

Tall Black Boots

I am driving to Tel Aviv to meet the founder of a start-up to talk about helping him promote his company abroad. I don't think that the meeting will result in new business, because most likely he can't afford to pay a monthly retainer, or he will resist just because the investor asked him to meet with me. Most entrepreneurs don't like other people telling them what to do.

My husband is concerned about me going to this meeting for different reasons. Hamas is bragging that their missiles can make it all the way to Tel Aviv. These threats are nothing new. All the neighboring Arab countries take turns threatening us. Men wearing turbans brag that they will blow us to bits, and the TV screen frequently shows crowds at demonstrations holding signs and shaking fists. But we pretend we don't notice them and life goes on as usual. Those strange images on the news look like they are stuck in a time warp and don't belong in the same world with the skyscrapers and super highways crisscrossing through the country.

But this time our enemies appear to be serious, and it appears they may actually be able to deliver on their threat.

Even though I'm brave I have taken the necessary defensive measures. Back when Iraq was sending over scud missiles, I waited in line at Auto Depot to make sure my children's gas masks fit their growing heads. I even did the ultimate and had the bomb shelter in our home equipped with an air filtration system, provided by Germans committed to protecting Israelis from chemical attacks. Since there are no gas masks made for dogs, I needed to make sure he would also be safe. If we lived but Dusty died, my children would never forgive me.

Still the sense of being a human target is new and uncomfortable. I was born a Catholic girl from a suburb of Boston, and I never threaten or intimidate anyone. The

thought of someone aiming at me from the other side of a gun, is unthinkable. The fact that somewhere in Gaza someone can aim a ballistic missile that will detonate over my head seems implausible. So when my husband requests for a second time that I hold off meeting this start up in Tel Aviv until things quiet down, I snap back.

“If I cancel this meeting it’s because it’s a waste of time, not because I’m in danger.”

But now that I am driving and listening to the car radio, I am thinking maybe I should have listened to him. Each song on the radio is interrupted by the announcement “code red”, followed by a monotone voice keeping score of how many missiles were shot and a very wide and generic description of where they landed; “Northern Negev”, or in the outskirts of “Beersheva”. The exact location of where each missile landed is not disclosed since this information could be used improve the shooters’ aim. Most missiles land in empty lots followed by the mantra “no damage or injuries”.

I decide to focus on my meeting and try to mentally prepare myself, but I panic for a moment when I forget what this start up does, or more accurately what they are trying to do.

Then with a sigh of relief, their product comes back to me. They developed a mobile app to help commuters find the fastest way to get to work using public transportation. It includes its own social network so riders can warn other commuters when an air conditioner is on the blink, or if there are suspicious characters hanging out at the bus stop. This app is hard for me to appreciate because I have only used a car for the last thirty years. I amuse myself by wondering if there are any alerts for incoming missiles.

As I park my car in the lot, the announcements are running more frequently so you can’t hear a single song from beginning to end. In addition the type of music changes, so that the normal upbeat dance hits from Beyonce are no longer on the radio, most likely out of respect for those people sitting in bomb shelters. Most of the music is slow and moody music similar to the play list you hear on sad holidays like Memorial Day or Holocaust Day.

In Israel you can always tell by the types of songs playing on the radio if something horrible is happening. Israel has a tradition of institutionalized mourning, they have it down to a science. When there was a wave of suicide bombings, all the music on the radio changed to reflect the fear and sadness as if the whole country was suffering a low level depression.

This happened without any time of law being passed or any formal agreement between broadcasters. There is a collective consciousness; we all share. The biography of every single person who was in the path of flying glass was shared and exposed on the radio airwaves, on TV, and on the front page of the paper until we felt we know them all personally. This is how connected we feel to one another in times of tragedy. But I consciously put our current security situation in the back of my brain and focus on my upcoming meeting.

As I walk towards the café, I prepare in my mind all of the questions I need to ask; who is their competition, what are their key differentiators, what prevents other companies from copying them, the questions are drilled into my memory from the dozens of high tech companies I have met with in the past. I am continuously trying to define which story these entrepreneurs can tell, while evaluating the chances that journalists in American, Europe, or even Africa will be interested.

I find the café fairly easily, although there are six or seven cafes in the area. The weather is perfectly comfortable with gentle sun, only warming and not scorching. All of the tables overflow to the sidewalk, not to miss a single inch.

I arrive enough time in advance to find a nice table indoors, away from the street sounds, of cars bicyclists and dogs on strolls. I haven't met this person before, so I look him up on "Linked In" and save his picture on my wallpaper so I won't embarrass myself by approaching strangers.

My daughter who is serving in the Israeli military in the West Bank is worried about me. She takes an armored bus to her base to protect her from rock throwers. Her questions are merged with my husbands' as my family What's App keeps chiming demanding my attention. Did I arrive safely? Yup. Don't Sit outside. I don't know who is more protective my husband or my daughter.

The pestering is needling me and I am tired of answering, and am debating if I should just turn my phone off, but I can't. I had become more Israeli, craving a constant connection; feeling a need to always be reachable.

I see the managing director enter and am relieved right away. He looks pleasant and sufficiently mature. Gray around the temples, slim, in loose fitting jeans, horn rimmed

glasses; looking very much like a professor and less of a kid right out of university that didn't bother to finish his degree but already knows everything there is to know.

We exchange business cards and pleasantries when our meeting is interrupted.

I suppose despite all the radio announcements and warnings, I don't really expect missiles to hit Tel Aviv, that is why my mind does not acknowledge that the sound I hear is a siren. It's ironic, because I don't hear the siren from outside the café where the sound originally comes from, but instead from the live news broadcast from the blaring TV over the bar.

Yes we have reached that point in society where the digital world seems more real than the physical world. However, I don't put my faith in TV broadcasts so I open the window and stick my head outside hoping to hear the real siren, to prove to myself this event is really happening.

Sure enough I heard the wailing siren, but it was faint, as if no one really needs to know. People on the street don't run to the closest bomb shelter, they are like me looking up at the sky trying to see history being made, trying to see that missile for themselves, so they can say they were there. It doesn't register that these bombs could actually hit ground and leave a crater behind.

My potential client follows me and also approaches the window, until the café owner yells at us.

"Get away from the glass!"

We run towards the bar, behind the large wooden counter and then stoop down as if we are in a Western movie and are hiding from the long arm of the law. In a few moments we hear a huge "boom" which was a combination of the sound from the TV and an echo from outside.

Then there was the horrible realization that we had no idea what the sound of the boom meant. Disregarding the warning to stay away from the glass, we return to our table by the window and search urgently on our laptops for the latest news story. Our race to be the first to find the latest news online make us forget that we might actually still be in danger.

There was the warm glow realizing the "Iron Dome", had succeeded in intercepting the incoming missile and the scrap metal had landed in an open field not causing any harm

to anyone. We looked at each other and smile as I comment that this defunct missile managed to find the one and only empty lot in Tel Aviv.

After hiding from a missile together, the rest of the meeting seems so superficial, his product sounds solid and newsworthy and I convince him that the monthly rate is worth it so we made a date for me to present a proposal. After shaking his hand, and walking out on the street, life appears normal and there is no sign of the previous missile attack. I am smiling to myself proud my adopted country has created a technological wonder to deflect missiles without having to send in any soldiers; especially when these soldiers could be my kids, or my kids' friends.

As I walk back towards my car I feel that I have been spared something.. not sure what.. an explosion, an ambulance, a war.. what if we didn't deflect the missile? As happy as my sense of security is, I am not sure how much longer it will last. How much more time do I have? Will there be another attack? Will I be so lucky the next time?

Like most people, I pride myself on being up to date with current events, being able to argue politics with my friends, happy to take a side usually supporting the two-state solution and bold moves to reconcile with the Palestinians and end our conflict and the need for our children to police the territories to prevent terrorists from sneaking in. But at this particular moment my mind is not consumed with theories and philosophies. My mind is leaning towards the need for some sort of instant gratification, a celebration that I am alive and still in control with arms, legs and my five senses.

At that moment I walk by a huge glass storefront window with the most beautiful pair of tall black leather boots I have ever seen. They are smooth and supple made from one piece of high quality leather with no seams and an elegant zipper going all the way up the back.

I am in love.

I go into the store with the sense that if I don't buy them now, I didn't know when I will be in this neighborhood again or if something will happen to me or them.

Then, I do something unexpected. I have always resisted the Middle Eastern art of negotiations, accustomed to the American notion that if you want to save money you go to an outlet or a discount store, but if you go to a regular store you pay whatever is written on

the price tag. But based on the sense of being under fire and still performing my duty, I find for some reason I am expecting some sort of compensation.

After all, my son puts on his uniform and does his reserve duty, and my daughter spends a week at a time at an army base on the other side of the green line, keeping the peace, and making her own food, in a small poorly equipped kitchen. I want to receive some special treatment for the fact I am continuing to serve Israeli high tech ambitions despite the falling missiles. I want someone, somewhere to recognize that we are at war.

So, somewhere in my head I actually ask sales woman to give me a 20% discount on the boots, 10% for my son who was in Gaza for the last operation to mop up after missiles rained down on us, and another 10% for my daughter who is serving in the territories.

The sales lady is happy to hear my children are serving and I am proud of them; and I am thinking the boots are probably overpriced and she might have been happy perhaps to discount them even more. It doesn't matter, somehow I like to think we are appreciated and rewarded for our efforts. She smiles and agrees, I leave old boots behind with the heel worn down.

Before I can put on my new boots, I hear my family "whats up" beeping and report back to my husband and kids that all is well. I know my daughter will love the boots, and of course I will let her borrow them when she is home from the army, because thankfully we are the same size. Despite our age difference, and our different stations in life we can both appreciate a beautiful pair of tall black boots and I don't mind if she wears them when we sit around the table eating Friday night dinner. I will be happy knowing we are all safe and back together again.

As I walk back to the car with my new boots I don't know if I will nab the account or not. I can't even be sure if the "code red" announcements will start again on the radio and I will have to pull over on the side of the highway waiting for a new missile to land. The only thing I know for sure is that these tall black boots are mine.