

## Yemin Orde's French Teens Call Israel Their Home

June 2, 2017

**January 2015. This is the date in which Eden Madar's life changed.**

Eden Madar, then 15 years old, came home from school in the quiet 12th district in Paris. She was already close to her home. Just then, Amedi Colhballi, an ISIS terrorist, entered the nearby kosher grocery store and started shooting at customers.

"Suddenly the police showed up and didn't let me pass, but also didn't explain to me what happened," Eden said. "Later I realized that there were hostages inside the store. Because the police were worried about an additional terrorist, they took me along with two relatively old people and told us to lie down on the road underneath a police car and to be quiet."

For two hours Eden hid under the car. She heard explosions all around her.

Today, Eden is a student at Yemin Orde Youth Village. Since that day in January, her life has gone from one extreme to the other.

**Eden talks to a reporter and recalls how she felt hiding under the police car and the events of the day.**

"I mainly didn't understand what was happening. We lay under the police car on the road. Everything was confused. I didn't know what was happening and why I was lying there.

"When I saw on my cell phone that there was a terrorist attack, I called my mom to tell her that I am okay. I told her that I was unable to come home, but that I was stopped by the police on the street. I didn't tell her that I was underneath a police car and laying on the ground.

"I waited in order not to worry her. I remember that next to me there was an elderly lady. She called her family and told them: 'you can come home on Shabbat, but I am not sure that I will live'. She called to say goodbye to them. When I heard her, I went into shock because I didn't think this was serious



**Safe and thriving at Yemin Orde Youth Village. Left to right: Liora Zano, 18, Eden Madar, 18 and Eitan Zano. They all left France to live in Israel freely and without fear as Jews. "Socially, it was difficult to be the only Jew in the school," said Liora.**

situation. I didn't know that we are in mortal danger."

Four Jews were murdered in the terrorist attack that shook the Jewish community in Paris. According to reports, as he was entering the supermarket, the terrorist shot at least two hostages; another 15 people inside the supermarket hid in the basement.

"Occasionally the police would come to say that everything is alright. They brought us earplugs, told us to shut our eyes and asked us to remain quiet," Eden said.

**Did you cry?**

"I didn't cry. Especially when I am under pressure, I try to laugh," Eden said. "Even though it took two hours, it felt like a week for me under the car."

"Suddenly we heard gunshots and the sound of glass shattering from the direction of the supermarket," she said. "A few minutes later it all ended, they took us out from underneath the police car and I ran home."

### **After the terrorist attack, Eden did want to come out of her house.**

"I didn't go to school for a month. I didn't go back to my studies. Eventually, I decided that I must get away and come to Israel to breathe. I was in Israel for a month, and then I went back to France. I told my mom that I don't want to go back to school or live in France. I told her that I want to live in Israel," said Eden.

"In the beginning she didn't agree because we are very close and she didn't want me to leave her. When she saw it wasn't good for me in Paris and I was attached to the television all of the time trying to see whether there were any terrorist attacks or not, she understood and let me go."

### **Dreaming to Be a Fighter**

The family looked for an appropriate educational framework in Israel for Eden and decided on the *Naale* program. The *Naale* program is an Israeli government-supported program that provides opportunity for teens from all over the world to live and learn in Israel.

Eden and her family decided the best educational environment for her would be Yemin Orde Youth Village, south of Haifa, near the artist village of Ein Hod.

Eden has lived at Yemin Orde for

the past two years, along with hundreds of other immigrant teens from France, Brazil, and the former Soviet Union. At Yemin Orde, 430 teens live and study together.

Yemin Orde is surrounded by the serene and beautiful Carmel Forest. Youth live at the Village, as well as attend its high school, which is walking distance from their homes. There is a synagogue in the center of the community, a swimming pool, gymnasium and basketball court, as well as access to many extracurricular activities.

When Eden remembers her first days at Yemin Orde, she remembers mostly tears.

"For a week I just cried. I didn't want to do anything, I didn't want to come out of my room, I didn't even go to study Hebrew," she said. Slowly, Eden realized that she could not go back to France.

"It was just a difficulty that I had to go through. In the beginning I didn't want to meet anybody, but after a week I saw that all of the other girls from France were just like me. Their families were also in France and we could support and help each other. Then I came out of my room," Eden said.

"I started going to classes and met girls that today are like my sisters," she said. "I was used to living in a city but here, at Yemin Orde, it's more relaxed, like a *kibbutz*. There is a lot of nature here, a dining room and friends. We are three girls in the room, friends like sisters, sleep, get up, eat, study and celebrate the holidays together."

### **What did you think the Village would look like?**

"Until I got here, I didn't know Israel. Since then I visited different places around the country, such as the Golan and the Negev. The Israelis are warm people; they are very helpful to each other; they always have a smile. In France, I felt it less. People are more suspicious."

### **What are your plans for the future?**

"I want to be a soldier in the border police and to do something meaningful," Eden said. "I have a friend and a cousin in the border police and another cousin who serves in the *Golani* combat brigade. I want a combat role. The State of Israel gives us so much, and I want to help the country and contribute to the society and the military."

When Eden is asked about her biggest dream, she answers without hesitation: "I want my family to make *Aliya* to Israel and to be a child psychiatrist – I love to give advice, listen to people and help them."

### **"Safer Here" Among Friends**

Two of her friends in the youth village, siblings Liora (18) and Eitan (17) Zano, also left their parents and a younger sister in France.

Liora and Eitan are from Toulouse, France. Liora arrived at Yemin Orde before her brother after attending non-Jewish schools in her community. She said she always felt unhappy and out of place.

She said that she was uncomfortable to be the only Jew in her school in Toulouse. "People can't understand what it is to be a Jew. As much as I tried to explain, it was always unpleasant," she said.

### **How did you arrive at Yemin Orde?**

"I heard about Yemin Orde from my cousin, who is also at the Village. It calmed me down a little bit," Liora said. "When I arrived, I discovered that I was to share a room with girls I didn't know. It was a bit scary and strange, but also a happy situation because most the girls came from France alone, too. I understood that I was not alone."

Liora's brother, Eitan arrived at Yemin Orde one year later. He was not certain he wanted to live in Israel and was worried that he would miss his life in France.

"I visited Yemin Orde during the summer holiday and I liked it very much. I realized that my place is here in Israel," Eitan said.

Liora followed the news about other terrorist attacks in France. "Every time there is a message about a terrorist attack, we call straight home to make sure everything is alright," she said.

Eitan said he also worries about the ongoing violence in France and other places in the world. "But we feel strong together here. Israel is a strong nation. There are soldiers everywhere in the streets, in the holy places, on the train. We see it and feel safer here," he said. "When I lived in France it felt like I was just at a 'friend's house'. I am not saying that I suffered there – I

had a home and friends. But in Israel, I feel more complete."

Liora will soon graduate Yemin Orde High School. She is planning to be student- soldier and study in the Technion university.

"Because I still don't know where I will live, I know that I can always come back to Yemin Orde. This is my home – here we don't close the door. The Village has homes for its graduates and I know, for sure, I would come back here to celebrate Shabbat and holidays," Liora said.

### **Do you feel independent enough?**

"Yes, also when I came here I felt independent; I had to decide on any given moment what I need to do for my future. I think that also now I am old enough to leave the Village and move on," said Liora.

She said her brother, Eitan, has also matured while living at Yemin Orde the past two years.

"Missing home wasn't difficult, and also the distance was not difficult. The hardest thing was changing myself. Before I came to the Village I was less independent, less serious," Eitan said. "Thanks to the instructors and informal educators and the extra curricular activities I have become a better person. I developed a love for fitness – I participated on all recreational activities and sports teams: the running team, training for the army in the "Follow Me" project, a course to become a personal trainer, and every night I play football and basketball with friends. I am also preparing myself for the army when I enlist to an elite unit or attend an officer's course."

In April 2017, Liora's and Eitan's family arrived in Israel to celebrate Passover with them.

During the year, the siblings keep in close contact with their parents through social media applications.

"I include them in almost everything and also send a lot of pictures, show them everything I do here. If I bake a cake and I am happy and proud of myself, then I take a picture and post it. They know where I am going and what I am doing, and when there are big things or decisions I have to make about the future, I talk with my dad, who gives me advice, and calms me down," Liora said.

Liora and Eitan said they are glad they are sharing the Yemin Orde experience together. They are anxious for the rest of their family to make *Aliyah* and make the move to Israel, too.

"I am worried for my parents and also for my younger sister. Liora and I are trying to convince her to do what we have done and come to Israel through the *Naale* program, too. Maybe my parents will come with her. I know they are thinking about it all the time," said Eitan.

### **Speaking in in Hebrew**

It is possible to understand why they fell in love with Yemin Orde Youth Village, which is the furthest place from the sad image of a boarding school. Yemin Orde is a unique educational model, which includes a community where there is a high school, children's homes, and an agricultural farm, called the Eco-Farm.

Shmuli Bing is the director of the youth village. At Yemin Orde, 430 students from around the world learn and live together. There are approximately 100 youth who arrived in Israel on their own.

The Village also has a modern and comprehensive library, a fitness room, swimming pool, gymnasium, arts center, learning center, computer center and more. Students also receive a monthly allowance.

“There are students here from all kinds of places and cultures,” Liora said. “I was fortunate to meet here students of Ethiopian origin, Brazilians, or those who came from countries of the former Soviet Union. Everyone expresses themselves and their culture with special programs. For example, at least once a week, there are food choices from the different countries represented at the Village. There might be Ethiopian

food, Russian food and even French food, such as croissants.”

Liora said she feels a deep connection between herself and the other youth at the Village.

“In the beginning it was a bit difficult to talk with students from other countries because of the language barrier – not everyone who arrives knows Hebrew,” said Liora. “When I first came here, it scared me to speak in Hebrew and I was embarrassed. But not any more!”