**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey listeners, it’s Mishy.Before we dive into today’s episode, which is one we’ve been working on for a long time and I’m really excited about, I just wanted to remind you that we’re organizing a really really fun Israel Story trip in November. We’re going to be closing the registration pretty soon, so this is your chance to sign up. It’s going to be a blast: We’ll meet many of the folks you’ve heard on the show, we’ll visit the scene of action of many of our stories, and you’ll get to meet many of the producers and storytellers that work on Israel Story. I know I’m looking forward to it, everyone else on the team is, and if you are too, you can easily find out more details, and sign up, at [israelstory-trip.com](http://www.israelstory-trip.com/), or just email us at [trip@israelstory.org](mailto:trip@israelstory.org). OK, let’s go into today’s episode.

**Emanuel Sabar:** I never wrote any poem of mine on commission. On someone asking me to write. I always write because it comes from within, and I feel it in my veins and blood, and I take it into words on my notebook. OK, that’s how I write.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Meet Emanuel.

**Emanuel Sabar:** My name is Emanuel Sabar. And the meaning of Sabar is *sabra*. And *sabra* means someone who was born in Israel.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Both of his parents had come from Yemen, but Emanuel, the third of eight children, was already a *sabra*.

**Emanuel Sabar:** I was born in 1948, in the Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus, during the war, the Independence War of Israel.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Since then, Emanuel has lived all over the world: In Jerusalem, in Beit Zayit, in Puerto Rico, England, Canada, South Africa. Today his home is in Kfar Yona, a sleepy town in the Sharon, more or less midway between Netanya and Tulkarem. And that’s where we visited him, on a hot spring day, a few months ago. Emanuel met us outside, showed us his lush garden, offered us glasses of cold water in the living room, and then invited us to join him in his den, where he works. We all crammed in the tiny room, which - if I’m not mistaken - is a converted *mama”d*, or bomb shelter. There was barely room to breath, but we were all perfectly content. After all, we were there to discuss poetry.

**Emanuel Sabar:** As a poet, I don’t control the writing. The writing comes, flows, in the middle of the night, in the middle of driving, in the middle of… of doing something totally different. And suddenly I know that I have to take a pen, and write something. And by the way, I belong to a generation that takes a pen.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So I said we were there to discuss poetry, but the truth is we were there to talk about one, very specific, poem - the poem that made Emanuel famous.

**Emanuel Sabar:** You know, I have thousands of poems that I wrote. But in this poem I felt that I was touching. Like saying to… to whoever, upstairs there, saying to him, ‘these are the words I want to use, allow me to use them.’ It’s the only poem, out of the thousands that I have, that I feel sacred about it.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** It’s also, coincidentally or not, the only one of Emanuel’s poems that was set to music. But always the purist, Emanuel doesn’t like referring to it as a song.

**Emanuel Sabar:** I don’t write songs, I write poems.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So after that fairly dramatic build-up, I should probably tell you what this poem slash song is all about. And to do so, we need to go back in time exactly thirty-five years, to June 1982.

**News Anchor I:** Good evening.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** To the First Lebanon War.

**News Anchor I:** The stillness of the ceasefire in southern Lebanon was shattered today by the sound of guns, bombs and planes. *[Goes under].*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Now, this was a very different kind of war than the ones Israel had previously fought. It was a war we chose to initiate.

**News Anchor II:** Israeli tanks and troops, backed by air and sea bombardment, crossed into Lebanon before dawn. *[Goes under].*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And it was - and still is - very far from being a matter of consensus in Israel.

Eager to put an end to repeated terrorist attacks in the north of the country, and provoked by the assassination attempt on Shlomo Argov, Israel’s Ambassador in London, Prime Minister Mencahem Begin and his Minister of Defense, Arik Sharon, activated a long-standing plan to invade Lebanon.

The war, which cost hundreds of Israeli lives and thousands - some say tens of thousands - of Lebanese ones, officially ended three years later, in 1985. But in reality, it got Israel into the *Butz Ha’Levanoni*, the continued presence of troops in the so-called ‘security zone.’ It wasn’t till the year 2000 that Ehud Barak, the former Chief-of-Staff-turned-upstart-Prime-Minister, withdrew Israeli forces back to the blue line.

**Ehud Barak:** *[In Hebrew]* We shall return our boys from Lebanon and bring… *[Goes under].*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Anyway, in the 80s Emanuel was living in London, working as a representative for *Keren He’Yesod*, the United Israel Appeal, which is the official fundraising organization for Israel abroad.

One day, Yehuda Avner, the new Israeli ambassador, told him he was organizing a memorial ceremony for fallen soldiers at the embassy. He said…

**Emanuel Sabar:** “Emanuel, we know that you are a poet, and I want you to write something for *Yom Ha’Zikaron*.” I said to him, “OK, thank you.” And I went home and I said, “what can I write about.”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Emanuel, as we heard at the top, was more of a muse poet than a pen for hire, and the whole task kind of stressed him out. It was 1984, two years after the start of the First Lebanon War, and Emanuel felt he should probably write something about that, he just wasn’t sure what.

He mulled it over for days, consulted his wife, talked to friends. One of them was Dan Smama, an Israeli journalist.

**Emanuel Sabar:** And Dan Smama said to me, “Emanuel, if you don’t have an idea what to write about, why don’t you write about the Yuval Harels?” So I said to him, “come on, come on, Yuval Harel? What’s Yuval Harel?” So he said to me, “let me tell you the story.” And he told me the story, and I was absolutely shocked! Oh, I’m getting goosebumps now.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Emanuel immediately went home, and sat down to write.

**Emanuel Sabar:** I didn’t want to hear anything, I said to my wife, “don’t bother me,” and I sat in my living room with the Bible, the Prayer Book. I had a feeling, a gut feeling, that the story is so sacred, and is so moving, and is so soul searching, that I cannot use any secular words in order to write it. And I was looking for holy words. And I delved into the books and into the… all my sources, and I wrote this poem.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** We asked Emanuel to read it to us. He got up, opened his filing cabinet and started searching for the original manuscript.

**Emanuel Sabar:** I think it’s here. Let’s see. Here! This is it. Eleventh of February ‘84, that’s when I wrote it. ‘*Brit Damim*.’ ‘Oath of Blood.’  *[Emanuel starts reading the poem in Hebrew, “Al Da’at Ha’Makom, Ve’Al Da’at Ha’Kahal” and then goes under].* “By authority of the heavenly tribunal, we rode tanks called Tempest and Storm. Secure in the command, ‘Lay not your hand upon the boy.’” *[Hebrew: U’Vi’Yeshiva Shel Ma’ala, U’Vi’Yeshiva Shel Mata, Od Ze Medaber Ve’Ze Ba” and then goes under]*. “By the court on high, by the court below, whilst this one was still speaking, another one came, as for that night, let darkness seize upon it, as for that night, it came.” *[Hebrew: “Ha’Layla Ha’Hu Yikachehu Ha’Ofel, Ha’Layla Ha’Hu Ba”].*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** As you can probably hear even from that little snippet, the poem is full of biblical and liturgical references - to the binding of Isaac, to the friendship between David and Jonathan, to Job, to the opening of *Kol Nidre* on *Yom Kippur*.

Now, a poem about an ongoing, controversial war, chalk full of esoteric biblical allusions, doesn’t necessarily spell out blockbuster. But it just so happened that Yair Rosenblum, one of Israel’s most prolific song composers, loved the poem and decided to set its words to music.

That song, *Brit Damim*, ended up becoming an Israeli staple. One of the most iconic war songs we have. It has rich lyrics and a harrowing melody. But what makes it even more haunting is the story it describes. The story of Yuval Harel. And that’s the story we’re going to hear today.

*[Music break]*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** 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.

*[Music posts]*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** There are many many versions of the Yuval Harel story out there. Some of them exaggerate the details, others just get them wrong. Somehow there’s this need that many people have to enhance it, as if the actual story isn’t dramatic enough as is.

Over the last few months, Samuel Thrope has been trying to understand what *really* happened there. To separate the mythologized public fiction from what were - more than anything - the most private and intimate moments a family could imagine. And he brings us our story today, **‘Oath of Blood.’** Here’s Samuel.

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*[Music enters]*

**Samuel Thrope**: Could you introduce yourself?

**Yuval Harel:** My name is, eh, Yuval Harel. I'm thirty-four years old.

**Samuel Thrope**: And you're named f… after Yuval Harel?

**Yuval Harel:** Yeah, after two of them unfortunately.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: In Jewish tradition, at least among Ashkenazi Jews, it's customary to name a child after a relative who has passed away.

But Yuval isn't named for a beloved grandparent or a favorite uncle. Instead, he's named after two young men whom neither he, nor his parents, ever met. Actually, the other two Yuval Harels never even knew each other either. And yet, the three men’s lives have become intimately, and publicly, intertwined.

*[Musical break]*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Yuval (who just introduced himself now) was born in 1982, in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Talpiot. Nowadays it’s just another part of the city’s urban sprawl, with bumper-to-bumper rush-hour traffic, discount supermarkets, and new highrises. But back then, Talpiot was a small place, kind of a village really, on the edge of town. The shady, tree-lined streets ended in open fields where Palestinian shepherds grazed their sheep. It was a tight-knit community where everyone knew their neighbors, and all the kids went to the local elementary school, Zalman Aran.

In the early ‘80s, just before Yuval was born, Talpiot was also home to another, unrelated, Harel family who lived just a few streets away: Chaya and Yossi, and their two sons - nineteen-year-old Yuval, and fourteen-year-old Amir.

**Amir Harel:** My name is Amir Harel. I'm Yuval's brother, little brother. He was born in '62, I was born four-and-a-half years later.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Growing up, Amir idolized his big brother:

**Amir Harel:** He was very protective he was the ultimate big brother that's nobody mess with, everybody knows him, in school he's brilliant, he has all the achievement, and eh, he volunteers, and everybody knows... He was very big physically. Like 6'4" and full of eh, you know, full of muscles. But he was very gentle.

**Samuel Thrope (narration**): In high school, Amir’s brother Yuval was a golden boy of sorts: Popular, a good student, and a talented artist who dreamed of becoming an architect.

And like most young people his age, Yuval was also preoccupied with his upcoming army service. He organized a *gar’in* (a group of friends who serve together in the army). They spent a year volunteering on a Kibbutz, *Kibbutz Lochamei Ha'Getaot* in the Western Galilee. Then in January 1981, they started their military service.

But Yuval? He took a different path. After the year on the kibbutz, he was accepted into *Course Tayis,* the Air Force pilot’s training program. Pilots are considered to be the best of the best, the most elite unit in the Israel Defense Forces, and getting into the flight program is fiercely competitive. Which is why it was *so* surprising when, just a few months later, Yuval quit the course.

**Amir** **Harel**: He said, "I'm not going to be a pilot."

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: It didn’t feel right to abandon his buddies from the *garin*,who were all serving together in the infantry.

**Amir** **Harel**: "I have to be with my friends.”

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: It was a fateful choice.

*[Music enters]*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: On Sunday, June 6, 1982, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon, which had been locked in a bloody civil war for years.

**Ron Ben Yishai:** *[In Hebrew]* It is now 10:53 and IDF armor forces are entering Lebanon. *[Goes under].*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: The conflict known today as the First Lebanon War had begun.

The stated objective of the Israeli offensive was to strike at Palestinian militants operating in southern Lebanon...

**Dan Meridor:** *[In Hebrew]* The government of Israel has decided to instruct *Tzahal*. *[Goes under].*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: And to push them back twenty-five miles from the Israeli-Lebanese border.

**Dan Meridor:** *[In Hebrew]* From the range of the terrorists, whose headquarters and bases are concentrated in Lebanon.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: In particular, the main target was Yasser Arafat's PLO, which had been launching raids and terrorist attacks into northern Israel.

However, Israel's Defense Minister Ariel Sharon had a much more ambitious goal in mind.

**Ariel Sharon:** *[In Hebrew]* We have no dialogue with terrorists... *[Goes under].*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: To crush the PLO, remove Syrian influence in Lebanon, and establish a Christian government there. He was sure that this new, Christian-led Lebanon would then sign a peace agreement with Israel. Prime Minister Menachem Begin promised that the treaty would assure long-term stability.

**Menachem Begin:** *‘Va’Tishkot Ha’Aretz Arbaim Shana.’* Perhaps there will be peace for forty years as it is written in the Bible.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: But that’s *not* what happened. The war, which would continue until 1985, came at a heavy cost. According to official army statistics, three hundred and seventy-three Israeli soldiers were killed. Many of them died in the first, chaotic week.

*[Music exits]*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: For decades, the Israeli army has followed a standard procedure when a soldier dies: First army representatives come to the family’s home to inform the parents and siblings, and only then do they release the information to the media, and the soldier's name is announced on the radio.

During the Lebanon War, these radio announcements were usually how relatives and friends would learn of a loved one's death. They’d just hear the news on the radio, and get in their cars to attend the funeral.

The names of the first soldiers who had fallen in Lebanon were announced on Thursday, June 10th.

**IDF Radio:** *[In Hebrew]* IDF Radio morning bulletin, it is now 8:07am.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Chaya, Amir and Yuval's mother, anxiously listened to the broadcast.

**IDF Radio:** *[In Hebrew]* The IDF spokesman announced that twenty-three IDF soldiers were killed in yesterday’s battles. One soldier is missing, one hundred and sixteen have been injured, most of them lightly. The families of the fallen soldiers, those injured and the missing soldier have all been notified.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: To her great relief, her husband Yossi (a reservist who had also been called up to war) and her son Yuval, were not among those named.

The next morning, on Friday, Chaya prepared her regular care package to send to Yuval. Having passed the night without a dreadful knock on her door from an army representative, she was confident her son was safe.

**Chaya Harel**: I was sure that he would receive my cake.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: She planned on sending the package to the front with a convoy later that day, but just when she arrived at her office, cakes in hand, the telephone at her desk rang. Her friend Yardena was on the line. "What are you... doing at work?" she asked cautiously.

**Chaya Harel**: She said: "They just announced on the radio that Yuval Harel from Jerusalem will be laid to rest today."

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Chaya broke down.

*[Music enters]*

**Chaya Harel**: I yelled out: "If a single fingernail has fallen from Yuval's body, I'm going to jump off the roof." I didn't want to live anymore. I didn't want to live a minute after Yuval.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: When Chaya talks about that morning now, she describes being in a terrible emotional limbo. In her gut, she was all but certain that Yuval was gone… that the army had forgotten to tell her, and were about to bury her son without his mother by his side. At the same time, Chaya also knew the army’s procedure. And since no one had come to notify her, she couldn’t be absolutely sure that the Yuval Harel they were talking about on the radio was *her* Yuval. Without receiving official word, going to the funeral seemed inconceivable.

Not knowing what else to do, she made her way back home, to Talpiot.

**Chaya Harel**: Everyone. Literally everyone in Jerusalem thought it was our son. When I got back to our neighborhood, to our street, Shalom Yahuda Street, there was total silence. You didn't even see a cat passing by. No one talked with anyone.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Chaya’s parents had taught her that no matter what, *no matter what*, you always have Shabbat dinner. So Chaya set about her usual errands.

**Chaya Harel**: I entered the corner store to buy a *challah* for Shabbat. No one spoke with me. As if they wanted this ghost to leave the store. Just like that!

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Meanwhile, friends and family members from across the country had heard the same announcement on the radio - that Yuval Harel from Jerusalem had been killed.

*[Music enters]*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: They were now traveling from as far away as Haifa to make it to the Mount Herzl military cemetery in time for the funeral.

Representatives came from Yuval’s youth movement and from *Kibbutz Lochamei Ha’Getaot*, where his *garin* had volunteered.

Because so many soldiers had been killed in those early days of the war, there were rows upon rows of open graves, and bereaved families standing in the hot sun.

But the many friends and family gathered at Yuval’s grave site were perplexed: You see, Yuval’s parents, Chaya and Yossi, were nowhere to be seen. And in their place, another couple was reciting *Kaddish.*

**Chaya Harel**: They had gone to the funeral with big wreaths… for our Yuval. Then, all of a sudden, they said: ‘Wait a minute! Chaya is not a redhead, and Yossi isn’t so short. Yossi is a giant!’ No one could believe it.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Confused, the would-be mourners made their way to Chaya’s apartment in Talpiot. At the same time, Amir, Yuval's fourteen-and-a-half-year-old little brother, came home from school.

**Amir Harel:** I remember coming home and eh, one of the neighbors hugged me and said, "you know, it's a sign of long life." I said, "what is sign of long life?" He said, "oh, you didn't heard. There was a rumor that your brother was injured or dead, but it's another Yuval Harel. It's not your brother, it’s… It's a good sign, it's a sign of, of long life for him."

**Samuel Thrope (narration**): So that's when Amir's family first learned there was another Yuval Harel. Eerily, this other Yuval was also a soldier, also nineteen, and also lived in Jerusalem. And strangest of all, his family lived nearby, in the same neighborhood, Talpiot.

Put this way, lining up the basic facts of their lives side by side, the two young men almost sound like the same person. But the truth is that they were very different.

**Ayelet Harel**: He was very individual, very unique. He not… doesn't do what like everybody does. He did not go by the... by the stream of everyone. Yuval, my brother, was - you know - the guy of many doubts.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Ayelet is the sister of the *other* Yuval Harel.

**Ayelet Harel:** My name is Ayelet Harel. I'm almost fifty-one, fifty I should say.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Now, it’s easy to get the two young men confused, so to keep them straight I'll just call them Amir's Yuval and Ayelet's Yuval.

Anyway, Ayelet, Yuval, and their younger sister Idit spent most of their childhood in Holon, a city just to south of Tel Aviv. Ayelet says Yuval was a dutiful child.

*[Music enters]*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: But as a teenager he got more rebellious: He dropped out of high school, and just wanted to listen to records all day. That may not sound like much of a rebellion, but this was no small matter in the straight-laced Israel of the time.

**Ayelet Harel**: He had very long hair. Really long. I mean like girl-style long. I mean, people thought he was a girl, and then they would go around saying, you know, “what is this, the hippie?” We had a lot of conflicts as two teenagers. I mean, I was the annoying sister. I was much more Israeli-like, much more boring than him. I think I looked very much up to him because he was maybe many things that I wanted to be that I was not, you know? I was reading Naomi Shemer, which is an Israeli poet, and he was like listening to Led Zepplin.

**Samuel Thrope (narration):** Yuval spent an extra year finishing high school in Holon. Then, in August 1981, at the age of nineteen, he was called up for his military service. The day he went into the army - typically a celebratory day for Israeli families - Yuval insisted that he didn't want people making a fuss. No gathering of family, he asked, no excessive displays of emotion. When they dropped him off at the base, Ayelet recalls...

**Ayelet Harel:** My brother didn't want us to get out of the car. So he just went out of the car, said “bye bye,” I mean, agreed to give us some hug.

**Samuel Thrope (narration):** Soon after, Ayelet’s family moved to Jerusalem. In fact, they moved into an apartment just a few streets away from where Chaya, Yossi, Amir, and Yuval had been living for years. Ayelet’s mother, Miriam, even found a job teaching at the neighborhood Zalman Aran school where Amir andYuval went as kids. But the two Yuvals never met. Ayelet's Yuval preferred to spend his weekends off from the army with his friends back in Holon. And by the time the war broke out, in June of 1982, he had only been to Jerusalem a handful of times.

*[Music enters]*

**Samuel Thrope (narration):** Ayelet’s Yuval served in the armored corps. On the first day of the war, a Sunday, his tank brigade entered Lebanon and began advancing north along the coast. By Monday evening, June 7th, they had reached the city of Sidon, some thirty-five miles from the Israeli border.

**Archival News:** *[In Hebrew]* This division, will be tasked with conquering Sidon itself and ‘cleaning up’ the Ein Hilweh camp. A battle that will last a few days.

**Samuel Thrope (narration):** Their objective was to capture the nearby Ein El-Hilweh refugee camp. The camp was originally built to accommodate Palestinian refugees from the Galilee who fled to Lebanon in 1948, but in the intervening years it had become a PLO stronghold.

The next morning, Israeli forces stormed Ein El-Hilweh.

Missiles and rocket propelled grenades were fired at them from all sides. The tank brigade was trapped in the narrow lanes of the refugee camp, unable to turn around or maneuver in any direction. Yuval’s tank was hit by a missile.

He was killed instantly.

Following protocol, an army car pulled up outside of Ayelet's house at 6:15 on Friday morning. Ayelet remembers that she was up early that morning studying for a math test. Suddenly, she heard screaming and ran downstairs. Her father and mother were standing, frozen, next to two strangers in military uniforms.

**Ayelet Harel:** My parents could not do anything. They were in shock. Screaming. Saying stuff. The only thing my mother could say to me, because I was in my pajamas, "go get dressed so we don't be embarrassed after people come here," you know so, she got that focused on me.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: After getting dressed, Ayelet stepped out onto the street.

**Ayelet Harel**: You know, Jerusalem in a Friday morning – very, very quiet. Very beautiful. It's June. A very, very clear day. So I remember the difference between life going on outside and my home. Sort of like, I remember this thinking about it, wow *keilu*... Like here nothing happened. For a second you can still live.

**Samuel Thrope (narration):** The funeral took place later that day, at Har Herzl, Jerusalem’s military cemetery. This was the same funeral that Yuval’s friends and relatives - that is, Amir’s Yuval - accidentally attended.

**Ayelet Harel:** It was a very, very hot day. You know, June. And my brother grave's is up the hill of Har Herzl - it's the big, big hill. So you had to walk all the way up. First goes the command car with the coffin, because soldiers are buried in coffins, and after the command car went my grandmother. And I remember her, you know she was crying and going. She was a small woman, my grandmother. I don't know how old she was, I guess, close to seventy I think. So you know, I remember like seeing the hole, seeing people digging.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: That day, Ayelet recalls, the cemetery was in turmoil. So many soldiers had been killed that funerals were taking place one after the other. As one bereaved family walked down the steep hill after burying their loved one, the next funeral party was walking up to do the very same thing.

Ayelet remembers that there were unfamiliar faces at her brother’s funeral.

**Ayelet Harel:** We noticed that there were people that don't belong to us. But we were not thinking of this. We were not really busy with who are the people.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: The strangers at the funeral, of course, were Chaya and Amir's relatives. As soon as they realized their mistake, they made their way to Talpiot, bearing good news: *Their* Yuval must still be alive.

*[Beat]*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Now, you’d think Chaya and her family would be happy and relieved. But that’s not what Amir remembers.

**Amir Harel:** Actually it wasn't joyous. It wasn't a joy that, "oh, we learned that he is okay." No. Actually people were crying. I remember that, because somebody was dead! It's not, it’s not my brother. But it's somebody's brother, it's somebody's boy.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Chaya couldn't relax. After all her son (and husband) were both still soldiers. Both still fighting in Lebanon. And both, in every way that mattered, still very far from being safe.

A few hours later, with friends and relatives still gathered, Amir was the first to notice a car pulling up on the street outside...

**Amir Harel**: I looked out of the window, I don't know why. And I saw the military car coming and eh, parking opposite the house. Three people came out of the car. And I understand immediately: Also my brother was killed. It maybe sound cold, but I understand in a second that my life, my family, everything is changed from now. I went to my uncle and said to him, "be next to my mother. Something's going to happen." Half a minute, a minute later they knock on the door. They went in and people were starting telling them, "listen, you have a mistake, check again. He's not dead, we've been to the funeral. We've been to the funeral and we understand that it another Yuval Harel."

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: But the soldiers were adamant. They repeated again and again that “yes, *both* Yuval Harels had been killed.”

It seemed impossible that two soldiers with the *exact* same name from the *exact* same neighborhood had been killed. Especially since none of Chaya's friends and neighbors, all long-time residents of the neighborhood, knew of Ayelet's newly-arrived family. Talpiot, you’ll recall, was a small, closely-knit place. How could there be another family of Harels, with their own nineteen-year-old Yuval?

It was much more likely, they all thought, that in the chaos of the first week of the war, the army had simply made an innocent, if heartbreaking, error: Confusing the still living Yuval, Amir's brother, with Yuval, Ayelet's brother.

But the officers assured them there was no mistake.

*[Music enters]*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Amir’s brother’s unit had also entered Lebanon on the first day of the war, and slowly made its way up the country's eastern front. By the fifth day, Thursday (so two days after Ayelet's Yuval had been killed in the Ein El-Hilweh refugee camp) the soldiers had reached the village of Rafid, about twenty-five miles from the Israeli border. That morning, four Israeli fighter jets were sent on a mission to bomb enemy forces further to the east.

But the pilots mistook their target, and dropped their bombs on the Israeli troops instead. Twenty-four soldiers - including Amir’s brother - were killed, and over a hundred were injured.

A day later, Yossi, Yuval’s father who had also been called up for war, heard about the tragedy and rushed home to Jerusalem.

**Amir Harel:** My father came from the front, I met him at the stairs, and told him, "it's okay, you're gonna have a lot of grandchildren from me. So don't be upset, it's going to be okay.”

**Samuel Thrope (narration):** The two Harel families passed that Shabbat in mourning. But now, after hearing about the mix-up, Ayelet's family began to wonder...

**Ayelet Harel:** Sunday morning, my grandmother opens the newspaper, and then she sees there a mourning notice to Yuval Harel from *Garin* *Lochmitan, Kibbutz Lochamei Ha’Getaot*. She said to my mother, “who do we have in *Lochamei Ha’Getaot*? We don't know anything.” So they called the *Ktzin Ha’Ir*. They have the data of all the people that are being killed. So they said to us there is another Yuval Harel, and then they even said the facts you know that both of them were nineteen, and they live also in Jerusalem. So then, you know, my mother tells my father: It's a mistake. Maybe it was wrong. It seems so many details that are the same, so she tells him, “Yuval might come back.”

**Samuel Thrope**: Do you think your mother actually thought that?

**Ayelet Harel**: You know, today, I mean, this information would come in a second, but in that time, of course I... I can imagine that every mother saying to herself, you know, I wish it didn't happen, yes? There was an atmosphere of everything here is a mess. Chaos, the war itself, it's a... it’s a mess.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: Ayelet's parents sat with the guests who came to console them at the shiva. But all the while they hoped, and, for a few days even believed, that the army had got it all wrong.

Finally, on Tuesday evening, June 15th, Yuval’s tank commander arrived at Ayelet’s family's home in Jerusalem, and gave the account of Yuval's death in Ein El-Hilweh. For Ayelet's parents, that marked the end of hope.

*[Music enters]*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: In the end, the two Harel families both followed the same tortuous path: The shock of learning of their son’s death; the glimmer of hope that perhaps he was still alive, that it had all been a terrible mistake; and, finally, the sobering realization that their Yuval was truly gone. It’s just that, each family’s passage through these stations depended on the other, like a bullet ricocheting again and again off the walls of a closed room.

*[Music exits]*

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: The two Yuvals are buried next to each other in the Mount Herzl military cemetery in Jerusalem: Just a few plots apart, in the same row, in the same small section overlooking the same forest of evergreen pine trees. The graves are planted with rosemary bushes. Some are topped with pots of colorful flowers. The names of the soldiers are carved into identical headstones, all painted with the same gold paint.

Thirty-four-year-old Yuval Harel (who we heard at the start of our story) comes to Mount Herzl every Memorial Day. He stands with Amir and Ayelet and their respective families at the official ceremony honoring the country's fallen soldiers. But he’s not just an extra at this intimate gathering. They know him well, give him big hugs, and invite him back home afterward. Yuval is basically just one of the family.

**Yuval Harel:** Chaya was at my wedding, under my *chuppah*. Like, with my mother, my father and Chaya. When I talk to Amir, he's like an older brother and Chaya is like a mother or grandmother to my kids.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: So how did he get his weighty name? Back in June of 1982, this Yuval's family also lived, believe it or not, in Talpiot. His mother was seven months pregnant – with him – and his older brothers were in elementary school at Zalman Aran.

**Yuval Harel:** And when, when it happened, of course, the whole school was... was shocked and it was a big story in, in school. And my two brothers were, you know, they took it really hard, and they came to my mother say, "listen, mom, if it's a boy, let's call him Yuval." And they said yes without thinking without thinking about the consequences. Sometimes when people ask me "what is your name?" and I say "Yuval" — "Yuval what?" — "Yuval Harel" — "Wait, Yuval Harel? Do you know the story? Do you have any connection to the story and everything?”

**Samuel Thrope (narration**): You see, *everybody* knows the story of the Yuval Harels. There's a famous song about them called *Brit Damim*, or "Oath of Blood." It's played on the radio every Memorial Day, and performed at community centers and schools across the country. Kids learn about the story. Army welfare officers study the case in their training courses. And tourists from Israel and all over the world, including many Birthright groups, are taken to see the two adjacent graves on Mount Herzl.

**Yuval Harel**: So I went there one day with my wife, to the graves to Mount Herzl. And then there was a group of students with their guide, telling them the story about the two Yuval, Yuval Harel. And I'm... you know, standing aside, listening to, to what she has to say, and then she's... she's telling this, my story. "You know, there was another Yuval Harel, who was born and then, and the song, and, and everything." I'm of course... I don't know what to say.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: When the guide finished, Yuval took her aside and told her that *he* was the third Yuval she had just been talking about.

**Yuval Harel**: She refused to believe it, so I had to take my ID out. I was shocked, she was shocked, she didn't know what to do with herself, she started crying, because, er... Because it was all so... it's, it's... The story is touching, you know, as itself, then... you know, to see the person that you was just talked about.

**Samuel Thrope (narration**): Imagine being born into a story of grief that everyone knows before you've even taken your first breath. Hearing “your song” on the radio every Memorial Day. Chaya making her dead son’s favorite date cookies, just for you. Your family breathing a sigh of relief when you *don’t* die, like your two namesakes, at nineteen.

Sometimes Yuval’s name makes him uneasy. But mostly he's proud to be a part of the story.

**Yuval Harel:** It's an all Israeli story, I think. I mean, if this story would take place in any other country, I don't think it could be a big deal like in Israel, but Israel is so small.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: When Yuval says "Israel is small," I don’t think he’s talking about geography. I think what he means is that the entire country is – or imagines itself to be - just a slightly larger version of that intimate Talpiot neighborhood of the early 1980s. A place where everyone knows everyone, and all their business. Where neighbors, and even strangers, can be as close as family. Where two families’ private grief can so easily become muddled with everyone’s grief - the collective grief. A place where, when they put on their uniforms, two very different boys could seem almost... interchangeable.

*[Music enters]*

**Ayelet Harel:** He died through a public national war, yes? Paying the price of the public, so the public is involved in his death. I understand that, of course.

**Samuel Thrope (narration)**: In the end, though, the two Yuvals are *not* all of Israel. They were particular men, particular sons and brothers, each mourned as a particular loss by his own particular family. And maybe that’s a good place to end this whole confusing saga: With the memories of the people who loved them.

**Amir Harel:** He was a kid, but he was... he was with an old soul. Really. *[Amir laughs].*

**Ayelet Harel:** He was not the hero guy. He's not like the Israeli military story about fantasizing to be a combat and a hero. I remember when… when he died, you know, I was saying, this was not belonging to his biography.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Samuel Thrope. Samuel is a freelance writer living in Jerusalem. His latest book, "The Israeli Republic," is available on Amazon.

The original music in today’s episode was composed and performed by the supremely talented Ruth Danon and featured Sher Niv on the guitar. This episode was edited by Julie Subrin, and mixed by Sela Waisblum.

Thanks to our dubber, Debbie Sinclair, to Dima Perevozchikov, Eti Anetta and Gal Hermoni.

As always, 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. And if you get a chance, rate us on iTunes, apparently that helps get the show to new listeners. You can also follow us on FB, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story. And, if you’d like to sponsor episodes of Israel Story, which you really should, it’s easy – just email us at [sponsor@prx.org](mailto:sponsor@prx.org). I’m reminding you one more time about the Israel Story trip, in November. For more details email us at [trip@israelstory.org](mailto:trip@israelstory.org).

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I’m Mishy Harman, and we’ll be back very very soon with a brand new Israel Story episode. So till then, *yalla bye*.

*[Brit Damim song]*

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