

Americans Donate Ambulances to Save Israelis

In Israel, scarcely a week goes by when there's not an anniversary of a war or some **terror attack** that kills and maims Israelis.

We recall those killed nationally on **Yom Hazikaron** and anniversaries of wars and major battles. Those injured brace at the annual reminder, still bearing physical and psychological wounds.

For those who survived these incidents, there's no more important organization than **Magen David Adom** (MDA), Israel's national emergency medical service (EMS), ambulance, first responder service and national blood bank.

As much as **terrorism** has changed the lives of Israelis, the events of Sept. 11, 2001, changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans as well. Unfortunately, ambulance and EMS services were not needed, and many emergency service professionals lost their lives trying to save others.

Nearly 3,000 people died on Sept. 11, but thousands escaped the towers before they fell, and some didn't even make it into work that day or missed their flight. They now look back at how, but for the grace of God, it could have been them. Their lives were changed dramatically—not for what they lost but because they were saved.

One of these people is Donna Calcaterra. On the morning of Sept. 11, Donna didn't feel well and stayed at home in bed. Her life was saved and changed forever. She only heard about the tragedy after the twin towers had collapsed. Some months later, her bank called and said they had recovered her safety deposit box. All that remained was a charred mess, but one thing that stood out changed her life yet again.

An **Israeli government** collectible gold coin, on top of the ashes and other melted coins, remained intact. Three words stood out: *Am Yisrael Chai*, which means “the people of Israel live.”

Donna took this as her charge to do more for Israel, which was well into the suffering of the second intifada. Busses and cafes were being blown up weekly, and thousands of **Israelis** were being killed and maimed regularly.

Donna donated one ambulance to the **American Friends of Magen David Adom** (AFMDA), then another and another, then a bloodmobile, another ambulance, and another. Sometimes it takes a stark wake-up call to put things into perspective, as it did for Donna.

An incredibly generous woman, she actually went back to work as a commodities trader to give more money away to the organization.

The Connection Between Heroes

Just as Israel has had its share of sorrows, we also have more than our share of **heroes**.

One of these heroes is Amber Biton. At 15, Amber joined the ranks of one of the teenage volunteers in MDA, just as thousands of kids throughout Israel do, expressing a desire to give back and the sense of **volunteerism** that palpitates through Israel.

While in high school, Amber got sick with cancer. She continued her calling to volunteer and help save others. However, at 17 years old, Amber lost her life. She had devoted her last years to helping save others’.

By this point, Donna’s generosity had made her a member of the AFMDA board, donating several ambulances and two bloodmobiles to MDA. When she heard about Amber, she felt it wasn’t good

enough for Amber to only be remembered in MDA by those who knew her. Donna decided there should be an **ambulance** in Amber's memory. The ambulance would serve to carry on her legacy, and in honor of Amber, many lives would continue to be saved.

That **ambulance** arrived in Israel recently and is stationed in Kiryat Gat, where Amber lived and volunteered. It will enable other **MDA** staff and volunteers to save lives for years to come. The ambulance's dedication was last week, coming within a month of Amber's 18th birthday and the first anniversary of her death. Children who were born after Amber died will mature as teens like Amber, fulfilling the sense of **volunteerism** in Israel and riding on this very ambulance, saving the lives of others.

It's also certain that, once in a while, a baby will be born on this ambulance with the help of the dedicated staff and volunteers of MDA, the backbone of this incredible pillar of Israeli society.

A tragedy that made one woman dedicate her life to **Israel** and another tragedy of the death of a special young woman permanently connects these two women who never met, who never looked for recognition, but who, each in her own way, stepped to the plate and devoted herself to **saving lives** in Israel.

May the generosity of one and the memory of the other always motivate and inspire others to do their part in saving lives in Israel.

Jonathan Feldstein is the director of Heart to Heart, a unique virtual blood donation program to bless Israel and save lives in Israel. Born and educated in the U.S., Feldstein emigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He

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