



הצילומים באדיבות יורם אשדתיים ועדה גמך

The Change She Wants to See in the World

An Interview with Loren Shekh-Abid

Shay Cohen, August 9, 2022

Since I joined the Road to Recovery Association, Loren's name keeps cropping up, and is always said with a look of appreciation, even admiration, reserved for few. For some reason, I did not meet her until our recent beach day at Kibbutz Sdot Yam. It was not until the end of this exciting event, when we sat down to rest from the heat, that a woman with a black hijab came towards me, large sunglasses covering her soft face, wearing a black and white animal print dress, and introduced herself. "Hello, I'm Loren, and I was told I should talk to you..."

"You're the Lorraine everyone is talking about?", I answered with a smile, and within a few minutes we found ourselves sitting on plastic chairs on the sand, and talking as if we had known each other for years. All around us was the noise of hundreds of parents, children, and volunteers on the beach, yet they all seemed to disappear in the flow of our conversation. For a long while it seemed to be just her and me, except for Lor, her sweet daughter, who every so often came up for a hug, checking who her mother was talking to.

"I'm originally from Jaffa, and now I'm married and I live in Ar'ara, in the north. I met Yuval Roth (the founder of the Association), in 2007-2008, while working with at-risk children, and I volunteered to visit sick children at Tel Hashomer. Together with Yuval and Tal, his partner, we would perform for the children. They with their juggling act, and me as an activity leader. We went to appear together to entertain children in villages throughout the West Bank. In harsh and forlorn places. It was a very special time.

When Yuval founded The Road to Recovery Association, and started organizing fun days out for the kids, I joined and helped in every possible way. Yuval and I were perfect partners”.

Loren is 39, she finished her Master’s degree in in educational counseling, and works in the Education Department of the Umm Al-Fahm Municipality. She is married to Fahed, a structural engineer, a “supportive husband”, and is mother to two daughters, Lor and Nil.

“Be the change you wish to see in the world” – “This is my favorite quote from Mahatma Gandhi. It is a sentence I am very committed to. Before I got married, a 3-year-old child came to me who had swallowed a coin and was in critical condition. His life was in danger and he became my life project. I slept at his bedside in hospital until he recovered, and to this day I have a close relationship with his mother. Every Ramadan I collect donations for them and for other families. I prefer to act from behind the scenes, to connect to people's hearts.”

The time passes and I am enthralled and enchanted by her story. I try to understand the gap between her reserved and somber appearance and the boundless energy of this woman. Maybe there is a hint of this in her animal print dress.

I skip a heartbeat and my ears prick up when Loren says, “I’ve never told anyone this... After Lor, my eldest daughter was born, I had a miscarriage, and for a while afterwards, without any understanding or recognition, I was depressed and anxious. At the time I was working with at-risk youth, and when the anxiety started, I had to stop. I didn’t know what was happening to me. I thought I was going crazy.

There were days when I couldn’t function, but there was always some fight in me. Maybe working with at-risk youth saved me from depression. Maybe devoting myself to strengthen those people that need me gives meaning to my life.”

Loren tells me about her work at the Municipality, in the Education Department, about countless personal initiatives to help the needy, beyond the norm. Countless attempts to help the weak, initiatives that often result in opposition and a lack of any appreciation. Loren finds herself surrounded by people who do not always understand or rise above the familiar and acceptable norms in their environment. “Today I try and stay away from people who underestimate me or make me feel stressed or depressed.”

“I had a student who everyone said was using drugs, and yet I refused to see or believe it. When I discovered he was indeed an addict, I took it very hard, but I learned to let it go”. I ask Loren where it all comes from, what or who in her childhood inspired her to act so totally for the sake of others. She thinks for a moment and then tells me that in her childhood her family was a foster family. “I remember that when I was 15 years old, people from the welfare department came to take our foster kids back to boarding school, and I cried. I felt as if they were taking my own child away. Saying goodbye is very difficult for me.”

“I really wanted a third child, but it didn't work out. I would very much like to adopt or be a foster family, but I am afraid of saying goodbye. When I was a child, many families in my neighborhood were foster families, but they did it mainly for the money, and this image also deters me.”

I am fascinated by Loren stories and my heart goes out to her. I find it hard to believe that under all that goodness there is so much pain and suffering. Something is torn apart when a baby is separated from his mother, when a student separates from a teacher. Something was broken and Loren, with unbelievable courage, chooses each day to pick up the pieces and go and fight for another child that needs her.

Although Loren is not active in The Road to Recovery Association, and does not drive sick people from the border crossings, to me, and to many of us, she is an integral part of the Association. She is a role model for each and every one of us. Lorraine is unquestionably the change she wishes to see in the world.