

# Our Thanksgiving Story: A Tribute to Our Son and Brother, Keith

Dear friends,

When Sadler and I were in Israel our wonderful guide Lee casually mentioned to us that he takes people to plant trees. Sadler and I customarily plant trees in Israel to either celebrate or memorialize someone. I asked our guide Lee if he would plant two trees in Keith's memory for us when he did this type of tour again. I gave him the money and waited to hear back from him. I would like to share with you what he wrote to me today and my response back to him. This email is a *true* Thanksgiving story that affects our journey to find hope and reason in life with Keith no longer here to share with us. Wishing you all a very happy thanksgiving!

The Hayes Family

Sadler, Sheila, Adam and Brian

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Sheila and Sadler,

Well, it took a bit longer than I expected but you're crazy friend here wanted it to be something special.

Yesterday I took a group of about 20 young men on an adventure that included hiking, crawling and for the highlight of our day, planting two trees in memory of a young man that couldn't be with us..., Keith.

We chose to plant a pistachio which will bring nourishment one day to people strolling by, and an oak that will stand tall and strong and bring shade and comfort.

I read this blessing:

**Our Heavenly Father:**

You who builds Zion and Jerusalem,  
Take pleasure in Your land  
And bestow upon it of Your goodness  
And Your grace.

Give dew for a blessing  
And cause beneficent rains  
To fall in their season,  
To satiate the mountains of Israel  
And her valleys,  
And to water there  
Every plant and tree.  
And these two saplings  
Which we plant before You today.

Make deep their roots  
And wide their crown,  
That they may blossom forth in grace

Among all the trees in Israel,  
For good and for beauty.

And strengthen the hands  
Of all our brothers,  
Who work to revive the sacred soil  
And make fruitful its ruined earth.  
Bless, o Lord, their might,  
And may the work of their hands  
Find favor before You.

Look down from Your holy place,  
From heaven,  
And bless this land  
That it may flow again  
With milk and honey.

It is hard to describe the feeling of pride that seemed to be coming from this group of young men. Then I read the kaddish which is simply an affirmation that there is some sort of sense, some sort of plan that God has in mind for us all. Then something happened that I didn't expect. The men I was with decided to plant trees on their own all around the two trees we planted for Keith! It was just a spontaneous act of camaraderie, support and good will from a group that didn't know me, you or one another.

It's days like these that make it so very wonderful to be a guide.

Thanks folks, for coming here and bringing me a wonderful day to remember.

With very best wishes from a wonderful day in a world that sometimes really sparkles,

--lee

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***My response back to Lee which I would like to share with you:***

Dear Lee,

Your email made my eyes glisten with tears and my heart swell with thankfulness to have met such a dear man who fulfilled a very special wish from Sadler and me to plant 2 trees by your hands in memory of our son Keith in Israel. The beauty of this story that you shared with us in this email and the spirit of these young men seem so appropriate at a time when we celebrate the American holiday of Thanksgiving. My son Brian just came in from California tonight and Sadler and I drove with Brian into the City to be joined by our eldest son Adam. We shared a lovely intimate dinner before we are joined by our extended family for the Holiday weekend. I sat gazing at my boys and my husband and as we toasted to health and being together. We also toasted to Keith who remains very strong in our memories and in our hearts. I will forever be thankful for Keith being in our lives and enriching us, and thankful for the ability to still love life and enjoy all the people that come into our lives. Thank you for coming into our lives and giving Keith such a wonderful tribute for Sadler and me.

With appreciation and fondness,  
God Bless,

Sheila