**Kibbutz Carmiya residents experience miraculous escape from direct missile attack**

**Rachel Greenblatt, Ayelet Hashachar Organization**

Gili Ochayon and her family are former members of Gush Katif. Evacuated by the Israeli Government in 2005 they moved to Carmiya, a Kibbutz on the Southern Israeli border of Gaza, situated between Ashkelon and 4 kilometers from the Gaza strip.

Carmiya, established by the Shomer Hatzair in 1950 has always had its troubles. In the early days it was thievery by the local Arab community and later, the constant barrage of missiles. A beautiful spot, it is surrounding by grape vines after which the Kibbutz is named but they have suffered a number of failed enterprises.

Due to the incessant missile attacks, Gili decided to look into helping about 40 families leave the area for a while to catch their breath and allow the children to be able to leave the shelters. Rabbi Raanan encouraged her to go to Manara, a Kibbutz in the North promising her his assistance. He told her he had established a synagogue up there and told her to make sure to go and see it.

While talking about the arrangements on the phone Gili was forced to cut Rabbi Raanan short as there was an air-raid siren. She called back some time later, thoroughly shaken and told him about the miracle that had just occurred. Her neighbor Orna Elimelech, who lived next door had come in to her house together with her daughter, to help her make calls to all the families to tell them about the plan to move up to North. Just then, the neighbor’s house took a direct hit and destroyed part of the house. With no one home, they were miraculously saved from injury or worse. “We live in Caravillas we have only 10-15 seconds to go into the shelters. We live with miracles that you just can’t take in”.

“I said come to me and we’ll make the calls from here” Gili explains. “Then we heard the siren…”

**“It’s up to us mothers to be strong for our children, for our grandchildren**. I’m living like this for 13 years since Nitzanit. Over there one of our friends went out on Shavuot and was murdered.

We take food out to the soldiers – my daughter runs out to give it to them between the sirens. We try and keep Shabbat and give our children a traditional education – the people here are from the Shomer HaTzair – they don’t all understand why we want a synagogue”.

Gili puts these miracles down to the fact that Carmiya now has a synagogue in its midst – a synagogue built by Ayelet Hashachar.

Gili continues to tell her story :

“In Manara each one of us read a perek of shir hashirim – we all shared together in the Kabbalat Shabbat –the fellow who opened the synagogue for us was so happy we came.

The people who left here took the Sefer Torah with them when they left. I didn’t want the Kibbutz to be without one, a place where people could pray together. One day I checked on the internet and I found Rabbi Raanan and we’ve been in touch since. The shul is doing so well and we have regular minyans.

“Last Monday when the kassam hit, it was just after they tried to get through the beach to Kibbutz Zikim, right next to us”

Rabbi Raanan told me Ayelet Hashachar also had a Beit Knesset in Kibbutz Manara. I went into see the synagogue and we set up a Shabbat there – it was a wonderful Shabbat. There was a young fellow from Ashkelon who also ran away and said he needed to say Kaddish for his mother that Shabbat.

As we speak, she tells me there’s another siren. She runs around looking for her husband Yehuda and says “where is he, I’m frightened’ . A large bang. She says ‘oy vey’ it fell here in our kibbutz, I have to check’. She is running around trying to find out what happened outside, but is sure to tell me ‘Rachel, we’re OK’ don’t worry.

They are all safe. The rocket fell in an open area at the entrance of the kibbutz. “But we came back here. Life must go on, we have to work. We live with miracles”