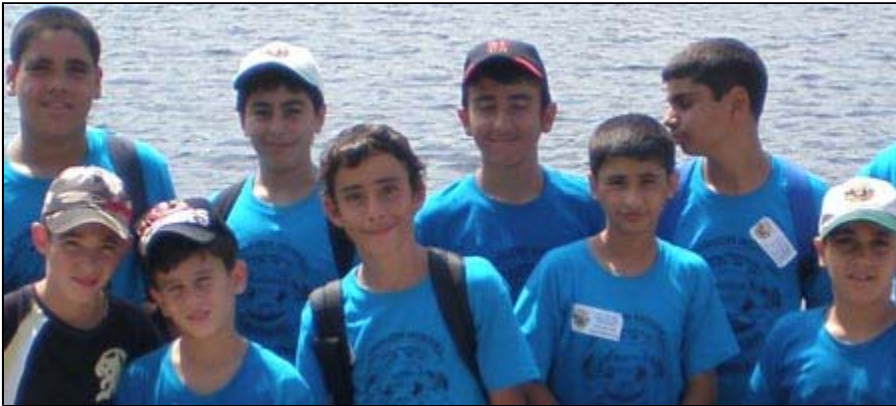


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NORTH AMERICA

Boston Gets a Taste of Sderot Life



A group of Israeli children from Sderot pause for a picture by the lake of their suburban Boston summer camp.

By Lev Cottlar
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Opening day was far from normal last week at one of the Camp Gan Israel day camps in suburban Boston. Several hours into the Chabad-Lubavitch camp's first day at the Shaloh House Jewish Day School in Brighton, Mass., a group of 10 Israeli boys arrived for the summer.

The local campers broke into enthusiastic singing to welcome the tired group, and the head counselor asked one of the new arrivals to say a few words. Chanan, an outgoing 12 year-old, acquiesced and, speaking in his native Hebrew with the help of a translator, began to shout into the megaphone, "Red Alert! Red Alert!" – the standard Israeli announcement warning of an impending missile attack.

With the help of his fellow Israelis, Chanan directed the surprised American boys to run for cover with their hands on their heads, then to crouch near a brick wall to complete this impromptu bomb drill.

It was more than your conventional welcoming ceremony, to be sure. But, then again, this group of 10 were far from your conventional campers. As residents of the shell-shocked Negev town of Sderot, which sits just miles from Israel's border with the Gaza Strip, Chanan and his friends have played out the bomb drill for real day after day after day.

While the bomb scare may not have been the standard get-to-know-you fare of cross-national introduction, it was clearly in good spirits. And no one knows more than these Israelis just how much good spirits are needed right now.


For the past two years, Sderot has endured more than 2,000 Kassam rocket attacks launched by Palestinian terrorists. In the past three months, the attacks have only intensified, leaving residents scared, many refusing to walk the streets.

Chanan's father died six months ago, falling victim to a Kassam explosion while making his way to the nearest bomb shelter. His mother still cannot sleep at night, overcome by grief.

Even the most mundane of childhood activities – going to school – has become something of a rarity in Sderot; in the last year, students managed to scrape together just three months of classroom time as a result of their schools being perpetually closed.

The seemingly carefree attitude of the United States, where people can walk up and down the streets without fearing for their lives, was just what Chanan and his companions needed, decided Rabbi Dan Rodkin, the Shaloh House's executive director. With the help of a Cornell University journalism student, her mother and the financial backing of the local Jewish community, he invited the 10 to come to America and experience a stress-free summer of fun, friendship and learning.

Rodkin, who also directs Brighton's Camp Gan Israel, explained that the purpose of bringing the Israelis to the East Coast is to give them a chance to breathe and, at the same time, to raise Jewish community awareness of Sderot's plight.

By **Lev Cotlar** [More articles...](#) | 

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