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Israel's Young Conscientious Objector

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by Igal Sarna

Omer Goldman, daughter of a former Mossad chief, tells why she prefers jail to the military draft.

Omer Goldman is a pretty girl, slender as a model. Never still, very restless, she is filled with anxiety by the expected loss of her freedom. For months before she refused to be drafted into the Israel Defence Forces, she went to a psychologist every week to prepare for what was to come: incarceration in a cell in a military prison.

I met her several times last month in an apartment with other girls who are conscientious objectors. Together they would hand out flyers against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza at the gates of a high school like the one she left a year ago.

On her last day of freedom as a civilian, I saw her at the gates of the intake base to which she had received orders to report for induction into a two-year stint with the defence forces, like every Israeli girl. She had come to refuse the draft, to be tried and to be imprisoned immediately.

Several dozen supporters showed up – members of Anarchists Against the Wall, her mother and a few girlfriends – and she stayed close to them as though she were trying to delay the end, the moment when she would clash all alone with the army.

For Omer, this transition is sharper and more surprising than for most conscientious objectors: she is the daughter of the former deputy head of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, the man who nearly became its head.

Omer grew up all her life in the warm bosom of a huge security establishment that has now become an enemy rather than a friend. Her father appears in the newspapers as N. He was a senior intelligence officer who transferred to Mossad and climbed to the top until in 2007 he became the deputy to Mossad's chief, Meir Dagan, now considered the most powerful mystery man in the Israeli security system.

N, whose speciality is Iran, was spoken of as Dagan's designated successor, but Dagan had no intention of retiring. Differences of opinion developed between the two strong bosses, and N resigned in June 2007.

This was the time when his 18-year-old daughter Omer, a pampered child of the wealthy suburb of Ramat Hasharon, was beginning to move away from the usual high-school-to-army trajectory.

In parallel to her father's struggle and his resignation from Mossad, Omer rebelled against the path he had paved for her and went to have a look at Palestinian life on the other side of the wall. Call this an adolescent's rebellion against her father or a battle for the heart of a father who had left home.

She is one of about 40 pupils who signed a school-leavers' protest letter this year. Thirty-eight years ago the first such letter – a counterblast against the occupation and the war of attrition, sent by pupils in the final year of my secondary school to Golda Meir, the prime minister – caused an uproar.

There have been other letters since then, and although the furore is not what it was, in Israel conscientious objection still arouses cold, self-righteous wrath.

Omer told me that the crucial moment of her metamorphosis occurred this year when she went to a Palestinian village where the Israeli army had set up a roadblock. Someone she had considered her enemy all her life stood beside her and someone who was supposed to be defending her opened fire at her.

“We were sitting by the roadside talking and soldiers came along and after a few seconds they received an order and fired gas grenades and rubber bullets at us. Then it struck me, to my astonishment, that the soldiers were following an order without thinking. For the first time in my life, an Israeli soldier raised his weapon and fired at me.”

And when you told your father? “Dad was astonished and angry that I had been there and endangered my life. After that we had conversations. He supported me as his daughter and we have a good relationship, but he is decidedly opposed to what I do and even more to my refusal to serve in the army.

“At first he thought this was a passing phase of adolescence and later he understood that this is coming from a place deep inside me. He and I have very similar characters. I, too, fight to the end for what I believe in. But we are opposites ideologically.”

When I ask more about her father, Omer smiles and does not answer. A rare moment of silence.

On September 23 she refused to serve in the army, was tried and was sent to prison for 21 days. This week she will be tried again – and again, until the army tires or she tires.

In two weeks' time my own son Noam is due to join the army, and I will be accompanying him to the base where I last saw Omer Goldman. Unlike her, Noam intends to do his military service. I understand them both.

Source: [The Timesonline](#)

For more information on Israeli conscientious objecters. <http://www.shministim.com/about/>