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## NEWS

August 17, 2009

### Saving my heart

I look across the room during rounds in the pediatric intensive care unit.

A little girl is just waking up, tugging at the oxygen mask, looking searchingly at her mother. The woman reaches for the girl's hand, strokes it, and then looks kindly at the doctors who have fixed her daughter's heart defect, free of charge.

Her eyes meet mine. I smile. She smiles back.

Not normally a remarkable exchange.

Except she is Palestinian and I am a Jew.

It is safe here in Tel Aviv, working at the Wolfson Medical Center with Save a Child's Heart. But the news seeps through, words of rockets and war. It is a time of unrest, of fear, of sadness.

Yet, as the glass doors of Wolfson slide open, the unrest disappears.

There are no conflicts in the pediatric intensive care unit. No argument, no stones and no guns. Everyone works together for a higher cause - little children with big hearts.

Save a Child's Heart is an Israeli-based humanitarian organization that provides cardiac surgery to children from around the world. It has operated on more than 2000 children — almost half of whom are from the Palestinian authority, Jordan, and Iraq.

The war rages on.

It is a difficult time. Being in Israel during the Gaza conflict, I found it hard not to get discouraged and sad, hard not to see the world as black and white, the conflict as irreparable. And then I glanced across a room in the unit and exchanged a smile, and the world seemed hopeful once again.

The mission statement of Save a Child's Heart states that it is based on an age-old Jewish tradition of "tikkun olam" - to repair the world.

The humanitarian organization says that by fixing the hearts of children, regardless of their nationality, religion, or color, they are contributing to a more peaceful future.

And therein lies its beauty. By working to save the hearts of children, I ended up saving my own.



Dr. Elissa Abrams, currently a pediatric endocrinology fellow in Montreal, stands with Dr. Sion Houry in front of the Wolfson Medical Centre in Tel Aviv, Israel, the site of Save a Child's Heart.  
 PHOTO CREDIT: Alexander Singer

— Elissa Abrams MD, Winnipeg, Man.

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