

The Strident Heartbeat

By: Ariella Esterkin

The Kassams are not fireworks, they kill people. Have you ever heard of a little city called Sderot? It is in Israel, located exactly 2.4 miles away from the Gaza Strip. Most people haven't, but they should. Sderot is known for the dedication of its people, and the rockets that fall habitually within its borders.

Camp RSM, located in the Berkshires, on the ridge of Lake Sunapee agreed to host 9 children from Sderot for the entire summer, pay for their round trip plane tickets, and cover all of their purchase expenses, thanks to one extraordinary girl; Masha Rifkin.

Hear the story of these children; how the צבע אדום signal rings frequently meaning the entire people of Sderot have at most 15 seconds, usually only 5; to get to a corridor or the nearest bomb shelter and duck for cover; which still promised nothing of protection to the powerful Kassams. Then, they fall, blowing the roofs off buildings, traumatizing the minds of the people, and shattering all surroundings, until nothing is left. When I heard this story, I knew I had to do something. Living with these kids they all wanted to get the same point across to us; that they were no different, that they were just the same as the rest of us, and we accepted them with hugs and loving smiles, but the point still lay there that they were different. They told us stories of how they wanted to stay in Sderot, and to fight the battle for freedom, and we listened, choking back tears. We knew in our hearts that if these children could live so strongly like this, with these horrendous conditions, that we should not cry in front of them, because the support of our tears was not something they needed in order to lift them. They yearned to get that point across, and all during camp, you could see their hearts aching with joy of living peacefully, that was, until the night of the RSM formal.

Bang! Crackle! BOOM! The thunder struck through the cold blue night sky. Tomer screamed, Masha fainted, Dalia dug her fingernails so deep into a counselor's back, from fear, that she left a series of bleeding holes in the counselors arm. Masha Rifkin struggled to quiet the children; they all had the same thought in mind; the Kassams were falling. Just when everybody

calmed down, lightning hit a tree, and the tree caught on fire, luckily, the rain put it out, but the Sderot kids were hysterical, and panic-stricken.

As my bat mitzvah project, I am raising money to build more bomb shelters in Sderot. Hopefully these bomb shelters will have a higher protection rate. My goal is to build 18; I plan on dedicating 2 to every Sderot child that was hosted at RSM camp in 2007; Dalia, Tomer, Sabrina, Slava, Valera, Masha, Gala, Ally, and Vika. I want each to host an activity that that child loved doing while going to RSM camp, for example; in each of Tomer's I would put arts and crafts.

In addition, I plan to offer (with the help of Masha Rifkin, of course!) support groups in a moral support children's center in Sderot. Did you know that 2,053 Quassam missiles have been fired within the borders of Sderot since August 2005. Imagine being a parent and driving your kids to school, unknowing of whether you will ever see your child again. Imagine being a child, and going to school, then hearing the צבע אדום signal, squatting down under your desk, screaming, and wondering if you'll ever see your parents again.

There have been law suits in Sderot against the loving parents of children, who were caught driving their kids around w/out a seatbelt, their excuse; if the צבע אדום signal rings while they are in the car, those 4 seconds spent unbuckling their child's seatbelt, could mean the child's (or both the child's and the parent's) life. Yet these parents are found guilty, and still insist on not buckling up. Due to the mental and emotional strain of the parents, I wish to put together seven support groups for children and parents, too. Each will be named after a victim of a fallen Kassam missiles. All of this is only possible through awareness. Please, raise awareness.