

The Women of Israel: Barbara Goldstein

I was first introduced to Barbara Goldstein thanks to my mom, who herself is an inspiring Jewish woman for Israel.

As a Jewish teenager actively involved in leadership programs with BBYO, and NCSY, I knew just how valuable it was to meet someone who was doing so much for our people and our homeland—especially a woman with such passion, such joy that it was contagious!

When I told her how much I hated packing up and leaving Israel after each visit, she told me, one day, “Elana, you won’t ever have to do that anymore. I see you; I see your passion. You will make it happen. You have so much to give to the Jewish people.”

And now, nearly 20 years later, she is still one of my most cherished mentors, lending a supportive ear and heart from the first day of building up Israel Forever.

Known as BG to most of the Zionist world, Barbara is the Deputy Executive Director of Hadassah’s office in Israel, and past National Vice President of Hadassah.

Jump-starting what would be a long career in Jewish communal work, Barbara was a volunteer during the Yom Kippur War working directly with the wounded soldiers and others before serving on numerous boards and committee for the American Zionist Movement, the Joint Authority for Jewish and Zionist Education and, of course, Hadassah. I believe it is her personal commitment to speaking out for Israel that remains her most valuable contribution no matter what organization you might be a part of.

In my encounters with Barbara, I watched real activism in

action. She was, for me, an example of what any woman could achieve if they believed enough in themselves and in their cause. Her smile, her enthusiasm, her optimism, her candor, her love—all of these things gave me the added inspiration for whatever I was doing no matter where or when in my life.

I am blessed to have BG in my life for nearly 20 years and, every time I see her, I say the same thing: you are AWESOME. She smiles each time, because of course I'm sure she hears it from everyone. Telling someone you admire them isn't usually something you say face to face, so I love having the chance to say: Barbara, in my eyes, you belong among the eschalons of Jewish women of history—alongside the likes of Henrietta, Golda, Sarah, Rachel, Miriam.

A story that BG shared with me years ago: "In the Yeshiva when I was a little girl, the Rabbi used to come to the yeshiva every week with questions. He would always have candies for those who answered right. However that one time he did not have candy, but he said he had something else, more meaningful, and then he took a stone from out of his pocket, a stone that had once been a part of the Western Wall of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

While giving me the stone he said: "Remember that one day you will have to bring it back to Jerusalem because if everybody would bring stones with them from the Kotel, what would be left of it. I carried that stone that I got from the Rosh Yeshiva from the time I was eight years old until the Six Day War.

This small piece of stone was a reminder that there once was a Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The Six Day war in 1967 changed it all. Jerusalem was finally united. Before the war I had not told anyone about the stone, but as I told the story to my family they wanted to walk with me to the Western Wall. I put the stone there, as once the ancient builders had done. There was a purpose in my life for all this."

Barbara has been known to say “The State of Israel is the greatest gift to Jewish people in 2000 years. Titus, the Emperor of Rome once said that Jews would never live here, and look where Titus is, and look where we are now. People need to feel the connection to the land—Israel is yours even when you live in the Diaspora.”

Which is why BG was one of the first to fall in love with the idea of gathering the Jews of the world into a global community of Virtual Citizens of Israel—making sure they all feel a part of this amazing historical, real journey of our nation in our homeland.

Dr. Elana Yael Heideman, executive director of The Israel Forever Foundation, is a dynamic and passionate educator who works creatively and collaboratively to create a stronger voice for future Jewish leadership. An independent lecturer and educational consultant, Elana’s range of activities demonstrate the intensity of her commitment to incorporating understanding of and respect for the history of the Jewish People. Through her involvement with numerous programs, projects and lectures, Elana continually seeks to facilitate dialogue and build bridges between the past, present and future.

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