

HEADING HOME

Jewish students brave political turmoil for Israel pilgrimage

Jessica Sommerville | Staff Writer

There's no place like your homeland—even if safety isn't three ruby-heeled clicks away.

For Jewish students on pilgrimage in Israel, their home in Mason is 6,198 miles away, and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts are prevalent, according to junior Adrian Niedermann.

"(The Gazan War) started while we were there (last summer)," Niedermann said. "What sparked it was three Israeli boys were kidnapped, and they were found dead in a field; they were shot. That led to a revenge killing in Jerusalem of a Palestinian boy, and that all escalated, and (there were) already existing tensions. And then Hamas (a Palestinian militant group) was firing rockets...the number increased by the thousands."

Niedermann and his travel group were staying in a kibbutz, a commune with hotel units, when his group counselors warned him of potential rocket fire in the area.

"A car alarm went off, and everyone panicked because we thought it was the rocket sirens," Niedermann said. "But then a couple minutes later, the actual siren went off, and our counselor told us all to get on the floor. We got in tornado positions on the floor, and the rocket landed in a field a couple miles from us, so we felt the windows shake."

Threats may not abate under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reelected as of Tuesday, March 17. Formerly agreeing with President Obama on a two-state solution to the



Students from the North American Federation of Temple Youth ride camels in the Negev Desert in Israel.

Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, Netanyahu reneged, promising no separate state while he remains in office; later claims of misinterpretation muddied U.S.-Israel relations further.

The continued political turmoil won't inhibit sophomore Brooke Suddleson's plan to travel to Israel for the first time this July to August with her summer camp, Camp Livingston.

"It's important to my culture and to my religion that I get to go, and conditions there aren't the best right now," Suddleson said. "You just have to trust the people that you're going with, so you know that they're not going to put you in a dangerous situation. And if there is a dangerous situation, they're obviously going to get you out of it, so no one gets hurt."

Suddleson said her camp is preparing for the trip with the help of an Israeli correspondent who educates it on political issues.

"They have this program that he's involved with where they keep track of all the different groups that are in Isra-

el...they keep track of them on a map as a safety precaution," Suddleson said. "So they have the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) update these people, and people who are in the Northern part can send a message to this room and say, 'Hey, there have been some conflicts going on here and don't let people go to this area.' So we know...that we can avoid it by doing that."

The extra precautions keep Suddleson from worrying too much; she said she is excited to experience Israel and world religious practices with her friends. Proximity to other Jews creates a spiritual experience, according to Niedermann.

"I feel closest to my religion when I'm with other people who practice it and when I'm in a Jewish environment," Niedermann said. "And then we went to Israel, and...not only are you surrounded by Jewish people, (but) everyone there is Jewish. It's a Jewish state; there's Judaism in every aspect of life around you; you have all these monuments. Instead of hearing a story about a certain monument, you're actually there looking at it."

This religious clarity is worth the trip, Niedermann said, regardless of any military or political dissension.

"Regardless of what happened while we were there, it's still the best thing that's ever happened to me," Niedermann said. "I love it so much; it's the best summer that I've ever had."

BIG REVEAL

Committee prepares all year for After Prom

Erin McElhenny | Staff Writer

The day following After Prom, it starts all over again.

Every year on the night of Prom and into the following morning, from 1 to 4 a.m., Mason is home to After Prom. While Prom is a stage for dancing, After Prom is a reservoir of activities. While most items are rented, they do store some in a closet at the school from past years. According to co-chair Terri Hardy, if you don't plan early, you may not get the things you want to rent.

"We have the emails of the people we used for that year and the day after After Prom we begin contacting people again, saying, 'We want the same stuff as last year,'" Hardy said. "We have to order things like the hypnotist, the caricatures and the inflatables early so we can make sure we reserve them."

The night doesn't plan itself. The After Prom committee meets once a month for 12 months—starting the day after After Prom and ending the morning it's over. Hardy and her co-chair, Beth Wilson, are overseers of the committees and boosters that have rooms in the school. According to Wilson, the committees and boosters serve to fill the school with the activities for the students.

"The committees are kind of doing their own thing and we are just making sure everything runs smoothly," Wilson said. "We meet monthly with all the committees and booster groups. We have different parts of the school split up for the different committees, like: junk food alley, and a café, and a tattoo parlor and the different booster groups have rooms with special activities they plan."

According to Hardy, as the night draws nearer, they began to focus on planning the logistics of the event.

"Right now we're figuring out all the stuff in the building that needs to be moved, all the decorating that needs to be done, and the biggest thing is getting all the volunteers," Hardy said. "We send an email out to all the high school parents because there are almost 300 volunteers we need from Friday at 2:30 p.m. until Sunday morning at 6:30 a.m."

After Prom isn't solely seen by those attending Prom; After Prom opens to the community for viewing before the Prom goers arrive. Meant to be an event for all, Wilson said she hopes it's something people keep wanting to come back to.

"When I volunteered last year the kids were all really nice and they seemed very appreciative of having this to go to and I liked that the kids, even if they don't go to Prom, can still go to After Prom and have fun with their friends," Wilson said.



Photos contributed by Adrian Niedermann

NFTY students hike down from Masada, a mountainside fortress in Israel.