

Jerusalem Post > Israel-Hamas War

Hammas massacre survivors help fellow victims recover, get life back on track

OCTOBER 7 AFFAIRS: The Sharabi brothers have come to America to raise money for their new nonprofit foundation, The Association for Survivors and Wounded, to help other survivors.

By AMY KLEIN

FEBRUARY 4, 2024 02:29



A WOMAN visits the site of the Supernova music festival last month.
(photo credit: ALEXANDRE MENEGHINI/REUTERS)

NEW YORK – Right before he was supposed to go to America on October 11 to take a pilots course, 23-year-old Daniel Sharabi invited dozens of friends to come to the [Supernova music festival](#) as a going-away party: his younger brother Neriya, 22, his best friend from boarding school and the army, Yosef Haim Ohana, his cousin Shalev, and two good friends he'd met in Brazil at a similar rave.

"I wanted to go in the morning; it's the best part of the party because it's light and you can see everyone smiling and dancing and happy," Sharabi recalled with a smile from a New York City office. "But Yosef Haim wanted to go at night, so

we compromised and went at night," he said, no longer smiling but twisting a paper towel so tight around his thumb it was turning bright red.

No doubt he can't stop thinking about the what-ifs – especially, what if they'd gone to the party at dawn? They might not have ever made it there at all, because the party was stopped suddenly after the barrage of rockets began at 6:30 a.m. His friend Yosef Haim might not still be in captivity nearly four months later, and his friend Karin Journo might still be alive.

Many in Israel have harrowing stories to tell about the [October 7 massacre](#) – a family member wounded, kidnapped, killed. But not everyone spent eight hours fighting off terrorists and lived to tell the tale of the survivors – and is now trying to help those survivors recover.

Helping survivors of Hamas's attack on the Supernova music festival

The Sharabi brothers have come to America to raise money for their new nonprofit foundation, The Association for Survivors and Wounded, which is dedicated to helping the 3,000+ Supernova survivors of the Hamas massacre. "There are many organizations to help disabled soldiers and [soldiers with PTSD](#). Everyone also knows the victims of kibbutzim like Kfar Aza and Be'eri – because they're all from the same place," Sharabi explained, "but no one knows who these thousands of people are from all over the country that survived the massacre, after 364 died and 50 were kidnapped."



The families of October 7 Nova music festival victims participate in an tree-planting ceremony together with KKL-JNF at the Re'im Forest on January 21, 2024. (credit: Yossi Ifergan/KKL-JNF Photo Archive)

They started the foundation to help Nova survivors get back on their feet physically, economically, and mentally. The Sharabis are hoping to raise half a million dollars to fund therapies and events, like one held in January in the Gamaliya Khan, near Ein Yahav, for 600 Nova survivors. There's a private Facebook group for Nova survivors that has more than 13,000 members.

A lot of survivors are too traumatized to recover, Sharabi said. "Many have stopped working – it's hard for them to go back to work; it messed with their minds," he said, noting he knows 20-30 people who were killed, not to mention the horror of his best friend being kidnapped. His brother is having trouble sleeping.

Advertisement

"I have a friend who dreams every night that Hamas is kidnapping him," he said. Another mom friend had a young son who brought a knife to school to protect his mom from terrorists – and now can't send her son back to school until the son gets private therapy costing \$5,000. A number of survivors are suicidal and in psychiatric institutions, he said.

Sharabi himself has been to therapy, and is trying alternate modalities like EMDR (Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) used to help process trauma. On the recent leg of their trip to Los Angeles, the brothers met with Dr. Orli Peter, who practices psychoneurotherapy guided by something called "qEEG Brain Mapping" and is leading a mission of therapists to treat trauma in Israel called "Israel Healing Initiative."

She looked at Daniel's brain networks that could be impacted by PTSD and said all three were not functioning well. "I've seen Nova survivors; they can barely sit still for treatment," Peter said, explaining that their goal in Israel will be to help relax the nervous system so that Israeli trauma therapists can take over.

Of course, Sharabi is still traumatized: he needed two cigarette breaks and quite a few napkins to shred to talk with a reporter about what happened that day.

THE SECOND of six kids from Elad, Sharabi arrived at Re'im at 12:30 a.m. with his brother, after a celebratory Simchat Torah meal with their extended family. They met up with Yosef Haim and their cousin Shalev and headed inside to gather with other Israeli friends, including some he'd partied with on his gap year in Brazil at the Universo Paralello psytrance festival, the company hosting the Nova event.

"It was perfect – it was large and crazy, and we danced till morning," he said, showing an Instagram reel of his friends dancing to pulsating music, a pan of the crowd under the tent, and then a shot of the empty dawn sky. Someone shouted, "The best of friends!" and the video was captioned with the Hebrew words, "Vehakol Tov" (and everything is good). It was time-stamped 6:29 a.m.

At 6:30 a.m. the music stopped. "They stopped the music and we saw the rockets – a lot of rockets, a hundred every minute. Someone said, 'Why are they so uptight? Go dance!' It's all peace and love – that's what these parties are. You come to enjoy. When else are you going to enjoy like that?"

They started leaving the party, but one girl was having a panic attack, so Yosef Haim and Daniel, who had served as a medic in the Givati Brigade during his army service two years prior, stopped to help. Neriya and Shalev went to get their car. Then Daniel and Yosef Haim met up with their friends, who were packing up their gear. A few were lying down, waiting for the crowds to disperse.

"I saw someone eating a hot dog and realized they were going to throw them away, so I went with Yosef Haim to get the last of the hot dogs," Daniel said. When he returned, his friend Karin laughed, "Only you would get food when the sky is erupting." It was the last time he saw her.

They went over to the local security to find out what was going on, and heard over the comms that someone had been shot. "I didn't know what to think; I didn't think it was terrorists, because I've served in Gaza and know there's no terrorists there – only in east Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, but not in the South."

They both transported wounded to medics and eventually ended up in a field with abandoned cars. That's when he and Yosef Haim split up. "I saw him stand up behind a car. He popped up [and] went down – he got shot from an RPG. Neriya tells me I tried to run to him, but he stopped me – I don't remember that part." The next time he saw his friend was on a Hamas video, confirming he'd been kidnapped.

Daniel and Neriya started running with no cover for 15 meters, slaloming between the bullets, watching people die beside them. "I saw a girl that I cannot get out of my mind. I wanted to pick her up, but then I saw a bullet in the back of her neck and I knew there was nothing I could do but run."

They finally saw a tank some 500 meters from the party, so Daniel and his brother jumped inside. "It's 9 a.m. and I call my grandfather – he was a tank

driver, so I said, 'Hello Saba, how do you operate a tank?' My grandfather must have just been waking up and said, "Good morning, Daniel," but then the call got cut off. Neriya found a rifle on a dead soldier and they left the tank ("one grenade could have finished us"), where some 15-20 people were gathered around. Daniel called his former army commander, saying "come and save us!" His commander gave him minute-by-minute instructions, like "Shoot every 60 seconds so they know you're there!" So it was his brother on one side firing, and another guy on the other using the tank gun, and Daniel trying to help the wounded in the middle.

They were fighting like this for six or seven hours. At one point a policeman with civilians in a white van drove up to them, and Daniel instructed him to make a barrier with a tank - right then an RPG hit the car, wounding Daniel with shrapnel. At one point they saw 30 people or so emerging from the forest, running toward them. "Only one made it to us," Daniel said.

Sometime in the afternoon, Daniel's commander showed up from Tel Aviv, bringing three army officers, rescuing more than 100 people from the festival. Finally, Daniel and his brother and cousin evacuated to the police station in Ofakim ("the road was full of dead bodies") and then to Saroka Medical Center to have their wounds treated. He called his grandfather, who was screaming, "Have you been taken hostage? Have you been taken hostage?" And Daniel had to put him on video to prove to him he was okay.

He was okay. His brother and cousin were okay. His best friend has not been released.

"It was hard at home," he said, after the attacks, watching the dead and wounded, having panic attacks. The way he deals with his PTSD, he says, is this trip, speaking about his experiences and raising money to help Nova survivors.

Does he feel lucky that he and his brother survived? "Lucky? Not so much. I feel thankful to God that He gave me the opportunity to fix things," he said.

Standing outside in the cold New York City evening, Daniel smoked another cigarette, watching the city commuters rush by. Was it hard to watch the world go on, after all he's been through?

"We went back recently to visit Re'im and went to where the tank was," he said. "Grass is growing over the blood. That's life: It goes on."

Related Tags

non-profit The October 7 Massacre Hamas-Israel War

Nova music festival

Advertisement