

Magic and Music

On The Go

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Magic and Music at Elem Gala, Honoring Its Founder, Ann Bialkin

The September 28 ELEM/Youth in Distress benefit, held at the Harvard Club and honoring organization founder and chair **Ann Bialkin**, was an evening of music and magic. NBC's chief legal analyst, **Dan Abrams**, hosted.

Greetings by ELEM/Israel's president, **Nava Barak**, and a video of 18-year-old ELEM alumna **Diana Golbi**, 2010 winner of "*Kokhav Nolad*," Israel's version of "American Idol," set the stage for supernatural entertainment" by mentalist **Lior Suchard**, who entertains audiences with his "psychic" abilities. His 45-minute mind-reading wizardry dazzled the crowd. Also honored was **Oren Heiman**, managing partner of Shibolet, LLP, the largest Israeli-based law firm in the United States. **Lenore Ruben**, president of ELEM/America, made the presentations to Bialkin and Heiman.

"Wow! Can you believe that ELEM has been in existence for 28 years?!" Bialkin exclaimed. Citing the statistics that impelled her to found ELEM in 1981 and its Israeli counterpart, ELEM/Israel, in 1982, she noted that back then, "25,000 Israeli youth neither worked nor went to school; over 10,000 — 10% of 14- to 18-years-olds — went through juvenile court each year: homeless runaway youth, Russians, Ethiopians, prostitutes, sex offenders, family violence, dysfunction, alcohol, drugs. At first there was denial. But little by little, people acknowledged the problems. We now have 2,000 volunteers, over 200 well-trained professionals. We run community-based hostels, offer literacy programs."

In the video, Golbi — a former ELEM rescuee and now a role model to current street children — is mobbed, hugged and embraced by adoring friends at concerts, as well as by former ELEM pals. When she was 4, her family made aliyah to Israel from the former Soviet Union. She had difficulty adapting to a new language and culture. After her parents divorced and she was taunted for being Russian, she became one of Israel's "street children," until a social worker saw her playing the guitar and singing. The social worker realized that Golbi needed someone who believed in her and who would push her. Originally rejected by the producers of "**Kokhav Nolad*," 2008, she is now a national celebrity who uses her fame to help others find their way.

In his tribute to his wife, **Kenneth Bialkin** recalled their first visit to Israel in 1959, "where we knew no one and had no relatives.... We saw that the Jews of Israel then, as now, were the first line of defense for the Jewish people... that their fight was our fight." Touting ELEM as a "model of American-Israeli partnership," Bialkin concluded: "After 28 years [now that Elem will be moving to its own offices], the Bialkin dining room has been liberated from its service as ELEM headquarters... I will miss those days of coming home and never knowing who or how many ELEM stalwarts would be deep in discussion, planning... eating and drinking."

The evening concluded with a performance by award-winning cabaret singer **Sheera Ben-David** and the Manhattan-based ensemble Metro, comprising **Avigail Malachi**, **Alex Forbes**, **David Segal** and **Elad Kabilio** — highly gifted young musicians from around the world who attend Mannes College at the New School for Music, in New York.