

“THE HOPE,” A NATIONAL ANTHEM

By Cheryl Kane

What do you do with individuals who have been wounded, both physically and traumatized emotionally by vicious acts of terrorism? If you're Rabbi Shimon Kashani and his wife Vared, of the Southern California Jewish Center, you arrange to bring a large group of them--- thirty, mostly young people---from Israel to the United States for two weeks of healing and meeting supportive new friends.

The group visited the White House, the Pentagon, Ground Zero, Disneyland, Universal Studios and visited the Equine Sanctuary of Ojai, where their connection with the horses that had been rescued and rehabilitated, after suffering horrific injuries, made the Ventura County edition of the Los Angeles Times.

“We just wanted to give them a good time,” said Vared Kashani, who helped organize the whole trip, a sequel to last year's effort which brought in twenty survivors of terrorist attacks in Israel.

“The picture they have over there is that no one care,” she told L.A. Times staff writer Steve Chawkins, “It's like the Holocaust, when the whole world looked the other way. That's how they feel now.”

Their stories were heart wrenching. Akhi Kam, now 14 years old, was hit in the head by a rock thrown by a Palestinian terrorist when he was riding in his parents' car as a seven-month-old infant. It fractured his skull, and caused permanent brain damage despite multiple surgeries. The boy still suffers from daily seizures.

Dana Mizrahi, a beautiful 16 year old girl, lost an eye and part of her face in a homicide bomb blast.

Then there is the Shabo family, the mother and three sons murdered during a terrorist attack on their home, leaving three surviving children very traumatized, including 10 year old Ase-el, who had to have his leg amputated because of the injuries he suffered.

The group was feted with a celebrity-studded dinner in their honor at the Century Plaza hotel in Los Angeles last week. They joined the special honorees, including John Miller, Chief of the L. A. Police Department Counter-Terrorism Bureau and Lou Lenart, U.S. Marine Corp fighter pilot hero and leader of the first mission of the Israel Air Force.

In an effort to take the children and their families to a different experience in the realm of healing the group was brought to the Equine Sanctuary of Ojai, where director and founder Alexis Ells talked about how she rescued the top level polo and show horses, who otherwise would have been slaughtered because of the horrible injuries they suffered. Ells' extraordinary care and compassion restored the animals to good health and

productive lives. The horses, including the one who had suffered two broken knees, enjoy a permanent home at the sanctuary.

Ells quotes the trainer from the film *Seabiscuit*, in the sanctuary's brochure, "You don't throw away a whole life just because he's a little banged up."

Akhi Kam was the first of the youngsters who elected to ride on one of the horses. "It was worth coming up here just to see the smile on his face," said Janet Weiser of Woodland Hills, who volunteered to help with the horses for the day.

Vared Kashani commented on the two-week visit after the thirty returned to Israel last Sunday. "It was very educational to the group and to the public in general. The public got to see the face of terror, not just the numbers and statistics, but the aftermath, the families who are emotionally scarred for life."

She talked about how Ase-el Shabo suddenly started crying at Universal Studios, "I'm only a kid, I'm only 10 years old, it's not fair that I have to suffer so much!"

As Ginette Thaler, who lost her only daughter, Rachel, in a terrorist bombing recently, said, 'This war, and it is just that, a war against us as a people, us as Jews, and us as a nation, may go on forever, but we must never give up and must never run away. Rachel believed so strongly in all this, and for her [and for all the young lives lost], we must keep on.'

This is the lesson left by the visitors from Israel who have survived the cruelest and most vicious acts of terrorism imaginable. Despite everything the hope for peace remains as strong as ever, and can only be accomplished when the dictators of the Middle East, who cling to their own lives, even when trapped like rats in hole, stop pushing the cult of death in the name of radical Islam and dreams of world domination.