



Israel Lives Deep in Our Hearts: A Tail of Resilience, Love and Community

by Gail Androphy

Israel holds a special place in our hearts, a sentiment that has been tested and strengthened since the horrible events of October 7. As the news highlights stories of hostages, sounds of war and the deafening shouts of hatred, the media seems to darken our perception of the world. Yet amidst the darkness, many within the United States have rekindled the flame of Klal Yisrael by hearing the heartwarming stories from the Israel Guide Dog Center.

Founded three decades ago by the Israeli paratrooper Noach Braun, and the U.S. philanthropist Norman Leventhal, the Israel Guide Dog Center has transformed the lives of nearly 1,300 Israelis with blindness, PTSD, autism or other challenges through their partnerships with specially trained dogs.

These dogs are more than cute bundles of fur, they are the means of transforming Israeli lives by providing safe mobility, independence and self-confidence for those they serve. And October 7 marked the day when these remarkable dogs transcended even their usual roles to become literal lifesavers.

Enter Maya (whose name has been changed for anonymity), a resilient and independent blind woman residing alone

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in southern Israel, her home a modest caravan. Partnered with her guide dog Teddy for several years, Maya faced a perilous situation when a siren pierced the air signaling imminent danger. With only 30 seconds to reach safety and lacking an inner safe room in her home, Maya improvised, quickly seeking refuge under her bed. Teddy joined her, lying right beside her. As Maya received an alert of a terrorist invasion in her community, she and Teddy endured hours of uncertainty and fear beneath the bed. The eventual clarification that it was only a threat and not an actual invasion brought tears of relief to Maya's eyes, though her heart still trembled in the aftermath.

For Maya, Teddy and his steadfast partnership were more than a beacon of

light; his presence on October 7 was her miracle. She said, “I couldn't have made it through those dark hours without Teddy. Because of his training at the Israel Guide Dog Center, he remained my incredibly calm, supportive and loving partner during the most terrifying time of my life.”

In Israel, it is common to hear cell phone alarms indicating the immediate need to seek shelter. But imagine having to seek shelter when you can't see where safety is. This is a familiar situation for so many of our blind clients. And this is why nothing will stop us from providing for the needs of our clients, our dogs and Israel.

After October 7, we started providing “Puppy Love Encounters” where we bring our puppies and dogs to comfort families, children, patients and anyone who could benefit from the love of a dog. We've given emotional support dogs to families most impacted by war.

It's hard to see light in these dark times, but thanks to donors, friends and communities throughout the U.S. who believe we are a global family—“Klal Yisrael,” the Israel Guide Dog Center will continue to be a light for our 2-legged and 4-legged friends. ☆