

# A Funny Thing Happened on the Way From the Skirball

**O**n Sundays, I spend my day alone with the kids. From 7 a.m. until my husband gets home from work in the evening, it's just the two boys and me: a needy 6-month-old (like all 6-month-olds) and a hyper-loquacious toddler. It's the most challenging day of the week for me.

So why in the world, you might wonder, would I volunteer to spend a Sunday at the Skirball Cultural Center helping other parents and their children — with special needs — when I can barely get a handle on my own?

Well, to be honest, it was something (good) to do. Keep a toddler cooped up for too long, and he's likely to come up with clever new ways of driving you nuts — like emptying the entire contents of his dresser drawers: “Imma, I’m doing laundry, like you!”

Also, I had a commitment to fulfill. This time last year I attended, and enjoyed very much, a Moshe Peretz and Matisyahu concert put on by the Israeli Leadership Council’s ILC-Care program. In exchange for a ridiculously low ticket price of \$18, I promised to give four hours in service to the community. There was a one-year time frame for the commitment that was nearly up, and it was time to make good on my promise.

I’d received the e-mail newsletter from ILC-Care about its upcoming Good Deeds Day II (the first one was in May, a day after I gave birth, when I clearly was not in a position to do anything but care for my newborn), and, as I looked over the offerings of volunteer projects, I wondered how many of the 6,000 Israeli-Americans and American Jews who also attended last November’s concert have held up their end of the bargain.

Several hundred of them immediately took themselves off the ILC-Care e-mail list, the organization’s director, Donna Kreisler, told me. “I took that very personally,” she said. “To me, it meant that person was not interested in even hearing about opportunities to give back to the community.” (However, over the past year, hundreds more also joined the list.)

ILC-Care’s mission — which I wrote about in last year’s Giving issue of *TRIBE* — was to encourage a network of Israeli-Americans committed to volunteering regularly for the community. Not a revolutionary concept, but a relatively novel one in a community where *tikkun olam* is not as deeply rooted as it is in the American Jewish world.

So, putting all judgment aside, Donna said she was not surprised that many concertgoers had happily accepted the discounted tickets without much intention to fulfill the hours of service. She and the ILC were realistic in their expectations — they are, after all, Israelis — and anticipated that three groups would emerge from the launch effort: those with no intention of volunteering at all, those who already volunteer in some capacity, and those who would be open to service, if the circumstances were right.

I fall into that last camp. So, on Nov. 4, with my mom in charge of my toddler and the baby strapped into a Baby Björn, I stood in the lobby of the Skirball, ready to give.

A funny thing happened, though.

More volunteers showed up than children with special needs from HaMercaz, the organizers, along with the Skirball, of this annual family day. So they sent us through to Noah’s Ark without a matched family, and we spent the morning exploring that fabulous exhibit — our first time — doing art projects alongside children with different abilities, as well as participating in a drum circle, eating snacks provided by HaMercaz and receiving free tickets to return on another day.

“What a fun day!” my mom exclaimed in the car on the way home, just as I was thinking what a disappointment it had been, because I’d missed my opportunity to give. “We should volunteer for more days like this. You see, when you give, you always get in return.”

That’s precisely the motto of ILC-Care: When you give, you get. The sentiment is that giving should be a part of all of our lives, not just because it is the right thing to do, but because, ultimately, when we give, we are the greatest recipient. Giving to someone else contributes to our confidence and sense of worth, our understanding of the world and our level of compassion, sense of community, capacity to love, and so much more.

So although I initially felt we had missed the entire point of the day, in the end I realized that the message had come through loud and clear: We came to give, and we received. ■



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