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Gazan baby's life saved by Wolfson heart surgery

By JUDY SIEGEL-ITZKOVICH

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The war in Gaza has not slowed down the work of Save a Child's Heart (SACH), the voluntary organization based at Holon's Wolfson Medical Center that has provided free cardiac surgery to over 600 Palestinians and nearly 2,000 others from around the world.

A three-week-old baby named Jafar from Gaza underwent surgery on Sunday nine days ago, the day after Israel's air strikes on Gaza were launched.

Dr. Lior Sasson, SACH's chief surgeon, has done so many operations in recent weeks that he can hardly keep track. Jafar, he said, would almost surely have died quickly after birth because he was born with a severe congenital heart defect, the transposition of the great arteries.

"Tomorrow we hope to take out the drainage tube. He is a very sweet baby. We don't care if he comes from a Hamas family or what. He is a baby," he said.

In December alone, the SACH staff of 70 - including five physicians - have performed lifesaving surgery on 10 children from Gaza. "It is not difficult to get them here. We have a well-oiled operation, and the security forces know us well. There are no problems, even during a war," Sasson said.

Jafar was accompanied by his grandmother; Sasson conversed with her with the small amount of Arabic he knows.

SACH (www.savechildshsheart.org) was founded by the late Dr. Amram (Ami) Cohen, a pediatric heart surgeon who came on aliya from the US in 1992 and quickly established the organization, which he turned into an important contributor to children's health worldwide. He joined Wolfson's staff and served as the deputy chief of cardiovascular surgery and head of pediatric cardiac surgery.

In 1988, while serving in the US armed forces in Korea, the head of the international organization Save the Hearts approached him. The organization was sending orphaned and indigent Korean children to Western countries for medical care not available locally. Cohen was so impressed with the idea that he requested and received permission from his superiors to participate in the program, and during the rest of his time in Korea,



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As war raged, Israeli doctors operated on a tiny baby boy from Gaza.

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performed 35 pediatric cardiac surgeries Cohen died in a tragic accident while climbing the Kilimanjaro Mountain in 2001.

"Ami would be very proud of us that we are continuing what he started by operating on young children from Gaza," Sasson concluded. Despite the world financial crisis, SACH is still able to solicit donations with which the organization is able to continue.

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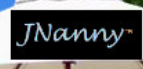
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