

# Volunteer puts life on hold for Haiti earthquake victims

By Dan Horowitz

While billions of people around the world watched the horrific images of the January 12, 2010 earthquake that struck Haiti, for some, watching was simply not good enough.

Eilat resident Roy Rosenfeld, a 31-year-old businessman and former paramedic with Magen David Adom - Israel's national disaster, ambulance and blood bank service - volunteered his services to the people of Haiti as part of IsraAID: The Israel Forum for International Humanitarian Aid.

IsraAID is a coordinating body of Israeli and Jewish NGOs in Israel that provides humanitarian aid worldwide. United Jewish Appeal has previously supported its work following earthquakes in Peru and Pakistan, on the border of Darfur, and after Hurricane Katrina and the recent typhoon in the Philippines.

Just six days after the quake devastated Haiti and ultimately killed more than 230,000, while leaving over a

"Unfortunately, the helicopter landed in the wrong zone," recalled Rosenfeld. "The following morning, Moran and I, accompanied by two more friends from the JP/HRO team, found a local volunteer with a pickup truck and drove to the Doctors without Borders camp in Leogand. We rigged the pickup with a mattress and stretcher, a shade canopy and an IV hanging clip. I established IV access for Alexandra so I could give her a shot of morphine if the trip was too painful." Rosenfeld sat with Alexandra in the back of the truck all the way to the airport, holding her hand for the entire three-hour drive on less than ideal roads.

At the airport, Alexandra was admitted to the MediShare Field Hospital where Rosenfeld was assured she would be evacuated the next day. As it turned out, the MediShare Hospital misplaced her records and they were never found.

"Still, I didn't stop looking for her even after I came home,"

basis, many of whom were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. She treated more than 500 children and set up a psycho-social study among the refugee camp's 100,000 displaced people to ascertain their needs to better coordinate the relief efforts.

"Along with our team, she also helped create two new schools in Haiti for young kids," Rosenfeld said proudly. "Knowing that we did more than watch these people suffering on television, that we actually joined all these other incredible volunteers, all of whom left the comfort and stability of their own lives for a while to do something of this magnitude is really a wonderful feeling. Although I returned to Israel on February 11, my mind and soul are still very much with the people of Haiti."



Roy Rosenfeld, along with Israeli actress turned volunteer Moran Atias, comforts Alexandra, a victim of the Haiti earthquake, in a pickup truck he rigged with a mattress, stretcher and an IV hanging clip, as they drive her to safety.



Eilat resident Roy Rosenfeld poses with some Haitian locals.

million homeless, Rosenfeld landed in Port-au-Prince as part of IsraAID's second rescue team deployed to the region.

"No matter how much we were prepared for this mission, you really couldn't be ready to witness the amount of devastation, death, pain and suffering that awaited us," explained Rosenfeld in a phone interview. "We were looking down at the devastation on the ground as our small plane landed. It was an amazing scene with airplanes, helicopters, aircraft carriers and other military crafts filling every square inch of the field below us. What I remember the most was that on these aircraft were flags from all over the world. The whole world came to help these poor people. From up in the air, seeing these victims everywhere, it looked like a whole country was homeless."

Of all the tragic victims of Haiti, one young woman, in particular, touched Rosenfeld's heart, becoming a personal project for the Israeli.

"On our second day on the ground, I came across a young girl, around 18, named Alexandra Paul," recounted an emotional Rosenfeld. "She had been trapped under the ruins of her house for two days after the earthquake. Initially, she had been treated in a Japanese field hospital that diagnosed her with a crushed pelvis. The doctors told her that there was nothing they could do for her at that time."

But, for Rosenfeld, a self-confessed "stubborn Israeli," giving up was simply not an option.

Two days after first meeting Alexandra, Rosenfeld, along with Israeli actress turned volunteer Moran Atias, received an urgent message that a helicopter was about to land near Leogand, a small town approximately three hours from Port-au-Prince. It also sustained the majority of damage from the quake. The two of them raced to Alexandra's camp and rushed her onto a stretcher and to the landing zone.

said Rosenfeld. "Finally, on April 5, I tracked her down; she is back in Leogand in a camp. She had been evacuated to the USNS Comfort, the U.S. Navy medical ship where she underwent three unsuccessful surgeries and remains paralyzed from the waist down. I'm glad our efforts got her evacuated, but I wish we could have done more to get her walking again. I am currently reviewing options for getting her flown out to a medical center specializing in orthopedic surgery, specifically pelvic reconstructive surgery. We remain in touch and I hope to see her again soon."

Rosenfeld, as part of the IsraAID/Fast Israeli Rescue & Search Team (F.I.R.S.T), implemented new systems in Haiti that simply did not exist prior to their arrival. In the Petronville Refugee Camp, home to more than 100,000 victims, joining forces with the Jennings Penn Haiti Relief Organization, led on the ground by actor Sean Penn, Rosenfeld and others were split into five teams of three medical experts who performed exhausting tent-by-tent "house calls," seeing who needed attention and prioritizing their needs.

"We also set up an OBGYN tent and we built portable X-Ray and ultrasound machines from scratch for pregnant women," said Rosenfeld. "One of the late nights there, a guard came running to us screaming that a woman was about to give birth. And, just five minutes later, an 82nd Airborne medic and I - armed with only a flashlight - delivered her baby on a hill. It was amazing, but bittersweet, knowing that this baby's first night in the world would be in an improvised tent in the middle of so much destruction. But it was also something to know that, in the midst of all this death, we helped bring new life to the region." In all, Rosenfeld's team delivered six babies during his time in Haiti.

Rosenfeld's team also included a post-traumatic stress specialist who worked with Haiti's children on a daily

## Teens practice tikkun olam



Hundreds of GTA-area teens joined Jewish teens from across North America, Europe and Israel for J Serve, the Global Day of Jewish Youth Service.

Thanks to funding from UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, this was the first year the teens had the opportunity to participate in the international initiative that sees them volunteer at a variety of community service and improvement projects. Pictured above, GTA teens create blankets for displaced Haitian refugees who have been devastated by the recent earthquake that rocked their country.