

Homeless Men in Israel Find Hope, Shelter in American Couple's Home

The Liebmanns moved to Jerusalem in 1999 and opened their home to men who had been living on the streets

Gerald Liebmann fancies himself a doctor, his home a hospital and the hundreds of homeless men in Jerusalem his pool of potential patients. He says he earned his "M.D." in the school of hard knocks, spending years of his life addicted to heroin and living on the streets.

"All I can offer them is what saved me," Liebmann said. "This is our home. We're the doctors; they're the patients. The medicine is love and accountability. If they don't want the medicine, we can't help."

Since 1999, when Liebmann, his wife, Tracy, and their two children, Gina, 17, and Michael, 14, moved to Jerusalem, the family has opened its home to more than 100 homeless men, who receive food and a place to sleep, and quickly become part of the family.

"It's a 24/7 atmosphere," Tracy Liebmann said. "It's a home, not a shelter. Our kids have never been harmed."

"Gina and Michael have never complained about moving here," Gerald Liebmann added. "I'm not saying it's good to go through such things as terrorist aggression. We're not foolish, but it does show you how much trust in God my children have."

"I don't deserve to have such a devoted family, willing to go all the way for God. I am really a blessed man."

Liebmann didn't always consider himself so blessed. He grew up in New York City, abused as a child and an alcoholic by the time he reached his teens. He later became addicted to heroin and spent most of his days begging on the streets.

He moved to California in the 1980s, then later to Hawaii. But the cycle was the same: living on and off the streets, making and losing money in legitimate and illegitimate jobs, and whirling in and out of secular rehabilitation centers.

Liebmann met Tracy in Hawaii in 1984 when she bought drugs from him. "We'd drink and fight all the time," said Tracy Liebmann, who grew up in South Central Los Angeles with parents who were Jehovah's Witnesses. "I never had a Christmas until I was saved in 1988."

The two married in 1986 after they both entered a rehab center. They came out clean and six months later headed back to California. "By the time we landed, we were drunk on the champagne they served," Gerald Liebmann remembers.

Soon he was back on the streets before being admitted to a psychiatric hospital, but he was homeless again upon his release. His wife was living house to house with relatives.

Finally, Gerald Liebmann joined the Victory Outreach Rehabilitation Center, a ministry of Victory Outreach International, which was founded by Sonny Arguinizoni and now has more than 500 churches across the United States.

"I met the Lord one week later," Gerald Liebmann said. "Nicky Cruz was preaching at a Victory Outreach Conference. I knelt down with my whole body shaking. I knew I wouldn't go back to the old life."

That was Aug. 14, 1987. Tracy Liebmann accepted Christ the following year. "I never knew there was a whole world of Christianity where you could be happy," she told Charisma. "I didn't know love until I felt it at Victory Outreach."

For seven years, the Liebmanns were mentored by Victory Outreach staff, then became mentors themselves. "If you've been a wounded soldier, you know what the wounds of another feel like," Gerald Liebmann said.

The Liebmanns eventually planted a church in California. Describing himself as an Italian with a Jewish name—though he believes his aunt's claim that he is Jewish—Gerald Liebmann later began attending Messianic Jewish events. "As I was praying, God said: 'I want you to go to My people.' It was like a light bulb. From then on, Israel was deep inside me."

The Liebmanns moved to Jerusalem in 1999, hoping to see homeless men like Oleg Fiegleman touched by the same love that transformed them. A Russian immigrant and former music teacher, Fiegleman hoped to make a living in Israel but found himself drinking night and day. "I didn't even know what country I was in," he says today.

That was before he met the Liebmanns. Now the worship leader for the church that meets in the Liebmanns' home, Fiegleman says: "I never heard please or thank you before. ... I'm treated like a human being here. God has given me this chance."

Arlene Bridges Samuels in Jerusalem

For more information about the Liebmanns' work, visit .