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Until not long ago, I was a journalist. I worked during the days, studied in the evenings, played music at night and organized demonstrations in my spare time, not hoping for much more than a good feeling of being alive - of having dreams.

Like many Israelis, when I was 18, I decided to take a year off and volunteer in a school in Tiberias as a teacher, feeling that if we educate the younger generations, we will become a healthier society. But, the kids I was attempting to teach were never given a chance to live a healthier life.

Born to lower-class families, they were doomed to move, at sixth grade, to a technical school, where they learned hair-design - not languages, art or physics. Only because of their parents' financial situation, a situation that has become more and more widespread.

Like most Israelis, I was recruited a year later to the military. Still carrying my dreams, I was among the first generation of women who was accepted into the pilot course, something that until then women were prevented from even applying to.

Like most Israelis, when I left the military service after seeing one war and one disengagement process, I was supposed to get back to what people call: "normal life." Not that I ever understood what that term meant. I moved to London for my studies, but after three years, I missed my country and wanted to come home.

I knew that returning to Israel would neither be easy, nor comfortable. Many of my best friends had already left the country for Berlin or New York. They had given up on a future in Israel. The lack of hope had reached them. Not only politically but also financially -and definitely socially.

Last summer it all changed. **We discovered hope again.**

It happened almost by accident. Together with a bunch of friends I met on Facebook, we pitched tents on Rothschild Boulevard to protest a very simple issue: affordable housing.

To our great surprise, thousands of people came. We insisted that people come without any partisan signs, "no logo," no uniform, in order to create a space that is free of old politics, and open for new.

When our mayor came to the boulevard in the middle of the night, surrounded with cameras, we could not accept his distant presence. We declared that whoever comes to the boulevard, regardless of their class, color or position, must come as an equal citizen. Sit with us in one of our discussion circles and be a

part of it.

That night was our first night of independence. For the first time in decades, we made ourselves free in our own country.

It took only a few hours to build our vision. It was a Friday, and the most natural thing to do was to have a *kabalat Shabbat*, and invite our families over. We received donations of food from every restaurant in the area, and built a kitchen that served three meals a day to our thousands of new residents. In our university, someone built a field cinema. And somebody else started a kindergarten.

Without planning- we became a city within a city, a country within a country. Our new country's citizens met every day for discussion, people from different backgrounds and worlds. The rich lady, who lived at the top floor of a building on the boulevard, was together with the homeless man who lived on the bench outside. Nobody knew who was who - all we knew was that we had to be together.

A day after we pitched our tents somebody called me and asked to pitch a tent in a different city. "No need to ask," I replied, making it clear that in this movement, we do what we feel is good, no permission needed. He pitched a tent in Yaffo, and 24 hours after that, a first tent stood in Be'er Sheva, and another one in Haifa. Within weeks, Israel was full of tent camps. One hundred and twenty of them.

Soon, we could already admit that this wasn't just a movement for affordable housing, because a house - a home - is a symbol for many other things we miss in our society: a health care system, a welfare system, and a good, open education system for all.

That day in July, we experienced the formation of the largest protest movement in the history of Israel, one that took hundreds of thousands to the streets in wonderful rallies, every Shabbat, eventually bringing half a million people on one single night - calling for justice, solidarity and democracy. "Ha'am Doresh Tzedek Hevrat" - "The People Demand Social Justice."

Israel had the highest number of protesters per capita in the whole world. Something that would compare to 19 million Americans out on the streets on one single night, protesting a cause. Imagine that. 19 million Americans out on the streets, in one night, for one cause.

Our protest began at the very last minute, it feels. The last opportunity for us to change the direction our country has taken, leaving us, the young generation, behind. It came as a result of 30 long years, shared by both left and right wing governments, which reduced our social services one by one and broadened our

lack of equality to the vastest extent it could go.

This breach of our social security network was an anti-Zionist decision. Instead of working towards one, strong society, it made our differences stronger and broke Israel into fragments and sectors. In Israel it's like that: tell me who your enemies are, and I'll tell you who **you** are: Jews against Arabs, Mizrahi against Ashkenazi, Ultra-Orthodox against Secular people. For years, the government hasn't listened to us – so we blamed each other.

But that is now over.

Today, for the first time, we don't look at the past with horror, but at our future – and with great hope. For the first time, we have no fear, only shining eyes that could stare down any threat.

Sadly, there have always been those in government, left and right wing, who wished to compensate for the missing social cohesion by beating on the drums of war.

Our external threats are big and dangerous, but we cannot build if we are constantly in hiding. We are not a bomb shelter. We have to defend not only the borders of Israel, but also its entity. Its special values - its most courageous dreams.

And to do that, we have to build a system that takes care of people. For the first time in Israel's history, we realized the trick: we united. We came together – Jews and Arabs, secular people and religious, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi - and fought for one vision.

When our grandparents came to the Middle East with their crazy, beautiful dream, they did it with great courage, and no matter how difficult this struggle will be, we must remember them and have no fear.

Today, together with some of the most inspiring people I've ever met, I'm spending days and nights travelling throughout the country, organizing communities and establishing the foundations for a long-lasting social movement. Sleep is not an option. Despair is not an option.

We haven't got a lot of time, but we do have great dreams, and those dreams are our best weapon. Instead of running away from our enemies, let's walk together towards one, beautiful and crazy dream. For a new Israel. One that can soon come true.

Thank you so very much.