NEWS

"This dream isn't feeling sweet / We're reeling through the midnight streets"
RIBS LORDE

Oct. 7 survivor recounts Nova festival massacre at Slifka Center

BY ALIZA SHYOVITZ
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Rom El-Hai, a survivor of the Nova music festival massacre, where hundreds of people were killed on Oct. 7, 2023, spoke at the Slifka Center for Jewish Life on Monday night.

Around 35 people attended the speech and question-and-answer session, which was organized by the Slifka Center in honor of the third anniversary of the 2023 Hamas attack on Israel. El-Hai, who was at the festival when the attack began, presented a slideshow displaying images and videos that he and his friends captured on their phones while the attack was taking place.

"Sharing his story is one way that we educate the Yale community about Jewish life, loss, history and resilience," Uri Cohen, the executive director of the Slifka Center, wrote in a Wednesday email to the News. "The events of October 7, 2023, hit our community hard, as many of our students had friends and family who were directly affected, including at the Nova Festival."

On Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas militants invaded Israel starting at about 6:30 a.m. They killed approximately 1,200 people and took 251 people — including children — hostage, according to NBC.

The overnight Nova music festival, which was located near Kibbutz Re'im in southern Israel, was one of the sites of the attack. Over 360 people were killed at the festival site, and 44 were taken hostage there.

"I was just a person who went to a party and survived the most terrible attack," El-Hai said in an interview following Monday's event.

In the videos he presented to audience members, El-Hai could be seen hiding in bushes. Gunfire could be heard, which El-Hai said he was able to identify at the time as coming from AK-47 guns commonly used by Hamas.

El-Hai detailed the events of the morning and described his fear upon realizing the gravity of the attack. As he was attempting to escape, he said, he heard people being shot and killed around him. He recalled traveling three miles on foot over the course of a few hours as he avoided gunfire and being saved by a police officer who brought him to a nearby village.

El-Hai said he began sharing the story of his survival with American audiences a few months after the attacks.

"I thought to myself: What can I give? I looked for purpose. I looked for something to be active. I said, I didn't even know how to speak English, but I felt like, what do I have to lose?"

Elijah Wiesel '28 said he attended the event in order to help ensure that the memories of the victims remain alive.

"I came because I believe it is my duty to bear witness to the atrocities that happened at the Nova festival and to hear from the people who survived it, so that the memory of those who were killed there is not forgotten," Wiesel said.



MARTÍN PERALTA / HEAD PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
Rom El-Hai, who survived the festival massacre on Oct. 7, 2023, spoke at the Slifka Center for Jewish Life this week in honor of the third anniversary of the attack. Students said they attended the event to remember the victims of the attacks.

El-Hai said that one of the most meaningful parts of speaking around the United States has been connecting with American Jews.

"I always knew that there is Jews that live in the diaspora, and I thought okay, they have their own life, their own problems. They don't live in the same reality, and I didn't know how much they care about Israel," he said, adding that speaking on college campuses has shown him how much some American Jews actually care about Israel.

"I found a lot of people gave me hugs and support, which made me feel good," El-Hai said.

Hannah Rubin '27 said that she was impressed by El-Hai's willingness to share his story.

"I think it's important to me to remember the extent of the tragedy that occurred on Oct. 7 and respect someone who experienced so much trauma on that day and is willing to share his story in a different country," Rubin said. "It's a very vulnerable story to tell, and it's one that needs to be shared with as many people as possible in this country."

The Slifka Center for Jewish Life is located at 80 Wall St.

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Law School 'Olympics' bridging the aisle return for a second year



COURTESY OF FREDERICK LIU
The series of friendly athletic competitions between the liberal American Constitution Society and the conservative Federalist Society, touted by affiliates as a way to build community across the aisle, returned for a second straight year.

BY IRENE KIM
STAFF REPORTER

Yale Law School's liberal American Constitution Society and conservative Federalist Society met at Scantlebury Park over the weekend for the second annual "FedSoc-ACS Olympics."

The games kicked off on Friday and continued until Monday, when the historically rival student organizations met for a tie-breaking round of spikeball. Members of both groups interviewed by the News praised the event for bringing students with varied political inclinations together.

Before the tie-breaker, the Federalist Society and American Constitution Society faced each other across six athletic competitions: basketball, Capture the Flag, dodgeball, flag football, golf and kickball. With the final round of spikeball, the Federalist Society bested their progressive counterpart 4-3 to capture the title for the second year in a row.

Tobias Johnson LAW '27, the president of Yale's chapter of the Federalist Society, lauded the event's dual purpose of getting students outside and bringing the traditionally opposed groups together.

"We thought it'd be a great way for us to get out here, have some fun and bring ACS and FedSoc together," he said in a Saturday interview.

The inaugural FedSoc-ACS 'Olympics' last year won praise from then-Interim Dean Yair Listokin LAW '05 for helping students bridge ideological divides.

Students commended the improvement in relations between the two groups that the event has come to symbolize.

Sadie Cheston Harris LAW '29, who was recently elected as the 1L class representative, said she didn't feel the same division in her class that previous students of the respective organizations may have experienced.

"As a whole, our 1L class has been really kind, social and excited to get to know one another," Cheston Harris said.

Gabriel Voorhis-Allen LAW '27, who is on the board of the American Constitution Society, agreed with Cheston Harris's observations. In an interview with the News, he noted that "it was extremely rare in years past to have friendships across lines."

He said based on conversations with law school alumni, the groups used to have quite poor relations.

"A lot of times, they'll express some measure of shock that we would do an event like this, that we would have friendships across these lines," Voorhis-Allen said of alumni he's spoken with.

Back then, "if an American Constitution Society person was friends with a FedSoc person, it would subject you to social stigma and threaten your standing in either organization," he said.

Now, things have changed. Both Voorhis-Allen and other students the News interviewed described a growing sense of collaboration between the two groups after a period of heightened antagonism.

"The law school, like a lot of the country, was a pretty divided place for a few years," Voorhis-Allen added.

To Ibrahim Dagher LAW '28, a member of the Federalist Society, events like the annual 'Olympics' are symbolic of a larger community.

"I think we're a really unified community anyways, but these events are a nice symbol of that fact," he said.

The Olympics will not be the only time the American Constitution Society and the Federalist Society collaborate this year. The two have already co-sponsored three speaker events together, including a student debate on foreign policy with the Paul Tsai China Center, and plan to host several more this semester.

The Federalist Society took the trophy home for the second year in a row — in the event's two-year history. Named after Byron White LAW '46 — a Yale Law School alumnus, NFL player and associate Supreme Court justice — the "Byron White Award for Supreme Excellence" is meant to reflect both the "athlete and jurist," Ilani Nurick LAW '27 said.

In an email to the News, Johnson wrote that the trophy will be held in the law school and engraved with the winner of the games each year.

Ultimately, all seven students the News spoke to agreed that the games were a light-hearted way to have fun outdoors while bringing the two organizations together beyond the classroom.

"A lot of our politics are unempathetic, I think, because we don't see each other as humans," Voorhis-Allen said.

The American Constitution Society was founded in 2001 at Georgetown University, while The Federalist Society was founded in 1982 at Yale.

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