



‘Shir’ Song of the Heart - Interview with Noya Becher

Shay Cohen / September 9, 2022

“Let’s meet at The Bookworm at Rabin Square,” said Noya. I smiled as I remembered the Tel Aviv culture hub, an island of sanity where, in the past, I’d spent many a peaceful hour. Although I didn’t remember Noya, it seems we had both been at Sdot Yam recently on the annual beach day. Later, I looked through the hundreds of photos for a shot of Noya, but in vain. It seemed, to my surprise, that this charming woman, so reluctant to speak about herself, had somehow managed to elude every camera.

“It’s going to be a rather complicated story,” Noya warns me, adding, “I’ll tell it chronologically, and you’ll see if it makes sense to you. I came to The Road to Recovery through a friend who got to know Yuval about 8 years ago. At that time, I was in mourning. I’d lost my daughter, Shir. She was 22. Shir was killed in a rafting accident in Peru.”

Shir had served in the IDF’s elite Intelligence Unit 8200, but her military service failed to meet her need for human connection and giving, and so, she started to volunteer at Aleh Negev, a rehabilitation village for people with disabilities located near her base. Here Noya interrupts her own narrative to speak about Yam, Shir’s older brother by a year. He was born with cerebral palsy and is wheelchair-bound. The bond between brother and sister was fierce. “Shir worked with an adolescent named Liron, who lives in the village and who formed a very strong bond with her. Shir wasn’t a talker. She was a child of nature. In her volunteering, she always looked for the sense of closeness and belonging.” Later, Shir served with COGAT, the unit that coordinates government activities in the territories, in Hebron and at border

crossings. At this time, she had completed her officers' course with distinction. "I'd hear Shir on the phone and her frustration with being unable to process a border crossing permit on the weekend for someone in need. After 10 months in Hebron and daily confrontations with this rigid, male system, she asked to be transferred to Training Base 1. Shortly after her discharge from the army, she went trekking in Peru where she was killed."

In awe, I stare at the strong woman in front of me, a grieving mother who, over and over again, tells the story of her daughter and the complex story of her life. "When I was in mourning, I felt I had to channel my feelings into something constructive, something meaningful. Then I met a friend who told me about The Road to Recovery; a different friend hooked me up with Madrassa, a free online platform for learning spoken Arabic. My daughter always said that to truly understand what's going on, you have to know Arabic.

"I've spent a lot of time in hospitals with my son Yam and I've met many people, including Palestinians, who've suffered a great deal. I could identify with them. I discovered that it's very easy for me to get into my car and just give people rides, listen to their stories, and even practice the Arabic I'd learned. So many unique meetings leading to human connections have happened... each at its own unique moment in time. The sharing has really helped me; I identify with the pain and I feel I've helped."

I ask Noya about her past, about the woman before the bereavement, and she tells me about Moshe, her husband and a volunteer with the Civil Guard, who experiences the loss in his own way. She got to know him on Tel Aviv's advertising scene. Noya is the daughter of the late David Admon, a pioneer in Israel's advertising industry, and she and Moshe both worked at Belkin Advertising Agency. Since then, she's switched careers, and now works in interior design. Noya, 59, speaks about being a late bloomer. "I went to study business administration at 36 and got my BA at 40. I just recently finished my MA in education and art at Beit Berl."

"After Shir's death it was hard for me to deal with the grief and my difficulties with Yam and I made a decision to help Yam become independent and to move out to his own apartment with the caregiver who has been with him from childhood. It was a hard decision but made with a deep understanding that it was the right thing to do. I felt that otherwise I would fall to bits. Today I can be proud of the happy child who lives independently."

Noya continues and tells me about the men and women that have entered her life through Shir. "I am a person who believes in "signs", she says. She talks about Alex and Hadas, friends who had connected to Shir during their military service and thanks to her help were able to achieve self-fulfillment, despite having difficult family and social backgrounds.

"I met a mother and daughter from Ramallah and took them to the beach and for a stroll at the Tel Aviv port. Beyond the regular trips I initiated fun days out, a visit to the beach and the safari and more. "The connection that I had with COGAT through Shir's military service, enabled me to help Yuval on a number of occasions. My involvement in the Association allowed me to share the pain." A reminder of the pain immediately brings Noya back to Shir's story. "During the shiva for Shir I couldn't fall asleep at night and scrolled through Facebook . . . A post jumped out at me of a friend who knew someone who was organizing an event at 'Aleh Negev'. In one of the pictures, I saw Liron who Shir had assisted. At midnight I wrote to Doron Almog, founder of the village and at 12:30 AM Doron wrote back. He was very moved and expressed his sorrow about Shir. We agreed to meet, and we were invited to visit the village. There we met Liron.



"A year later we were again invited to an 'important meeting', and there we met the head of Army Intelligence, Herzi Halevi. Doron said that he wanted to continue Shir's legacy, soldiers from '8200' volunteering at the village. Herzi Halevi undertook to promote this matter and this is how the Heartsong Project was established."

I try to see beyond the impressive fabric woven by Noya from threads of action and involvement, in an attempt to connect or understand something of the survival mechanism and action of a mother whose life revolves around bereavement and a super-human effort to cope with a child with special needs. And then I find out about Nitzan.

"Nitzan is my youngest daughter, 26 years old. When Shira was killed, Nitzan was 18. At first Nitzan refused to take part in memorial days at 'Aleh Negev' and I remember that it was very hard for me to accept her way of dealing with the grief. I tried to create a united family to cope together, but I understood that this was her way. This was an important lesson for me"

I see in Noya's sparkling eyes that this is a sensitive spot, but something in this brave woman refuses to break down. Refuses to sink.

I go back to the beginning and remember Yuval's referral and the event at 'Aleh Negev', that changed its name about a year ago to 'Ya'adei Negev', and Noya tells me: "We decided to hold an annual event as a gift to the village on Shir's birthday in July. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic we postponed the date to the date of her memorial day on October 2. Here we had the idea of inviting volunteers of the Association to an emotional event to take place at the village, and this year there will be a performance of circus performers organized by Yuval. "It's a wonderful opportunity to get to know the inspiring activity which goes on every day at this wonderful village, and for me, it's like closing a full circle. An attempt to connect Shir's threads of volunteer work with my activities in the Association."