

Seven Blessings At Boys Town Jerusalem



Danny Liani and his bride, Sonia.

JERUSALEM — The soulful singing which filled the Jerusalem night was coming from the Boys Town Jerusalem dining hall. "The voice of rejoicing, the voice of groom and bride, shall yet be heard in the towns of Judea and in the streets of Jerusalem," went the chant. Part prayer and part song, it was in fact one of the "Sheva Brachot" ("Seven Blessings" reception) which follow a Jewish wedding. The festive celebration was arranged and hosted by Boys Town faculty, students and alumni.

Danny, the groom, was elated by his newly-found happiness. He was keenly aware of everyone and everything around him, but he could only guess at the way they looked. In fact, Danny had never seen his bride Sonia, nor was it likely that he ever would.

It happened five years ago, on the southern outskirts of Beirut. An Israeli infantry unit was under severe artillery and mortar fire and suffering heavy casualties. Rifleman Danny Liani raised his head above the embankment at the precise moment when a 60 mm. mortar shell exploded yards in front of him.

"My first thought was that my whole face had blown off. I felt a searing pain in my eyes, and I was bleeding badly. I must have passed out and when I came to, I was in a hospital. I could touch my face, but the burning sensation in my eyes continued. They were completely bandaged up. It was only much later, after several operations, that the realization came to me that I would be blind for life."

Danny, the son of Algerian immigrants, was the first of the ten Liani children to be born in Jerusalem, a fact of which he is proud. A handsome, somewhat bashful boy, he grew up on the squalid slum area of Musrara, his home a cramped tenement apartment and his playground the junk-strewn "no-man's land" separating Jerusalem's Arab-held Old City from the city's Jewish neighborhoods.

When he finished elementary school, Danny's father brought him to Boys Town Jerusalem where he was accepted to the printing school. This was to prove a crucial step in his life. "I grew up in a very traditional Jewish home," Danny says, "but it's the education that I got at Boys Town which gave me faith and helped make the worst moments of my life bearable."

The relationships with his classmates that developed at Boys Town are important to Danny. Living, learning and working together for four years, meaningful and durable friendships were created. His rabbis were more like fathers than teachers. "When I was in the hospital they visited me many times. They were a source of inspiration. My classmates were in the army, but someone always managed to be at my side. It helps a lot to have such good friends."

After a period of recuperation, Danny began to think of his future. He decided that he would like to learn social work and specialize in helping blind people. But, deciding is one thing, doing it is a different matter. He was ridden by fears, physical and psychological. Doubts set in,

eroding his determination. These, he admits, were the worst days he knew after losing his sight.

Then one day, Sonia came into his life. She had recently come to Israel from France, motivated by the desire to learn about her Jewish roots. Born in Tunis, Sonia had been living in Paris where she was an announcer on a Jewish radio program. Someone there had asked her to deliver a letter to a friend in Jerusalem. That friend was also Danny's friend and when Sonia came, she and Danny were introduced. They liked each other, and met frequently. Danny was transformed - Sonia brought a new light into his life. They decided to get married.

The wedding took place almost four years to the day that the mortar shell deprived Danny of his sight. Jerusalem does not remember a wedding as happy as this one. Almost every

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