

NEW YORK POST

IN ISRAEL, UNDER ROCKETS' RED RAIN

By LAURA BIALIS

The CityKids Foundation

January 9, 2009 --

In Sderot, a 15-second warning, then boom.

CityKids' helps young people positively impact their lives, their communities and the world.



To learn more or get involved, check out www.citykids.com.

CityKids uses the arts to engage and train young people to create positive and powerful solutions to issues impacting their lives. Young people learn to improve their own educational status, become agents for social change, take action in community projects, and carry positive messages to their peers. And they have a great time doing it.

SDEROT, ISRAEL

EVERY morning, we're awakened by the Tzeva Adom (Color Red) alert - one of the most bizarre air-raid warnings ever. It starts with the click of a loudspeaker, and then a calm woman's voice says "Tzeva Adom, Tzeva Adom" over and over again. It can be hard to hear if you're, say, watching TV.

Last week, two soldiers from the Home Command Unit dropped off a home-beeper system; this goes off two seconds before the Tzeva Adom alert, adding a loud beeper sound.

The moment of an alert, my husband Avi and I jump out of bed and run to our Mamad (bomb shelter). We huddle there and hug, waiting to hear the explosion. Sometimes it's a distant thud. Sometimes it is terrifyingly close, and our house shakes. After 20 seconds or so, it's over.

They say that you have a 15-second warning. Actually, it varies. And occasionally a Qassam rocket lands without an alert. Those are the worst times, because there's a good chance someone's been hurt.

Here in Sderot, we were used to getting Tzeva Adom alerts every week, sometimes every day. The city has been hit for eight years - the number of rockets growing with time. Then, on Wednesday, Dec. 24, we received more than 60 rockets. That Saturday, we heard a new sound - airstrikes. Finally, after eight years, Israel was taking action.

Since then, the Qassam attacks have been endless - about 10 alerts a day. And each Tzeva Adom means two to four exploding rockets.

We stay alert at all times: If Avi takes a shower, I'm nearby listening for the alert, ready to grab him if need be (and vice versa). If we drive somewhere, we tune our radio to channel 104, the army channel - ready to jump out and run for cover.

We drive with seat belts off, and windows open, just in case.

The CityKids Foundation

Where do we run? Bomb shelters of every shape and size are everywhere you look in Sderot - almost every 30 feet in some areas.

Yet some residential streets have none, so you have to run into the nearest house. And not all homes have shelters. Several of my friends usually crouch under a stairwell, hoping everything will be OK.

Ironically, Sderot is probably the safest place in southern Israel just now, because now the entire South is being hit: Ashkelon, Ashdod, Be'er Sheva, Netivot . . .

The fact that much of the country is living as we have for so long - running for shelter and fearing for

their lives - creates a whole new sad reality.

When I first came to Sderot, I *didn't* run to the shelter. The fear takes a while to grow on you - till the stories add up. One friend went to a shelter, then a Qassam landed right in the bed he'd just been sleeping in; another miraculously survived a Qassam hit on her house - she's OK after massive rehab, despite the shrapnel still in her brain. Other friends have seen people killed by Qassams right before their eyes.

I understand why the world press makes light of the rockets. When you come to Sderot for just a day, the attacks seem random and you feel immune from harm. The words "amateur, homemade rockets," used in most major publications, make the threat seem less serious.

But these rockets are nothing other than bombs falling from the sky, designed to kill civilians. And they do.

If Qassams are really dangerous, you ask, why haven't more people died? The warning system and shelters have saved thousands of lives - more than 10,000 rockets and mortar shells have landed in this area in the last eight years.

Still, this is no way to live. Can you imagine this happening in any city in America or Europe?

A Qassam is about 15 pounds of explosives attached to a metal tube with fins. Last night, we heard that Hamas will start shooting Grads into Sderot - rockets twice the size that Hamas uses to bomb the further cities. Some people have headed out of town.

But the international media have descended in droves.

Being a mile away from Gaza, we can hear everything: the sound of bombs being dropped from airplanes, F-16s, helicopters, guns, mortars, tank shells . . . our lives have a new soundtrack.

All around, you just feel *war*. People stay in their houses, schools are closed. The war is all people talk about. It's hard to keep from watching the news all day.

The weirdest thing is when you realize that *you're* the news.

Two nights ago, we sat in Coffee To Go for dinner. Suddenly, Tzeva Adom. We ran inside, away from the glass storefront. The Qassam exploded just across the street - the café rocked with the blast. Journalists who had been on a coffee break raced out to try and get their shots. Five minutes later, a large-screen TV above our heads was broadcasting what we had just felt and heard.

It's depressing for us to hear the loud explosions in Gaza and to know that there is no way for innocent civilians not to be killed in this war. But most of us also feel that finally the government is doing what it needs to do to defend us.

People who call Israel's actions "disproportionate" upset me - they just don't have a clue. What *would* be a proportionate response? For us to shoot unmanned missiles targeted at civilians every day?

Instead, we're doing something more effective and humane - we're taking away their weapons and bombing their stockpiles, tunnels and terror infrastructure. Plus, we're sending SMSs and leaflets warning civilians to leave areas that will be bombed.

We're doing what we need to do to stay alive. I invite anyone who has any doubts about that to come live with me here in Sderot. I guarantee they'll change their mind after a few days in my living room.

Laura Bialis, a documentary filmmaker who moved to Israel from Los Angeles in 2007, blogs at sderotmovie.com/blog.

Home

NEW YORK POST is a registered trademark of NYP Holdings, Inc. NYPOST.COM, NYPOSTONLINE.COM, and NEWYORKPOST.COM are trademarks of NYP Holdings, Inc.
Copyright 2009 NYP Holdings, Inc. All rights reserved.