

Avi Schaefer z"l



Avi, along with his identical twin brother Yoav, was born on June 11, 1988 in Los Angeles, California to parents Rabbi Arthur Gross-Schaefer and Laurie Gross. The family moved to Santa Barbara in 1990 where Avi became an active participant in the Jewish community. Throughout high school, Avi engaged in Israel advocacy, and took it upon himself to organize programs, write op-ed articles, and educate the greater community on behalf of the State of Israel. He actively participated in NFTY and spent his summers at Camp Ramah in California.

At age 18, Avi along with his brother Yoav, left home and moved to Israel, volunteering to serve in the Israel Defense Forces. Avi served for three years in the army as a lone soldier, having no immediate family in Israel. He was accepted into a Special Forces combat unit, and underwent rigorous and demanding physical and mental training. Avi later served as a counter-terrorism instructor and trained Israel's most elite units.

Upon completion of his army service, Avi was accepted to Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. In the summer of 2009, he left Israel to pursue a degree in International Relations and Middle East studies. As a freshman at Brown, Avi was committed to the pursuit of peace in the Middle East and actively sought to change the atmosphere towards the Israel-Palestinian conflict on campus. Motivated by his father's words that, "an enemy is someone whose story you have not yet heard," Avi engaged in dialogue and understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. Avi eagerly offered his services to the Providence Police department, utilizing his army skills to train the SWAT team.

Avi became a natural leader and role model for the Brown Jewish community in advocating for Israel, while simultaneously reaching out a hand for peace and reconciliation. Avi sought to prove that he was a "soldier for peace" and saw no contradiction in fighting for Israel's security and building peace. In an **open letter** to the Brown Daily Herald, Avi wrote, "I went to the army so that my children will not have to- a dream I fear may not come true." Fun-loving and outgoing, Avi made friends throughout the Brown community, sharing his passion for ideas and change with everyone he met. His beliefs and his actions were never at odds; rather, he constantly strove to integrate his principles with his actions. After the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, Avi organized a party to raise funds to support IsraAID's efforts in the devastated nation.



Avi's life came to a tragic end on February 12, 2010. He was walking back to his dorm with some friends when he was struck by a drunk driver. In the short 21 years of his life, Avi managed to accomplish much and left his mark on the hearts of many. Avi was a living testament to his ideals and an inspiration to all who remember him.