of shekels! I pursued filing for bankruptcy, but when the judge heard my story he told the collection agencies to remove my name from the debts. It was a victory, a true miracle!

I had a massage therapy business that gave me flexible hours to work, provide for the children, and have enough left over to put myself and my children in therapy in order to work through our trauma. I tried several different types of therapy, but my kids continued to struggle and would regularly wake from nightmares at night.

When a friend of mine said, "Just put them on a horse and see how it helps," I thought it was funny advice, but I was willing to try anything and was shocked at the positive influence that equine therapy had. My kids began sleeping through the night and I saw a real change so I tried the therapy myself and was in awe of the good it did. I knew there were others out there who

could benefit from this and so began looking into becoming an equine therapist myself.

It was help from **ISWI** that made it possible for me to study and earn the credentials I needed to become an equine therapist. It's a privilege to be able to earn a living doing something I love and believe in. Perhaps one day I'll be able to own my own equine therapy ranch that will specialize in helping women who have come out of violent situations. In the meantime, however, I am just thankful I can take all the pain and suffering I have experienced and use it to help other people heal from their struggles. ■

***His drug abuse only got worse; he followed us to my parents house and threatened all of us. One day I received a letter.***

**Shlomit**







## STORY FOUR

## Igor

**M**y wife and I were four months away from immigrating from Ukraine to Israel in 2004 when she was killed in a freak car accident. I was devastated, but decided to continue with our dream to move with all five of our children (ages 1-18) to our homeland.

For three years, after we arrived in the country, I prayed asking the Lord if He wanted me to remain alone or to remarry. Then, in 2007, I met a woman named Naomi who stole my heart. She opened her heart not only

to me but also to my children and within two years we were married. It took time for each of my kids to accept a new mother but soon we became a family. I continued in my work as a family counselor and pastor and Naomi was a teacher. Together we had two more children and I felt as though my life and happiness had been restored.

It was during the COVID lockdowns that Naomi began complaining about pain in her back and a colonoscopy revealed stage 4 cancer. We fought for two years against the evil of this disease but in the end, I lost her.

It was overwhelming. I had barely been able to work for two years as we struggled to hold the house together and the bills that had piled up were sky high. My kids were devastated—again. And I was a pastor. What could I tell those I counseled about faith and God's goodness?

Still, I see God at work. My friends and associates rallied around us to help and together with **ISWI** stepped in and covered the bills. So, while our pain is still raw, at least the financial pressure has been lifted. I believe my story isn't over and I will say like King David, "Hope in the Lord for I shall yet praise Him." ■



Igor and his family

**During the COVID lockdowns, my wife began complaining about pain in her back and a colonoscopy revealed stage 4 cancer.**





## STORY FIVE

# Olga

I came to Israel with my husband and three children. I have a Ph.D. in engineering, so my husband and I were thankful to be able to find work in construction engineering, our field of expertise, soon after moving to Israel. In our local congregation we help with technical things such as the sound system and I serve in the women's ministry.

About a year and a half ago I was waiting at a bus stop when I was hit from behind by a guy riding an electric bike. At first, I was thankful I had not broken anything and I thought I had gotten off easy. But I had been struck in the head and back, so the pain took a few days to start, and

it affected me more and more as each day passed. Within a week or two I wasn't sleeping at all from the pain. Standing would hurt and sitting too long would make me dizzy. Taking sleeping medication helped with the night but affected my days negatively. The experts involved with my physical therapy were wrestling over whether I would require neck, head and lower back surgery—or whether they would be able to help me recover with years of therapy—but without the risky surgery.

The whole process has taken time and I am still in treatment with the possibility of surgery in the future. However, I am well enough

***While waiting at a bus stop, I was hit from behind by a guy riding an electric bike...the pain took a few days to start, and within a week I couldn't sleep.***

now that I can work part-time and stabilize our family income. The issue we faced as a family was the one-year gap when only my husband could work and I had extra medical expenses. I am so thankful to **I Stand with Israel** for helping us cover this financial gap so we can move forward on our own two feet. ■



## STORY ONE

# Kyiv Refugee Shelter



The initiative began when Valentina (whom we wrote about in the *Stories from Ukraine Maoz Israel Report* earlier this year) and some local acquaintances received a shipment of clothes and blankets. They invited anyone in need (many who had lost their homes and possessions) to come and take what they needed. The process was messy. It was wet and rainy—and people were just guessing at their sizes when they grabbed clothes.

“We need a dedicated space with changing rooms so people can keep warm and dry and try on clothes instead of taking things and then discarding them when they don’t fit,” we discussed amongst ourselves. **I Stand with Israel** had helped us in the spring provide medicine and hygiene supplies for some of the elderly who couldn’t physically

leave their homes. So we shared our idea with them.

We found a warehouse that would work—getting a “war-time” price for rent—and **ISWI** told us they were willing to cover the rent and utilities for the place. We outfitted larger spaces with racks and shelves for blankets and other supplies as well as clothes and changing rooms to try them on. We also prepared several rooms with beds made of stacked wooden crates and mattresses to temporarily house individuals and families who had lost everything and needed a few days or weeks to get situated.

When people come to our center, we offer them not only supplies but spiritual and emotional support. We have 20 volunteers, all

who work jobs during the day, and give of their free hours to help others.

Each time we presented a need to **ISWI** as it arose. Each time they said “Yes!” From Ludmila, the single mother who had to close her kindergarten and had a son who fell suddenly ill and needed urgent surgery, to an unemployed grandmother caring for her special needs daughter and young granddaughter—we’ve already helped more than 8,000 people since we opened the center in May. We know the road ahead is long, but we are prepared for it. ■



Smiling volunteers and people receiving help at the Kyiv Refugee Shelter





Just part of the devastation in the school after Kharkiv was bombed

## STORY TWO

# Kharkiv Special Education School

This school for special education in Kharkiv used to be open around the clock from Monday to Friday assisting and educating 260 visually impaired children coupled with other disabilities.

When the war broke out we took everyone into the subway because it was underground and safer than being above ground. But it was crowded and loud, so when we realized the conflict would be longer than two days, we moved into the school's basement. All the while the teachers kept finding ways to keep the kids calm and teach them. But when the school's electrical hub was hit, the heat went out.

It was late February and still cold, so the kids began getting sick. We in turn began evacuating some of the children with their families as some of their homes had been shelled or vandalized. In the past months the school itself has been shelled five times. Each

time the damage has been massive inside and out. The windows and doors and even some walls were smashed, the sports field has been destroyed, and greenhouses and orchards crushed.

Because of **ISWI**, we were able to replace the shattered doors with strong metal doors allowing us to use those classrooms again. Our main focus is the mental, emotional and physical health of the children. We work hard to occupy their minds with things other than the war. The children have found much satisfaction in the arts during this time and in October 2022 our orchestra even won first place in the Golden Fest international competition! After the war, we can always teach subjects like science and history.

We are so thankful to **IStand with Israel**, that in a difficult time for our country, you found an opportunity to support our special children, who lay the

foundations of the life of the generation of the 21st century. You are an example for our children. Your actions today are a guarantee that our children will grow up caring and ready to help others in need. ■



Installin the new doors



Stories from  
**UKRAINE**

STORY  
FOUR

## Anya

When the war broke out, Anya hoped it would be short-lived. People around her were fleeing, but being older and only able to move around with a walker, any move would be difficult. It was a month later when her daughter came home from work and said a rocket had



hit the grocery store where they shopped. It was time to leave. Unsure where to go, as Jews, Israel seemed the logical place. **ISWI** was quickly made aware of their immigration and reached out to learn what they needed after the government got them situated in an apartment. "Just a washing machine would be great!" they said. And so, a washing machine it was! ■

STORY THREE

## Wood Burning Stoves

Working with other organizations is something Maoz loves to do! We knew many homes in Ukraine had spotty electricity at best. So when we heard of Val and Tatyana (Jewish Partner Initiative) wanted to deliver wood burning stoves to homes before the icy winter hit, **IStand with Israel** joined forces with them giving \$10,000 to purchase 77 stoves! ■

STORY FIVE

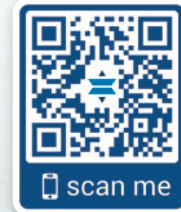
## Veronica & Konstantin

Imagine being physically disabled from birth, while being part of a family that is also entirely special needs in one way or another. From blindness to dementia, to being unable to walk without special shoes, the individual struggles of each of the family members are ever-present. This means even the smallest change in lifestyle can be debilitating in terms of mobility or ability to access food. We all know that war brings with it no small number of



changes. With a good amount of help from locals in Ukraine, Veronica and Konstantin were able to immigrate to Israel with their family members. Since they arrived in Israel, **IStand with Israel** has kept in touch with them to assure they are provided with the specialized medical items they require. ■





Shalom from Jerusalem!

December 2022

***I Stand with Israel partners did it again!!!***

***Did you read those real-life stories of deliverance?***

**Whether the world is on a financial high or on complete lockdown, our partners have never stopped believing that investing in Israel is important!** Your sincerity in prayer has undergirded our efforts. Your generosity is beautiful to witness. And the trust you place in us to serve both you and our nation means the world to us.

I find it amazing that even though we only occasionally highlight stories of the individuals and families helped by **I Stand with Israel**, every month tens of thousands of dollars are given by our partners specifically to help change the course of people's lives.

It's not usually until we get towards the end of each year and reflect on what God has done through **I Stand with Israel**, that we revel in the way God orchestrated every need, every decision, every gift we were able to give.

**Last year, I Stand with Israel was able to distribute more than half a million dollars to Israelis – both Jews and Arabs—in need!** We want to finish this year STRONG as well—and continue to make believers STRONG in Israel! **Maoz partners have already given \$470,000 this year and we have until the end of December to reach our goal of \$650,000 to meet the needs of those who have asked for help.**

Will you join the many around the world who have brought hope and healing to so many through **I Stand with Israel**?

We've been told it is "more blessed to give than to receive!" **That is why your gift to I Stand with Israel becomes a double blessing**—as you give, and we get to receive your gifts and get to give it away! Talk about a WIN/WIN!

Your Partners in the Land of Promise,

*Kobi and Shani Ferguson*

**Kobi and Shani Ferguson**

P.S.: If you're looking for a great holiday gift, don't forget the **Families of Israel Calendar**, now available for a holiday special of 5 for your gift of \$50 or more.







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AND  
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