

# 2018 YEAR IN REVIEW

Former Lone Soldier  
Saves Chicago Girl's Life

From Satmar to Tzahal

Lone Soldiers of Wall Street

▲ Read the story behind this powerful photo inside

## LETTER FROM HARRIET AND MARK LEVIN

For the past 12 years, we have made it our duty on every Yom HaZikaron – Israel's Memorial Day – to visit our son Michael's grave at Israel's national cemetery on Mount Herzl. This annual ritual has drawn swarms of people and, by late morning, the crowd around our family swells beyond what the eye can see and envelopes us in a communal embrace.

This past Yom HaZikaron was no different. Every year, while we mourn and memorialize, we also take comfort in reconnecting with Michael's friends from Philadelphia, Israel, and beyond who join us to share stories about Michael that we'd never heard.

Perhaps most astonishing, however, is the steady flow of newcomers that gather with us and encapsulate the wider world that Michael has reached. They'll approach us and say, "Michael inspired me to work harder in school;" "I grew up with a photo of Michael in my bedroom;" "I named my son after Michael;" or "I made Aliyah because of Michael."

Michael had always been a special kid to us, but we never imagined that he'd inspire a generation of Zionists, just like his hero Yoni Netanyahu.

Today, that dream is to continue to transform lives and lend support to Lone Soldiers through the non-stop efforts the Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin. Whether sleeping on a park bench during his first

two nights in Israel or not having anywhere to go for a Shabbat meal, Michael knew all too well that there were needs unique to Lone Soldiers that were not being met. He told his friends that when he finishes his service, he's going start a center that would make sure Lone Soldiers don't have to endure their service alone.

Today it is our responsibility to help continue Michael's dream.

The U.S. Supporters of the Lone Soldier Center is an American organization that directly addresses the needs of Lone Soldiers, both past and present, and from all walks of life. In Israel, the LSC houses and feeds Lone Soldiers, addresses their medical and psychological needs, and gives these young men and women the best chance to succeed. The Center in Jerusalem hosts weekly Shabbat dinners and manages Lone Soldier housing all over the country – including the only house in Israel that exclusively shelters female Lone Soldiers—and has certified professionals on staff who help our soldiers deal with PTSD and other afflictions.

When the time comes this year to return to Mount Herzl, of course we will be there. Although more than 12 years after Michael's death the day still carries many challenges, the true beauty of Yom HaZikaron in Israel is that it leads into Yom Ha'atzmaut – Israel's Independence Day celebration.

This transition from mourning to celebration is immediate, and the jolt to our emotions can be severe. It's true that we'd prefer crying a bit longer over our son's grave, but this isn't what Michael wanted. He volunteered in the Paratroopers as a responsibility he felt toward the country he loved. And that is always a reason to celebrate.



Mark and Harriet Levin

### Harriet and Mark Levin

Philadelphia, PA



## Michael Levin, z"l

**M**ichael Levin made Aliyah from Philadelphia in 2002 and joined the Paratroopers. In the summer of 2006, he was given leave to visit his family in the United States. Two weeks into his trip, war broke out on Israel's northern border.

Michael cut short his vacation and flew back to Israel to serve with his unit. Although his platoon had already been deployed in the north and he was being told he couldn't rejoin it, Michael demanded permission to be with his fellow soldiers – and the IDF brass relented. When he arrived, his squad was dispatched to the village of Aita al-Shaab, a Hezbollah stronghold. On Tuesday, August 1, 2006, Michael's unit advanced on the village and engaged in an intense firefight with enemy forces.

Tragically, Michael was killed in action, at the age of 22.

During Michael's service, he befriended Tziki Aud, a 27-year veteran of the Jewish Agency who specialized in supporting new immigrants in Israel, with a particular focus on Lone Soldiers. Michael shared with Tziki a dream of his, that one day there would be a center for Lone Soldiers, where they could receive meals, support, and advice throughout their army service.

With the help from Tziki and Michael's friends, the Lone Soldier Center today helps thousands of Lone Soldiers. It's only fitting that the organization is named in Michael's memory.



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## FEATURE: A YEAR IN REVIEW

## What a year it has been for the U.S. Supporters of the Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin.

As the organization has expanded its programming in 2018, our family of supporters has grown too. While we look ahead to continued growth in 2019, let's take a moment to look back at some of the year's highlights both in the United States and Israel.

In New York, the U.S. Advisory Board, comprised of young professionals, launched the Lone Soldier Alumni Association to provide opportunities to former Lone Soldiers who have moved to the United States to network and receive mentorship. In March, David Sable, the CEO of Y&R at the time, spoke to the Alumni Association about his IDF service and how that experience has guided him through his professional career. IDF alumni are constantly looking for the chance to learn from industry leaders and to grow their networks, and some have even received job offers through the Alumni Association.

The Advisory Board organized educational programs and fundraisers, including a Flywheel charity ride, boozy bingo night, and a boisterous Yom Ha'atzmaut party (See: Yom Ha'atzmaut, New York-Style).

The U.S. Supporters also added programming beyond the tri-state area and expanded its reach to Chicago, Los Angeles, Boca Raton, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. Representatives from the U.S. flew to Israel in April to participate in the official Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut ceremonies organized by the Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin.

In June, the U.S. Supporters also gathered a delegation of friends and former soldiers to march in the Celebrate Israel Parade. Before marching up 5th Avenue, families of current and former Lone Soldiers gathered at a nearby synagogue to eat lunch together.

As part of its services, the U.S. organization inaugurated a support group for fathers of Lone Soldiers. At their first official meeting, the fathers met for lunch in New York City and Mark Levin attended as the guest speaker.

The mission of the U.S. Supporters of the Lone Soldier Center is to provide support and resources for Lone Soldiers serving in the Israel Defense Forces. Much of that support, of course, goes directly to the Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin (LSC), an organization that provides meals, housing, and social services to meet the unique needs of Lone Soldiers serving in the IDF today.

This year, the Jerusalem-based organization took unprecedented leaps forward to help transform the IDF experience for Lone Soldiers.

Indeed, 2018 was a year of firsts for the LSC. The organization opened the first home in Israel that solely houses female Lone Soldiers. The Norton and Sylvia Alevy Bayit L'Chayalot (See: A Bed & Community) houses 10 soldiers and one live-in counselor. In addition, the LSC opened new homes in Petach Tikva and Herzliya.

For religious offerings, the LSC started hosting weekly Kabalat Shabbat services at the Jerusalem Center and on Purim more than 80 Lone Soldiers attended the organization's first Purim Megillah reading, generously sponsored by the Doft family.

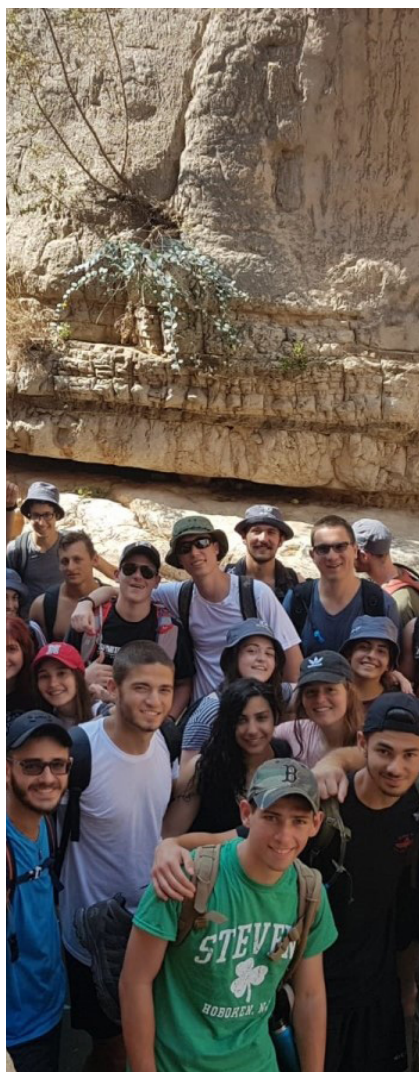
The LSC also expanded its staff and hired Lt. Col. Liora Rubenstein, a recently retired 30-year veteran of the IDF, who now runs the division that oversees helping Israeli-born Lone Soldiers, most of whom come from broken homes or from Ultra-Orthodox backgrounds and have been disowned by their families for joining the IDF. Col. Richard Kemp, a veteran combat soldier in the British Army with decades of counterterrorism experience, joined the Center's Honorary Board.

The LSC is blessed to have volunteers in Israel offer their resources and services. Picolino, a popular restaurant near Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem, began hosting 60 Lone Soldiers a week to eat there free of charge. The LSC established a Medical Committee, comprised of Israeli physicians, psychologists, and other healthcare experts, to support injured Lone Soldiers and to help them navigate Israel's healthcare system. The organization also held its first blood drives in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv for Magen David Adom, which offered a wonderful opportunity for Lone Soldiers to give back even more.

The LSC also built partnerships with the Jewish Agency, the Israel Ministry of Defense, and the IDF's Education Corps to improve Tsevet Mikey, a unique pre-draft educational program run to help Lone Soldiers learn Hebrew, history, and geography. The program helps enlisting Lone Soldiers acclimate to the IDF and Israel much more effectively.

The staff has also begun connecting Lone Soldiers finishing their service to employment opportunities in Israel, with established companies in Israel hosting groups to learn more about them.

Both in the United States and Israel, dedicated teams are working around the clock to make sure that Lone Soldiers' needs are addressed. It's been an amazing year filled with exciting initiatives, and the best is yet to come.



A group from Tsevet Mikey hikes through Wadi Kelt and learns the history about this area in the Judean Desert



A group of Lone Soldiers enjoying a day off at Picolino in Jerusalem



The LSC raised \$38,000 competing in the Jerusalem Marathon

**"I WAS JUST THE RIGHT  
GUY IN THE RIGHT PLACE  
AT THE RIGHT TIME  
WHO SIMPLY DID WHAT  
NEEDED TO BE DONE."**

AVI NUTKIS



Eliana Rosen



Avi Nutkis

## FEATURE: CONTINUING HEROISM

# Former Lone Soldier Saves Chicago Girl's Life

Avi Nutkis walked across the cafeteria to get his wife a glass of water. He had just attended his nephew's eighth grade graduation ceremony from Arie Crown Hebrew Day School, in Skokie, Illinois, and now the graduates' families were celebrating this milestone with cake and fruit. As Nutkis approached the table, he heard someone ask, "Can you breathe?"

A trained paramedic and a former IDF combat soldier, Avi's ears perked up. He swung around and saw a girl clutching her throat and her family standing around her in a panic. "Can you breathe? Can you breathe?"

Without thinking, Nutkis sprang into action. He approached the girl, Eliana Rosen, a recent graduate, and asked her if she could try coughing. He did not think air was coming out of her mouth, her chest was not moving, and her face was quickly turning beet red.

"I'm going to help you," he said, calmly.

He walked behind Eliana and performed the Heimlich maneuver, dislodging a piece of melon from her throat.

"I acted because I was trained to," Avi says today. "I was just the right guy in the right place at the right time who simply did what needed to be done. I wasn't a hero or anything."

Eliana, 14, disagrees. "After I regained my composure, I was thinking about what would have happened if Avi wasn't there," she says. "And I'm thankful that he was and that I'm alive today."

Avi hates the idea that he should receive special recognition for his actions that day, but he understands why the Rosens sent him thank you cards and fruit baskets. "I wish they hadn't – not that I don't appreciate their gratitude – it's just if you are in a position to help, you should help."

Nutkis grew up instilled with strong Jewish and Zionist values. His great grandfather served in the 39th Royal Fusiliers, one of five battalions comprised of Jews who volunteered in the British Army's World War One efforts to wrest control of Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. He fought alongside Zionist luminaries Joseph Trumpeldor and Theodor Herzl.

"Keep in mind, nobody really knew who they were back then," he says with a laugh.

Although Avi grew up in Chicago, he always felt that if his Israeli aunts, uncles, and cousins were putting their lives on the line to defend the Jewish people, how could he ask anything less of himself.

"So at the age of 25, I decided to enlist," Avi says.

Well above the standard military age, Nutkis was repeatedly denied authorization to enlist.

"I showed up to draft and demanded to serve, and they said no," he says. "I remember one specific time I went to the draft office and walked right up to the soldier at the front desk and told her I want to join Tzahal."

The soldier asked him if he has his draft papers, which, of course he did not.

"I told her that I just made Aliyah and I want to join the

army," he recalls. "She asked me for my ID and looked at my date of birth and then looked back at me and said, 'Go home, grandpa.'"

Avi persisted. He sent emails, faxes, letters of recommendation, notes from doctors and psychologists. "They finally gave in and I drafted."

His battle to serve had lasted for nearly two years. The first time Avi donned his IDF uniform, in January of 2011, he was 27 years old.

Avi drafted into a combat role within Palchatz, the emergency search and rescue unit. After suffering a back injury, he was re-assigned to a non-combat position in the foreign relations unit within the Homefront Command.

"It was basically just me and my commander running the entire foreign relations operation," he says. "I met with visiting dignitaries, three-star generals from the German and Czech armies, and even drank beers on the Tel Aviv beach with the head of the U.S. National Guard."

Although Avi had planned to stay in Israel following his service, his girlfriend convinced him to move back to Chicago. The decision paid off; the girlfriend is now his wife.

Prior to enlisting in the IDF, Nutkis worked in retail sales – "It paid the bills." – and today, he works for an information security company that services smalls business. He credits his Lone Soldier experience as transformative.

"I didn't really have a mission or purpose in life before I enlisted," he says. "We don't really grow up in the U.S. until our late 20s, and going through two years in the IDF taught me discipline, chain of command, and self-reliance."

"Of course just being in Israel also forces you to fight for what you want," he adds. "Nobody is going to hand anything to you."

Avi wishes that he had the support offered today by the Lone Soldier Center while he was trying to navigate the often labyrinthine IDF bureaucracy.

"Back then the Lone Soldier Center wasn't nearly as effective as it is today, with all of its staff and volunteers," Avi says. "I was 27 then, so I didn't need the support structure that an 18-year-old needs, but I did need help understanding documents and having a professional advocate on my behalf."

Whether he likes it or not, Nutkis certainly has the Rosen family advocating on his behalf today.

"I still get emotional when I think about Avi being there to save my daughter's life," Noah Rosen says. "We're all so appreciative."

As an expression of gratitude for Avi's heroics, the Rosen family has decided to sponsor Friday night dinner at the Lone Soldier Center in Jerusalem on the Shabbat that coincides with the one-year anniversary of Eliana's graduation.

"We want to acknowledge the contributions Lone Soldiers make in Israel, even as they continue to be felt at home in Chicago," Noah says.



# Thanksgiving: Tel Aviv Edition



The LSC served up enough Thanksgiving turkey and stuffing to feed an army

▲ Following two intense weeks of sustained missile attacks on southern Israel and additional IDF troop deployment to the Gaza border, the military de-escalation coincided with Thanksgiving. More than 800 Lone Soldiers took respite from the military grind and joined the Lone Soldier Center in Tel Aviv for a festive Thanksgiving meal, which was generously sponsored by Shai Waisman and his family.

The meal is not only a service to the American-born soldiers but an opportunity for them to play host to their international Lone Soldier counterparts, who are happy to institute a new American tradition in Israel of all places.

The meal lasted for nearly seven hours, as soldiers feasted on the obligatory turkey and stuffing. Deputy Minister Michael Oren, who served as Israel's ambassador to the United States from 2009 to 2013, joined the meal. At one point, a group of French-born Lone Soldiers approached Minister Oren and hoisted him on their shoulders, as the room erupted in cheers.

After the meal concluded, many of the soldiers continued to enjoy their night off, of course remembering to set their alarms for the early wake-up to make sure they return on-time to base.

## HOUSING FOR LONE SOLDIERS: A BED & COMMUNITY

One of the most urgent needs that Lone Soldiers have is finding a place to live during their IDF service. Whether it's properly understanding a rental contract or choosing a location with access to a community, the process can be daunting. The Lone Soldier Center has placed housing as a priority and currently operates six homes for Lone Soldiers.

In Jerusalem's Mekor Chaim neighborhood, 10 soldiers live in the four-story Norton and Sylvia Alevy Bayit L'Chayalot, the first-of-its-kind home dedicated exclusively to female Lone Soldiers. Ariana Berlin, the live-in "mother" of the house, is a former Lone Soldier and prides herself on instilling a sense of community among the women in the home.

Today, women comprise 30 percent of the Lone Soldier population.

Not far from the Bayit L'Chayalot, 36 Lone Soldiers live together in the Arnona Home, a stand-alone building with seven separate apartment units.

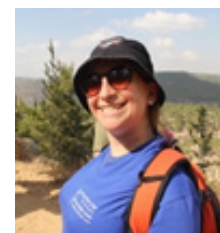
While the soldiers sleep in private rooms, the common area and open kitchen on the ground floor are the big draw. At any given hour, meals are being prepared there, friends are playing guitar together, and the Lone Soldiers are given an opportunity to detox from the constant stress they experience throughout their time on base. The live-in "parents," Hadar and Haggai Swed, are always on call to make sure that the needs that arise are properly addressed. They recently welcomed Gili, the Arnona Home's first live-in "baby."

The other LSC homes are in Herzliya, Sharei Tikva, Petach Tikva and on King George Street in Jerusalem.

The Lone Soldier Center's dream is to build its own facility to house Lone Soldiers in need.

## Ariana Berlin

Bayit L'Chayalot "Mom"  
Cherry Hill, NJ



After graduating from Brandeis University in 2014, Ariana Berlin decided to move to Israel. She served in the IDF for four years – three of which were spent as an officer of education and public relations in the Air Defense Unit, which oversees Iron Dome. Ariana grew up spending summers at Camp Ramah in the Poconos,

where she heard fellow Ramahnik Michael Levin's story. "Once I finished my service, I knew that I wanted to work with other Lone Soldiers," Berlin says.

In October, Ariana joined the Lone Soldier Center team as the live-in "mom" at the Norton and Sylvia Alevy Bayit L'Chayalot in Jerusalem. Aside from being a dependable resource for the soldiers who live in the Bayit L'Chayalot, Ariana makes sure that the women have a comfortable place to live when they're off from base. "We really try keep the house feeling like they're home," she says. "Whether it's leaving a jar of home-made cookies in the kitchen for when they return from base or helping them recreate their family recipes for Shabbat dinner, I like to think I'm helping them feel as though they're part of a family."

Ariana acknowledges that of course nothing beats the feeling of being at one's actual home, but the fun and warm environment that exists in the Bayit L'Chayalot is meaningful in its own right. "As any responsible 'mom' can relate, sometimes I have to remind the other young women of the importance of a good night's sleep."

# Yom HaZikaron



From left to right: Alex Singer, Michael Levin and Max Steinberg, z"l

The full impact of sacrifice, commitment, and hope in Israel is felt most deeply on Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut. The back-to-back national holidays begin with a full day of mourning and memorializing the lives of those who made the ultimate sacrifice defending Israel and those who died in terror attacks. When night falls on the somber day, fireworks dazzle the sky, ushering in a nationwide celebration of Israel's founding.

For as long as Israel has been around, Lone Soldiers have fallen in its defense. They have also played a crucial role in building the state and have continued to help make it flourish.

On Yom HaZikaron, the Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin organizes the only English-language official Yom HaZikaron ceremony in Israel, honoring the Lone Soldiers who have died on behalf of the State of Israel.

The ceremony this year, attended by the Jewish National Fund – USA, was held on April 17 at Ammunition Hill, the site of one of the most intense battles for Jerusalem during the Six Day War. The theme of the memorial was The Sons We Lost, with the mothers of fallen Lone Soldiers delivering the poignant keynote remarks.

More than 650 attendees filled the outdoor bleachers overlooking the battle trenches carved into Ammunition Hill. They watched an active duty Paratroopers squad march in formation to begin the ceremony. At exactly 8 p.m., the memorial siren blared for one meaningful minute of silence. The Paratroopers stood at attention, and the IDF officers in attendance saluted the flag.

Evelyn Steinberg spoke first. She shared her son Max's story of growing up in California, playing baseball, and listening to Bob Marley. Despite his diminutive stature, he continuously defied those who

## From Satmar to Tzahal

### **"WHY DID I LEAVE A WIFE, A CHILD, FAMILY, FRIENDS AND A SUCCESSFUL JOB AND DECIDE TO BECOME A COMBAT SOLDIER?"**

This immense question opens a Facebook post shared by a combat soldier in the Golani brigade. As the answer unfolds, it becomes clear that this is anything but a typical combat soldier fighting in the IDF today. The soldier is Chaim Meisels and he is the great-grandson of Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, the world leader of Satmar Hasidism who died in 2006. Satmar is an Ultra-Orthodox sect that does not recognize the State of Israel, including all of its official institutions, such as the IDF.

Young men and women who grew up in Ultra-Orthodox communities in the United States and in Israel are enlisting in the IDF at an unprecedented rate. In the vast majority of cases, their decisions to serve in the State of Israel's military are accompanied by their communities and families abandoning them. There are more than 3,000 such Lone Soldiers serving in the IDF today, and their needs are unique. Much of the Israeli population view their success as critical to integrating more Ultra-Orthodox men and women into society and crucial for them to learn the skillsets to help make a living. The Lone Soldier Center has dedicated considerable resources and hired trained specialists to help these volunteer soldiers through their service.

Indeed, Chaim's decision to leave the Satmar fold and move to Israel took extreme courage and determination. It also left Meisels entirely on his own. Indeed, the Yiddish-speaking Ultra-Orthodox Brooklyn community in which he grew up couldn't fathom why one of their own, from such a prominent blood line, would take this decision to join the IDF.



Chaim Meisels left behind his life in Satmar, Brooklyn to join the IDF



"They're not against it, but they don't understand," he says.

In his Facebook post, Chaim explains that, growing up, he "had a feeling that something was missing." When he was 11, he visited Israel and loved how he felt being in a Jewish state.

"I didn't know yet how it would affect me, but I felt I had found my home," he writes.

When he returned to Brooklyn, he felt transformed. "Suddenly, there was something I was connected to... But because I am the great grandson of the Satmar Rebbe, and the community I grew up in doesn't support the State [of Israel], I had no one to talk to about it."

Chaim struggled with these feelings for years and at the age of 17, he decided he wanted to leave the Ultra-Orthodox world. He met with a rabbi and confessed that he had not been observing Shabbat for years and no longer felt connected to his

upbringing. The rabbi told Meisels that once he is married, he'll reconsider.

"Two weeks later, I'm meeting with the girl's parents and being asked questions about the Talmud," he writes. "I have a meeting with the girl while our parents are in the other room. After a 50-minute conversation with her, I agreed. We got engaged that same night."

Soon after the wedding, Meisels realized he "was not really connecting" with his wife and kept thinking about the feelings he had while in Israel.

"Six weeks later, I come home and my wife tells me she's pregnant," Meisels writes. "I was happy, I was very excited, until I slowly began to think about what I had done."

"How was I going to raise a Haredi child in a world I disagree with?"

He sought advice from friends within the Satmar community and from some of those who had left it. He decided that he

needed to leave.

"Most of my family left me," he writes. "I started life from scratch... and learned how to dress... and how to talk to people."

Almost a year after leaving his community, he decided he would enlist in the IDF.

As a 19-year-old divorcee with a child, Chaim was told by numerous people that enlisting in the army would be a big mistake.

"Even the friends around me said I wouldn't succeed in the army," he recalls. "They said I had no chance."

Meisels decided to pursue his dream anyway and bought a one-way ticket to Israel. "At first a friend got me in touch with the Lone Soldier Center in memory of Michael Levin and with Tziki Aud, who has helped me out tremendously. In August 2014, I joined a Hebrew course... and after three months of basic training, I was accepted into the elite Egoz unit."

Today, Meisels is an officer in Golani and, when he has time, a regular at Lone Soldier Center events. During some of his more overwhelming moments in the IDF, he found it particularly helpful to be surrounded by other Lone Soldiers confronting the same challenges as he. Meisels even takes the time to help other Lone Soldiers who have been abandoned by their Ultra Orthodox families.

"The biggest dreams you have, that's where you need to go," Chaim advised one of the soldiers. "Get to know as many people as you can. Look at the big picture. There are going to be tough days, but in the end, it's enjoyable."



doubted him, whether on the baseball field or the battle field.

"The first thing I think of when I think of Max is his silly, contagious smile," she said.

Max fell in love with Israel during his first visit to the country through Birthright and decided to enlist in the IDF. He served as sharpshooter in the Golani brigade. Max Steinberg fell in battle in 2014, during Operation Protective Edge.

Harriet Levin spoke next about her son Michael's decision to cut short his visit home to Philadelphia when he learned that the IDF would be deploying forces into Lebanon to protect Israeli communities from Hezbollah attacks during the summer of 2006. His tragic death shed light on Lone Soldiers and the sacrifices they make.

"Until Michael fell, the term Lone Soldier was virtually unheard of," she said. "Now it's a universal term, everyone knows what a Lone Soldier is."

Suzanne Singer was scheduled to speak about her son Alex, who was killed in southern Lebanon in 1987, on his 25th birthday. London-born Dr. Tuvia Book, who served with Alex, spoke instead.

"It was emotionally, physically, linguistically and psychologically



Lone Soldiers celebrating the Yom Ha'atzmaut barbecue in Jerusalem

challenging period of time [for me]," Book said. "The knowledge that this smiling, confident American officer had overcome all of these obstacles and risen to a command position in my unit was a tremendous source of comfort and pride for me."

At various points of the program, musician Shlomo Katz performed. After the speakers concluded their remarks, the crowd sang Hatikva in unison.

More than 55,000 viewers worldwide watched the ceremony through a livestream video link.

The following day, representatives of the U.S. Supporters of the Lone Soldier Center

headed to Mount Herzl, the national cemetery. At Michael Levin's grave, crowds of visitors gathered to pay their respects and comfort the Levin family.

As the sun set on this difficult day, a celebratory energy began to puncture the somber undertone. At nightfall, Israel ushered in its 70th birthday and the streets filled with song and dance late into the night.

The following day, on Yom Ha'atzmaut, the Lone Soldier Center hosted two celebratory barbecues, serving 880 pounds of meat and 500 liters of beer to 2,000 Lone Soldiers in Gan Sacher Park in Jerusalem and at the Namal in Tel Aviv.

Crave, a popular restaurant in Machane Yehudah, provided the delicious meat, and Beer Bazaar, a craft beer bar, served up the suds. Volunteers from Beit Shemesh and Ramat Beit Shemesh prepared side dishes and desserts.

In Jerusalem, a DJ blasted music throughout the park and Deputy Minister Michael Oren, a former Lone Soldier himself, came by to hang out with the soldiers. He cheered with them as the Israel Air Force conducted a flyover with dozens of aircraft, including the recently added F-35 Adir stealth fighter jets.

# Yom Ha'atzmaut

## ► 21 Lone Soldiers Among 120 Presidential Award Winners

Each Yom Ha'atzmaut, the State of Israel recognizes 120 exceptional soldiers, who are honored at an official ceremony at Beit HaNasi, the President's Residence. Of the 120 soldiers honored this year, 21 of them were Lone Soldiers.

This group of outstanding Lone Soldiers was comprised of eight men and 13 women, most of whom came to Israel from abroad. The countries of origin included the United States, France, Colombia, Brazil, and Russia. It also included Israeli-born soldiers from challenging socioeconomic backgrounds.

Along with President Reuven Rivlin and his wife Nechama, the ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Gadi Eisenkot, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat and former officials as well.

Dr. Shira Ben Barak Leibovich, a physician in the Armored Corps, delivered remarks as a representative of the soldiers.

"We do what we do as part of our everyday lives," she said, according to the Jerusalem Post. "It is our mission to defend the State and we don't forget those who are missing or who are prisoners."

## IN THE UNITED STATES

# Seals & Steaks



During Michael's service in the elite Shayetet 13 naval commando unit, he made a pledge to his squad that when their military service concludes, they would all meet in the United States and take a road trip together. A fanciful if not motivating notion at the time, Michael proved to be good for his word.

Michael, one of only a few foreign Lone Soldiers ever to be admitted to Shayetet 13, chose New York City as the group's meeting point. On July 1, the U.S. Supporters of the Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin hosted all 16 members of Michael's team, along with 30 organization supporters, for a backyard barbecue at a private residence in New Jersey.

"It was such a special night," said Melissa Rosenberg, who attended the event. "I was thrilled to have the opportunity to introduce my son to Israeli Navy SEALs, hear their stories, and personally thank them for their service and sacrifice. I think I can speak for everyone in saying we are forever grateful to them for everything they do to keep Israel safe."

Michael opened the Seals and Steak evening by explaining the elite nature of the unit and the types

of top secret missions they performed. He then spoke about the challenges of being in such a highly demanding unit as a Lone Soldier from the U.S. and how, ultimately, the support offered by the LSC made him a better soldier.

"Honestly, it wouldn't have been possible to serve as a Lone Soldier in a unit such as Shayetet 13 without the support that the Center has to offer," Michael told the crowd. "Having a community help take care of my needs, such as dealing with issues that arose with my bank account or helping me find furniture, allowed me to keep up with the unbelievably challenging military experience required from a SEAL and to focus on protecting the Jewish state."

It's not common for an entire squad to be at the same event, but Michael felt it was important for his team to know the type of support offered here.

Following Michael's remarks, his commander spoke about the awesome responsibilities he carried while leading these men on daring missions. He talked about sea and land navigation in the pitch black, about the life and death decisions he needed to make in seconds, and the challenges of keeping all

the information secretive. At the end, he revealed that he was only 24 years old.

"I was so uniformly impressed with the maturity and poise exhibited by each of the SEALs I met that evening," said Seth Finkel, who also attended the barbecue. "Given what they do on a day-to-day basis, and what they've experienced in their service, it was especially striking to see how politely and courteously they handle themselves in their interactions with others. It was such an inspirational experience for those of us fortunate enough to spend some quality time with the SEALs who attended the event."

Northern Valley Affairs sponsored the evening and provided all the food, top-shelf liquor, and tables free of charge.

After the event, the men piled into vans and prepared to start their road trip along the East Coast. From New York they drove to Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C., where they were hosted by local Jewish communities. They hiked the Appalachian Trail through the Carolinas, and finished their adventure in Miami.

## Yom Ha'atzmaut, New York Style



On April 18, 2018, more than 500 young professionals came out to mingle with their friends and dance to popular Israeli music at the U.S. Supporters of Lone Soldier Center's annual Yom Ha'atzmaut party in Manhattan. The celebration, which is organized by the USSLSC's Advisory Board, has become the organizations flagship event, pushing larger and larger venues beyond capacity with each party.

The energetic crowd filled both floors of Deweys Pub and even spilled out onto the sidewalk, while crowd-favorite DJ Igal Beat-On set the tempo with Israeli sing-along classics mixed with Hebrew dance rhythms.

"We market this as the most authentic Israeli Yom Ha'atzmaut party on this side of the Atlantic, and we've lived up to it every year," says Aaron Goss, a former Lone Soldier who volunteers as the president of the Advisory Board. "I can't imagine a better way to celebrate Israel than by singing along with my friends to Shlomo Artzi, while washing down some Bamba with a room temperature shot of Arak."

The excitement level was particularly high this year, as Israel celebrated its momentous 70th Independence Day.

In 2017, the Advisory Board rented out Houston Hall, a cavernous beer hall in Greenwich Village, drawing 400 celebrants. Executive Director Andi Flug Wolfer received an official New York State proclamation, signed by Governor Andrew Cuomo, in recognition of the organization's important work.

The event this year raised more than \$25,000 for the Lone Soldier Center's program to help Israeli-born Lone Soldiers who come from broken homes. The success of the event was made possible with the generous support from its sponsors. They included Barbara and Paul Brensilber - Jordan Cooper LLC, Tina and Mitchell Lieberman, the Naar family, and Stepping Stone Capital Partners.





Defiance ETFs Co-Founders Matthew Bielski and Assaf Regev ring the NYSE Closing Bell

## Lone Soldiers Make Noise on Wall Street

In 2005, Matthew Bielski graduated from Binghamton University and moved to Israel to accomplish a life-long goal of serving in the IDF. Growing up on Long Island, Bielski often heard stories from his grandfather that engendered strong feelings toward Israel and the importance of Jewish self-defense. Bielski's grandfather Zus, after all, along with his brothers, led one of the largest uprisings during the Holocaust, saving more than 1,200 Jews from the Nazis. The Bielski brothers' heroism inspired a blockbuster Hollywood movie in which Liev Schreiber played Zus.

"I grew up in a household that didn't take Jewish safety for granted," Bielski says. "Throughout high school and college, I made up my mind that I needed to serve in the IDF and play a role, however small, in protecting the Jewish state."

Bielski made Aliyah through a program in which a

cohort of Lone Soldiers lives together on a kibbutz as a way to provide an immediate community and support system. When he arrived at Kibbutz Ramat HaShofet, one of the first fellow Lone Soldiers Bielski met was Assaf Regev, a recent graduate from the University of Florida.

Born in Israel, Regev moved to Miami Beach when he was seven. His mother's parents were also Holocaust survivors who endured Auschwitz. His father served in the Paratroopers and fought in the Yom Kippur War. Indeed, Assaf was raised on stories about both Jewish perseverance and heroism. He was greatly impacted by his visit to Poland's Holocaust sites as a high school participant on March of the Living.

"Walking through the same death camp my grandparents had survived inspired me to really act on 'Never Again,'" Regev says.

Armed with supreme motivation and a strong sense of peoplehood, Bielski and Regev each passed grueling tryouts and were accepted into elite special forces combat units.

Following their military service, both tried making their lives in Israel but eventually found their ways back to the United States to work in corporate America.

"When I finished my service, I thought that I finally had earned my right to live in Israel," Bielski says. "But there was no support from anyone, and I was on my own. I worked in a few odd jobs and earned my MBA there, but I didn't have the support system that places such as the Lone Soldier Center offer today."

Regev adds: "From my experience, it was easier being a Lone Soldier than a Lone Civilian, since nobody really cares if you're just in Israel working."

Last year, these two former Lone Soldiers left their jobs in big law and Wall Street to pursue a new challenge. They decided to use their complementing

skillsets to launch a company of their own.

"We saw a tremendous opportunity in the market and we both sensed we had the right backgrounds to seize it," Regev says.

In January of 2018, Bielski and Regev co-founded Defiance ETFs—named after the movie and book about the Bielski brothers—which specializes in providing investors exposure to disruptive technology sectors. As Defiance continued to expand, Bielski and Regev rounded out their management team with other Lone Soldier friends. Today, 60 percent of the Defiance executive team is comprised of former Lone Soldiers.

"Defiance ETFs values trust, ability to succeed under pressure, and no ego," Bielski says. "What better place to source this kind of talent than from a pool of people who left everything to volunteer in a foreign military?"

Although they were the new kids on the ETF block, the Defiance team tapped into the discipline and audacity they honed in the IDF to put Wall Street on notice. On August 1, Defiance ETFs launched an augmented and virtual reality ETF (AUGR) and, soon after, they released the first quantum computing fund (QTUM). In between the launch of these funds, the global head of ETF sales at BlackRock left his position to join the Defiance team.

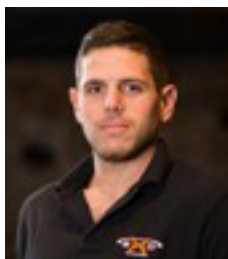
"When you go to battle, it helps to have the best soldiers," Bielski says.

On October 10, the New York Stock Exchange invited Bielski and Regev to ring the Closing Bell.

"That was a great moment for us," Regev says. "When we looked out from the New York Stock Exchange's podium and saw our supporters, so many of them were other Lone Soldiers who served alongside us. These guys have been with us every step of the way."

### Keeping it in the Family

Bielski isn't the only former Lone Soldier making noise in the United States — or even within his own family. His cousin Nuri Golan, who also enlisted as a Lone Soldier in an elite IDF unit, founded EXO technologies, which was acquired earlier this year by the Detroit-based Lear Corporation, a leading global supplier of automotive seating and electrical systems.

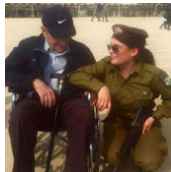


Golan's team at EXO developed high-accuracy GPS technology solutions that are critical for autonomous driving cars.

"The critical thinking and problem solving abilities that you hone while serving in an elite unit are all extremely useful as an entrepreneur," Golan says. "They were certainly a big part of our success at EXO."

Golan, who earned his MBA from the Technion following his service is another success story to emerge from the Start-Up Nation.

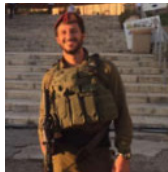
## SOLDIERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT



**Tamar**  
New York

### What inspired you to enlist?

"My grandfather, Yosef Hartman, who was also a Lone Soldier. After my Saba survived Auschwitz, he made his way to Israel with his brother. They enlisted in the IDF in 1947. I was always amazed that after being targeted because of their Jewishness, that didn't make them want to run away from their identities but embrace and protect it. My Saba and his brother are players in the Jewish National Story, an epic tale dating back thousands of years detailing the struggles and triumphs of my ancestors, my heritage."



**Adam**  
Florida

### How did you feel the first time you put on your uniform?

"I was shocked and proud. Shocked because I genuinely couldn't believe that I got to the point in which I am enlisted in the Israeli army, and proud at myself for sticking with the plan of drafting through thick and thin."



**Dov**  
Pennsylvania

### What's your favorite part of the week?

"My favorite part of every week is saying Kiddush on Friday night. Whether I'm on base or on leave, it reminds me that time keeps moving, that I've tackled another challenging week, and that I have a day ahead of me to rest before needing to hit the ground running again."



**Eden**  
Florida

### What was the moment when you realized all this hard work is worth it?

"My search and rescue unit was recently dispatched to the Gaza border to help out with all the chaos going on there. My commander woke us up at three in the morning and said that we have to get all our stuff and get into one of the vehicles in the waiting military convoy. This was an eye-opening night for me, because the seven months of training was finally paying off. I was being sent to an emergency situation in which innocent people needed my help. The fact that I was equipped with the tools and knowledge to actually help these people was a truly amazing feeling."



**Shana**  
Belgium

### What was your proudest moment in the IDF?

"When I was in pre-basic training for foreigners, I always worked my hardest and felt that I never got anything in return. During our 'graduation' ceremony, my sergeant came to me and gave me her unit tag that she wears on her uniform, which is a big military honor. She told me that I deserved it because I was the best soldier in the platoon."



**Sarina**  
Florida

### What was your most challenging moment?

"I had just completed the most exhausting two weeks of my life and was so excited to finally leave base and go home. With all the traffic it took me more than four hours to get home, and as soon as I stepped off the bus, I got a call from my commander that I have a mission that night and need to return to base. My heart sank. I was supposed to celebrate my best friend's birthday that Shabbat and had made many plans to see friends and finally get more than two hours of sleep. Without washing my laundry, eating normal food, or showering in my own apartment I turned around and went right back. I was crushed, but it was one of those moments when you remember you're a combat soldier and these are the sacrifices you have to make."

**Are you interested in hiring or mentoring a former Lone Soldier living in the United States?**

If so, please email [support@lonesoldiercenter.us](mailto:support@lonesoldiercenter.us)



## FROM THE COVER

# Sarah Schecker Photographs

Sarah Schecker is a senior at New York University and majoring in Photography and Imaging. Schecker, who grew up in Bethesda, M.D., decided to photograph the lives of Lone Soldiers for her senior thesis. The genesis of this idea stemmed from her admiration for people who believe in the importance of protecting and defending the State of Israel.

"It's something that is extremely important to me," she says.

In the cover photograph, she captured Joel, a Lone Soldier from the United States, waiting for his second bus to take him to his kibbutz for the weekend. Many Lone Soldiers need to travel great distances to get to their homes when they are on leave.

See more of Sarah's photos at [www.LoneSoldier.us](http://www.LoneSoldier.us)





**THE LONE SOLDIER CENTER**  
In Memory of Michael Levin

# Sponsorship Opportunities

The success of the U.S. Supporters of the Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin depends on its family of generous supporters. All contributions go toward addressing the unique needs of Lone Soldiers. A core component of perpetuating Michael Levin's legacy is to educate others about the challenges Lone Soldiers need to overcome in order to succeed during their service. As it looks forward to continued growth in 2019, the U.S. Supporters of the Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin is introducing a contribution program, below, that draws a personal link to the impact of a generous donation, whether from an individual, a community, or an organization. **The U.S. Supporters also welcomes and appreciates general donations to ensure that Lone Soldiers' other unique needs are met.**

## **Shabbat Dinner** \$2,500 per dinner

The LSC hosts weekly Shabbat dinners for 50-100 Lone Soldiers in Jerusalem and monthly Shabbat dinners in Tel Aviv. For many Lone Soldiers, coming together away from base to be among friends is the highlight of their week. For individuals, families, synagogues, local Federations, men's clubs, sisterhoods, or schools, this is a wonderful opportunity to sponsor a Friday night dinner for a group of appreciative Lone Soldiers. For U.S. synagogues, it is also an opportunity to coincide the sponsored Shabbat dinner with a Lone Soldier-themed Shabbat program at home. The U.S. Supporters will work with synagogues on providing a speaker, as necessary.

## **Adopt a Lone Soldier** \$10,000 for foreign-born Lone Soldiers & \$15,000 for Israeli-born Lone Soldiers

From pre-draft until the release date, help a Lone Soldier benefit from the pre-basic training curriculum offered by Tsevet Mikey, weekly Shabbat dinners, housing, social services, and job placement assistance. Donors will be there every step of the way with the adopted Lone Soldier, establishing a connection and providing encouragement to these young men and women throughout their journeys. The added services and specialists required to assist Israeli-born Lone Soldiers necessitate additional expenses.

## **Passover Seder** \$50,000 in Jerusalem, \$30,000 in Tel Aviv

Every year, as Passover rolls around, active duty Lone Soldiers do not have the time, means, or network to organize a proper Seder. The Lone Soldier Center has filled that need by offering a unique and meaningful communal Seder in Jerusalem that hosts all Lone Soldiers in need. This requires renting out a larger facility and placing major food orders, among other added costs. While we say Next Year in Jerusalem, the LSC plans to host a concurrent Seder Next Year in Tel Aviv.

## **Legacy Donations**

There are currently opportunities to secure legacy naming rights for Lone Soldier Center facilities. For more information, please send an email to [support@lonesoldiercenter.us](mailto:support@lonesoldiercenter.us).

6,000

Friday night meals served  
to Lone Soldiers last year

141

Lone Soldiers housed last year

947

Sets of bedsheets, blankets,  
and toiletry kits provided to  
Lone Soldiers last year

520

Israeli-born Lone Soldiers  
supported by the Center



▲ **October marked a special occasion for the Lone Soldier Center community.** Yichiya, pictured to the left of LSC staff member Tziki Aud, received his green beret from the Nachal brigade. Yichiya is an important member of the Lone Soldier family. He grew up in an Arab town in northern Israel and fled his home at the age of 16. With the LSC's help, Yichiya received permission to draft into a combat unit, becoming the first person from his hometown ever to serve in the IDF. Today, he is a sharpshooter and he speaks warmly of the Jewish soldiers in his unit whom he considers his brothers.

**Lone Soldier Center**  
*Care of: Silverman Linden LLP*  
1500 Broadway, Suite 903  
New York, NY 10036



# Our soldiers need your support **today.**

Three ways to make your tax-deductible contribution:

- ✓ **Visit [www.LoneSoldier.us/donate](http://www.LoneSoldier.us/donate)**
- ✓ **Return the enclosed envelope with a check payable to:**  
*U.S. Supporters of the Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin*
- ✓ **Scan this QR code with the camera on your smartphone** →

