

[Go Back](#) | Featured in [Region](#) > [Editorial](#)

Of War And Holy Land Headaches

By DANIEL WOLF SAVIN

Published on 5/11/2003

The pain began a few weeks before this latest Gulf War. To be more precise, shortly after they began to pass out gas masks to non-Israelis at the institute where I work. I was nervous about the impending war. But at first I made no connection between that and the dull throbbing just below and behind my left cheekbone. The doctor thought it was a sinus infection and suggested that it would go away in a week.

The pain got worse. So after a week I tried to make another appointment with the doctor. This was no easy task. Even when his office is open, the secretary doesn't always answer the phone. And the answering machine they have is rarely turned on.

The doctor gave me antibiotics to take for a week. I guess that it was about this time that I realized I was avoiding driving next to buses. I would try to pass each bus as fast as possible while looking in and seeing if there were enough people inside to make it a likely terrorist target. Nearly empty buses I found calming. Waiting at a traffic light next to a packed bus was somewhat less than relaxing.

Meanwhile the pain got worse. It had radiated into my ear, up to my left temple, further up the left side to the crown of my head, and also down to the left side of both my upper and lower jaws. The pain was so bad that it would keep me up at night until I finally fell asleep from exhaustion. I was beginning to wonder if all this were due to my fear of suicide bombers.

At my next doctor's appointment, I got a prescription for painkillers and a referral for X-rays of my sinuses. I called my insurance company to find out where to go. They gave me the phone number and address of a clinic one town over. I drove over there immediately only to find out that the address was incorrect. So there I was walking up and down the main street of this town unable to find any sign of the X-ray place. I called the clinic on my cell phone to get directions and found out that there were no signs visible from the street. Then they began to direct me using landmarks. All I had to do was first find the laundromat next to the bank in the center of town.

About this time the U.S. attacked Iraq and I began to sleep with two backpacks by my front door. One contained my gas mask, snacks, and a few other items that the Israeli Homefront Command recommended one take into the bomb shelter in case of an attack by Iraq. The other contained items recommended by the U.S. State Department: important personal and financial papers and several days worth of clothing in case an emergency evacuation out of the country was necessary.

▼ advertisement

GRIDLOCK Grille THE PERFECT Gift Card
566 COLMAN ST
NEW LONDON
442-0033
6034 1190 1805 7815
Available in any denomination
Home of the 9 lb. Lobster
**Gift Cards Available
In any Denomination -
The Perfect Gift !**
566 Colman St., New London
CT 06320 (860)442-0033 [CLICK HERE](#)

After the war began, I got the X-ray results and saw the doctor again.

No sinus infection. So he gave me a referral to see a neurologist. Again I called up my insurance company and they told me to go to the local hospital. I called the hospital to make an appointment. Two phone calls later I found out that I had actually made an appointment with a urologist!

By the time I saw the neurologist later that week the pain seemed to have developed into a pattern. I would wake up okay, over the course of the day it would get worse, and at night it would become excruciating. The painkillers helped some but I was still not sleeping much. About now I was pretty certain that the root cause of my pain was the stress of life here.

The neurologist was a woman from Eastern Europe who was not too happy about having to speak English. She took my history, then had me lie down, and using a paper clip began to jab me all over. I imagine this was a technique first developed by the KGB and later taught in medical schools in the former Soviet Union.

Her diagnosis was “cluster headaches” and she recommended that I get a CT scan of my head to rule out other possibilities. So again I called my insurance company to find out where to go. They gave me three numbers to call. The first place did not do such a test and the second two numbers were both disconnected. Eventually, with the help of a Hebrew speaking colleague, I got the correct phone number, made the appointment, and got the CT scan.

“Unremarkable” were the results of the test. I was relieved. But if there were no obvious physiological causes for the pain, then what could it be due to? By this point I was convinced that between the Intifada, the war in Iraq, and the inefficient bureaucracy, life here was just way too stressful for me and the only cure would be to move back to the U.S.

While this was all sinking in, I went to see a dentist about a filling which had fallen out. He looked at the tooth and took X-rays. While we waited for the X-rays to be developed, I described to him the headaches that I had been suffering for the last month and a half. I told him my belief that they were due to stress and that I would have to leave Israel. He got the X-ray back, looked at it, looked at me, and told me that I could stay in the country; I just needed a root canal.

Daniel Wolf Savin is an atomic physicist working on a year-long research fellowship in Israel. He grew up in New London. His e-mail address is savin@post.harvard.edu. ■

© The Day Publishing Co.