

ISRAEL

2009 - 2011

OUR TWO-YEAR JOURNEY OF ADVOCACY

WRITE ON FOR



<A TWO YEAR TOUR>

In the fall of 2009, 23 teenagers gathered at Siegal College completely unaware of what the next year had in store for them: all day meetings jam-packed with lectures from esteemed journalists and politicians, writing a plethora of articles, visiting museums, and even making videos. The experiences and friendships we gained during our 14-day trip to Israel (that culminated our first year of studying) were well worth the arduous work WOFI entailed.

As rising seniors, we learned of the importance of advocating for Israel; that, as we leave our comfortable atmosphere behind for college, we may be attacked for our Zionist views, and conse-

quentially, we must stand behind Israel. To prepare to defend ourselves, we put our new-found advocacy tools to use throughout year two of WOFI by throwing a party, attending conferences in Washington D.C., and even putting together this magazine.

Reflecting upon the experiences of the past two years, we are unswervingly confident that the wealth of information we have absorbed will allow us to defend Israel, wherever we are. WOFI has been an incredible and enlightening experience, as found in the following articles, and we are grateful to Amnon, Ellen, Cindy, Tina, and The AVI CHAI Foundation who made this group possible. **[becky#zucker#and#becca#levin]**

<BUS EXPERIENCE>

The bus experience on the Write on for Israel trip cohort 2 was an experience I will never forget. Not only did the time on the bus bring the cohort closer together, but it also gave us the opportunity to view the land of Israel from a different window. Each day we spent valuable time on the bus growing as a unified group and hearing a different tour guide inform us on the land we were passing by. When we did not have a tour guide, Amnon stepped up to the plate and never left us uninformed. I think one of my favorite parts of the Israel trip was

in fact the bus experience. It was on the bus that I built strong relationships with every individual on the trip. I made great friends that I will never forget and we became a write on for Israel family. What made the bus experience ever greater was that we had the privilege of viewing the beautiful land of Israel. A significant amount of time we spent on our Israel trip was on our bus and I will never forget the singing, laughing, talking, smiling, sleeping, and of course learning we experienced on our bus in Israel. **[jessica#borrison]**

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Write On For Israel is open to all Jewish high school juniors.

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OUR THANKS

<LIFE-CHANGING JOURNEY>

On June 13, we embarked on an unforgettable, life-changing journey. Admittedly, the majority of teens who take trips to Israel claim their trips to be life-changing, but our trip with Write On For Israel (WOFI) was a truly unique experience.

WOFI is a two-year Israel advocacy program for high school juniors and seniors that equips teens with the resources, facts, and skills to defend Israel on college campuses, because that is the battlefield of the anti-Israel war. Throughout this past year we had eight all-day learning sessions both about Israel's history and politics (hard advocacy) and Israel's culture and people (soft advocacy).

We thought we knew Israel. Now we realize that you cannot

**We thought
we knew Israel**

possibly advocate for something unless you've experienced it. REALLY experienced it. And not by riding camels and swimming in the Dead Sea, neither of which we did on our trip. We experienced the real Israel.

We interviewed people while waiting for falafel, talked with taxi drivers about their understanding of various topics including the Arab-Israeli conflict, and rushed all over Tel Aviv in just a few hours.

I now realize I took home with me more than just mosquito bites and a sunburn. My love and pride for my Jewish homeland has never been so strong.

What more could I possibly need to make my connection with Israel stronger? Another trip, of course. **[samantha#miller]**

<IF NOT FOR AMNON ... >

The intense work load and time commitment made me hesitant to apply for Write on For Israel. WOFI director Amnon Ophir repeatedly told me to apply to this incredible program, and eventually I did (to stop his nagging). If not for Amnon, I would have missed out on a truly outstanding program and an unforgettable trip to Israel.

In Israel, Amnon was usually the first to rise and the last to go to bed at night.

He spent his days making sure that everything ran smoothly, while still finding the time to joke with us and sporting his signature

forest green ranger hat [3]. He filled our days with speakers and activities because he did not want us to miss any opportunity. If anyone complained about the schedule, quality of food or lack of sleep, Amnon was there to kindly

remind them that, "WOFI is not a democracy, it's an "Amnonocracy."

Late at night, Amnon could be found typing away on his

computer, trying to keep the parents informed about our trip.

I really appreciate all the time and energy Amnon put in to make our trip a success. I loved every minute of it. **[lyoni#kirsch]**



[1]



[2]



[3]

Amnon, please
go to sleep.
It is 2 in the
morning!

ISRAELI FLAVORS

[1]



We would like to visit the Aroma coffee shop

<WHY NOT TRY THE BRICK?>

There is one blatant and universal truth about American cuisine: it is drenched in grease and mass-produced in large quantities. During our trip, we experienced a more nuanced and personal approach to cooking that is uniquely characteristic of Israel.

While vegetarian dishes often dominated our meals, the food we ate in Israel revealed the culture of the localities we visited. For

instance, I recall a potato concoction with zatar and other seasonings called "the brick" from a Sephardic village in the South.

At first, I refused to try this foreign delicacy, but Amnon persisted, "Daniel, your mother will be very disappointed if you don't at

least try it."

It was delicious!

"The brick" is not served anywhere else in the country, unlike other Israeli delicacies such as the caffeine-infused beverages at Aroma Coffee, the Israeli equivalent of Starbucks. Aroma has quite possibly the greatest iced

coffee in existence despite Amnon's objections that greater coffee exists.

I refused to try this foreign delicacy

With both commercialized cuisine and local dishes popular in Israeli culture, we could not help but take in the true cultural diversity through the most basic and enjoyable act of sharing large plates of food with each other. [\[daniel#bram\]](#)

[2]



<THE ORIGINAL ORGANIC>

If you go to your local grocery store, you can easily find myriad products that boast the USDA organic seal. While the organic movement has recently been gaining momentum in the United States, Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu paved the way for organic farming decades ago.

This quintessential organic farm utilizes donkeys to manage weeds and barn owls to control rodents. No pesticides are used at all.

Sde Eliyahu also pioneered a product called Bio-Bee [3], a box containing a live hive of bumblebees. Farmers can use Bio-Bee to help pollinate their crops and increase their crop yields. The kibbutz's newest project, Bio-Fly, is a co-effort with Jordan to reduce the

population of fruit flies; By releasing controlled amounts of sterilized fruit flies into an area, Bio-Fly preserves crops. Sde Eliyahu is also helping educate Jordanian farmers about organic farming methods.

At the end of our tour, we got to taste the fruits of their labor when a Sde Eliyahu representative

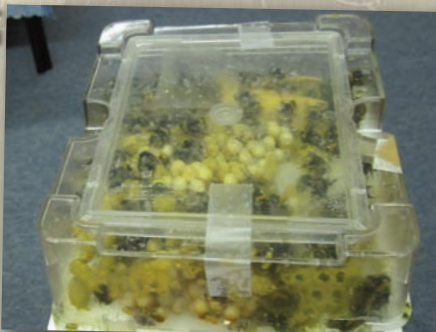
passed around a box of dates. They were plump and juicy, unlike many dates sold in the

We tasted the fruits of their labor

United States. Besides from the amazing dates, I think Sde Eliyahu has really touched upon something with their farming: cooperation with Israel's neighbors. If politicians cannot bring peace to the area, perhaps Sde Eliyahu's all-natural farming methods can.

[\[becky#zucker\]](#)

[3]



FINDING FASHION

<KIBBUTZ INSPIRATION>

To honor the 100th birthday of kibbutzim, the Israel fashion industry produced a clothing line that showcased the casual look of early kibbutz members. The hottest fashion in the summer of 2010 was a long, flowing earth-tone dress embroidered with flowers and complemented by a matching sweater. These dresses, a new take on an old fashion, are natural looking, just as the kibbutz is all about nature.

A new take on an old fashion

Another clothing trend consisted of mismatched prints, commemorating early kibbutz farmers who wore whatever they could find in their haste to get to work. Since they were working in the fields, their clothes would always

become dirty, resulting in spots and different patterns on their clothes. Tastefully replicating splotchy and mismatched clothing requires a high level of skill and artistic talent.

No outfit is complete without shoes. The shoes for these kibbutz-inspired outfits are a modernized version of kibbutz shoes but with an added heel. They are earth colored with work boot laces; however, the small heel adds a level of sophistication. From dresses to shoes, fashion in summer 2010 was very much influenced by kibbutz, and artistically created by fashion designers using "old" styles in a modern fashion. [orit#coleman]



[1]



[2]



[3]



[4]



[5]



[6]

<SCAVENGING FASHION CITY>

On a sweltering hot Friday afternoon in Tel-Aviv, six teams of teenagers took off and headed to the streets on a citywide scavenger hunt. Each team was armed with a camera to take pictures of the different types of people they found in the city. We were shocked when we saw the list of the different types people, ranging from surfers to traditional to fashionistas to skaters to business men.

As my team looked down at the seemingly never-ending list we

Trendy in the states... also stylish in Tel Aviv

were stunned by the variety of people harmoniously living one city as well as the amount of people that resembled fashions in the States. For instance, we saw California-style beach bums and New York City-esque fashionistas.

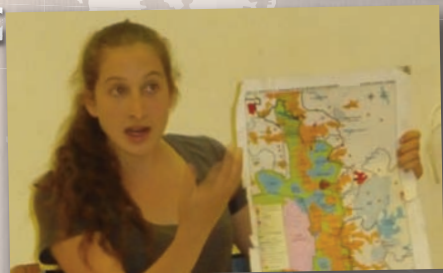
Just across the street was a group of skater boys who also reminded us of home with their loose jeans and t-shirts. The traditionally dressed people seemed undisturbed by modern fashions and maintained their dress with payes, tzitzit, and kippot on the men at all times. We walked by a wedding and were comforted to find that most styles that were trendy in the States were also very stylish with the people of Tel-Aviv.

Because of this simple part of the scavenger hunt, we paid more attention than ever before to the varying types of people who share one city. The scavenger hunt forced us to open our eye and see the beauty of diversity in Israel that was right under our noses. [rosa#katz]

[1]



[2]



[3]



RIGHT & LEFT

<A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION>

The political and social gravitas of Aryeh King [1] and Maya Wind's [2] speeches took WOFI cohort 2 by storm. The primary focus of these speakers' conversation was the treatment of Israeli Arabs living in East Jerusalem. Each revealed staunchly opposing stances.

Calm and composed, King described the East Jerusalem Arabs as parasites who live off of the generousities of the Israeli government, and lack the motivation to establish economic footholds. King went on to call these Arabs "criminals" for constructing numerous buildings without permits. He purposefully did not mention, as Wind later did, that the Jerusalem zoning magistrates had not included East Jerusalem in their plans, thereby rendering all construction in East Jerusalem illegal. It was apparent that King was skewing the information by omitting certain facts to justify his radical conservative claims. He concluded his presentation with a picture of Maya Wind waving a PLO flag to bias us against her, and to put her on the defensive.

As a result, Wind was incensed during her entire presentation. She described the East Jerusalem Arabs as unfairly oppressed, underrepresented faux-citizens, and blamed the lack of a zoning plan for their oppression. Wind also claimed discrepancies in allocation for medical funds, citing a source that claimed that, under Israel's national health care plan, a Jew in West Jerusalem would receive nearly twice as much care as an Arab would in East Jerusalem. When asked whether Arabs pay their taxes, Wind said that indeed they do, as they use their tax receipts as proof of residence. (Like King's claim of Arab criminality, this assurance was actually a misrepresentation of facts. We were later informed by an employee of Jerusalem's tax office that as few as 10 percent of Arabs in East Jerusalem pay their taxes.)

While the narratives they described were entirely different, both Aryeh King and Maya Wind preached the same message: The other side is wrong. This is a symbol of Jewish Israeli and Arab relations; if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to ever be resolved, such radical, divisive sentiment must be replaced by a cooperative mentality. [Isaac#hoffman]

Focus was treatment of Israeli Arabs in East Jerusalem

<A NEW BATTLEFRONT>

"There is no (single) solution to this problem. Period."

Daniel Gordis, a renowned author and minced no words when discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with our WOFI group on the final day of our Israel experience. Gordis sees three possible 'solutions' to the problem:

1. A single state for all citizens
2. A single, strictly Israeli state, or
3. Compromise.

"Land for peace" is the only plausible solution Gordis sees to this problem, though he is skeptical even that could work before the next Palestinian generation realizes the necessity of negotiation.

Gordis then posed the question, "Why do we care so much about Israel?" His response:

1. We have the right to Israel not just biblically, but because the world voted on it

2. The state of Israel is "key to the Jewish people." Without it, he predicts, the Jews would be destroyed within 20 years.

Since our goal in Israel was acquiring knowledge for advocacy, I was particularly interested in the correlation Gordis drew between terrorism and the media.

Terrorism alone cannot bring a country to its knees

"Terrorism alone cannot bring a country to its knees," but a negative portrayal of a country in the media can, he claimed. Anti-Israel fanatics are trying to destroy Israel by making the world regret creating and legitimizing it.

Take a minute to consider the positive side of the situation. You'll find that, as Gordis emphasized, we have just as much power as our detractors and our enemies do! We don't have to stoop to the low level of terrorism; we are armed with the truth and the ability to spread it. [sophie#shiloh]

MEETING ARAB TEENS

<INSIDE AN ARAB VILLAGE>

We arrived in the well-kept community center of Jisr-al Zarqa, Israel, and quickly became acquainted with a way of life that I had only learned about through the media. All of us, Palestinian and American teens, formed a circle in the multi-purpose room with a chorus of awkward giggles from both sides.

We began our conversations around questions written in English, Hebrew and Arabic to discover the differences and similarities between us. I pulled out the question, "What are boy/girl relationships like in your community?" I was expecting my Palestinian peers to answer with comments such as: "My parents choose for me," or "Not allowed, only marriage." As I reached for one of the already written response cards that read, "Just for fun, not serious," a girl from Jisr-al Zarqa reached for it, too. This unexpected response was a pivotal point for me, rendering my previous beliefs of Palestinian teenagers invalid.

Later, we all walked down to the Mediterranean Sea together, where we played in the water and "hung out" like typical teenagers.

**We all walked
down to the
Mediterranean Sea.**

When it came time for dinner, we sat on rugs in the sand. On the tables were bowls brimming with hummus and baba ganoush. Platters of whole grilled fish, eyeballs and all, were served next.

I initially looked at the fish with disgust and heard someone say, "I dare you to eat the eyeball." This was not my idea of a good dinner.

A boy from Jisr-al-Zarqa came over and urged me to "try, just try [the fish]," in his thick Arabic accent. Of course, I felt obligated; he was so warm and hospitable. I ripped off a tiny piece of fish and wrapped it in pita. I closed my eyes and tried to swallow. Thankfully, I didn't choke. "Good, Huh?" the boy said, smiling. To my surprise, it wasn't too bad!

My experience in Jisr-al-Zarqa has definitely shaped the way that I perceive people who have different perspectives and lifestyles than I do. Yes, we live in different communities, however, we are similar in many ways. If people participated in more multicultural events, like our trip to Jisr-al Zarqa, the world would be more tolerant. **[Jennifer#goldberg]**



SHABBAT



<A MUSICAL SHABBAT>

If I had to choose one place to spend the holiest day of the week, it would be Israel. Jerusalem, to be exact. And if I had to pick one way to make it extra special, I would choose to spend it with friends surrounded by music.

Three Israeli soldiers, Aviv, Amitai and Judah, brought with them not only their musical instruments and voices but also a contagious energy and excitement. We started Shabbat with them playing their instruments (guitar, clarinet and upright bass) and singing songs. [3]

Some songs we were familiar with, and a few of us were brave enough to sing along, and contin-

ued to sing our own Hebrew songs on our walk down to the Kotel.

After lunch on Saturday, we sat in a circle and sang more songs and learned beautiful Israeli melodies. The soldiers stayed with us through the end of Shabbat and we had the opportunity to talk with them about their experiences in the IDF and growing up in Israel. After Havdalah, they played

Singing our own Hebrew songs on our walk to the Kotel

their instruments while we sang and danced. My musical Israel Shabbat was so special, and spending time with three Israeli soldiers was an amazing and effective way to experience the real Israel. [samantha#miller]



<SHABBAT SERVICES>

Monday, September 06, 2010

On Shabbat morning in Jerusalem, many of us took advantage of, "One of my favorite parts of the trip: sleeping in." After the refreshingly late wake up, we were each given the choice of choosing a shul to attend - Conservative, Orthodox, or Reform.

I opted to attend services at the Great Synagogue, a small Italian Orthodox shul only a brisk walk from our hostel. From the outside, the building seemed like any other Jerusalem stone building in the area. As we walked inside, the boys went through the lower entrance to the shul to the men's section while the other girls and I walked up an extra flight to the women's balcony.

From the intricate gilded woodwork on the screens for the women's section to the beautifully crafted ark for the Torah, the work and effort was obvious. As we approached our seats, a friendly old woman, clearly happy to see young new faces, handed us leather bound siddurs (prayer books) with the usual Hebrew prayers, but with Italian translation next to the Hebrew, enabling us to understand the Italian from the Hebrew without ever learning a single word of Italian.

The leader of the congregation began to zoom through the prayers as more seats were filled. I definitely won't forget the beauty and spirituality (or the speed) of these Italian services. [rachel#sirkin]



OLD CITY

<NOT YOUR TYPICAL GUIDE>

If I had to choose one adjective to describe Yoni Berg, I would confidently choose "passionate." Yoni showed his passion for Israel, King David's story, and Judaism in the hours we spent with him in the City of David.

Most tours can get pretty boring, so it's usually very easy to space out and not pay attention to the tour guide. However, Yoni Berg was not a typical tour guide. Instead of talking in monotonous tones or saying things as if reading off a note card, Yoni was energized

Yoni was not a typical tour guide.

and excited in his retelling of King David's story. He made me understand why King David was a true hero and not a fake superhero that no one can relate to. Yoni

explained King David's attributes: he was brave, selfless, humble, and did not do things for the sake of glorify-

ing his name.

Yoni's passionate presentations made our tour of the City of David anything but boring. His overflowing enthusiasm causes the people around him to be inspired as well. [anaveh#glazer]



[18]



[27]



[37]



[47]

<REVISITING YAD VASHEM>

Having previously been to Yad Vashem, the official Israeli memorial of the Holocaust, I expected to see nothing new. I was so very wrong.

Yad Vashem is a vast complex, and every building, garden and stone is a strategic masterpiece commemorating the valiant people who fought the Nazi regime or a specific event in the

I expected to see nothing new. I was so very wrong.

Holocaust. We made our way to an interactive multimedia exhibit that discussed all angles of some of the most controversial questions of the Holocaust. We also visited the Hall of Remembrance as well as one of the most heart-breaking buildings of all: the Children's Memorial. This under-

ground exhibit is a tribute to the approximately 1.5 million children that died during the Holocaust. As we walked through the darkened structure illuminated only by candles reflected in mirrors, the

names of the children were spoken and our hearts sank with grief.

Our last stop was Theodore Herzl's tomb, Har HaZikaron. Herzl was the

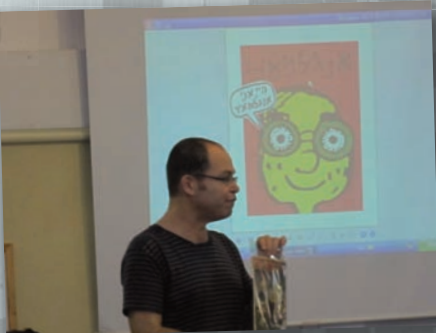
founder of modern Zionism, and it is no coincidence that his tomb is adjacent to Yad Vashem. As we climbed the hill, we realized that Jews have had a long struggle; but as we reached the top, we realized what we as a nation have survived. [ben#galun]

It is very difficult to walk through Israel in high heeled flip-flops!

[1]



[2]



FILM

<CARTOON CHARACTER>

While we had the privilege of hearing several distinguished, political people speak to us: Zeev Engelmayer was not one of them. Engelmayer is a cartoon artist who creates fun, controversial cartoons about Jewish themes and holidays.

At Alma College, a college stressing Hebrew Culture in Tel Aviv, Engelmayer spoke to us about the messages he sends in his work. He tries to add humor to traditional Jewish traditions and texts such as the Passover hag-gadah (the religious text setting the order of the Passover Seder).

He strives to provoke discussions about the relevance of these traditions in modern day culture. To inject comedy into otherwise

serious topics, the cartoon artist flawlessly mixes Israeli cultural references and iconic pop culture with cinematic images from the 1950's.

Engelmayer's talk with us was just that – a talk. It wasn't a lecture and he certainly wasn't trying to be our teacher. He was funny, fun and understood how to reach out to an audience very different from himself. Our day at Alma College was quite long, but Engelmayer managed to add some spice that helped wake us up (for some people, literally). Engelmayer was just a cool guy who does what he loves and loves what he does and that really came through in his presentation. **[ben#sass]**

<SISAI>

Watching David Gavro's prize-winning documentary *Sisai* was part of the preparation for our trip. This film, about a 20-year old Ethiopian Jew and his quest to find his birth father, won Best Documentary Award at the Jerusalem International Film Festival. *Sisai* was adopted by Gavro's family and David later directed the film about his stepbrother.

Sisai is a young man in the Israeli Army who discovers that his biological father is still very much alive back in Ethiopia. Since *Sisai* and his girlfriend have a baby on the way, he wants to meet

his father to share the good news and cultivate a relationship with him. With the encouragement of David and Mr. Gavro, all three of them head off to Ethiopia to find *Sisai's* father.

When *Sisai* and his father meet for the first time, tears flow from both men as they catch each other up on their lives and visit *Sisai's* hometown.

Just as *Sisai* had hoped, his father is very interested in participating in his son's life. This story about identity and the desire to belong is uplifting and highly recommended. **[michal#rosenberg]**

**all three of them
head off to Ethiopia
to find *Sisai's* father**

MUSIC

<KAROLINA FEVER>

When someone says "Yellow Submarine," I usually think of The Beatles and start subconsciously humming "We all live in a yellow submarine..." But when I entered through the door of a warehouse-looking club in Jerusalem called The Yellow Submarine, all I could think was "cool."

I was there to see MC Karolina, an Israeli singer who had a personal style unlike any musician I'd ever listened to before. Some call her the Israeli version of Lady Gaga: quirky, different, interesting. Karolina's enthusiasm, along with her wildly curly hair and her bohemian-style outfit, owned the stage amidst the smoke and colorful lights; she fueled the audi-

The Israeli version of Lady Gaga

ence's energy. The reggae/fusion rhythms she sang in a throaty voice perfectly reflected her funky personality.

We managed to snag a prime spot in the concert room pretty close to the stage. We were surrounded by Israeli Karolina fans who seemed to know every one of her songs and were intent on letting loose.

Karolina fever swept through the crowd until everyone was dancing and swaying and having a good time. Karolina gave us a real taste of Israeli music. When someone mentions "Yellow Submarine," now, after automatically jumping to The Beatles, I will definitely remember Karolina.

[elana#fink]



[16]



[27]

<BACKSTAGE WITH KAROLINA>

For most, attending an Israeli concert is a unique cultural experience. For WOFI, simply attending Israeli band Karolina's concert was not enough. After the fun concert, we got to have a backstage interview with the lead singer. She told us she didn't start singing until high school when she was around 16-17 years old. Once she found her talent in singing, she began chasing her dreams.

Her motivation and enthusiasm is what got her to get together a band. She had been very successful with the band Karolina and she continues to perform concerts and sell CDs. I thought that the concert and session with Karolina was a great way to enjoy the Israeli musical atmosphere, and discover a foreign music scene. [daniela#leibovici]



[37]

Today was a long, exhausting day. Tomorrow will be harder.

THEATER



[1]



[2]



[3]



[4]

<OH, GOD>

Taking place in the home office of Ella, a psychologist [1], the play Oh, God initially seemed quite dull, until there is an unexpected knock on the door. An old man in a black coat walks in to tell Ella that he needs an emergency session; he has fallen into a deep depression and wants to give up his life's work.

This would appear like business-as-usual until it is revealed that the man is actually God. If he were to give up his life's work the world would be no more.

In her one-hour session Ella sits with a notepad [2] asking God questions about his life and regrets. His problems are not so different from everyone else's; His past mistakes are well-known bib-

lical tales. The entire play is comprised of their psychologist-patient dialogue, with brief appearances by Ella's autistic son. The small cast lends the show a warm vibe, and makes it much more personal.

Though the subject matter is hard to relate to, the audience members become very comfortable with the characters. They truly feel in the middle of a therapy session with God. It is hard

God's problems are not so different from everyone else's

to forget a show like "Oh, God." Its uplifting ending leaves audiences content and lighthearted. The audience knows it is just a show, but they can't help thinking 'what if' God shared his inner thoughts?

[Jordan#kaye]

<NOT BY BREAD ALONE>

There was not a dry eye in the house as the audience stood for an ovation and made its way onto the stage to greet the actors. Being an audience member at "Not by Bread Alone," a play comprised of eleven deaf-blind actors, was certainly one of the highlights of my spectacular journey in Israel.

We sat in awe as we watched the actors and interpreters collaborate on stage to not only bake bread, but to tell their stories as well.

The title of the play illustrates that while bread is necessary to sustain our bodies, human relationships are vital to sustain our souls. While the actors truly baked bread and engaged the audience in vignettes about

their lives, their memories and their dreams, I was absolutely moved as I observed the teamwork between the actors and their interpreters. They used touch vibration to guide one another from scene to scene, demonstrating how important human connection is for all of us and how these connections can be achieved in different ways.

The evening ended with the audience breaking bread with the actors. Although I only briefly touched an actor's hand, the impact he made on me will last a lifetime. I left the performance practically speechless and utterly inspired by the culmination of the experience.

Vignettes about their lives, memories and dreams.

[Iana#decates]

ARTISTS

<TK>

It is always exciting to meet someone who is extremely passionate and ardent about her work. This summer, we had the privilege of spending the day with a beautiful, young artist, Neta Elkayam looking around Netivot, the yishuv that she lived in. Later that day she graciously brought all 24 of us to her house where we met her father, who also is an artist.

She led us up a flight of stairs onto a deck where she had dozens of paintings of her family leaning against all four (low) walls. In each painting we were able to see the love she had for her family. Despite the many pictures she had painted, each were different in their own way. In some pictures you could see sadness in the faces of her family; in others, happiness and joy.

What made these paintings unique were the 'canvases' she painted on. Neta does not paint on traditional canvases, but instead she utilizes discarded

materials such as a headboard of a bed, or a screen of a window to paint on. These unorthodox "canvases," along with leaving the pictures on the deck, means that, with time, the paintings will fade and disintegrate, leaving behind no trace of the beautiful art that we were fortunate to see.

Neta's artwork represents more than just a beautiful family. It represents the struggle that some Israeli citizens have to go through every day. They spend their lifetime working hard to build good lives for their families, only to have it all fall apart. A perfect example of this is found in Sderot. The citizens of Sderot worked for 50 years to make the city a livable place for their people. In 2000, rockets began to be fired from Gaza into Sderot. For many years this onslaught continued and families watched as their hard work was destroyed. Neta's pictures are a perfect representation of this cycle of work and futility. **[miriam#klien]**



[1]



[2]



[3]

<THREE ISRAELI ARTISTS>

To watch a foreign film or to study a painting is one thing, but to understand the story behind the work is quite another. Escaping the scorching Netivot heat in a cool, air-conditioned theatre, we gathered to hear three Sephardic artists: painter Neta Elkayam, and film directors Ronen Amar and David Gavro. These unique artists revealed their inspirations and connections to Netivot.

Ronen Amar's documentary, *My Family Pizza*, follows the entrepreneurial struggles of his family as his brother and father co-operate a pizza shop. Chaos and frustration ensue as his stubborn brother makes many mistakes at the family's expense. We were disheartened to hear that the pizza shop had been sold.

To conclude his presentation, Amar enlightened us with his own personal, lighthearted advice that "the most important thing is to close your eyes for just one second" to allow yourself to obtain a better hold on a situation. As a director, he strives to do so and give people confidence through

his films.

David Gavro also discussed his documentary *Sisay*, which followed his brother's journey to Ethiopia to meet his biological father. Gavro brought us uplifting news of his brother and family and explained the misunderstood realm of Ethiopian Jewry.

Neta Elkayam, who also served as our Netivot tour guide, is a mesmerizing artist with a passion for family. She paints striking portraits of departed relatives on unusual "canvases." For Neta, life is a constant cycle: Her work will wear away with time, as did the generations before her.

This intriguing discussion highlighted the similarities between these seemingly different artists and their works. They all share a deep-rooted connection to Netivot which we were better able to understand and appreciate after this discussion. For, as Gavro so perfectly stated, "Israel is a place of human-beings- we must work together" despite our differences. **[becca#levin]**



[4]

GRAFFITI



<SPRAYING THE TOWN>

I can't help but love graffiti in all its rude glory. On a previous Israel trip, a friend led me around the nation and described why each tag and mural we saw was good or bad, commissioned or fly-by-night, 'flow' or messy. While I'm no aficionado, I have developed a taste for the art in all its varied forms. When I discovered WOFI was taking a 'graffiti tour' of Tel Aviv, I almost leapt for joy. Our guide explained how the critical words of Hebrew author and Zionist pioneer Joseph Brenner and the sublime spirituality of Rav Kook are embodied in the graffiti scrawled

on the city's walls.

When we turn on the TV, we see images of a war-torn Israel without any mention of the deep and layered culture underneath the strife. While war is one part of Israel, it also has a vibrant culture that crafts works of art, music and film. In the same way that graffiti is more than one entity, Israel is multifaceted. The language of graffiti embodies one of my favorite aspects of Israeli society: a complex nation of diverse opinions. I hope to always see the beauty in variety, and the graffiti of Tel Aviv showed me one more variation. [rachel#davidson]

Graffiti embodies one of my favorite aspects of Israel.



YEAR TWO



