**Mishy Harman (narration):** For lack of a better way to describe it, I’d say that my high school English class was more of an exercise in shelling, blasting and precision artillery than in grammar, vocab and reading comprehension.

OK, let me back up: On September 1st, 1998, I found myself walking into a new school, on the first day of tenth grade not knowing a soul.

One of my first friends was another new kid, Ariel. Ariel Harpaz.

Ariel and I met in English class. We were both in *Dovrey Anglit*, the English speakers section, and I knew we’d be friends from day one. He was, and still is, the craziest kid I’ve met.

Our English class met on Mondays, for a double period, separated by a twenty-minute-long recess. Ariel and I sat next to each other, at the back of the classroom. And almost immediately we took heavy fire from Aviv Ponger, a mischievous Australian kid, who had made us practice targets for his mechanical-pencil-turned-spitball-gun.

Ariel and I tried to retaliate, but it was clear that we were no match for Aviv’s mini-bombs.

And then, towards the middle of the year, everything changed when Ariel got his license and bought a red Kymco motorcycle. Now, this was big news. Ariel was one of the only kids in our grade who had a bike, and it made him instantly popular. But as far as English class was concerned the implications were even more dramatic: We could now leave school during the break, hop on his motorcycle, drive to the nearby central bus station, buy a hundred-and-fifty grams of chocolate-covered-raisins (otherwise known as ammunition), drive back to school and spend the entire second period pelting the back of Aviv’s head with the candy.

Now other than the fact that Ariel drove so fast that I would literally kiss the ground when we got back to school, this was pure joy. For the rest of the year we turned our English classes into a never-ending food fight. We perfected our aim, Aviv perfected his aim, and the ensuing mayhem would test the limits of our teacher, who - ironically - was called Ivria, which means the Hebrew one.

Till, one day, it all came to an abrupt end - an errant chocolate-covered-almond (that wasn’t even supposed to be in the bag with the raisins) hit the girl sitting next to Aviv. I nearly got expelled. Game over.

Ariel and I left the world of food fights for good. Or, at least, so I thought.

Hey I'm Mishy Harman and this is Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by PRX and is produced together with Tablet Magazine.

Our episode today - **Food Fight.** Forget politics, forget territorial disputes, forget religion. We give you two stories about the real arena in which matters are battled out here in the Middle East - food. Our first story - about a Jerusalemite’s quirky obsession - couldn’t be more local. And our second story is the exact opposite. It’s an outsider’s take, an impression of a visitor, a radio icon, on her first ever trip to the region.

Alright, let’s begin.

Less than a month after we graduated high school, we all went into the army. Just by chance, Ariel, my English class partner in crime, was drafted into the same unit as two of my closest childhood friends, Shai Satran and Yochai Maital, who years later would create Israel Story with me. They all became good friends. So Ariel’s always been part of the show’s orbit. He even made a cameo appearance in one of our earliest stories, about self-inflicting bee stings as a way of getting sick days from the army.

But as we all learned over the years, the epic bombardments with Aviv Ponger were nothing more than child’s play for Ariel. This whole time, he was actually engaged in a much more important food fight. A high stakes food fight. A crusade for recognition. **Act One - The Pitcher.**

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** A few weeks ago, on a hot Friday morning of mid-summer, Shai and I met up with our friend Ariel. He wanted to fill us in on a story, and then we were going to go to his favorite hummus joint, Pinati.

Pinati’s an iconic workers’ restaurant on the corner of King George and *Ha’Histadrut* streets in the center of Jerusalem. Here’s Ariel.

**Ariel Harpaz:** It’s important to say that Pinati is known for its hummus, and it’s probably the best hummus in Jerusalem. And it’s definitely the best Jewish hummus that I’ve come across.

**Mishy Harman:** And we should just say that Pinati, it’s just like one small room.

**Ariel Harpaz:** Yeah, Pinati is a place that has four tables inside, and each table has five seats (it’s actually four seats and they can squeeze in five), and you sit with people you don’t know as you eat.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But Pinati is much more than just a dive. It’s a Jerusalem institution.

Local politicians go there to appear connected to the people, famous athletes pop by for hummus after practice, and for the past two decades it has also regularly fed one extremely loyal client - Mr. Ariel Harpaz.

**Ariel Harpaz:** We used to cut school and go to Pinati every day.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And it was then, over countless plates of hummus in the late nineties, that Ariel noticed a problem. He was constantly thirsty.

**Ariel Harpaz:** I used to drink a lot of cups of juice while we were eating.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Calling the phosphorescent *petel* liquid served at Pinati “juice” might be a bit misleading. As Ariel pointed out, *petel* is more like the Israeli version of kool-aid.

**Ariel Harpaz:** It’s a very cheap syrup that’s… you add water to. And in Pinati you have two flavors - you’ve got one a grape flavor and you’ve got lemon flavor. And it’s usually… Each cup is two shekels.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But although two shekels wasn’t that much, even for a high school kid, it started adding up.

Always the businessman, Ariel went up to the owner, Meir, who sits at the cash register, and asked how much it would cost to get unlimited *petel* refills.

Now Meir’s not one for change. In fact, Pinati’s menu basically hasn’t changed at all since Meir’s father opened the place in 1974. But Ariel was a good kid, and clearly a thirsty kid, so...

**Ariel Harpaz:** He thought about it for a few seconds and then he said, “it will cost you eight shekels, and you have unlimited amount of *petel*.”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Needless to say, Ariel was thrilled. But it didn’t take long before he noticed that the new unlimited refills policy solved the monetary problem but introduced an interpersonal one instead. He kept on handing the waiters his empty cup, till more or less all they did what bounce like yoyos between the juice dispenser and Ariel’s table.

**Ariel Harpaz:** I felt bad that I kept on harassing them for more and more and more juice. So I came to the owner and I asked him, “can we change this deal from unlimited juice to a pitcher of juice?”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** At first Meir claimed he didn’t have a pitcher, but Ariel asked him to check again.

**Ariel Harpaz:** So he goes behind to the storage room, and he… I see like things are flying, you know, he’s moving tables and boxes and stuff and he finds a pitcher. So he brings back the pitcher and now I have a pitcher. We’re talking about a very cheap, plastic pitcher. It’s like half a gallon of juice.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And so, thanks to Ariel’s sheer doggedness, a new item at Pinati was born.

Or, sort of… See, every time Ariel would come in for some hummus, which was very often, he’d ask the waiters for a pitcher.

**Ariel Harpaz:** And the waiters always said, “we don’t have a pitcher! We don’t know what you’re talking about.” And every time was the same story. So I had to look at the owner, and the owner would catch me in my eye and say, “ah, him? Give him everything her wants. Give him anything he wants.” And then they would go back and get me my pitcher and I… you know, this went on for like a year, a year-and-a-half. Every time I had to prove to them that they have a pitcher, and I deserve it.

**Mishy Harman:** Cuz’ it wasn’t on the menu?

**Ariel Harpaz:** It wasn’t on the menu…

**Mishy Harman:** So it was like one of these items that like only real regulars, people in the know, would know to ask?

**Ariel Harpaz:** No. It was only me for a long time *[giggles]*.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** In an unprecedented move, Meir officially modified Pinati’s offerings. And Ariel was, for all intents and purposes, the father of the pitcher.

That was his claim to fame.

**Ariel Harpaz:** Many people who know me, I mean, at some point will hear this story. This is a part of who I am.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And he’s very proud of it.

**Ariel Harpaz:** I mean, I invented a concept.

**Mishy Harman:** You realize that like a pitcher is something that exists in many many places around the world.

**Ariel Harpaz:** What I invented was not a pitcher. I invented the option to change something in Pinati, the open-mindedness to change. I brought change to Pinati.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** For years he’s been telling us that he regards this as the pinnacle of his creative life.

**Ariel Harpaz:** This is definitely one of the most important and and greatest achievements of my life.

I don’t know if that means I haven’t achieved much, or this is just really important *[Shai and Ariel laugh].* Anyway. *[Shai and Ariel laugh].*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Now, the walls of Pinati - like many family-run restaurants or dry cleaners in the States - are full of pictures of all kinds of celebrities who walked through the door posing with the owner. But here’s it’s not about bragging rights for the establishment. In Pinati’s case it’s the folks in the photographs who are dying to be seen on the wall.

**Ariel Harpaz:** Prime Ministers, actors, any person who is who and who in Jerusalem, or if he came from the big city Tel Aviv he usually gets awarded as well.

**Mishy Harman:** It’s sort of like a sign that you’ve made it, if you get on the wall at Pinati, right?

**Ariel Harpaz:** Yeah. There’s no bigger respect in Jerusalem than having a picture in Pinati, on the wall.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Pinati, as you’ll recall, is a really small place, and there isn’t that much wall real-estate. That means that competition to make it onto the wall is fierce. Even Teddy Kollek and Bibi have been bumped. Only Herzl and Begin, Meir recently told me, have everlasting wall immunity.

But Ariel was convinced that as the inventor of the pitcher, he should be up there, immortalized. For him, more than anything, it was a matter of recording his accomplishment for posterity.

**Ariel Harpaz:** I need to have a picture on the wall, with my pitcher, to prove for rest of history, that I invented the pitcher. And this is why the story is so important, cuz’ I don’t have children. This is the closest I have to children, is to have a picture in Pinati.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Ariel made his case to Meir, the owner, who mulled it over.

**Ariel Harpaz:** I just want to point out one thing about Meir - Meir is like this very old fashioned, Kurdish, Jew. Very typical Jerusalemite. He knows everyone, and he’s basically a celebrity in Jerusalem, and he’s really amazing with people and he’s really really street smart.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** By the time Meir decided - after much deliberation - to grant him this tremendous honor, Ariel was already in the army, and the matter got postponed a bit. But ultimately he came in and posed for the camera.

**Mishy Harman:** Can you describe the picture?

**Ariel Harpaz:** The picture is a picture of one of my friends, the owner, Meir, and me with a pitcher, that proves beyond doubt that I’m the inventor of the pitcher.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Yet life, and an uncomfortable dispute among Ariel’s friends as to who should be included, next to him, in the picture, got in the way. As a result, the photo never went up on the wall.

Meanwhile, Ariel moved away, first to Tel Aviv, then abroad. He studied law, started businesses.

And many years later, he returned to his old stomping ground.

**Ariel Harpaz:** At this point I haven’t been to Pinati like five, six, seven years. And I was going out with this chick, and we go to Pinati. And we come especially from Tel Aviv.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** It was a Friday afternoon, which is the busiest time of the week at Pinati, when all the soldiers coming home for the weekend pop in for a quick hummus.

**Ariel Harpaz:** So anyway, we get to Pinati, and I’m standing outside and like suddenly one of the waiters sees me and he comes and he hugs me and then a different waiter looks at me and he sees me and he comes and hugs me. And then owner sees me and he comes and kisses me. And I’m feeling like, you know, a lot of respect and love my way and I’m really excited. You know this is Pinati, and I mean this was an important place for me, you know, growing up.

The real reason Pinati is so successful is because Meir makes you feel so important when you come there. It’s like ‘where everybody knows your name and they’re always glad you came.’

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So with that royal homecoming reception, Ariel and his date sat down to eat.

**Ariel Harpaz:** And we order, and then Meir, the owner comes by me, and I asked him, “do people still order pitchers here?” And then he looks at me and he says, “what?!” (he disgusted with what I’m saying). “Everybody orders pitchers. It’s the biggest thing here.” And then he walks away, and as he walks away I realize that this guy… It seems like he’s not crediting me for inventing the pitcher.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Ariel was stunned. His fear had come true - his invention had been forgotten.

**Ariel Harpaz:** Not only did he embarrass me in front of my girlfriend. I’m like sitting there just like shocked. I mean I feel like he spat in my face.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Ariel, you might have already ascertained, is not one to take a perceived slight lightly. Especially not when it comes to something as weighty as a his liquid legacy.

**Ariel Harpaz:** I look at him and I tell him, “Meir, ten year ago, I came here. You only had cups of juice at the time, and I told you…”

*[goes under]*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Ariel went on to recount how that had led to him harassing the waiters for constant refills, and how he came up with the idea of the pitcher. He reminded Meir that even after the invention it was always a struggle, and Meir would have to instruct his waiters to give Ariel whatever he wanted, till they decided to make it official with a picture on the wall, which never went up.

**Ariel Harpaz:** And the reason we did all this was so I don’t come here ten years later and hear this bullshit that you tell me that I didn’t invent the pitcher. He looks at me, and then he says “*mechila, mechila, mechila. Kol mila shelcha emet. Ata avi ha’kankan. Ata avi ha’kankan.*” “I ask for your forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness, every word that you spoke is true. You are the father of the pitcher, you are the father of the pitcher.”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Redeemed, Ariel took his date, and went back home.

**Ariel Harpaz:** And I realized that I have about four weeks before his memory blacks out again, and this is like my golden time to get the picture back on the wall.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He found the image in an old email account, and printed out several different options.

**Ariel Harpaz:** I don’t know if I should do an A4, A5, A6. I just don’t know how to deal with this. And I have no one to consult with, cuz’ everybody first of all thinks that this is the dumbest story they’ve ever heard, they can’t believe I’m wasting my time on this. Usually I’ll talk to like my business partner, and - you know - I’ll have like a creative team help me out, work out my problems, but this is just wasting their time on something that only I think is important, cuz’ they’re not from Jerusalem. They don’t understand the importance of this.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He also went back and forth on whether to include a caption. He decided to go for it.

**Ariel Harpaz:** ‘*La’bayit ha’sheni shelanu, be’a’hava, avi ha’kankan.’ ‘*To our second home, with love, the father of the pitcher.’

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Ariel framed the picture, and - with a mixture of excitement and trepidation - made another Friday afternoon pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

When Ariel walked in Meir said hi, as usual. But Ariel couldn’t tell whether it was because he remembered him as the father of the pitcher, or else was just being friendly.

**Ariel Harpaz:** He always remembers me as a person, like he says hello and he knows me, but he doesn’t remember my name or why he knows me. We need to tattoo on him that I invented the pitcher.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Ariel sat down, ordered a hummus and - of course - a pitcher of *petel*, and took his time.

**Ariel Harpaz:** And then I waited till the place was almost empty, and I come to him and I said, “you remember what we said?” And I pull out the picture. And he said, “sure, no problem.” Like fully nonchalant, as if it’s like most normal thing and no problem at all. And then he said, “leave it here, I’ll put it up tomorrow night.” And I look at him, and I said, “tomorrow night?!” It’s like Saturday night, Pinati isn’t even open on Saturday night.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Feeling that something was a bit fishy, Ariel became adamant. “What?!” he said impatiently, “I came especially.”

**Ariel Harpaz:** “I’m not waiting, we have to do this now.” So he said, “but I can’t, people are eating next to the spot.”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Ariel asked Meir where he intended to hang his picture. Meir pointed to the corner, where an orthodox couple were finishing up their meal.

**Ariel Harpaz:** Maybe the worst real-estate on the wall!

**Mishy Harman:** What made it bad real-estate?

**Ariel Harpaz:** This spot is as you walk in, it’s on the far left, and it’s on the far low corner. Far left low corner. So no one… It’s not visible to everyone eating because if somebody’s sitting next to it, you can’t see it.

**Mishy Harman:** But on the other hand it’s not that far from the juice dispensers.

**Ariel Harpaz:** Yes, it actually is the closest picture to the juice dispenser.

**Mishy Harman:** Which is itself kind of an honor.

**Ariel Harpaz:** *[Mumbles]* The fact that it’s next to the juice dispenser, I mean it’s, maybe, I mean… from the poetic point of view is beautiful, but it means nothing cuz’ you want a good real-estate inside the place.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Ariel was disappointed, no doubt. But he tried to console himself. After all, he was so close now.

**Ariel Harpaz:** Inside I’m trying to convince myself that it’s OK. That we know… I mean every real-estate is good, on the wall in Pinati, and I can’t be a pig. *[Sighs].*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** After so many years, Ariel’s dream was coming true. His picture went up on the wall of Pinati.

**Ariel Harpaz:** And then we had like a whole five-ten minutes of me and my friends and different people around taking pictures of my picture on the wall, with Meir, without Meir, posing, and you can see in the pictures that I’m very proud. I sent this on whatsapp to all my family and friends, and like this is like a glorious day for me.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** In fact, I remember receiving those pictures from Ariel at the time, and imagining just how happy he must be. You can see them too, by the way, on our website.

Anyway, just before leaving Pinati, a jubilant - if always practical - Ariel did one last thing.

**Ariel Harpaz:** I looked at Meir in the eye, and I pointed at him, and I told him “Meir, I don’t want to come here in twenty years and find out that your son is running the place and is telling me that I didn’t invent the pitcher. Therefore, the picture needs to stay on the wall. And he said, “don’t worry, don’t worry, no problem, no problem.”

 **Mishy Harman (narration):** Famous last words.

**Ariel Harpaz:** I promise myself that I’m going to continue on going to Pinati every once in a while, to supervise that my picture is still on the wall.

**Mishy Harman:** You had doubts?

**Ariel Harpaz:** Ummm… Yeah, I had doubts. Cuz’, I mean, if somebody different comes in now, more important, I mean they might switch your picture, I mean, who knows?

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But the next few times Ariel came to check, he was pleased to see his smiling self, in the far left corner, holding up his brainchild - the pitcher.

It seemed as if Ariel could relax. His legacy was safe.

A few months ago, I got a flurry of frantic text messages from Ariel. He had just learned - to his utter astonishment - that his picture was no longer on the wall. And he wanted our help.

You see, Ariel thought that showing up at Pinati with a radio crew might not only increase his chances of getting back on the wall, but could potentially even land him a better spot, right behind Meir, at the cash register.

And that’s how Shai and I found ourselves, on that sweltering Friday morning, helping Ariel reclaim his rightful place in history.

**Mishy Harman:** So we’re now in a strategy, a planning strategy conversation about what’s gonna happen. And Shai, myself and Ariel are in the studio, we’re about to go to Pinati. It’s Friday afternoon.

**Shai Satran:** So the first thing, once we’re there is to check on your real-estate and see what’s there?

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That’s Shai.

**Ariel Harpaz:** No, the first thing we’re gonna do is we’re gonna sit down, and order a hummus and relax.

**Mishy Harman:** Are we gonna order a pitcher?

**Ariel Harpaz:** We will. Oh, by the way, important thing - the pitcher these days has changed. It’s like a high-tech pitcher, and has maybe a sixth, like fifteen percent juice of the original one.

**Mishy Harman:** How does that make you feel, as the father of the pitcher?

**Ariel Harpaz:** I have no problem with Meir’s economics. It’s fine with me. *[Shai laughs].* As long as there’s a pitcher and I am acknowledged as the inventor.

**Mishy Harman:** Cuz’ you know, a lot of people they’re like… If they invent something they’re really particular about it staying exactly the way they invented it.

**Ariel Harpaz:** No no. I don’t… I’m not… I mean, I invented a concept.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Shai, who was an officer in the army, was eager to get back to the nitty-gritty planning.

**Shai Satran:** Do we need to like plot this out like military style?

**Ariel Harpaz:** Yes.

**Shai Satran:** Do we need like *matarot, mesimot*? Like what’s the overarching goal?

**Ariel Harpaz:** OK, the number one objective is to get this back on the wall. We’re gonna see if we manage to get it behind Meir, better positioned. And if not, we’re gonna accept it, and we’re gonna take any space that we’re offered. If my picture stays on the wall in general in Pinati, and specifically behind Meir, for the rest of my life, I will be credited as the father of the pitcher, and I can die quietly. What we are doing today is setting the record straight.

**Mishy Harman:** Do you think we’re gonna succeed?

**Ariel Harpaz:** I have no doubt in my heart. The picture is going up on the wall.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** With that, three childhood friends in their mid-thirties set out on a mission. Like any good commander, Ariel gave us a final briefing.

**Ariel Harpaz:** We’re gonna arrive to Pinati, we’re gonna be sitting at the table. I want all the equipment to be out, the radio equipment, the recording equipment. I want Meir to be aware that there’s something happening. That there are journalists sitting and eating lunch.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And we, like good soldiers, asked some clarifying questions.

**Mishy Harman:** So if he comes to the table and says, “hey, Ariel, want a pitcher?” We can start talking about the pitcher?

**Ariel Harpaz:** I mean, if it’s up to us, we wait till the end, we finish eating, we understand who’s against who, and then we attack the problem.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Yup, that’s us, about to attack the problem.

**Mishy Harman:** OK, so we’re entering, we’re entering Pinati.

*[People greeting us in Pinati]*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Everyone seemed genuinely glad to see Ariel.

*[Ambient tape from Pinati continues]*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** We sat down and casually ordered some hummus.

*[Ambient tape from Pinati continues, we order hummus]*

**Mishy Harman:** Should we get a pitcher?

**Ariel Harpaz:** *Betach.*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** *Betach*, sure, Ariel said.

**Ariel Harpaz:** *Meir.*

**Meir Micha:** *Ken.*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** When we were done eating Ariel approached Meir.

**Ariel Harpaz:** *Ma ha’matzav?*

**Meir Micha:** *Gan Eden.*

*[Goes under]*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Once again he relayed the entire saga.

*[Comes up from under]*

**Ariel Harpaz:** *Ata zocher et kol ha’parshi’ya she’haya lanu*?

**Meir Micha:** *Eize parshiya? Im ha’kankanim, ken, ve’ha’tmuna.*

**Ariel Harpaz:** *Yaffe!*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Everything he says is true, Meir acknowledged. But I have a problem - there’s a waiting list for getting on the wall.

It was clear that Ariel wasn’t going to take no for an answer and Shai and I exchanged a worried glance hoping this wasn’t about to get out of hand.

**Ariel Harpaz:** *Lo yitachen she’miseho yagid li she’ha’kankan lo ani hemtzeti oto. Ze lo yitachen.*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** It can’t be that I don’t get credit for my invention, Ariel complained. It got a bit testy, and Meir even called Ariel a *nudnik*, basically a pain in the ass. Ariel in turn said that Meir should be ashamed of himself.

But then, realizing that his best way out of the situation was probably just to give in, Meir got up on a chair, found a tiny square of bare wall underneath the fluorescent light, and started banging in a nail.

Seeing his picture back up there, a huge smile appeared on Ariel’s face.

**Ariel Harpaz:** *Yaffe!*

**Meir Micha:** *Ata merutze?*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** “Are you happy?” Meir asked, as they hugged it out. “We’re like family,” he said. And just before we left, unsolicited, he promised Ariel that the picture would stay up. This time for good.

**Mishy Harman:** Achi, we made it! Harpaz, any last words?

**Ariel Harpaz:** I want to thank everyone who helped me get this… just helped me get here. Thank you guys.

It was dirty and ugly, but it worked.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** A while back, in Chicago, we met up with Davia Nelson, one half of the amazing Kitchen Sisters podcast. They were just starting to work on a series called ‘Hidden Kitchens, War and Peace and Food,’ and she asked us what came to mind. We mentioned something you might have heard of, the ‘hummus wars’ between Israel and Lebanon. Now in case you have no idea what I’m talking about, I’ll just say that soon after the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese War, fighting moved on to a more appetizing plane. Israel and Lebanon went head to head, trying to outdo each other in creating the world’s largest plate of... hummus. Satellite dishes were involved as were Guinness World Record officials. When national pride is at stake, nothing - not even ten tons of hummus - is impossible.

Davia loved the story, and over the next few months we planned her trip to the region. She’d never been here before. But when she arrived she quickly realized that the story was much greater than just the mashed chickpea.

**Davia Nelson:** We came to Israel, and we were looking for stories of hummus and people making efforts towards peace through hummus. But it became a deeper and larger piece than that. It was people using food as a way towards peace and reconciliation. And it was sort of a pilgrimage to the country.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Davia talked to dozens and dozens of people - Israelis, Palestinians, Lebanese - and returned home to California with hundreds of hours of tape. Several months later she emerged from the editing room with a beautiful meditation on food, culture, war and peace. This is a shortened version of her impression. **Act Two - Operation Hummus.**

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Fadi Abboud:** My name is Fadi Abboud, born in Lebanon. I served as Minister for Tourism. I am the one who led Lebanon to break the Guinness Book of Records by making the largest tub of hummus in the world.

**Fadi Abboud (archive):** We want the whole world to know that hummus and tabouli are Lebanese.

**Fadi Abboud**: At the time I was the Chairman of the Industrialists AssociationinLebanon. A group of us just came from a food exhibition in France.Suddenly they were telling us [that] hummus is an Israeli traditional dish. I mean, you know, the world now thinks that Israel invented hummus. I was rather upset, you, know and I thought the best way to tell the world that hummus is Lebanese is to break the Guinness book of records.

**Guinness World Record Officer:** It gives me great pleasure to award the new Guinness World Record…

**Jawdat Ibrahim:** It was big issue. All over the news, all over. That hummus only Lebanese. I say, ‘no hummus for everybody!’ My name is Jawdat Ibrahim. We in Abu Gosh Restaurant, in Abu Gosh village between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. I came with an idea. I hold a meeting in the village and I say we are going to broke Guinness Book of world record.

**News Clip:** In the town of Abu Gosh this morning Israel retook the title for the world’s largest hummus dish weighing four tons scooped into a seven-meter-wide satellite dish.

**Jawdat Ibrahim**: Satellite Dish. Yeah, this a dish, no? Media they came here. And like over fifty TV channel all over the world. More than Obama visit in the country.

**News Clip:** The Lebanese have already heard about this and they’re already planning a counterattack.

**Ronit Vered:** We call it the Hummus Wars. When Lebanon accused the Israeli people of trying to steal the hummus and make it their national dish, hummus became a symbol. My name is Ronit Vered, I’m a food journalist about the culture of food here in Israel. I live in Tel Aviv. In Israel we don’t have a strong food tradition. This place only exists sixty years. You don’t have specific dishes which can be common ground for all the Israelis. So hummus became a common ground. Palestinians also made hummus a symbol that we didn’t only take their land, we take their food as well and make it ours.

**Nuha Musleh:** The hummus is ours. Tabouli is our tradition. They take our hummus and they make it their tradition. My name is Nuha Musleh. I’m a Palestinian. I work with journalists. I’m a fixer. Now we’re into Ramallah, we’re in the West bank. People run to get hummus when they are in Ramallah. It’s like getting a good pizza downtown Rome. Or getting a good t-bone steak in Texas, I imagine. I haven’t been.

*[Greetings in Arabic]*

**Nuha Musleh:** The restaurant owner says,“what distinguishes any hummus from another hummus is *nafs* – which means *soul* in Arabic. They pound it they pound it they pound it. You don’t even use a machine. You use good tahini. Sesame seed crushed. Sumac. Lemons from Jericho. Ahhh olive oil from the village of Beit Ula. Palestinians don’t mind that Lebanon is proud of its hummus, that Egyptians makes hummus. It puts Arabs together.

**Fadi Abboud**: The actual name ‘hummus’ comes from the Arabic for chickpea. Lebanon wanted to register hummus with the European Union for Lebanon. In the way of champagne, parmesan, like the Greeks did with feta cheese.

**Ari Ariel:** My name is Ari Ariel, author of article ‘The Hummus Wars.’ Part of the problem from the Lebanese perspective was that there were these two large Israeli companies, Strauss and Osem, that were selling most of the prepared hummus in the world.

**Fadi Abboud**: We were not successful in registering hummus for Lebanon.

**Ronit Vered:** In the first two decades of the state the Israeli people didn’t really eat local food. They stuck to the thing that is close to your heart. It’s also a political issue. If I eat Palestinian food in a way I acknowledge the fact that they exist, that there are other people here that have food of their own.

**Ari Ariel:** In the 1950s the Israeli Army started serving hummus in mess halls. And the average Israeli came to know hummus and consider it an everyday food.

**Dafna Hirsch:** These foods becomes more familiar to the European settlers. It become kind of hip, something the young people will eat. My name is Dafna Hirsch, faculty member at Open University of Israel. Hummus is appropriated as the food of the new Sabra, who is rooted in the land, who wears the *kafia* and eats hummus and falafel. In Israel, hummus is considered masculine dish. It’s considered a kind of masculine ritual to go with a group of men to the *hummusiya*. And eating hummus wiping with this, you know, large circular gestures.

**Shooky Galili:** Hummus has a community, a natural community because it’s not merely a dish but more like a subculture. I’m Shooky Galili from Tel Aviv, and I have a blog about hummus, hummus101.com. I have many people who want to know about the new places, “I’m in Jerusalem, where should I go?”

**Nuha Musleh:** Hummus unfortunately has become like in the category of fast foods. But actually in the Arab and all of Palestine, hummus is Friday honorable and appreciated breakfast. The father wakes up in the morning, makes hummus, makes ful. Invites all his daughters, his daughters-in-law, and his sons. It’s a way to get together in the morning of a Friday. When the family wants to throw all their worries and problems away.

**David Varon:** My Name is David Varon, from Tel Aviv in Israel, and I’m a taxi driver.

**Davia Nelson:** What does your tattoo say?

**David Varon:** No Fear. You cannot live in fear in Israel. Some people are afraid to live in a country where there is so much blood and wars and conflict of thousands of years. This conflict is about religion and it will not be over, I think, until religion will be over. Hummus, falafel, food is maybe the only thing that gets people to sit together with different thoughts to eat the same food.

**Dafna Hirsch**: This kind of approach which says ‘oh you know, if we eat hummus together then peace will come through the stomach. And all that.’ But no. As long as colonization continues, as long as occupation continues then you know, hummus is not going to solve it.

**News Clip:** Now you can see it’s quite a crowd, thousands of people gathered around. The hummus has been made…

**Jawdat Ibrahim:** We broke the Guinness world record in 2010. But to make the hummus is not the issue. To put things together this the main thing. People talking about blood and killing and I want to take it a different way. People can talk about Middle East nice things, not just killing and shooting. Hummus. Nobody get hurt with this war, you know.

**Davia Nelson:** This is Davia Nelson at the Kitchen Sisters. It is Friday. We are in Benny’s cab on the way to Akko, to Erez Komarovsky’s peace lunch.

**Benny:** Operation Hummus. War and peace.

**Davia Nelson:** And food.

**Benny:** And food. War and peace and food.

**Erez Komarovsky:** I love this market. It is one of the oldest. It’s the most non-touristic, real market. Especially in the fall, after we have the storms. So the best fish come. Shrimps, calamari. My name is Erez Komarovsky and I’m a chef, a baker, I don’t know what I am. But I cook and I bake. And I have a catering business. I live in the mountains near the Lebanese border. I have my own organic garden. I grow my own veggies. My chickens. I was born in Tel Aviv and I was a city guy all my life. I had restaurants there, and bakery and coffee shops. And then I decided that enough is enough. To save my soul, I went to live in nature.

**Davia Nelson**: And so what is happening today?

**Erez Komarovsky**: Today we’re doing fish dinner, without knives. Knives is the symbol of the fear. They will eat with their hands. So they will be safe. We’re trying to do peace and to live together. To eat together. I think peace is done not in politics, but like us, simple people that cook together. It’s nice under the tree.

**Dan Smulovitz**: Lunch with no knives, to show that there is no, no reason for the fear. My name is Dan Smulovitz. I’m the chef and owner of Savida, in Akko.

We need to attract the people by making a very unique menu. And bringing chefs to come over and then to see that nothing happens. Just people want to live their life quietly. And you sit together with people that sometimes you don’t know. But you will know them in the lunch. For us peace is here. We don’t wait for the government to be in peace.

**Ra’anan Alexandrowicz:** My name is Ra’anan Alexandrowicz. I’m a filmmaker, I live in Jerusalem. I was born in 1969, so I’m just two years younger than the occupation. There were still a lot of question marks about the future, a lot more openness between the societies. We would go to this hummus place in the old City. The man who had the recipe let my mother come into the kitchen and see how it’s done. I’m sure she wasn’t the only Israeli he taught to make it. We spent a couple of years in the US. I remember this image of coming home from school and going into the bathroom and seeing that the bath is filled with chickpeas being soaked. And knowing that my mom was going to make hummus and Israelis would come from all over because it was something that they really missed. It’s the basic food of the culture that’s described as the enemy culture but it’s also the most loved food here.

**Ronit Vered:** In Israel in the last couple of decades there is a really remarkable culinary revolution. The same thing happens in Lebanon, which I didn’t have the fortune to go to. But I follow people through Instagram and Facebook in Lebanon and in Jordan. Likes is the little man’s way of saying, ‘I don’t care if there’s war between your country and mine. I see what you do there and the food that you cook in Beirut and I think it’s beautiful. And I wish I could taste it. I wish we would live in a different world.’

**Eyal Shani:** Which pita did you eat?

**Davia Nelson:** I had the cauliflower.

**Eyal Shani:** The cauliflower. The whole cauliflower.

**Davia Nelson:** The whole cauliflower.

**Eyal Shani:** Did you like it?

**Davia Nelson:** Oh, I was ecstatic.

**Eyal Shani:** It’s something amazing. You know, each cauliflower is completely different.My name is Eyal Shani. I’m cooking for the last thirty years.

**Davia Nelson:** I’m wondering what comes to mind when you think of war and peace and food?

**Eyal Shani:** War and peace. It’s… I’m working a lot with vegetables. Because vegetables got not blood. But when you find it and when you know where to look after it, you can make magic from vegetables. And most of our vegetables we are buying from the Arabs. We are going to Jericho, to Nablus, to Hebron, and we are paying cash money to people and buy vegetables each, every day, we are doing that. That is the thing I can do about war.

**Nuha Musleh:** He says, I want to make a big dinner party and invite people from both sides. But I don’t want the leaders. It is possible to have peace. With the people.

**Eyal Shani:** I want to go into the streets and to make the food where the Arabs and the Jewish are fighting one against the another. To do kabab or shishlik. They are throwing stones? Take a pita. You try to shoot somebody? Take a pita. I can solve it. In an hour there will be no war.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Davia Nelson. You can hear a much longer version of this story on the Kitchen Sisters’ website, kitchensisters.org, or on their podcast feed. We’ll also link to it on our site.

And that’s our episode. You can hear all our previous episodes on our site, israelstory.org, or by searching for Israel Story on iTunes, and any of the other main podcast platforms. If you can, it would be great if you took a moment to rate us, and write a review on iTunes. That really helps us reach new listeners. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story. And, if you too would like to sponsor episodes of Israel Story, it’s easy – simply drop us a line at sponsor@prx.org.

If you happen to be in the area, do Ariel a favor: Go to Pinati and ask to see his picture. That way Meir will think twice before ever taking it down.

As I mentioned last time, we’re coming back to the States in January 2018, with one of our favorite live shows - “Roomies: Stories of Living Together.” So if you want us to come perform in your city, town or community, email us at livetour@israelstory.org.

The music in our first story, about Ariel’s Pinati crusade, was composed and performed by our newest team member, Ari Wenig. The episode was mixed by Sela Waisblum.

Thanks to Rachel Fisher, Shoshi Shmuluvitz, Benny Becker, Aviva DeKornfeld, Esther Werdiger, Naomi Schneider and Federica Sasso. And of course, to our great friends at The Kitchen Sisters: Davia Nelson, Nikki Silva, Nathan Dalton, Jim McKee and Brandi Howell.

Israel Story is brought to you by PRX - the Public Radio Exchange, and is produced in partnership with Tablet Magazine. Our staff includes Yochai Maital, Maya Kosover, Shai Satran, Roee Gilron, Zev Levi and our new cohort of amazing production interns - Hannah Barg, Ari Wenig and Yuli Shiloach.

I’m Mishy Harman, and we’ll be back before you know it with a new Israel Story episode. So till then, *shana tova* and *yalla bye*.

*[song]*

--- END ---