

RAZ PAUKER (L), Gal's father, with Sacha Roytman Dratwa, CEO of the Combat Antisemitism Movement.

(David Silverman)

HAIM GAN (L) and Gal Pauker saved the wine of Nir Oz winery after Oct. 7.

(Nir Oz Winery)



A HEART, A ROSE, & A GLASS OF WINE



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

This is a story of unspeakable horror and unbearable tragedy, but also of redemption, rejuvenation, and an underlying optimism. It spreads a feeling of strength in adversity, and hope. It tells the story of the biggest tragedy to befall the Jewish people since the Holocaust, in a bottle of wine. A message in a bottle.

Gideon Pauker, a stalwart of Kibbutz Nir Oz, was a wine lover and encouraged those around him to love wine. He went on the Soreq Winery Winemaking Course, was an integral part of the local Eshkol Wine Club, and was a loyal follower of the tastings and wine tours of wine guru Haim Gan of Ish Anavim (The Grape Man).

His great pleasure was to travel to Italy with his wife, Orna, to enjoy the food and wine culture there. He was the ultimate wine guy – unspoiled, unpretentious, yet infatuated with fermented grape juice.

He was a wine lover with a difference. He did not just want to drink, enjoy, and talk about wine, he also wanted to get his hands dirty in the soil. He wanted to touch, feel, and experience it. So he planted a vineyard, in between the kibbutz and Gaza, and created a domestic winery in an underground shelter. In 2007, he made his first wine.

Gadi Mozes, Haim Perry, and Yoram Metzger are names we have come to know. They were proud sons of Nir Oz. Each shared the hobby of wine. They were friends and partners in wine with Gideon.

On Oct. 7, the kibbutz was attacked by the marauding Hamas savages. Gideon Pauker, just shy of his 80th birthday, was shot while trying to keep the door of his safe room closed. He was left to bleed to death slowly for over four hours and died in the arms of his wife.

This is just one story of the carnage, misery, death, and destruction wrought by Hamas on Oct. 7. People

talk about the northwest Negev being abandoned by the government and the army. This was never more true than in Gideon's case. If help had have arrived much earlier, his life could have been saved.

All in their 80s, Gadi Mozes, Haim Perry, and Yoram Metzger were kidnapped, taken into captivity as hostages, and kept underground in unspeakable conditions. What depraved culture sanctifies the kidnapping and murder of babies and octogenarians?

Though the over-woke Leftists and Muslim world seem to condone this uncivilized, terrorist behavior, we will not forget. If a position of great morality is only taken with regard to Israel, and the slaughter of Muslims elsewhere is ignored, then it is antisemitism.

THE AFOREMENTIONED Haim Gan is one of the leaders in wine culture and wine education here. He was a close friend of the Pauker family. In the second week of the war, wine was the last thing on the family's mind, but Gan was the one who remembered the winery. The 2022 wine was in barrels and the grapes for 2023 wine had been harvested and fermented, but the wine was forgotten. Gan thought the wine could be saved, so he approached the family for permission to visit the winery.

When Orna gave her approval, Gan sprang into action. He gathered two winemakers, from the opposite ends of the political spectrum, who rallied to the cause: Shibi Drori from Gvaot Winery, and Meiram Harel from Amphorae Winery. One is religious from the Samaritan mountains; the other is secular from Mount Carmel in the northern coastal area.

The three gathered together to save the non-kosher wine of a left-wing kibbutz. If there is one thing positive about the Israel-Hamas war, it is that it has brought out the best in Israelis.

They found that the vineyard planted between the kibbutz and Gaza was not unscathed. Some rows, as well as the irrigation system, had been damaged. Ap-

parently, it was a site on Oct. 7 where the kidnappers rounded up their hostages.

The winery needed to be cleaned up. Wine in its natural form will turn to vinegar in the blink of an eye. Cleanliness and temperature control in wine are next to godliness. The rescue team came at the eleventh hour – just in time. Wine that could be saved was bottled; wine that couldn't was distilled to make brandy.

Assuming the formidable task was the impressive Gal Pauker, 24, eldest grandson of Gideon and son of Raz Pauker. Prompted and encouraged by Haim Gan, with the two winemaking experts at his shoulder, the younger Pauker took responsibility for the project that had been his grandfather's life.

He worked hard, drawing on the expertise around him and the agricultural traditions of his own family. He felt the weight of responsibility and understood that this was his task in life. To fulfill his grandfather's work and continue it in his memory felt totally appropriate for him.

At the same time, he had a lot on his plate with grief,



GIDEN PAUKER, wine lover and winemaker, was murdered by Hamas on Oct. 7. May his memory be a blessing. (Nir Oz Winery)



MEETINGS BETWEEN grandson and grandfather always centered around food and wine. (Nir Oz)

ORNA AND GAL Pauker present the award for Best Wine at the Terravino Competition. (Preker)

Below:
THE VINEYARD at Nir Oz was planted by Gideon Pauker, z'l.
(Nir Oz Winery)

A NEW vineyard was recently planted in Gideon Pauker's memory. It is called Gideon's Vineyard. (Nir Oz Winery)

loss, and concern about his younger brother, Sivan, who was seriously wounded on that black Shabbat day. However, he grew in stature to fill the void and has proven to be more than up to the task.

The first time I saw Gal was at the Terravino Wine Competition Awards Ceremony in January 2024. This is Israel's most important international wine and spirits competition. I was there to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award. Orna and Gal were invited to present the trophy for Best Wine in the Competition. There was scarcely a dry eye in the house when Haim Gan recounted their story.

Recently, the 2022 wine was bottled. When Gideon Pauker was moved to his final resting place, a bottle of the wine that he was not able to finish himself was laid in his grave. It was like closing a circle.

I was then determined to meet Gal. I expected to see a boy rather dwarfed by the expectation. Instead, I found an extremely impressive young man with a fire in his belly. The first thing you notice is the tousled hair, light beard, and then that heart-warming, infectious smile, which lights up a room. He is smart, very articulate, and a deep thinker.

After a short time of talking, you feel Gal's drive, determination, sense of mission, and ambition. He explained how the vineyard had established deep roots. The continuation of the project was a must and was symbolic of the rehabilitation of the kibbutz.

Gal has early memories of being at the harvest of grapes as a young boy. He had a deep and meaningful relationship with his grandfather. Meetings would normally center around food and wine. Gideon was incapable of not sharing enthusiasm for wine. He had a compulsion to share and talk about it.

On that fateful morning, Gal was in contact with his grandfather after hearing of the Hamas infiltrations. He asked what was going on. The last he heard from him was a WhatsApp message sent with an image of a red heart, a red rose, and a glass of red wine. That was Gideon's farewell to his grandson and the last communication between them.

Gal remembers him as "a humble and sweet man. He wanted only what he needed and dreamed of simple pleasures."

GIDEON WAS also a pioneer wherever he lived. He was a passionate agriculturist and took senior management and leadership positions in the communities wherever he lived. His memory is a blessing. He would have been grateful to Haim Gan and proud of his grandson. His legacy was saved.

Nir Oz is not a commercial winery. They produce 1,000 to 2,000 bottles a year, mainly for family and friends. However, all that will change. They have planted a new vineyard at Ein Habesor. It was named the Gideon Vineyard in honor of his grandfather – an investment in the future.



Gal loves going down the concrete steps into the winery. It is like entering another world – his grandfather's world. There is no communications reception there – no telephone, no message beeps, no distractions. Gal is alone there with the wine, his thoughts, and memories. But most of all, it is where he feels his grandfather the most.

Wine is an expression of a person and a place. Gal explained that the wine is a connection between his grandfather, his three friends and partners in captivity, and the place, Nir Oz. As I was writing these words, the news came that Haim Perry and Yoram Metzger had died in captivity. Just as Gideon Pauker was abandoned on Oct. 7, the captives were abandoned afterward. History will not look back kindly at those responsible. We are all praying that Gadi Mozes will come home safely. His wine is ready and waiting.

The Nir Oz Red 2022 is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Syrah. It is a wine that shows that life goes on. It illustrates you can rape, pillage, burn, destroy, and slaughter, but life is stronger than death.

Wine is a symbol of life. It is a bedrock of the Judeo-Christian religion and an emblem of Western civilization. Hamas, Hezbollah, and ISIS have something in common. They are anti-liberalism, anti-democracy, and anti-West. They hate all Jews and Israelis. They are also fervently anti-wine. Blessed be the winemakers; cursed be those fundamentalists who hate wine.

I met Gal to offer support but left greatly encouraged and strengthened by his fortitude and positivity. He was simply an inspiration. With his spirit, eagerness to learn, and sense of duty to preserve the legacy of his grandfather, I am sure he will succeed.

Just before we finished our meeting, Gal, now winemaker, wine grower, and custodian of Nir Oz Winery, said to me: "My grandfather planted deep roots. We will build and not destroy. I want to make great wine, but it will not be a wine of tears."

Nir Oz Red 2022 is not a wine the masses will taste or the international critics will write about. However, maybe it is the most important wine bottled in 2023. It is an expression of the Israeli spirit and a wine of defiance. ■

The writer is a wine trade veteran and a winery insider turned wine writer. He has advanced Israeli wine for 38 years and is known as the "English voice of Israeli wine."
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