

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

By: David Weinfeld

It seems so surreal to me that the last month of my life will one day be summarized in a few paragraphs in textbooks about the Arab-Israeli Conflict.

Academically speaking, the textbooks will cover all the facts: the kidnapping of three Israeli boys, the death of a Palestinian youth and the clashes in Gaza that followed. But facts and textbooks have limitations. They will never be able to encompass all of the emotions of the people here on the ground.

Last week, as the rockets flew from Gaza, I slept right through the first siren in Tel Aviv. I had just finished a morning shift on an MDA ambulance and had come home to rest before my first night shift. When I awoke, my night shift had been cancelled and my friends and family had called me, concerned for my safety. Luckily, I was safe due to Israel's inspiring and detailed mission to protect its citizens. The Iron Dome has saved many lives in the last few weeks, but it cannot stop every rocket, so it is our responsibility, as individuals in Israel, to get to safety. That is why the sirens have the power to dictate your life. Whenever I am in a new place, I am constantly scanning the area, looking for a bomb shelter or for the safest place to be. I never listen to music with headphones and the windows in my apartment are always cracked open so I don't miss a siren. These inconveniences seem insignificant, but the unpredictability of sirens can keep you on alert and defensive.

On my Thursday morning shift, we were called to a home of an elderly woman suffering from a fever and general weakness. Her sister accompanied us to the

hospital and instructed us to deliver her to the Oncology wing of Ichilov, the hospital where Yitzhak Rabin was rushed after being fatally shot. As we wheeled the patient towards her bed, comforting her and easing her fears with each step, the sirens began to sound over Tel Aviv.

It's hard to describe what I felt in that moment. I wouldn't call it fear or panic, but it was a combination of shock and anger. My driver and I lifted the patient into her hospital bed and then promptly went to the closest protected area. As I waited for the Iron Dome to work its magic, I was just consumed by my thoughts. How could a hospital be a target of the rocket fire? This woman was guilty of nothing, and as her mind was consumed with her sickness and aches, the thought of Hamas rockets was another stressful, unavoidable part of her darkest hour.

The siren's shrieking stopped as the Iron Dome shot down the rockets. The silence lasted only a moment before the motionless city reluctantly and carefully returned to normal life. As I walked down the hallways of Ichilov, toward the ambulance, I witnessed a moving and powerful scene. From a nearby stairwell emerged around a dozen patients and their families who had run for cover. These patients, many carrying IV bags of chemotherapy, walked methodically back towards their beds for more treatment. For a few minutes, cancer was the second largest threat to the lives of every patient in that ward. As the exhausted patients returned to their rooms, I was disturbed by how routine this taxing exercise was for them. These patients are going through the most difficult time of their lives. Their medication drains their energy and their condition makes them ill, but the threat of rockets has trumped their fear of cancer every time Hamas fires rockets to their city.

The patients' resilience during this time is both inspirational and necessary, and it reminded me that these are the citizens that Israel is always protecting. I am proud to be volunteering for Magen David Adom because I can help the state of Israel protect the brave and resilient Israeli citizens in these trying times.