

FALL 2004



# AMERICAN VETERANS OF ISRAEL

VOLUNTEERS IN ISRAEL'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

UNITED STATES & CANADIAN VOLUNTEERS

136 East 39th St., New York, N.Y. 10016

## *The Other Overseas Volunteers-*

*Review of Another Chapter in Kadish'*

*War of Independence, 1948-1949*

*"Ha' Gachal - Giyus Chutz L' Aretz b' Milchemet Ha' Atzmaut" (Gachal - War of Independence Overseas Mobilization), by Yaacov Markovitzky, pages 525-538 in Alon Kadish's collection of War of Independence articles. An overview and reviews of selected articles appeared in the Summer 2004 AVI Newsletter*

The article opens with Natan Alterman's moving poem, Achad Min Ha'Gachal (One of the Gachal), which tells of a raw recruit sent directly from the ship that brought him to Haifa to "the killing fields of Latrun." Its scene is Latrun, and the Hagana's failed attempt of 25-26 May 1948 to capture the police fortress from Trans-Jordan's Arab Legion. Known as Operation Bin-Nun, it was the first action in which Gachalniks participated.

From that battle emerged the popular view, immortalized in Alterman's poem and still widely-held, that poorly trained raw Gachal recruits were wantonly thrust into battle with dire consequences. But several pages later we learn that actually only eight of the seventy-four killed in that action were Gachal. Surely Markovitzky should have cited his original source for that revelation, rather than merely his lecture in 1993 on the Mythos Latrun (Latrun myth).

Markovitzky is apparently no newcomer to the subject. In the article's 44 footnotes are many references to his 1995 book; Gachalat Lochemet - Giyus Churz L' Aretz B' Milchemet Haatzmaut (Fighting Ember - Gachal Forces in the War of Independence).

The Gachal story as presented in the article begins in 1946, when Hagana agents taught Holocaust survivors in the DP camps of Europe self-defense tactics intended to counter anti-Semitic harassment. By November 1947 the able-bodied among them were seen as potential Hagana recruits, and courses of military-style basic training were organized at various locations in Europe and in the Cyprus detention camps.

In Europe they trained with simulated rifles. But in the Cyprus camps there were also some disabled Sten and Bren sub-machine guns, smuggled in by the Hagana, which they were taught to dismantle and re-assemble. By early  
Continued on page 2

## AVI ARCHIVES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

-Ralph Lowenstein, Archivist

### Catalogue of the Archives

Ralph Lowenstein, director of the Aliyah Bet and Machal Archives, at the University of Florida, has given AVI an outline of the material now archived either in his office workplace or in Special Collections at the University of Florida Libraries.

The University of Florida has agreed to be the official archive for all material gathered and catalogued by Ralph. The Libraries are now under reconstruction; so all material is either in storage or Ralph's office at the university until completion of construction in 2006.

Ralph has raised \$74,000 from foundations and AVI members to complete the archives in the next four years. He now has two undergraduate assistants working with him in his office 3110 Weimer Hall, University of Florida. He has a fund for copying photographs, and urges any AVI member with photos from 1946-49 to contact him.

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### AVI Websites

**Newsletters , Newsletter Index**

**and Links:**

[www.sas.upenn.edu/~sklausne/aviweb.html](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~sklausne/aviweb.html)

**Virtual Museum**

[www.israelvets.com](http://www.israelvets.com)

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# *The Other Overseas Volunteers-*

## *Review of Another Chapter in Kadish'*

### *War of Independence, 1948-1949 Continued*

1948 a ten-day basic-training course handling up to a thousand trainees was in operation in Cyprus. This was followed up with an 'advanced' fifteen-day course for a much smaller number. After the arrival in January 1948 of the Pan York and Pan Crescent's 15,000 passengers, it was estimated that the Cyprus camps held some 11,500 potential trainees.

They were a frustrated lot after the Latrun battle, believing that many Israelis saw them as being unsuited for battle except as cannon-fodder. Acts of bravery by Gachal fighters went unsung, and were known only to themselves. Furthering their frustration was what they saw as the 'antisocial' attitudes of their Israeli comrades-in-arms, who stayed apart and apparently considered themselves superior to the newcomers - a phenomenon not entirely unknown to Machalniks as well.

Individual commanders, notably in Palmach, Golani and Givati units, tried to instill some esprit de corps into the Gachalniks by means of lectures, pep talks and special Hebrew classes. These efforts were strikingly successful in the Palmach, where close-comradeship among fighters was traditionally regarded as essential.

By the time of October's Operation Yoav, Palmach fighting units included many Cyprus-trained Gachalniks. One such unit suffered thirty dead in an attack against Iraq el Manshiye, which cooled the atmosphere between its Israeli and Gachal fighters and was blamed for several desertions.

Gachal morale had improved considerably by the time of the Horev campaign (22 December 1948 - 7 January 1949). Units participating in the successful assault on Abu Agueila included a considerable number of Gachal troops. By the end of the War they were keen fighters, and proud of their achievements.

Readers wanting to know the number of Gachalniks won't find an easy answer in Markovitzky's article. The only specifically Gachal numbers he provides is that 716 arrived in the pre-State period by Aliya Dalet (with false identity certificates), that eight were killed in Latrun, and that by "cautious estimate" one can conclude that "over 4,000 men who received 'service' training and arrived in Israel ... between February and September 1948 joined various units of the Hagana which later became IDF units."

For the first two numbers he cites himself as the data source. And for the last number, as well as for the information that "most" of the 11,500 potential trainees in Cyprus took the ten-day course, I could find no data source at all.

## *Lola Sprinzeles:* *Volunteers Again as a* *Devoted Senior*

Lola writes:

In 1948 I volunteered (from England) to serve in the IDF. Very few people knew of my plan and those who did know considered me crazy. At this point in time, the reaction of family and friends is not different. While my immediate family and friends did not exactly support my various trips to Israel, they understood my desire to do so. In 2002 I (again) embarked on my venture despite disparaging remarks and even ridicule; for example, "Israel is waiting for assistance from a woman in her seventies (other than financial contributions)? What do you want to achieve by going to a war-torn country? I planned to volunteer in some capacity and was not to be deterred.

A former colleague from Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City has become Director of Movement Disorders, Department of Neurology at Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv. Prior to his departure from New York (to return to Israel), he told me that he would accept me in his department any time I am interested in working in his field. When I approached him upon my arrival in Israel, he kept his word and I was assigned to his department. My assignment consisted of computer operations, correcting charts, papers, etc., not a strenuous assignment but helpful to the overworked staff which was overburdened and stressed to the limit of endurance. Therefore, the work I did had been left for months.

Life in Israel goes on despite depression and anxiety. The determination of most Israelis to survive in the face of scant tourism and economic distress compounds their feelings of Israel's isolation, disappointment and anger. I was saddened to find more gentiles visiting the "Holy Land" than our own brethren who were afraid to come to Israel.

Personal health problems have curtailed my travel plans since 2002 but I fully intend to visit Israel before the end of 2004. I hope more machalniks will do so as well.

## **Jerry Rosenberg** — **Mentors Birthright Israel Youth**

Jerry Rosenberg writes:

My second trip as a Machal veteran on Canada's Birthright Israel program in June was as much an eye-opener for me as it was for the students visiting Israel for the first time. What impressed me the most was their lack of knowledge, not only about Israel, but about History in general. In order for these students to grasp what I was saying, I had to give them a lesson in the historical background leading up to the events I was describing. However, once I piqued their interest, they got excited about our History, and I do believe a small percentage will indeed follow up on it.



*Jerry Rosenberg at Yad Vashem*

The most defining moment of the trip was a visit to the Military Cemetery on Mount Herzl. They were able to empathize with all the fallen in Israel's wars. The ages on the markers really hit home.

The memory of all those young men and women who gave their lives, and the proximity of the battlefields they fought on had a profound effect on them. As the tour progressed, I did notice a change in many of them that I felt was very positive. This will leave them with a closer identification with Israel, its people and its History.

My last talk to them gave them much food for thought. Many of them came to me afterwards and told me I gave them a jolt, and a new way of looking at the situation of Israel and her neighbors. I told them the war we fought in 1948 is still going on; it never ended. It is now up to them to continue fighting this war. I told them they may not have to carry a rifle, but that they must learn the truth of what actually happened in 1948, and the ensuing years in order to combat the lies and false propaganda being spread by the Arabs worldwide.

On my return to Canada, I contacted the people in charge of the program, to ask about a similar program in the U.S. They told me it was a case of competing dollars. I also asked about following up with the students once they have returned. They do have reunions to keep them motivated. I suggested using Machal to talk to them on these occasions, and they agreed it would be a very good thing to do. So now we have a new job.



# OBITUARIES

*Correction: In the Summer 2004 issue, page 11, the name of the deceased should have been spelled Benjamin (Benny) Kulbersh and his ship as Paducah*

## Eleanora S. Stratham (née Ray) -Air Force Intelligence



*Ella Joseph (Stratham)*

Eleanora Ray was born September 26, 1925 in London, England. She served as a nurse during World War II and, in 1946, married

Joshua Joseph from Calcutta, India. Both Eleanora, now Joseph, and Joshua went to Israel from Italy in 1948. "Josh" has served as an air force navigator in Burma during World War II. He made the mistake of telling the Israelis he could fly. As a result he flew one of Israel's first aeroplanes in Italy. In Israel he became an air force gunner, while "Ella" joined the Israel Air Force's Intelligence Section. She was fluent and able to read and write in English, French, German and Hungarian. They both did double duty by serving in the ground crews, as well. When Josh was wounded severely in aerial combat Ella asked for and received permission to help nurse him and others back to health. Hospitals in Israel were, at the time, short-handed.

After this they returned to England, and then migrated to Canada, where they both received medals for their involvement in Israel's War of Independence from the Israel Consul. A bit later they moved to the United States and were divorced in Los Angeles.

Eleanora Joseph met and married Bill Stratham in California. He had two sons, Bill and Paul, from a previous marriage. Subsequently, Bill died and Ella followed him in death, a victim of pancreatic cancer, on August 4, 2004 in Riverside California. Paul and Yolanda cared for her during this terminal illness.

Throughout her life Ella did whatever she could to help Israel. She is not survived by any of her own children, or by any other relatives other than her brother and sister-in-law, Drs. Eric and Natalie Ray of Great Neck, New York. She is buried at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Los Angeles.

Eric Ray

Condolences to  
Dr. Eric F.L. Ray  
4 Margot Place  
Great Neck, NY 11023-147

## Harlow Geberer -Interned in Lebanon

Harlow Geberer, a veteran of both the American Army in World War II and the Machal in 1948, died on Oct. 26, 2004 at the age of 82, of a heart attack and stroke that unfortunately followed a successful back operation. Harlow was born in June 1922, the son of Benjamin and Minnie Geberer, both Romanian immigrants, and grew up in the Bronx, N.Y. along with two siblings, Milton (Moshe) and Beatrice. Milton also served in the Machal and was killed in May of 1948 in Jerusalem while scouting the area around the railroad station in preparation for an attack on Mt. Zion. Beatrice, later had a family of her own and lived in Westchester County, N.Y., until her death about 15 years ago.

Harlow graduated from Evander Childs High School (although part of the time, his family lived in Miami Beach), and later attended City College of New York. His father's business reversals forced him to go to work for his father and go to school at night, and ultimately, he didn't get his B.A., in accounting, until the early 1950s.

When World War II broke out, Harlow volunteered for the U.S. Air Force, but was not accepted. He later was drafted into the U.S. Army and served in Europe in the Military Police. When he came back, he, under the influence of his brother, became involved in the Labor Zionist movement, and met his late wife, Helen, at a Zionist meeting. Sometime in

1948 he volunteered for what became the Israeli Army, but the ship he and a group of other American veterans were traveling on, the Marine Carp, was captured by the Lebanese, and he spent several months in prison in Baalbek before being "rescued" by the U.S. government. In the meantime, he found out his brother had died in Jerusalem.

He returned to the U.S., but a year later, after getting married, returned to live in the new State of Israel, in Jerusalem, where he worked as a Morse code operator for the police. His wife's poor health forced him to return to the states in 1951. Soon, he became the father of two boys, Raanan (born 1952), now the editor of a local newspaper, and Noah (born 1955), a computer programmer, as well as the grandfather of David (born 1981), a music student, and a girl, Elana (born 1987) who unfortunately died at a young age as the result of a car accident. Harlow graduated from CCNY around 1954, and became a CPA in the late 1960s. He worked as an accountant for several companies, including the FR Company (which made chemicals for photography), Data Power (an early computer firm) Cirillo Bros. Oil, and Castle Home Heating Oil. After returning from Israel, he always lived in the Bronx, first in the Marble Hill section, but later in Co-Op City. He visited Israel at least five times over the years, and was planning to go back again this summer. His main hobbies were photography and playing the piano, and he did both on a regular basis until he began to feel intense back pain resulting from a spinal problem. His operation was designed to correct that problem, and it was unfortunate that it didn't succeed.

Harlow's wife, Helen died in 1985. He is survived by his sons Noah, David and Raanan.

Raanan Geberer

Condolences to  
Raanan Geberer  
315 8th Avenue, Apt. 4B  
New York, NY 10001  
212 675 6913

# OBITUARIES

## Rose Agriss—Defended Jerusalem



Rose Agriss 1930s

My mother, Rose Hochstein Agriss passed away on Friday, July 2 at the age of 90. Her life paralleled that of the Jewish people

over the last hundred years. She lived in the three major centers of Jewish life, Eastern Europe, Israel and the United States.

She was born and raised in Poland near Vilna. In 1932 she immigrated to the United States and lived in New Haven, Connecticut where her father also lived, a father she had not met before she arrived in the America. Her mother had died when she was three.

In 1947, while visiting a cousin in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania she was introduced to a young labor Zionist, Leon Agriss. They married in late July of that year. IN September 1947 they went to Palestine aboard the Marine Carp. They lived through the siege of Jerusalem along with their close friends Frieda and David Macarov. Together they fought with the Haganah, and then the IDF, in the defense of Jerusalem. In November 1949 their daughter, Rina, was born and they remained in Israel until the fall of 1950.

At that time my father returned to study at Temple University in Philadelphia. Their home was in the Strawberry Mansion section of that city. Upon his graduation from Temple, the family moved to Northeast Philadelphia where I was born.

My parents helped found Temple Brit Kodesh, which is now merged into Congregation Ner Zedek-Ezrath Is-

rael-Beth Uziel. My mother served as PTA President in the mid-1960s.

Each year my father would organize a contingent of AVI veterans from the Philadelphia and nearby town to march in the Israel Independence Day parade with Rose at his side.

Don Agriss

Condolences to  
Don Agriss  
7247 Horrocks Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19149-1220

## Stanley Behr -Irgun Zvai Leumi and IDF 8th Brigade



Stanley Behr

Staley Behr was born March 16, 1925 in a small town at the southern tip of Africa and grew up in

Capetown. He died on April 4, 2004 in La Jolla. His father had immigrated from Lithuania and his mother from Scotland. He has a twin brother, Frank, who survives him. An older brother, Andrew, predeceased him. Stanley was a private man, yet proud. He lived his life according to three principles: honor, integrity, and principle. Honesty, hard work and a belief that one's word is his bond characterized this disciplined man, disciplined even to his own detriment. Never forgetting those less fortunate, he was contributor to a number of charities. He would neither boast nor even talk about his success. He was a star athlete and sportsman.

He was a decorated war hero and was the recipient of numerous medals and honors for his wartime

service. In Israel 1947-1948. Reluctant to discuss this service his family learned of it from a friend. In 1979 Prime Minister Begin awarded him a medal in a service at the Western Wall. In 1964 the Zionist Revisionist Organisation of the Western Cape inscribed his name in the Iron Book of the Tel Hai Fund "to mark his readiness in answering the givus call of the Irgun Zvai Leumi in 1948. In 1968 the Executive of the Association of Irgun Zvai Leumi Veterans in Israel awarded him the Irgun medallion.

Stanley founded an insurance company, which he later sold to Lloyds of London. With an entrepreneurial bent he owned a number of rental properties and was loved and respected by his tenants.

The family moved to La Jolla in 1979 where he began and became successful in a second career in real estate. His wife, Margo, two sons, Douglas and Barry and a daughter, Carol and their respective spouses, survive him. He leaves two granddaughters. He will be sorely missed and fondly remembered by all those privileged to know him.

Douglas Behr

Condolences may be sent to  
Margo Behr  
POB 2613  
La Jolla, CA 92034



Stanley Behr 1948

***The Other Overseas Volunteers***  
***-Review of Another Chapter in Kadish'***  
***War of Independence, 1948-1949***  
***Continued from Pg 2***

There's also a table giving total number of "new immigrants" in the military forces at various times between March 1st and end December 1948 (this time citing original data sources), with the biggest number (17,249) for December. And once again Markovitzky refers to "new immigrants" in revealing that 858 were killed in the War. He's obviously implying that all new-immigrants in the IDF were Gachal, which I tend to doubt as surely not all of them were trained and mobilized overseas.

However, in his Machal article (which will be reviewed in the next Newsletter) Markovitzky writes that over 20,000 of those mobilized in the War of Independence were "new immigrants who were trained and organized in Europe and in the Cyprus camps...., "and that "most arrived after British rule ended on 15 May 1948." This statistic obviously conflicts with his earlier one about the "over 4,000 men who received 'service' training and arrived in Israel .... between February and September 1948."

Also puzzling is why there's no mention of the fact that also the overseas volunteers were known as Gachal initially, and that it wasn't until January 1949 that they were referred to only as Machal.

Nevertheless, it was a worthwhile read all told.

Eddy Kaplansky, Haifa

## AVI ARCHIVES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

-Ralph Lowenstein, Archivist

Continued from Pg 1

These are the categories of materials now on hand in the archives:

**Detailed questionnaires (52 questions) from participants:**

**U.S./Canadian Aliyah Bet: 120**

**U.S./Canadian Army: 120**

**U.S./Canadian Air Force: 128**

**U.S./Canadian Navy: 20**

**U.S./Canadian Materials for Israel: 10**

**Non-American/Canadian: 45**

**Crew rosters: 12 American-owned ships, now complete**

**Unit rosters, Army/Navy/Air Force: now being compiled**

**Photos: 50 different photo collections from AVI members**

**Audio-tapes: 54**

**Video-tapes: 20**

**Books: approx. 30**

**Manuscripts: 7**

**Virtual museum: [www.israelvets.com](http://www.israelvets.com)**

**Data Base: all questionnaires will eventually be in this data base**

**AVI Presidential papers files:**

**Leon Agriss**

**Elihu Bergman**

**Harry Eisner**

**Joseph Heckelman**

**David Kaplan**

**Paul Kaye**

**Samuel Klausner**

**Sidney Rabinovich**

**Lola Sprinzeles**

**AVI Newsletter 1966-present with Index**

## Letters of Contract With the University of Florida

Three letters defining the contractual relationship between the American Veterans of Israel and The University Florida Foundation are on hand. These letters define the way the AVI Archives are to be administered by the University under Dr. Ralph L. Lowenstein and his successors. All three letters are addressed to Dr. Ralph L. Lowenstein, Director and Archivist of the Aliyah Bet and Machal Archives.

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# AVI ARCHIVES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

-Ralph Lowenstein, Archivist

Continued from Pg 6

1. Paul A. Robell, Executive Vice President, University of Florida Foundations writes, in a letter dated July 28, 2004, that he reaffirms the commitment of February 28, 1990 to "oversee the distribution and usage of funds collected for the benefit of the Aliyah Bet and Machal Archives in Special Collections at the George A. Smathers Libraries." The letter goes on the note that after the death of Dr. Lowenstein funds earmarked for the archives will be transferred from the College of Journalism and Communication to the library. When the AVI ceases to exist as an organization, the Foundation will make every effort with the person officially designated by the AVI "Successor committee."

2. Dale B. Canelas, Director of the George A. Smathers Libraries writes in letter, dated July 23, 2004, that the Department of Special and Area Studies in the Libraries agrees to provide a home for the archives, maintain the collection according to best practices and standard professional procedures with the funds provided by the Machal Fund Endowment, make the archives accessible and work with the "Successor committee." An annual financial report will be provided to the AVI or its successor committee.

3. Terry Dynes, Dean of the College of the College of Journalism and Communication writes, in a letter dated July 1, 2004, confirms that the College will transfer funds to the Libraries at the appropriate time. The letter concludes saying, "On behalf of the college, I want you to know it is an honor for the college to be associated through you with the initiation and early years of the development of this fund. Thank-you for your leadership and dedication in providing this wonderful legacy for the future."

Full texts of these letters are available from Ralph Lowenstein or from Si Spiegelman.

## *Instructions for ordering photocopies of old AVI Newsletters.*

1. Consult the Index to the Newsletters. Link to the Index is on the AVI website (<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~sklausne/aviweb.html>). From the list of names and events select the pages and issues of the Newsletter, which are of interest to you.

2. Request photocopies of these pages and issues from:

Dr. Carl Van Ness  
POB 117007  
Dept. of Special and Area Studies Collections  
George A Smathers Libraries  
Gainesville, FL32611-7007  
carvann@ufl.edu

3. Dr. Van Ness writes, "Charges for photocopying are based on a minimum charge of \$15.00 for up to 50 copies and \$0.25 for each additional copy. However, if someone asks for a single issue of the Newsletter, I'm not going to charge."

## Aliyah Bet and Machal Museum Display

The Aliyah Bet and Machal museum display in the new \$8.5 million Hillel building at the University of Florida is making excellent progress toward completion, Ralph Lowenstein has reported. Some \$26,000 worth of display cabinets were installed in the main hallway of the building during the second week of October. Ralph and a professional museum production director, Dorr Dennis, are working hard to have the first of seven cabinets ready for the official dedication of the building on January 30, 2005. Ralph believes the remaining six cabinets will be ready by mid-year or early fall.

"I am overwhelmed with the response of AVI members," Ralph reported. "I have now received \$60,000 in cash and pledges toward the expected \$65,000 cost of the display." Ralph said this sum includes contributions from three foundations and 51 AVI members or their families. He said 25 AVI members contributed \$500 or more toward the project. In some cases, children honored their Aliyah Bet or Machal parents with a contribution.

The response has been so good that Ralph now believes he can raise enough money to produce a duplicate of each of the seven displays as a traveling exhibit, and has already given the order to make two copies of the first display being prepared for January 30. The first display will give a history of political Zionism. Five other displays will depict the participation of North American Jews in Aliyah Bet and Machal, and seventh will be a memorial to the 40 Americans and

# AVI ARCHIVES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

-Ralph Lowenstein, Archivist

Continued from Pg 7

Canadians killed while in the service of Israel.

The cost of the duplicate, or traveling, display will be about \$10,000, bringing the total cost of the project to \$75,000, Ralph said. Eddy Kaplansky, a former Canadian who was both an Aliyah Bet and Machal (Air Force) volunteer, has been working closely with Ralph on the project. Eddy now lives in Haifa. "This is the only museum tribute to Aliyah Bet and Machal anywhere in the world," Ralph said. "And this display will be a central focus of the building itself, as our cabinets are in the main hallway as one enters the building. This is undoubtedly the only museum display on our role that we will see in our lifetimes."

Ralph urged AVI members who had not yet made contributions to the museum display to consider doing so. All contributions are tax deductible, and checks should be made out to "University of Florida Hillel." Ralph's address: Ralph Lowenstein, Aliyah Bet and Machal Archives, PO Box 118400, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

## AMERICAN VETERANS OF ISRAEL HANUKKAH CELEBRATION



**CELEBRATE THE FEAST OF LIGHTS WITH COMRADES, FRIENDS AND FAMILY**

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2004**

**12.00 Noon**

**BNAI ZION**

**136 EAST 39TH STREET**

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**GUEST SPEAKER FROM THE ISRAEL CONSULATE GENERAL IN NEW YORK.**

***Ravit Bar-Av***  
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**LUNCH WILL BE SERVED**

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**PLEASE BRING FAMILY AND FRIENDS**