Good evening, my name is Mariela. I'm the CEO of the Jewish Federation—and Mica's mom.

I stand here tonight as one of the Jewish leaders in this community, and as a mother. A mother among other mothers. And I think of **Shiri Bibas**.

I stand here tonight, and I cannot help but look into my daughter's bright and sparkly eyes. And I think of **Ariel and Kfir Bibas**.

I stand here tonight as a believer in peace and in building bridges. And I think of **Oded Lifshitz**.

I stand here tonight as a true advocate for the power of community, for the strength we draw from each other, for the positive energy we create by being here together. And I think of you—my community, **our** community.

Hine ma tov u'ma na'im, shevet achim gam yachad—
"How good and how pleasant it is that people dwell together."

As I was preparing to speak tonight, it occurred to me that Purim is coming up. The Jewish carnival! A time to be happy, to be silly, to dress up, to celebrate—and, yes, for some, even to get a bit drunk.

How hard it is to think about celebrating.
How hard it is to think about joy.

And then, I was reminded of what Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, once wrote in reference to Purim and the Jewish response to trauma:

"The Jewish response to trauma is counterintuitive and extraordinary. You defeat fear by joy. You conquer terror by collective celebration (…) Precisely because the threat was so serious, you refuse to be serious and, in that refusal, you're doing something very serious indeed. You are denying your enemies a victory."

Reading his words gave me some comfort—that honoring the lives of the dead, even smiling at pictures of them, or remembering moments of their lives, **is** celebrating their lives. **Is** denying their killers a victory.

When I was thinking about tonight, I could imagine all of us in this sanctuary. I could see your faces—some wet with tears, some tense with worry, some showing clear signs of exhaustion. I could almost feel the heavy energy that comes from deep grief, from loss too great to bear, from pain that words can never fully capture.

And I want to say: **it is okay to feel that.** It is okay to sit in it, to let it wash over us, to cry, to hold onto each other, to be angry, to be exhausted.

Because **grief is love.**

Because **we've got you. You've got each other. We have each other.**

That is why, in Judaism, we grieve in community—surrounded by the care, love, and support of others.

And in that togetherness, we find something more.
We find **strength.**
We find **resilience.**
We find the reminder that **Am Israel Chai**—the Jewish people live.
That **we live.**
That despite all efforts to break us, **we are still here.**

So tonight, **we remember.**

We remember with our tears, with our stories, with stickers and bracelets, with words of hope, with our prayers.

We say (some of) their names. We hold their faces in our hearts.

But we also **hold each other.**

We stand, as generations before us have stood, through times of darkness and despair, and we say: **our love is stronger than their hate.**
Our unity is stronger than their violence.

Am Israel Chai.

And as we leave this space tonight, may we carry that strength with us.

Yehi zichram baruch—may their memories be a blessing.