**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I’m Mishy Harman and from PRX this is Israel Story. Israel Story is produced together with Tablet Magazine. And our episode today, (an episode we’re really excited about as you’ll discover in just moment), is called, “Birthquake.” Now, the whole hour is devoted to one story, one story about parenthood and gay rights, about fairness and bodies, about the differences between the developed world and the developing world. This story began almost exactly a year ago. One of the producers on our show, Maya Kosover, told us about something that happened the previous evening at her birthday party.

**Maya Kosover:** OK, it was party, we were all dancing, Israeli music, in the middle of Jaffa.

**Jad Abumrad:** It was her birthday, they were at her apartment. And this guy Tal.

**Maya Kosover:** Tal was dancing with his partner.

**Jad Abumrad:** These are friends of yours?

**Maya Kosover:** Yeah, Tal is kind of a mega star in the deaf community in Israel, because he translates the news in the TV to deaf people, to sign language.

**Jad Abumrad:** Oh, wow, so he’s like the little guy in the corner of the TV.

**Maya Kosover:** Yeah.

**Jad Abumrad:** And his partner?

**Maya Kosover:** Amir.

**Jad Abumrad:** Amir or Amil?

**Maya Kosover:** Amir.

**Jad Abumrad:** With an R.

**Maya Kosover:** Is psychologist that works specially with children that are autistic.

**Jad Abumrad:** Oh, anyway, they are at the party.

**Maya Kosover:** So we were dancing all together and then Tal was, “Oh my God, maybe it’s going to be the last party that I’m in, ‘cuz I’m going to be a parent, and not only a parent, I’m going to be a father for three.”

**Jad Abumrad:** Wow.

**Maya Kosover:** And then we were like, “Oh my god, three babies?!”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So you might have recognized that guy, talking to Maya. It’s Jad Abumrad, the co-host of Radiolab, one of the shows that really inspired us to get into this whole world of podcasting. And the reason that Jad was talking to Maya just there is that this hour is actually our very first collaboration with Radiolab. Which, honestly, is kind of like a dream come true for us. Now, I’m sure many of you actually heard this story on Radiolab’s latest episode, but even if you did, don’t leave just yet.

**Molly Webster:** Hello?

**Mishy Harman:** Hey Molly.

**Molly Webster:** Hi Mishy, how are you?

**Mishy Harman:** Good, how are you doing?

**Molly Webster:** I’m doing well, thank you!

**Mishy Harman:** Great.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That’s Molly Webster, from Radiolab, who produced this piece. We got her on the phone...

**Mishy Harman:** Hey Jad!

**Jad Abumrad:** Hey, how’s it going?

**Mishy Harman (narration):** With Jad and Robert Krulwich (the other host of Radiolab), to talk about how this story was born.

**Robert Krulwich:** Hi! *[Molly laughs]*.

**Mishy Harman:** Hey, hey guys! *[Molly laughs]*. How are you doing there?

**Jad Abumrad:** Ahh, we’re fantastic.

**Robert Krulwich:** Yes.

**Molly Webster:** Ready to go.

**Jad Abumrad:** Caffeinated.

**Molly Webster:** Uh ha!

**Jad Abumrad:** Feeling good!

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But really, we also just wanted to talk to them. So... I hope you indulge us while we geek out on Radiolab a bit.

**Robert Krulwich:** We’re in New York, you are on the other side of I think two oceans, at least. Well, at least an ocean and a sea.

**Molly Webster:** Wait, are you guys in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv?

**Mishy Harman:** Jerusalem. Jerusalem.

**Maya Kosover**: Jerusalem.

**Robert Krulwich:** Oh really?

**Mishy Harman:** You just missed the horn that sig…

**Robert Krulwich:** Oh, it’s Shabbat now.

**Mishy Harman:** The beginning of Shabbat, yeah.

**Robert Krulwich:** Yeah.

**Jad Abumrad:** My god, is it, is it, is it wrong? Is it unkosher of us to speak to each other?

**Maya Kosover**: It’s unkosher, and it’s forbidden to work on Shabbat, but…

**Jad Abumrad:** Hey…

**Mishy Harman:** I think it’s OK. *[laughter].*

**Jad Abumrad:** We’re living in the new world.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Anyway, this all began a few months ago - Robert came to Israel, to be the keynote speaker at the IDC’s radio conference.

**Robert Krulwich:** Right, yes. And I met you. *[Molly and Maya laugh]*.

**Mishy Harman:** Umm… we were all excited because somehow… somehow we ended up going out to dinner together.

**Robert Krulwich:** Yes. We did. It was a great dinner. And it was across from one of the most… I think of all the rooms I’ve ever stayed in in my entire life, that was the best hotel room of my life.

**Molly Webster:** No…

**Robert Krulwich:** And right across was this restaurant.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** OK, so for us meeting Robert was a big deal. But he was way more interested in the amenities of his hotel room. (It was this little boutique B&B in South Tel Aviv, which has since become the private home of a Russian oligarch).

**Robert Krulwich:** I conducted tours of this place. It was so spectacular. I had Mishy come up.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He’s not joking, by the way, before we sat down to eat, Robert, who could literally not stop raving about the room, insisted that we all come up to see the “fabulous curtains.”

*[Jad laughs].*

**Robert Krulwich:** And, I could push a button on the wall, behind my bed, and the curtains… The room would turn all kinds of beautiful colors and the Venetian blinds would half open, half close, things would come…

**Mishy Harman:** I was waiting for you to say something about the curtains. Robert had the entire team come up to his room, to inspect these curtains *[Molly and Robert laugh]*.

**Molly Webster:** Just to press the buttons. *[Robert laughs]*.

**Robert Krulwich:** I said, I have been given a gift that I want to share, which is curtains. *[Everyone laughs]*. I think a lot of these people were thinking I was completely insane. But I… I also took pictures of it, and I to this day, almost a year later, I go to my phone and I gaze at that room, because it was like being a king.

**Molly Webster:** Well I know what we are doing after this phone call.

**Jad Abumrad:** Yeah, yeah.

**Molly Webster:** We’re gazing. We’re gonna gaze at those photos.

**Robert Krulwich:** Ah yes, I can show you my room. Oh yeah. It’s really quite something.

**Jad Abumrad:** Wow.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Once we had all taken turns pressing the buttons and seeing the blinds slowly open, we finally got Robert to go to the restaurant.

**Mishy Harman:** And we were all, you know, mildly starstruck, and ah… and basically everyone was calling each other and texting each other and being like, “oh my God, there’s dinner with Robert Krulwich, come over, come over, come over.” *[Jad and Robert laugh]*. And all kinds of people who hadn’t been to a story meeting in half a year suddenly showed up. *[Jad laughs]*.

**Jad Abumrad:** I see, so you had a little bit of a coming out party for Krulwich.

**Robert Krulwich:** But no… But I, you know, usually I like to dominate the evening by like saying, “so then I, and then he, and then I…” But between all these people, I was pretty much in the audience that night, as opposed to be the teller.

**Molly Webster:** Minus the button pushing moment, minus the giant tour of the apartment *[Molly laughs]*.

**Robert Krulwich:** Well, but yes, the button pushing.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The dinner was the this magical evening of story after story after story. (I later told Robert that my life would be completely different if only some my first dates would go as well as that evening).

**Molly Webster:** They probably just put you two at the end of the table. *[Robert and Jad laugh]*.

**Robert Krulwich:** They should have done that, really.

**Molly Webster:** We’ll just stick Robert and Mishy down there.

**Robert Krulwich:** Oh God, yeah. *[Jad and Molly laugh]*. So I had the best… between the windows and that dinner, I was the winner of that evening. *[Jad and Molly laugh].*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** We began this extensive correspondence, basically swapping random tales - of pigs, of hell - stay tuned for both down the line. And then, we were in New York, for our very first live show, at the Manhattan JCC. One of our production interns, Bari Finkel, had previously interned at Radiolab, and organized a visit.

**Mishy Harman:** And you guys invited us to come to our pitch meeting.

**Jad Abumrad:** Yes.

**Robert Krulwich:** Yes.

**Molly Webster:** Umm hmm..

**Jad Abumrad:** Was this around the time of the earthquake?

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Jad’s talking about the earthquake in Nepal, in April 2015.

**Maya Kosover:** No, it was exactly the time…

**Jad Abumrad:** It was! It was exactly the time of the earthquake and you had just gotten that voice message from Tal, and you played it for us in the meeting. That eighteen seconds that he’s yelling and shouting and crying.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** OK, let me explain what he’s talking about here. Tal and Amir, that couple from Maya’s birthday party, had begun a process of becoming parents through surrogacy. And we decided to follow that process, not really knowing what would come out of it. We gave them tape recorders, and asked them to document themselves. They would send us snippets of those recordings, from Israel when they were waiting for the births, and then from Nepal, where they went to pick up their babies. That message Jad’s talking about - you’ll hear it later on in the story - was from right after the earthquake.

**Jad Abumrad:** It was like getting a blast of some other world.

**Robert Krulwich:** Yeah.

**Jad Abumrad:** In the middle of like, a very calm, placid, editorial meeting.

**Molly Webster:** I just remember you guys coming into the meeting and you had like a bunch of ideas, and then somehow you just started talking about this one, and like, it was like for the next forty minutes we were all enraptured like popping popcorn, like eating, like, “please go on, what’s next, what’s next?”

**Jad Abumrad:** *[Robert laughs]*. No, I was like, I was reading this pitch being like, “this is the most bananas story I’ve heard in a long time.”

**Robert Krulwich:** Yeah.

**Jad Abumrad:** Every single element of it, just from our American ears, felt strange and it just takes something you thought you knew about and flips it, almost twelve different times.

**Robert Krulwich:** The story itself is… it is a mood that cannot settle, sometimes you think “ewwww.”

**Jad Abumrad:** Yeah.

**Robert Krulwich:** And sometimes you think “awww,” and sometimes you think “no,” and sometimes your think “yes,” and sometimes you think it of the same person. And it’s… The thing that’s really interesting, every so often, is you find a story, which is so richly conflicted in its nature, that ahh… that every turn is big.

**Jad Abumrad:** Umm hmm…

**Robert Krulwich:** There are no small turns in this one.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Alright, let’s just jump right into it. **Act One - Making Babies.** Jad, Robert and Molly, together with Yochai Maital and Maya Kosover take us to the very beginning of the story.

**Amir:** The first thing that I saw in Tal is his ability to be a father.

**Jad Abumrad:** This is Amir.

**Molly Webster:** Really? How so?

**Amir:** He’s a good man. He is very gentle and really an adult to build a family

**Tal:** Mensch.

**Molly Webster:** Did you see that upon first meeting or was this four months in?

**Amir:** My career is to work with autistic people and to take notice in every sign of communication and to understand other people and to analyze them. It was really immediate.

**Tal:** Let’s say after two or three times, I want children so, are you interested?

**Amir:** Yeah, I wrote a manifest of my future. What I want to do, what I want to do with my career, my vision and I gave it to him and I said listen this is what I want.

*[Laughs].*

**Jad Abumrad:** Sign at the bottom please.

**Amir:** Yeah it’s like a contract, like this is what I want, if you want to join me.

**Tal:** So let’s do it.

**Jad Abumrad:** And Tal, what was your reaction to the manifesto?

**Tal:** I like it. It looks like someone who wants a future

**Robert Krulwich:** Did either of your parents have views about that? Like don’t do this or this is weird?

*[All laugh].*

**Tal:** Yeah.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Suffice to say, their families did *not* approve. Especially when it came to the idea of them having kids. (music) Now how to have those kids, that is a question.

**Yochai Maital**: There are two options if you’re a gay couple when it comes to having kids. It used to be three options.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** That is Yochai Maital from Israel Story. This is how Yochai and Maya laid it out for us.

**Yochai Maital:** You can adopt a kid from another country.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** But he says, over the last few years, what happened is that those third world country figured out who was adopting their babies and one by one, they banned it for gay couples.

**Yochai Maital:** The second option which is becoming more and more popular in Israel is ‘the new family’. That’s what it’s called in Hebrew at least. Sort of getting together with another woman who wants a family but doesn’t have a father and they have a joint parenthood.

**Jad Abumrad:** They all live in the same house?

**Yochai Maital:** No, they live separately. It’s kind of like divorced parents who get along really well.

**Maya Kosover:** They sign a contract before the process and everything is in the contract.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Tal and Amir said that early on, they tried this concept.

**Amir:** Tal got an offer to one of his friends to do the co-parenting. And I told Tal, “Listening, it’s very important for me to have a baby of my own, with my sperm.”

**Tal:** I said to Amir “I want to try but in the end, I don’t care if we have one baby with your sperm, it will be my baby all the same.”

**Amir:** I think I was more stubborn that Tal.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Amir couldn’t explain why it was so important to him, just that it was important to him. Maya reflected on it later and put it this way.

**Maya Kosover:** It’s very Jewish and Israeli. I mean if you are not in the Israeli mainstream, if you are gay or something, having a baby of your own is like being part of the mainstream.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Whatever the reason, Tal and Amir talked it over, went back to the woman who offered to do the co-parenting.

**Tal:** We asked her if she would bring two children, one of Tal’s sperm and one of Amir’s.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** In the end, she said no. At this point a year had gone by.

**Tal:** So in the end, we decided the best option would be.

**Yochai Maital (narration):** Option three is:

**(All voices):** Surrogacy

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Meaning of course, if you are a gay man, you take your sperm, some eggs from a woman, put your sperm in the eggs and those eggs into the womb of a second woman who carries the baby to term.

**Yochai Maital:** But surrogacy is illegal in Israel.

**Maya Kosover:** Only for gay couples.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** In Israel, if you are a hetero couple, you can use a woman as a surrogate but if you’re gay, you cannot.

**Yochai Maital:** So, there’s a big problem but that problem also creates a big demand. As you can imagine, there are quite a lot of gay couples in Israel so there are companies that have sprung up, basically offering international brokering of sperm and eggs.

**Maya Kosover:** Baby outsourcing.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** You can see this play out at conferences held in Israel.

**Yochai Maital:** Conferences where they get perspective parents together in a huge room. Hundreds of people.

**Jad Abumrad:** Basically what happens at these conferences is companies will get up and basically sell their products.

**Various speakers:** We now offer surrogacy in Mexico, Thailand, India, Ft. Worth.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** These agencies will find women in all of these places who will serve as the surrogate for your child. Depending on what country you choose, if you provide the donor egg and a million other factors, the cost will vary.

**Speaker 1:** We offer competitive prices. For example,

$36,000 for start to finish in Mexico. $30,000 in Thailand.

**Speaker 2:** Anywhere from $65,00 to $85,000 it could be that much.

**Speaker 1:** That’s excluding the donor of course. We have a good selection of donors including Jewish donors as well.

**Tal:** You have sessions with the lawyers, the families, with doctors.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Tal and Amir went to two of these conferences and coming back from the second one-

**Amir:** We took a calculator and start to think how we can make it? Money money money.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** They figured if they went with the company in the U.S. it would cost $150,000 or-

**Robert Krulwich:** Is that lawyers?

**Tal:** Lawyers, the hospital, the sperm

**Amir:** Delivery, the egg donor, there are a lot of people we need to pay.

**Jad Abumrad (narration)**: And keep in mind, when you pay that money, you are not guaranteed a baby.

**Tal:** We buy a process. We don’t buy a baby. One of our friends tried this process five times and still didn’t succeed.

**Robert Krulwich:** Five times?

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** They figured with that kind of risk, doing it in the U.S. was just too expensive. So they started to look at agencies that operated in India and Nepal.

**Tal:** Because over there you are can do the same thing for $60,000. Half price.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Now, one of the tricky things according to Yochai-

**Yochai Maital (narration):** India basically outlawed surrogacy.

**Maya Kosover (narration):** For gay couples. If you are straight, you can do surrogacy in India, but not if you’re gay.

**Yochai Maital (narration):** Nepal also outlawed surrogacy.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Effectively the cabinet said that if you are a Nepali woman, you cannot be a surrogate period.

**Yochai Maital (narration):** But, there is sort of a loophole, Indian women are allowed to be surrogates in Nepal. Just Nepali women aren’t allowed to be surrogates in Nepal.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** So what ends up happening is a strange situation.

**Maya Kosover (narration):** It looks like a puzzle.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** These agencies in Northern India will find Indian women, move them across the border to Nepal, take them to Kathmandu where the agencies have set up shelter houses and work with local hospitals and clinics. Maya says for Tal and Amir, the decision to do it this way was not easy.

**Maya Kosover (narration):** They had like different opinions.

**Amir**: Tal had a bigger issue with the moral concept of this process.

**Maya Kosover (narration):** Amir was like this is what we need to do but Tal was- it was very hard for him.

**Tal:** I thought it was immoral to think like that. To use another woman to give me a present like that and I know she will never see this baby anymore.

**Molly Webster:** Is it immoral because you are essentially using a woman’s body or?

**Tal:** Yeah, yeah you can say it.

**Maya Kosover (narration):** He felt like he was using other people’s bad luck for his good. She has no choice. She is not doing it out of freedom, she is doing it for the money. Maybe it is not morally okay that we use this weakness.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Tal and Amir went back and forth on this for months. And eventually the argument that won was this- That if they’re going to do it, they are going to do it with this agency called Lotus which to their understanding- paid the surrogates $12,000. Now, for a rural woman in India, that is a massive sum of money. They figured- this won’t just help her survive, this will change her life. She’ll be changing their life and they will be changing hers.

**Tal:** Maybe this was kind of comfort. They can get the

money and can change their lives. They can buy a house, send her children to school to learn in the University. When I thought it would be life-changer, and not exploiting to her, so I agreed.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** At the start of the process-

**Maya Kosover:** The main issue was picking the egg donor.

**Molly Webster:** And who are these women? Where do they come from?

**Tal & Amir:** They come from Ukraine.

**Molly Webster:** They’re all Ukrainian. I didn’t expect that to be thrown into the mix of countries.

**Yochai Maital:** The reason the eggs are from Eastern Europe is because they are white. It’s like cheap white eggs.

**Jad Abumrad:** Cheap White Eggs. [Laughs]. Wow. That’s quite a phrase.

**Amir:** So you have a website and you see all these pictures of these women and they you have to pick. It’s like J-date.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Jewish online dating service.

**Amir:** I think it was the most straight-ish act I’ve done in a very long time.

**Jad Abumrad:** Oh straight-ish because you’re picking out a lady. How did you decide what criteria you wanted in a donor mom?

**Amir:** Oh, the first one was height. Because it’s easy to live when you are high. Then eyes.

**Maya Kosover (narration):** She had these big round eyes.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** They showed Maya a picture.

**Molly Webster (narration):** Light brown hair and she has this nice nose. It was very strange.

**Tal:** It was very uncomfortable to chose for me it was very- like genetical…

**Molly Webster (narration):** Oh! You felt like you were doing eugenics.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Now, since Tal and Amir each wanted a baby with their own sperm, they told Lotus-

**Molly Webster:** We would like to rent two wombs, one of each sperm. And try to use two surrogate mothers and Lotus said-

**Tal:** Fine, it will cost you $50-$60,000 each pregnancy.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Again, no guarantees. So, Tal and Amir give Lotus their sperm in little cups, Lotus freezes the sperm and sends it to Nepal. The Ukrainian woman is flown to Nepal, her eggs are harvested somewhere along the way. Two Indian women are flown across the border to Nepal. Finally the doctors at the Nepali hospital take the sperm, inject it to the Ukrainian eggs, create some embryos and inject them in the wombs of the Indian surrogates. Four countries- one baby. A few months go by, they get the news that both surrogates are pregnant. The process worked. One is pregnant with twins. Three babies in all. They are sent sonograms, photos of the pregnant bellies.

**Tal:** I all the time, looked at the pictures, the ultrasound pictures, looking all the time on my cell phone.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Because Tal says there wasn’t much they could do because for three, four, five months, nothing happened. Until-

**Tal & Amir:** Six o’clock in the morning, Donna from

Lotus calls us and Amir answers the phone and I hear him say, “okay, they are okay?” I wake up and say “What?” because it was too early, about two weeks ahead.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** The surrogate who was carrying twins had given birth.

**Tal:** I was crying a lot.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** This was the surrogate carrying Tal’s baby. Which turned out to be two babies. Were you on a plane the same day you got the call?

**Tal:** The day after we fly from Tel Aviv to Istanbul to

Kathmandu. It was very crazy day. Then Gil (a friend who was in Nepal also for surrogacy) took me to the hospital and wow! I was shocked- because Gili was so tiny.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Gili was 3.8 lbs, his brother Yuval, 4.8 lbs.

**Tal:** And I was very scared to touch him. I expected the twins to stay in the hospital for a month but the nurses said, “Nope, going home tomorrow.” I thought I didn’t have enough time to think because I understand tomorrow I need to take them home, and be alone and I have never taken care of babies. So I said to the nurses, “Teach me how to feed them.” And after a few days, I took them home.

**Robert Krulwich:** So where was the surrogate during these days? In the hospital?

**Tal:** I think she was in the hospital because she had a

cesarean surgery. I asked if she was okay and if she needed something. They said “you cannot see her until she signs all the papers and then you can see her.”

**Molly Webster:** So the papers hadn’t been signed?

**Amir:** Right, because we knew she was giving up all her maternal rights and if she doesn’t want to sign on this paper, we can lose the baby.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** The laws on this get crazy complicated but basically, they needed Israel, India and Nepal to all recognize, they were the uncontested parents. And hanging in the air, was a recent case in Thailand, where after the baby was born, changed her mind.

***News Reporter:*** “Lake and his husband believe the surrogate decided to keep the baby because she found out they were gay.”

**Amir:** We had a little bit of anxiety that the surrogate was going to know that the baby was going to grow up in a house with two dads.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Tal is in Nepal with the twins, Amir is back in Tel Aviv. A couple weeks go by, and then-

**Amir:** Tal called me and said, “Mazel tov, you’re a dad.”

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** The second surrogate had given birth- one baby.

**Tal:** And the day after, we flew from Tel Aviv to Istanbul to Kathmandu. And then it was very nice, only us with no parents, no friends, no phones, no work. The first few days of our relationship with the babies, alone.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** And for the next month, they lived in an apartment in Nepal, just them and their three babies, learning to be dads. Waiting for the paperwork to be done.

*[Sounds of babies and Hebrew lullabies].*

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** The paperwork is a beast because after the surrogates sign away their rights, the babies have no nationality. And then they’re suddenly illegally in the country. The guys have to get a DNA test, send it to Israel, have it verified, get passports for the babies, then several sets of visas. All of that means several trips to the Israeli Agency. And it was on one of those trips, that they learned something.

**Tal:** It was really weird because we went over there with our kids to get our passports and there was another surrogate from another agency and standing next to her was an Israeli woman who happened to speak Hindi. And so out of curiosity, we asked her to ask the surrogate in Hindu, how much she is getting for the whole process. But she was shy, not delighted to speak about the money. Which made us more curious so we persisted. Then, we discovered she gets only $3,000 USD.

**Yochai Maital:** $3,000 for the whole pregnancy. Amir was like, wait a second..

**Amir:** In the agreement, $12,500 was supposed to go to the surrogate.

**Jad Abumrad:** That was their understanding. This was a different woman from a different agency and just one woman’s account but still.

**Robert Krulwich:** In your narrative, you described that you thought that the reason this was okay to do, the surrogacy because the phrase used was "this will make a change in the life of the woman we are paying."

**Tal:** Yes, this would be a life changing sum of money

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** So Maya says they walked away from that meeting-

**Maya Kosover (narration):** Wondering if they should do something in Israel.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** At the very least, call the agency, say, "Hey we heard some reasons they're probably not true but what do you think?"

**Amir:** We started to ask questions but then-

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Literally the next day-

*[Loud yelling].*

**Newscaster:** Horrendous scenes of death and destruction from Nepal today after a powerful earthquake that started outside Kathmandu.

*[Montage of news footage].*

**Newscaster:** The death toll is over 5,800 nearly 14,000 injured.

**Newscaster 2:** Officials say it is the most destructive earthquake it hit Nepal in over 80 years.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** The death toll would ultimately rise somewhere between 7-10,000. Maya says she was in New York in a meeting and she gets this voicemail from Tal.

*[Hysterical Hebrew voicemail].*

**Maya Kosover (narration):** He was shouting, "An earthquake just happened here, we saved the babies, we are outside, we are half naked and we don't know what to do.” He is crying over there and then-- it suddenly stopped, he lost the connection. It was like 12 hours with no connection to them. We didn't know if they were alive or not. Everything was unknown.

**Amir:** I don't know how but Tal took his cell phone and we just ran barefoot

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Amir says they ran out of the apartment, down the street holding the babies and the phone. On the way they ran into their friend Gil who had four babies another couple with two babies.

**Amir:** We are on the street, we have 9 babies.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** They shot a video on Tal's phone you see Tal only in shorts. A bunch of other couples holding babies and they're all literally standing on a pile of rubble.

*[Babies crying].*

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** As they're standing there, a guy with a badge walks by.

**Amir:** You're a policeman? Ah no, you're from the American embassy? We are Israeli citizens we have here 9 babies. We need help please we don't have food for the babies. Thank you

**Israeli woman:** We need to go from this place very

quickly, to go from here.

**Amir:** Thank you.

 *[Babies crying].*

**Amir:** So they took us into the Israeli embassy.

**Yochai Maital (narration):** They went to the Israeli embassy and the Israeli embassy went into emergency mode. Gave out blankets, put up tents.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** And shortly after, the news cameras arrived and Tal--

**Yochai Maital (narration):** Tal is in the media because he is the sign language translator so he realized he has no way to communicate back home that he's alive.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** So Yochai says that Tal shoved his way in front of the television cameras and started signing.

**Maya Kosover (narration):** 12 hours after the earthquake--

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Maya says she got a call from her partner in Tel Aviv.

**Maya Kosover (narration)**: And she says, “They're on the news now. I can see Tal speaking sign language to his parents, saying everything is okay, they are alive, the three babies are with them and they are waiting for rescue teams to come take them.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** But what the cameras also captured was this scene that hadn't really been grasped yet.

**Robert Krulwich (narration):** So this whole thing was kind of going on quietly and now you have an international earthquake. Everybody's watching the television and in the middle of the story there's ten Israeli babies and gay couples.

**Maya Kosover (narration):** *[Laughs].* There were a lot more than ten babies.

**Tal:** It was like 24 babies.

**Molly, Jad & Robert Krulwich:** 24?!

**Tal & Amir:** Yes because there is another agency also--

**Molly Webster (narration):** It's like all of a sudden you realize there's this pipeline of babies moving from Nepal to Israel.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Maya says when images of those 24 babies splashed across Israeli TV screens.

**Maya Kosover (narration):** It was like the first time surrogacy was discussed in Israeli media in that. A huge discussion broke out. On one side, was 'okay we are using women and it’s immoral' from the other hand, 'okay in Israel, gay couples don't have a lot choices'.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** And everyone was asking, what do we do with all these surrogates?

**Maya Kosover (narration):** There was a huge argument in the Israeli media about the question if there are women waiting to give birth, we need to bring them to Israel to have the baby here.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** So they would fly the women to Israel, have the baby and then fly them back?

**Amir:** Yeah there was talk about it.

**Tal:** Yeah they talked about it but legally they could not do that.

**Molly Webster:** Well yeah, that feels like kidnapping the ladies.

**Tal:** Yeah.

**Yochai Maital (narration):** So what happened was, very quickly, Israel sent over search and rescue and medical aid delegation. And all the babies and all their parents were basically all put on a plane and the process was expedited and they just brought everyone over to Israel.

***Newscaster:*** Back in Israel, a parade of newborns. They will celebrate together knowing the medical stress they've been through and very aware that many in Nepal are still going through it.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** So what happened to the surrogates? Any idea?

**Maya Kosover (narration):** They checked with the agency and the answer was that two of them are back in India already and they weren't there during the earthquake.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** And what about all the surrogates who are in Nepal but hadn't given birth yet.

**Maya Kosover (narration):** Yeah about them there is a big question. No one knows. There were worried fathers in Israel.

**Tal:** It's terrifying. All my thoughts, all my prayers are for the surrogate mother and for the unborn child.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Tal and Amir made it back to Israel with their babies, they were fine but there were still a lot of questions.

**Robert Krulwich:** If I were you guys, I would want to know. These two women gave you, as you pointed out, a remarkable gift. Both of you believe that you hope that that gift was well rewarded and life changing but both of you don't know. You're still suspicious that maybe it wasn't. Don't you have this feeling that you need to find out what they were paid them.

**Tal:** Yes, this is why we are so glad that we made the connection with you guys and we heard that you can…

**Amir:** Find them maybe

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** So, we started a kind of a whole new leg of the story.

**Nolan:** Hello?

**Molly Webster:** Hello?

**Nolan:** Can you hear me?

**Molly Webster:** Yes I can hear you.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Our producer Molly Webster was able to track down a reporter in India, Nola Gelabomic and she asked her if she can find those surrogates.

**Nolan:** Okay you had given me a name right?

**Molly Webster:** Yeah, Lotus

**Nolan:** Okay, Lotus has a representative in Nepal. I called that person in Nepal and they did tell me the location of the clinic and I spoke to the doctor and she said, yes I will put you in touch with one of the surrogates and the next morning we were supposed to talk again and she just went totally incommunicado. That's when the same day I opened my mail and there was an Israeli notes asking me to stop the search for sometime and I was so near them.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** As far as we understand is that the doctor contacted Lotus, Lotus contacted Tal and Amir and told them 'call off the reporters, you're putting these women's lives in danger. If someone sees a reporter hanging around, they'll know those women were surrogates. That's not something these surrogates want people to know. Stop!"

**Jad Abumrad:** Here's my understanding and you guys correct me if I'm wrong. We asked someone to look for them then that person got kind of close and that got back to the agency and that created pressure and that’s where we are now, figuring out how to respond.

**Amir:** We heard that there was a real threat on their lives because of the culture of the society they live in. One of them was Muslim. I don't think the Muslim society is going to accept that she carried the pregnancy to a gay couple and to Israelis.

**Molly and Jad**: Yeah, understood.

**Robert Krulwich:** That's a very, very weird and delicate situation.

**Tal:** Yeah, and we don't want anything that may hurt the surrogate.

**Jad Abumrad:** Well, hm. We want to tell the story. We definitely don't want anyone to get hurt but I do feel like we have an ethical obligation to hear from the women who do this. If not the specific women in this case, women who can represent their experience. It would feel wrong for that to be a voice that we don't hear.

**Tal:** I don't know, it's for us..we don't want that anyone will contact our surrogates. If it means we'll be without a story, so be it. Because it's not worth it for us.

**Jad Abumrad:** Understood, understood. We won't make any more attempts to contact those two women. Just so we're all clear. What I would like to do is to continue to pursue people who have been in similar situations but are not in anyway connected to those two women or to you guys.

**Amir:** Okay, we need to make sure that nobody is going to be hurt.

**Jad Abumrad:** Of course, of course.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** That's where we left things with Tal and Amir and then the story changed- a lot. That's coming up.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** I guess, in some ways, if this hadn’t turned into a radio piece, the story could have ended here. Tal, Amir and the three babies are all back home in Israel. Sleepless nights, for sure, a lot of crying and feeding, but all is basically good. The process was a wild success. But the story doesn’t end here. It just becomes much much more complicated, for everyone. And that includes the producers working on the story too, here’s how Molly, Jad and Robert started to think about it as it was unravelling.

**Molly Webster:** I would come out of conversations and I would think, “oh, I totally get why people do that,” and then I would come out of conversations and be like, “no, I’m back to, no…”

**Robert Krulwich:** Umm hmm.

**Molly Webster:** This is exploitation, then I’d go into a conversation and think like, “you’re misusing women’s bodies,” and then I would come out of a conversation and be like, “oh, these women are empowered.”

**Jad Abumrad:** I wonder if this is ultimately just about surrogacy. It’s like, I… I hear this story...

**Robert Krulwich:** Hmmm.

**Jad Abumrad:** And I hear it as a story that’s… it’s primarily about surrogacy, but it’s also about women’s rights, about gay rights, it’s about Jewish culture, in a way. It’s about, it’s about human-trafficking.

**Robert Krulwich:** To me, while this may seem to be about a gay thing, I don’t think it really is. I think it’s a… it’s the first act of a play that’s going to get richer and deeper and much more universal, the business of generating life, and there’s something just to say it - the business of generating life - just makes… it just feels troubled. This is the deep consequence of having to take an alternate path to creating a life. So normally, people create a life out of love, or just out of sex, or by accident or whatever. This is one where, the… the idea precedes the deed, and the deed is going to be paid for. So the idea that you’re gonna pay for a life, pay to br… pay for a genesis, is… is the trouble and the beauty and the complicatedness of this thing from the beginning right to the very last moment of the piece.

**Molly Webster:** I guess I was thinking less about the business, but to your point, Robert, like I do think it’s like more than a… It’s a gay rights issue but it’s way more than a gay rights issue, ‘cuz I think like in the 21st century you look around and you see everyone forming different types of families like…

**Robert Krulwich:** Umm hmmm...

**Molly Webster:** A traditional family is no longer the traditional family. Like that model of like what a family looks like, and what parenthood is, is getting totally blown up.

**Robert Krulwich:** Umm hmmm...

**Mishy Harman:** So did this story like make you think that “ughh,” good thing that I didn’t have to go through such a… such a, you know, business of commercial babymaking?

**Jad Abumrad:** Fuck yeah! My God. *[Everyone laughs]*.

**Molly Webster:** Yeah, just the paperwork alone, that they had to go through was *‘chwaa.’*

**Jad Abumrad:** I would not want to go through what they went through.

**Molly Webster:** Unn unn…

**Mishy Harman (narration):** OK, so we all seem to agree how complicated this whole story is for Tal and Amir. But in the second part of this hour, Molly turns to the other side of this business. To the surrogates themselves. **Act Two - The Business of Generating Life**. We go back to Jad, Robert and Molly.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** We will return now to our collaboration with Israel Story. The story of Tal and Amir and their three babies. Now, that's how it started for us. A story of two guys trying to have some kids. But at the time of the earthquake, the story shifted for us as it did for the entire world really.

**Robert Krulwich (narration):** Because we had been concentrating the tale on the fathers but with 24 some-odd babies, that's an awful lot of women who are carrying these babies. What are they thinking? What is the story about them?

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** How were they feeling about the transaction? How much were they getting paid? Will this actually change their life? These are some of the questions we had. We gave them to Molly and she kind of went with it.

**Molly Webster (narration):** Yeah, so in the months after the earthquake, I guess you can say the political situation in Nepal changed, how everyone started looking at surrogacy changed. When people saw all these pictures of babies outside the embassy being put on planes and sent back to Israel, it just cracked open this huge debates. Not just back in Israel, in Nepal, in India, even internationally. Basically, you had groups coming out saying- the feminists were saying "this is exploitation. You're using these women's wombs." Op-ed articles saying 'should we be shifting women across borders? Is this the way you want to do surrogacy?" And then three weeks after we talked to Tal and Amir, Nepal actually decided to ban surrogacy completed for both straight, foreign, local, same-sex couples, Nepali women couldn't do it, Indian women couldn't do it.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Wow, no more surrogacy, no more loopholes.

**Molly Webster (narration):** No more surrogacy, no more loopholes. The confusion was they banned surrogacy but there were still pregnant surrogates on the ground. And so they sort of existed in this grey zone and in the mists of that, we went out and tried to find surrogates. In Nepal, all the surrogates are kept in shelter houses which are just houses that agencies rent out and house all these pregnant women.

**Robert Krulwich (narration):** Even though this is banned? They still have these houses?

**Molly Webster (narration):** Yes, they still have the houses. The rumors are that they moved the houses further away from the city center to attract less attention and so we found a Nepali journalist based in Kathmandu to try to get into one of these shelter houses.

**Bercuti:** So the shelter house is actually quite far from the main city center, almost 30-45 minute drive from Kathmandu. It's on hilltop because these are the outskirts of Kathmandu where new settlements have just started. It was actually a school building which did turn into a shelter because the school had left after the earthquake. The moment I reached the first floor, I was so surprised. It was very noisy, a lot of children playing around. And turns out a lot of women bring in their young children if they are too young to be left alone.

**Molly Webster:** Really? And how many women were there?

**Bercuti:** There were around 20 or 22 women there.

**Molly Webster:** 22 women on the first floor the building?

**Bercuti:** Yes.

**Molly Webster:** This shelter house was run by another Israeli agency, not Lotus but another one. We are guessing that most of the women were carrying babies for Israeli couples.

**Bercuti:** At least the women I could see outside the rooms or with their doors open, they seemed to be around 30-early 40s.

**Molly Webster:** Really?

**Bercuti**: Yeah I mean the first woman I talked to--

*[Hindi greetings].*

**Bercuti:** She was wearing a mustard colored Sari. She had some bangles on. All the women had bangles on their hands.

**Molly Webster:** She said she was 36 years old from Calcutta. She has two girls, Bercuti asked how old are your girls? She said 8 and 12. Bercuti asked, "What are you doing this?" and the woman said, "I'm doing it for them."

**Bercuti:** Because she said "me and my husband have a lot of financial problem. My husband is a rickshaw driver and we don't make enough.She worked as maid in Delhi.

**Molly Webster:** And ultimately, she had no other way to raise money for her daughters to get married because in Hindu weddings, the bride's family pays off the groom's family for the marriage. The plan was to use the money from surrogacy for the dowries. She had been in Kathmandu for three months, in her first trimester. When Bercuti asked her, "Does she know who the baby is for?" She said no but she knows it's not hers. And actually, all the women that Bercuti talked to were very very clear about this. This is a job.

**Bercuti**: The second woman I talked to-

**Molly Webster:** 30 years old, also a maid in Delhi, also two daughters.

**Bercuti:** She was all dressed up as if she was about to leave somewhere and then I realized okay her husband is here.

**Molly Webster:** She had just given birth and she put the job sentiment pretty plainly. So she said, and I'm translating here, "I will give gladly. I will give the baby from my womb. If I will think this is my baby, how will it work? I have two children, I cannot take this child home I will have to go give. I have no sadness, no problem." Anytime Bercuti asked these women if they were conflicted, will they have trouble giving the baby up? She always got the same answer.

**[Montage- many women]:** Ne, Ne, Ne, Ne, Ne, Ne

**Bercuti:** They all said they would happily give away the child and they even said*--* If the baby comes out right now, I would give it to you right here.

**Molly Webster:** Did you get a sense that these women didn't want people knowing they did this?

**Bercuti:** Some of them did, some of them didn't. Some women were like-

**Molly Webster:** They said, now that I am here- my neighbors, my family, my friends, everybody knows and then when Bercuti asked her, "did they have an opinion? Is it right or wrong?" She answered, "No. I am here for the money so I would not listen to any opinions. If it were wrong, I would not come here." But another answered, "Why would I tell anyone?" There was one particular woman. 32 years old. Very cheerful. Nail polish on, she had this pink lipstick on. She said, "people in my village simply do not believe these things. That one can have children by getting injected or taking medicine. They would not believe this."

**Bercuti:** She kind of drew parallels with how some of the people in the village had done something similar when they bred cows or fish. Maybe they will understand but not my family.

**Molly Webster:** She said "I have told lies to them.

**Jad Abumrad:** So how much in the end, do they make?

**Bercuti:** I asked them, "How much money do you get here?" I talked to four women and the figure was the same.

**Molly Webster:** 3.5 Lax. If you do the conversion today, it's $5,300 US Dollars and the way it works is they get a small amount of money every month they are pregnant and they get a large lump sum at the end of the pregnancy. Bercuti says that for these women at the end of the pregnancy is around $2-3 thousand dollars which is what Tal and Amir heard at the embassy.

**Bercuti:** The total sum that they have when they go back home is quite, you know, it's not a lot.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** So 5ish thousand dollars is what you're here. That's different.

**Molly Webster (narration):** To see if that was a number that was just coming out of that shelter house or if that was the going rate, I guess. We talked to 6 surrogates who were in INdia and that same $5,000 or so kept coming up. And we did hear a range from one surrogate about a friend of hers as low as $1,000.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** A surrogate only getting $1,000 for a pregnancy?

**Molly Webster:** Yeah.

*[Skype ringtone].*

**Tal & Amir:** Hello?

**Molly Webster:** Hello?

**Tal:** Hello this is Jerusalem calling.

 *[Jad, Robert, Molly laugh]*

**Molly Webster:** Hi this is New York answering.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Ultimately we took this information back to Tal and Amir because this was originally their questions.

**Robert Krulwich:** So let's talk about the money now.

**Molly Webster:** Alright, so the last time we talked to you, you thought you were paying your surrogates $12,000 around-ish. We have been off reporting and the number coming up most consistently as what surrogates are reporting as their rate is $5,300 US Dollars.

**Amir:** WHAT?

**Tal:** *[Hebrew].*

*[Stumbling, shocked silence].*

**Tal:** It's too low.

**Amir:** It's too low. Really?

**Molly:** Yeah.

**Tal:** I want to cry.

**Molly Webster:** We explained to them, if you look at the contract- the line that looks like it's payment straight to the surrogate, doesn't actually say this is payment for the surrogate. It says this is payment to surrogacy services. It's like once you add in that second word, it opens the door to all kinds of things.

**Tal:** She is getting less than half. It's very- we feel like suckers.

**Amir:** So who got the money?

**Molly Webster:** That question hung in the air for a few weeks. Until-

**Donna McDosey:** I have about seven minutes till I go into something.

**Molly Webster (narration):** I was finally able to talk to Donna McDosey who is the head of Lotus which is the agency that Tal and Amir used in Nepal. The morning I talked to her, she had just flown in from Nepal to Israel and I caught her in a car on her way back to the airport and she was going to fly off to Australia. And I asked her how much the surrogates actually get paid.

**Donna** **McDosey**: I can tell you truly that I work in India, Nepal since 2010 and I cannot tell you exactly how much they hold in their hand at the end of the procedure because we don't transfer funds directly to the surrogate herself.

**Molly Webster (narration):** She's saying the reason she has no idea and the reason she has no idea is because-she said this and other agencies I spoke to said this- that when you working on the ground in foreign countries, under the umbrella of surrogacy, you are dealing with a lot of middle men and the middle men have middle men and there are sub-middle men. The people who find the women in India, who get the paperwork done who get them over the boarder who then bring them to Nepal. Someone meets them in Kathmandu and then takes them to the shelter house. All of those people people- they need to get paid.

**Donna McDosey:** I truly can tell you, I truly don't know, after the agent, how much the surrogate have in their hands. We don't come and ask the agent exactly how much goes to her agent, exactly how much goes to her. We don't go into that.

**Molly Webster:** Well I guess I was thinking, I would feel conflicted- as the head of an agency, to be like "I think the money is going to some people but I just don't know" I think that would nibble at me.

**Donna McDosey:** Yeah, well then that's a good thing you're doing what you're doing and I'm doing what I'm doing.

*[Molly laughs].*

**Donna** **McDosey**: Because you know you can look the whole world and say, "Okay I'm going to make it brighter." I cannot deal with all the problems in the world. We are trying to give them as much as possible.

**Amir:** We paid the money for this woman gets a life. And now we understand it's not exactly like that.

**Tal:** It's not right.

**Robert Krulwich (narration):** I think the deep question here, after everything is over, is- When we do a generous thing, we give people families who couldn't have families before but that becomes a business, is there something about the business of making a family, that is always going to be a little troubling and there are no perfect ways to do this or is there a way to pull this off in some..I just don't know.

**Tal:** I mean like, I still have three more embryos that are in a freezer in Nepal. I don't know if the next time, I will not do the process maybe in the States.

**Molly Webster (narration):** The U.S. is an entirely different surrogacy scene which we are just not going to get into here but the interesting thing that Donna said and the head of another agency- they think the U.S. will be one of the last places surrogacy will be happening.

**Donna** **McDosey:** Most of the places are closing down.

**Molly Webster (narration):** So obviously, Nepal has banned, Thailand, it looks like in a few days after this piece comes out, India might ban it for foreigner, rumors that Cambodia will ban it. Even in Canada, there are talks of new restrictions on surrogacy. These bans are not just for same sex couples but everybody.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Oh wow. And the main reason for all these bans and restrictions is worry about exploiting women.

**Molly Webster (narration):** Yeah.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** I feel weird about that a little bit though.

**Robert Krulwich (narration):** Because?

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Because if you are trying to- as we heard, these women are making a business decision. Whether we agree with it or not- we're going to take it away in order to protect them? Feels..I don't know.

**Molly Webster (narration):** It's funny because at times, it feels like "okay, these women can decide how their going to use their own bodies."

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Right, it's a little bit like the abortion debate in a way.

**Molly Webster (narration):** Totally is.

**Robert Krulwich (narration):** But by the same token, it's not wrong for a society to say "there are some things that we just won’t allow."We won’t give you that choice because we find the choice itself is wrong.

**Molly Webster (narration):** I mean it's fair but one of the arguments against banning it is that there is still demand for surrogacy and that that's not gonna go away so it just pushes the system underground.

**Robert Krulwich (narration):** In that way, it's a lot like abortion.

**Molly Webster (narration):** And then that way it's a lot shadier. The other thing was that then Bercuti went and actually talked to the women about *(Hindu)* what this job does for them. Like okay so it's not the crazy amount of money we thought it was. It's $5,000, what does that do for you?

*[Hindi].*

**Molly Webster (narration):** One woman said "When I get the money, I'm going to go back home and start something on my own. Start a small shop, my own little enterprise."

**Bercuti:** The other women though, they wanted to use the money to build a house. By some land.

**Jad Abumrad (narration):** Can you buy a plot of land in New Delhi for $5,000?

**Molly Webster (narration):** You definitely cannot buy a plot of land in New Delhi for 5 grand but what these women do is take the money and go back to their original village and buy land there and it's totally doable and it’s actually no small feat.

**Bercuti:** I think that ownership of land is so important in our society in South Asia.

**Molly Webster (narration):** Once you own land in South Asia, it raised your socioeconomic status. It's passed down through generations so you are creating something for your family. If you are one of the women who already have land, one thing you can do with the 5,000 is build a house on it.

**Bercuti:** A very small mud house or..

**Molly Webster (narration):** Keep in mind, all these women, their day jobs are maids. So they make less than 100 dollars a month?

**Bercuti:** They said if it weren't for this, they would never own this much money in a single time.

**Molly Webster (narration):** More than that, when I went into this, the thing that I expected to see was like, "Okay these are poor desperate women who were forced into this. They were dragged across the border." What I was surprised to see when I looked at the transcript was that even though these women don't have a lot of options and yes they are poor- they had chosen to do this. With the limited options that they had, they looked at them all and they thought "this is the thing that I am going to do to get what I am want." It felt like these women were making a choice.

**Bercuti**: I asked them- what if you were given a challenge to go abroad to Dubai or Qatar because a lot of women from India or Nepal, they go there. One of them said that, "why would I do that? That would be very far away." Here, the kids can come, their husbands can visit, they are fed well, they have good medical care, they are taken care of.

**Molly Webster (narration):** And for the whole nine months, they are sending money back home. And back home, there's one less mouth to feed.

**Bercuti:** I think the way we pass judgement, to pity these women, but they are very aware of what they are doing. They might be exploited on some level like you said but it seems like these woman are in charge of deciding how they want their lives to be and we don't have to look at them with pity.

*[Hindi].*

**Molly Webster (narration):** The last woman that Bercuti spoke to, she was a 32 year old woman from Darjeeling, she spoke Nepali and told Bercuti. "I came here in March. My embryo transfer was done in March but I don't know if it was due to the earthquake or something else but it didn't get heartbeat and it got washed.

**Bercuti:** She said that she lost the fetus at two months. *[Molly gasps.]*  They tried it twice on her. I asked her, how did you feel when the fetus got washed. "I felt bad."

**Molly Webster:** What to say? "It felt like it was my own." And they won't give money if it's unsuccessful...I didn't know, if you miscarry you don't get paid?

**Bercuti:** Yes, yes.

**Molly Webster (narration):** She said it's like a business. You get paid for every month you successfully carry and if you do lose the baby, depending on where it is in the pregnancy, part of the money is refunded to the intended parents.

**Molly (surrogate):** "Most of my friends had successful stories to share back in Delhi. Some of my friends made a house with the money, some bought land, I felt good." She basically says, she wishes she had done this earlier because now with the ban, she was being sent back to her village.

**Bercuti:** She was still weeping a little of what could have been if the eggs held and her health was alright. I asked her, "would you try again if it opens back up?" "Yes, I will come."

**Robert Krulwich, Jad Abumrad and Molly Webster:** Israel Story is brought to you by PRX - the Public Radio Exchange, and is produced in partnership with Tablet Magazine. Go to tabletmag dot com slash Israel Story to hear all our previous episodes. Our staff includes Mishy Harman, Yochai Maital, Shai Satran, Roee Gilron, Maya Kosover, Benny Becker, and Shoshi Shmuluvitz. Rachel Fisher and Sophie Schor are our production interns. Julie Subrin’s our Executive Producer. For help on today’s episode, thanks to Irit Rosenblum, Ruti Grossman, Atara Ben Chanan and Noga Berger.

**Jad Abumrad:** Can I just say one thing, which is either for tape or not, ahh… that we’re… Thank you guys! This has been a real…

**Robert Krulwich:** Yeah.

**Molly Webster:** Ah ha.

**Jad Abumrad:** Amazing experience for us.

**Mishy Harman:** For us too! Thank *you*!

**Jad Abumrad:** It’s been really really grateful to have… Whether it happened because of Venetian blinds or whatever *[Robert laughs]* we’re very grateful.

**Maya Kosover**: Thank you so much!

**Molly Webster:** Yeah, you guys have been amazing.

**Robert Krulwich:** Yes, I agree.

**Mishy Harman:** Thank you guys!

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So, a big thanks to our friends at RadioLab. Radiolab is produced by Jad Abumrad. Their staff includes: Brenna Farrell, David Gebel, Dylan Keefe, Matt Kielty, Robert Krulwich, Andy Mills, Latif Nasser, Kelsey Padgett, Arianne Wack, Molly Webster, Soren Wheeler and Jamie York. With help from Simon Adler, Alexandra Lee Young, Abigial Keel and Alexandra Brenin. Their fact-checkers are Eva Dasher and Michelle Harris.

And that’s our episode. If you’re new to the show, you can catch up on all of our previous episodes, just search for Israel Story on iTunes, Stitcher, or any of the other main podcast platforms. And if you’ve got a moment, please rate us and leave a review. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story.

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I’m Mishy Harman, and we’ll be back in two weeks with a brand new episode of Israel Story. Yalla bye.