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PARADISE JUNCTION, ONE HELL OF A JOURNEY
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Every year in mid-August, well the 15th to be precise, I celebrate my eldest son's birthday – even though he was born on May, 30th.

As regular birthdays go, Boaz is now 41 years-old but his second birthday two decades later puts him at twenty-one this year, a special birthday always and even more so in his case.

Serving in an IDF commando unit especially created that year to deal with terrorism, Boaz had asked permission from his commanding officer to be released mid-week in order to play in the quarter-finals of the regional five-a-side soccer team. With a special training session planned the commander refused the request and the disappointed goalkeeper stayed on base. However, late afternoon with the training session cancelled for some reason, the officer told Boaz he could go home and wished him well in the all-important fixture.

Hitchhiking home, the uniformed soldier goalie managed to get a lift for a good portion of the way, getting out of his first ride at the coastal road junction known as paradise – named after the nearby Israeli Arab town of Faradis - Arabic for paradise.

His next ride was in an intensive care ambulance with sirens blaring all the way to Rambam hospital in Haifa.

Waiting at the side of the Faradis feed off road with dusk about to fall, Boaz was struck by a car, the driver of which not stopping. 'Another hit and run incident' stated the police.

Three cars travelling behind the initial vehicle all stopped. Unfortunately, each of them had some bodily contact with the injured soldier - unavoidable as he came hurtling through the air, bouncing off each until eventually ending up on a grass verge between the slip road off the coastal road and another leading on to it.

Travelling in the opposite direction Avraham, family name unknown and a haredi from Jerusalem, realized there had been an accident when he saw people running along the grass verge and pulled over.

Avraham had a car full of equipment one would usually find in an ambulance for that day the ambulance he would normally have been driving in the capital had gone in for service. Fearing something might get stolen Avraham had transferred nearly all the ambulance contents to his station wagon before driving north to the town of Yokna'am, a journey he makes once a month apparently.

Avraham attended to the hit and run victim who had stopped breathing. Apart from serious head injuries and broken bones, the young soldier's lungs had collapsed.

The haredi medic from Jerusalem pumped life back into the young man from a Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz with atheist leanings and less than a low tolerance level for any haredim whatsoever.

I was writing a letter, my late husband watching television, when a loud knock on the door of our kibbutz abode mid-evening somewhat startled us. Opening the door, we were faced by the kibbutz general secretary and 3 uniformed soldiers who had come to tell us that Boaz was in critical condition and they had come to take us to Rambam hospital.

Unconscious for the next 2 months and a further 2 weeks induced by the medical team, Boaz not only struggled to overcome the horrendous injuries suffered in the accident but also after a few weeks in the hospital was attacked by a so-called superbug necessitating 2 major chest surgeries and at a much later date, plastic surgery to deal with the enormous scars left from emergency surgery and draining of further infections.

A few weeks in to the ordeal, I was approached late one evening by an extremely tall, well built, long bearded ginger haired haredi man, his face was bright red from crying. This was Avraham although at the time I did not know his name. When he asked me if I was Boaz's mother, I of course said yes. I was immediately very suspicious as I had been approached by a number of ultra-orthodox Israelis trying to encourage me to pray and at that time knew nothing of the story of how a haredi gentleman had tended Boaz on the grassy verge.

"I've just seen the boy," said the gentleman, tears flowing down his face and beard.

"Excuse me, but who are you?" I asked.

Avraham then explained his actions on the 15th August, 1991 on his way home from a visit to the north.

My immediate reaction was to give him a big hug. The black suited gentleman with the bright ginger hair and beard had suddenly become my knight on a white horse – and I wanted to thank him in a way that was oh so natural to me but oh so not acceptable to him. As I moved forward with my arms open – he backed away and not only that, put his hands behind his back leaving me feeling utterly deflated, extremely embarrassed and more than a tad angry.

I asked him his name and for a telephone number, promising him that he would be one of the first people I would call as soon as Boaz woke up. He refused to give me his name or a contact number.

A few weeks later he reappeared – again late in the evening and accompanied by a young Haredi gentleman. They stayed only for a few minutes but when asked again for his name and a telephone number he scribbled Avraham and a Jerusalem number on a scrap of paper before leaving.

Avraham was the second phone call I made some months later. As I explained to him, rather tearfully I must admit, that Boaz had opened his eyes and spoken a few words, Avraham also burst into tears. He yelled again and again to his wife somewhere in the background.

"Rochalie, the soldier boy has woken up," he was calling out and then I heard her crying as well.

I never saw Avraham again. I called him quite a number of times over the first years to give him a progress report and he told me that he had driven in to our kibbutz a number of times but felt he just couldn't stay and had driven off again without even calling us.

When I suggested to Boaz at some point in his recovery and rehabilitation that we go together to Jerusalem to visit Avraham, he reacted very strongly in the negative saying that Avraham would probably demand of him to become religious. He refused point blank to even contemplate such a journey to the unknown.

Eventually Avraham moved and the phone number I had been given no longer connected. I have never heard from him again although neither my telephone number nor address has changed over the years.

For over three decades I have been relatively successful in my work at the Givat Haviva Jewish-Arab Center for Peace bringing Jewish people, both Israeli and from abroad, to speak with Israeli Arabs and Palestinians and vice versa.

I failed miserably, however, in bringing 2 Israeli Jews to the most minimum of meeting points but I also question myself as to just how hard did I really try to cross the Israeli secular and haredi divide.

Obviously it was not enough - for all our sakes.

*** The quarter-final soccer match was won by the local team and in the final some weeks later the position of goalkeeper was taken by one of Boaz's younger brothers, Gilboa whom we were told ferociously fought off every attempt to score a goal and the home side won the championships. The trophy was brought by Gilboa to the Rambam intensive care unit and placed on a shelf above the head of his unconscious brother with tearful nurses applauding.

***Some weeks after the accident the family were informed that the driver of the car that didn't stop had been apprehended. With a choice of either going the civilian or Ministry of Defence route as far as future entitlements, the family decision was the Ministry of Defence and therefore knowledge of the civilian action, including the name of the driver – withheld from the family. It is known, however, that it was a Jewish woman.

***Boaz became known as 'The Miracle of '91' at Rambam Hospital. With a very high invalidity percentage awarded by the Ministry of Defence, Boaz eventually obtained a degree in Sport Education and works as a personal trainer at a prestigious health center in Haifa. He is married, the father of two children and lives in a kibbutz.

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