**Newsreel:** Germany invades Poland and the Free State of Danzig. The efforts and hopes of diplomats for peaceful settlement are transformed into the roar of gunfire. Warsaw is bombed, blasted and shelled. Poland is in ruins.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Last month, the world marked the eightieth anniversary of Hitler’s invasion of Poland.

**Newsreel:** Great Britain and France declare war or Germany.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And the start of the Second World War. In Israel too, of course, this was a big milestone. Kids discussed it at school, academics held symposiums and conferences at the various universities, newspapers ran articles and editorials. But, as we all know, this wasn’t always the case in Israel. For many years, the war - and the Holocaust - were taboo topics.

Now, close your eyes and imagine Israel in the late 1940s, or throughout the 50s. It’s a young country trying to construct a vibrant national ethos; one of strength and resilience and vitality. One that celebrates the farmer and the kibbutznik, and the young fighters that - against all odds - won the War of Independence and turned the dream of a state into a reality.

In *that* Israel there was little room for the Holocaust. It was shameful, and rarely discussed publicly.

Ora Rajevsky, from Kibbutz Afikim,near the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee, remembers the haunted Holocaust survivors who showed up shortly after the end of the war.

**Mishy Harman:** Ora, can you please introduce yourself.

**Ora Rajevsky:** My name is Ora Rajevsky. My maiden name is Galili, which I changed from Hebrew to Polish *[laughs]*. And I was born in Kibbutz Afikim.

**Mishy Harman:** What year were you born?

**Ora Rajevsky:** When?

**Mishy Harman:** Yeah.

**Ora Rajevsky:** 1927.

**Mishy Harman:** Oho! *[Mishy and Ora laugh]*.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But Ora and her friends, all strapping, idealistic *tzabarim*, men and women of the land - were off fighting for the state-to-be.

**Ora Rajevsky:** In the *Palmach* or in the *Hagana*. So actually we didn’t stay here. So we didn’t know them. Because they had their own life.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Even when the *Palmachniks* were around, they didn’t really interact all that much with the Holocaust survivors. Their experiences, their pasts, were so wildly different.

**Ora Rajevsky:** We didn’t ask, and they didn’t want to tell.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And that was pretty indicative of the general attitude. European Jews, many Israelis felt, had gone to the camps like sheep to the slaughter, *Tzon La’Tevach,* without really resisting, without putting up much of a fight.

But then, almost overnight, that perception started to change. And it changed because of one major event. On May 23rd, 1960, as most of the citizens of the young country were waking up from their afternoon naps, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion made a dramatic announcement in the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament.

**David Ben-Gurion:** *[In Hebrew]* A while back, the Israeli...

**Mishy Harman (narration):** “A while back,” he told the nation, “the Israeli security services discovered one of the greatest Nazi war criminals alive.

**David Ben-Gurion:**Adolf Eichmann.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Adolf Eichmann. Along with other Nazi leaders, Eichmann was responsible for what they called the ‘Final Solution’ for the Jewish problem, the extermination of six million European Jews.”

Ben Gurion then paused for a second, and delivered the bombshell.

**David Ben-Gurion:** *[In Hebrew]* Adolf Eichmann is now in custody in Israel.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** “Adolf Eichmann,” he said with restrained excitement, “is now in custody in Israel and will soon stand trial in Jerusalem.”

We all know about the Eichmann trial. You can probably even conjure up the famous image of a balding, middle-aged man, responsible for the deaths of millions of Jews, sitting inside a glass booth in the Jerusalem courtroom.

Many of us have learned about the trial in school, watched documentaries about it on Holocaust Remembrance Days, or read Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. And, just in case none of this sounds familiar, the Israeli National Archives and a bunch of other organizations have made sure it’s at the tip of our fingers. A few years ago they uploaded videos of the *entire* trial to YouTube. We’ll link to it on our site, israelstory.org.

And, during Eichmann’s trial, people came forward and recounted the horrors they had experienced in the camps. The trial opened up the flood-gates, and allowed for a kind of national catharsis.

At its end, of course, Eichmann was sentenced to death. He is, till this day, the last person to be legally executed in Israel. And, even more than that, he’s become a symbol. A symbol of evil.

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 - **The Needle.** It’s a collaboration with a wonderful National Public Radio podcast called *Rough Translation*. They bring fascinating stories from far off places, all the way from Brazil to China. They’ve told stories about Iraqi citizens rebuilding after ISIS, Evangelical Christians confronting climate change, a beloved McDonald’s franchise in France, and many many others. And what’s stirring about those stories is that they bring new perspectives on familiar conversations. The stories are so universal that no matter where you live, you end up thinking of your own backyard, of your own life. And in this episode, two masters of radio - *Rough Translation*’s host Gregory Warner, and NPR’s Jerusalem bureau chief, Daniel Estrin, bring us a little-known backstory of one of the best-known Israeli Mossad operations: The capture of Adolf Eichmann. But, as you’ll hear, this story goes somewhere you’ll never expect.

Now, long-term listeners might recall that in our second season we aired a story in which we went back and interviewed many of the folks who dealt with Eichmann while he was on trial. People who guarded him, people who interrogated him, even the people who executed him. And don’t worry, you don’t have to go searching for that episode - we’ll drop a rerun in our feed next week.

But that story was all about people who very much wanted their name to be part of the Eichmann saga. And this one, well, it’s strange. It’s about someone who did everything he possibly could to *erase* himself from the history books. To minimize his part in the capture of one of the most notorious Nazi war criminals.

Here are Gregory and Daniel.

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**Gregory Warner (narration):** The Mossad is the Israeli version of the CIA. Think top-secret spies, agents who deny they work there. So I was surprised to learn that there has been a tradition where, one day a year, the Mossad throws open its doors to the families of the employees.

**Avner Avraham:** And the kids used to come.

**Gregory Warner:** Wait. The Mossad has take your son or daughter to work day?

**Avner Avraham:** Yeah. Why not?

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Avner Avraham is a former Mossad agent with a passion for history. He would set up these elaborate exhibits for the kids with, say, a typewriter from the '50s that typed in Morse code or old spy gear.

**Avner Avraham:** Like, you have television. But inside, you can find camera. I think that all objects got energy.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** One day, a top guy told him he had something to show him in a refrigerated archive in the Mossad basement.

**Avner Avraham:** It was in the corner.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Ten boxes of stuff, all from one old operation.

**Avner Avraham:** It looks like someone said, “OK, let's put everything in boxes, and put it in the corner. And don't touch it for fifty years.”

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Avner finds an old Leica camera, a kit to make fake license plates, a pocket diary in code.

**Avner Avraham:** I remember that I opened one of the envelope - a brown envelope. And I saw old Israeli passports from the '50s.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Israeli passports from the '50s had blue cloth and gold letters. And he opens one of them. The name is in Hebrew.

**Avner Avraham:** Ze'ev Zichroni - if you translate, Ze'ev is wolf, and Zichroni is memory.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** The ‘wolf of my memory’ - it's a code name. The picture on the passport is Adolf Eichmann. Adolf Eichmann was Hitler's mastermind of transportation. He made sure the trains to the death camps ran smoothly. And after the war, he escaped to Argentina until he was captured by the Mossad and brought to Israel. And his trial, in Jerusalem in 1961, was broadcast all around the world.

**Gideon Hausner:** When I stand before you, judges of Israel...

**Gregory Warner (narration):** People crowded around their radios and TVs.

**Gideon Hausner:** To accuse Adolf Eichmann...

**Gregory Warner (narration):** More than a hundred Holocaust survivors took the stand to tell their stories.

**Gideon Hausner:** I do not stand alone.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** At the time, most people had never heard these stories in public. And in Israel, which was full of refugees, telling these stories was taboo. They didn't fit with Israel's self-image of resistance and strength. The survivors were seen as victims. They were called lambs to the slaughter. And lambs don't speak.

The Eichmann trial became the setting to flip that script. Victims became prosecutors of the Nazi in the dock.

**Gideon Hausner:** Here with me, at this moment, stand six million prosecutors.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** The Eichmann trial gave Israel a new story to tell about a nation that had suffered a wrong and was ready and able to exact justice. And it created the legend of the Mossad, this young spy agency from a tiny new country that discovered Eichmann was hiding under a false name in Argentina, then tracked him, staked him out in his home, kidnapped him, sedated him, dressed him in a flight crew uniform and snuck him onto a plane to Israel with Argentine authorities none the wiser.

This is the capture story that would be told and retold in books and documentaries and feature films and taught in Israeli high schools. And the agents became national heroes with books and memoirs of their own. That's the story that Avner found in these basement boxes. And he's asked to make a show for the public, the first museum exhibit by the Mossad about itself - some Mossad PR - at a moment when the Mossad is being especially criticized for secret assassinations.

And his exhibit - it's a hit. It goes up in Jerusalem and then Tel Aviv. And then they're invited to Cleveland and then Skokie, Illinois, and New York City and Florida, and New Orleans. And everywhere he goes, this odd thing happens. He's approached by people who say, you forgot to include my dad.

**Avner Avraham:** “Why didn't you write the name of my father? All the years, he used to say that he was one of the people that capture Eichmann. We know he took part. He was there. He was in the car.”

**Gregory Warner (narration):** One guy's dad booked hotel rooms for the agents. Someone's mom had a backup safehouse. A guy in New York had the job of going to the post office each day to take all the mail from the Argentine sources and put it in a new envelope for Tel Aviv.

**Avner Avraham:** It's amazing. All the time, there's someone in the audience that have a connection.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Everyone wanted a piece of this story - everyone, that is, except one person who was closer to the heart of this capture than anybody else. And yet, he did not want any part of this story.

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** My father didn't want to talk about anything.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** And his kids would spend years asking themselves “why?” Arguing about it. And some of those arguments revolved around just one object, an object that Avner, the Mossad curator, was trying to hunt down.

**Avner Avraham:** This mission to bring the needle.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Our story is about the doctor who injected the sedative into Eichmann's arm and then accompanied him through the airport in Buenos Aires, both men dressed in flight crew uniforms with starched white shirts, blue trousers, Stars of David on their caps. This was, in a sense, the trickiest part because they had to pass Eichmann off to airport authorities as just a member of the crew who was feeling sick.

**Avner Avraham:** That's why the doctor was with him. He need to… he need to keep him like a puppet.

**Gregory Warner:** What does that mean, “like a puppet?”

**Avner Avraham:** Like he is not sleeping. He cannot speak. He cannot scream. He cannot... he looks very sick.

**Gregory Warner:** And in 1960, with the anesthetics of that time, was that difficult to do - to put him in exactly that twilight?

**Avner Avraham:** That's why he was a professional.

**Daniel Estrin (narration)**: His colleagues considered him this magician. He was a legend in his field.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Daniel Estrin, Jerusalem correspondent for NPR, has been digging into the doctor's story.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** He was the anesthesiologist who would be called upon whenever a baby - even a preemie - needed to be operated on. The doctor died some years ago, but I know he would not have talked to me anyway. He probably would have shut me out, as he did everyone who wanted to hear his story. So I ended up meeting with his son, Danny, in a noisy Tel Aviv cafe.

Danny spent his life trying to figure out his father's mystery.

Danny is a trim guy in his 60s. He's got two kids. He's a cardiologist. Like his dad, he loves the artifacts of his profession. He actually has a collection of heart stents he's removed from patients' bodies and mounted. He calls it the world's largest collection. The hospital where he works is the same one where his dad was the director of the anesthesiology department. They call him Elian number two.

**Danny Elian:** Elian the second. I mean, it's really funny. I'm thirty-one years in the hospital, I'm still considered the son of Dr. Elian here.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** As a kid, Danny remembers his father being gone a lot. He was always on call, traveling to different hospitals around Israel. But one of those trips, Danny remembers, when he was eight years old.

**Danny Elian**: He woke me up early in the morning - I was a little kid - and sort of kissed me goodbye. And he told me he was going to Eilat.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Eilat is about four hours south of Tel Aviv. But he was gone for weeks.

**Danny Elian:** And I have this really strong memory. When he came back, he gave me a pistol.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** A toy pistol.

**Danny Elian:** And the butt of the pistol was from ivory. And I was like, “wow. They have such beautiful things in Eilat.” I was shocked.

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** Yeah, right. My brother remembers the pistol, yeah. And I remember getting a doll.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Danny has a twin sister named Miri - Miri Halperin Wernli. And she also remembers this trip. And she remembers the gifts.

**Gregory Warner:** What was the doll that you remember?

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** Just a doll that the girl likes. I didn't have many dolls.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Miri, as a kid, was more into soccer than dolls. But even she had the same reaction as her brother - like, ‘wow. You can buy such beautiful things in Israel?’

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** In Israel fifty years ago, you could not get things so easily like you get now. So these were very small signs that something maybe not usual is going on.

**Gregory Warner:** You mean that there may be more to your father than you realize?

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** Yeah.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** They didn't even know which country those gifts had come from until they were teenagers in high school, and Danny was hanging out with some friends, and they were talking about the Eichmann capture.

**Danny Elian:** I mean, a group of friends were kind of talking and - something about Eichmann. And one of them turned to me [and said] “maybe this is your father who is the doctor involved.”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Danny had no clue what this kid was talking about. Had one of his father's long trips been for the Mossad - to sedate and kidnap a well-known Nazi? Danny gets home from school. And he asks his dad, “Dad, did you... Eichmann, did you do that?” And he was like, “yeah, yeah, yeah.”

**Danny Elian:** In his very sort of typical nonchalant way, he, you know, kind of acknowledged it and just moved on.

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** Repeatedly, we asked. And he didn't want to share any information. He said, “it's my right not to say anything to anybody.”

**Gregory Warner (narration):** This silence provoked almost opposite reactions in his two children, the twins. While her brother went to med school and became Elian number two, Miri left Israel. And she stopped asking her dad questions.

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** He was not a storyteller at all. He was very quiet. I don't like the limelight either. He just didn't like... some people like it. He doesn't. He didn't. Why? He must have had his reasons.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Miri says in Israel, where military service is mandatory, many people have done things that they just can't talk about in public.

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** In Israel, everybody's involved in these things than the Mossad. Everybody has kind of secret activities. It's not that unusual.

**Gregory Warner:** What do you mean, everybody's involved in Mossad?

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** Many people are involved in the Mossad in Israel.

**Gregory Warner:** Did you work for the Mossad?

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** No. And if I would, I wouldn't tell you. *[Gregory laughs].*

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Unlike his sister, Danny was not the type to let secrets lie.

**Danny Elian:** Many times I asked him, “Abba, why won't you talk about this? What's so secret? Everybody knows about it, so what's the big deal?”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** His father did eventually give him one answer.

**Danny Elian:** He would talk about that, as a doctor, he didn't feel quite right about using his knowledge, his power, against somebody's will. It's against the Hippocratic oath.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** The Hippocratic oath - the pledge that med students take that a doctor should first do no harm to their patients. Danny is a doctor himself. He could agree that yes, technically, his father had brought harm to Eichmann - sedated him against his will.

**Danny Elian:** I told him, I understand the argument. But the Hippocratic Oath is - I mean, it's so unfitting for this situation. And I told him, “Abba, this is not just any person. This is Eichmann we're talking about, a mass murderer - mass killer. But that's... he was adamant about that.”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** It seemed like his dad might have regretted his role in this historic mission. In the cafe, I asked Danny about that - about his dad's regret. He did not like that word.

**Danny Elian:** I just don't feel like he regretted it. Regret is just not the right word - absolutely not. I never heard him say, “I regret.”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** He says the headline here is not - doctor regretted his role in Eichmann capture. That would be unthinkable here. Israel is a country where everything is up for debate except for Eichmann. There is no debate about Eichmann.

And maybe there is something really uncomfortable about your father not only refusing to take credit for it but thinking something about it was wrong.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, it’s Mishy. We’ll get back to the story in just a minute, but I wanted to make sure that you all know about our newsletter. Some of you, we recently learned, weren’t even aware of the fact that we have one. Well, we do! And, it’s a great way to stay up-to-date. Want Israel Story delivered right to your inbox? Want special behind-the-scenes photos and staff recommendations? Want to be the first to know about our live shows, and presentations and public talks? Go to israelstory.org/newsletter and sign up today.

OK, back to our story. In 2007, Danny’s father, Yonah, was invited to the Knesset for a special event honoring all those who participated in Eichmann’s capture. But, true to himself, Yonah refused to go. His son tried to persuade him to attend.

**Danny Elian:** I really, really tried to convince him to do it - to go to the Knesset and receive this certificate.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But, to no avail.

**Danny Elian:** And, of course, my father doesn't want anything to do with it.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So Danny devised a plan. His daughter, Gali, had recently gone into the army. And Danny thought that maybe, in her olive green uniform, she might be able to push the old man’s patriotic buttons.

**Danny Elian:** So I thought maybe I'll use the fact that she's a soldier, and that will somehow, you know, get him to agree to go.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That didn’t work either.

**Danny Elian:** He was steadfast in his refusal. So I told him, “why don't you just let us accept the certificate for you?”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** For some reason that seemed like something Yonah could stomach. Danny and his daughter went to the Knesset and represented the doctor. But when they received the commemoratory certificate on his behalf, they noticed something strange. It didn’t have Yonah’s full name on it. Instead of Yonah Elian, all it said was Dr. Alef, for Elian.

Somehow, Yonah had managed to keep his name off the books even at the official ceremony in the Knesset. This insistence to remain anonymous always seemed odd to Danny. But he was about to learn a much darker reason behind his father’s silence. It all began when one day Yonah received a weird phone call, out of the blue. “Dr. Yonah Elian?” the guy on the other end of the line asked. “Yes,” Yonah replied. “You killed my father. I’d like to talk.”

Alright, back to Gregory Warner and Daniel Estrin.

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**Gregory Warner (narration):** To understand the origin of that strange phone call and how it changed things between the doctor and his son, we should tell you about a twenty-year hunt by one of Israel's most famous journalists for details about a different Mossad operation that turned out to have everything to do with Eichmann. The journalist is Ronen Bergman.

**Ronen Bergman:** The senior national security correspondent for *Yedioth Ahronoth* and a staff writer for The New York Times Magazine.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** His investigation centered on a secret safe in the Israeli government archives.

**Ronen Bergman:** And in that safe they found a file which proved that something that was whispered as a sort of an urban legend throughout the years. Something that nobody actually knew whether it was right or wrong, it's just a rumor - was in fact 100% right.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** So should I say briefly what the story is?

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Yes, tell me that story.

**Daniel Estrin (narration)**: This was actually the story of an Israeli army officer. His name was Alexander Israel. And as the story goes, this Mr. Israel was desperate for money and turned against his country. In 1954, he flies out of Israel with a suitcase full of military secrets and offers to sell them to the Egyptian Embassy in Rome.

**Ronen Bergman:** The Mossad wanted to get him.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** This is, like, the very first years of Israel. The Mossad is this new intelligence agency. And the head of the Mossad realizes, this is a great opportunity to prove ourselves - to prove what we can do. They decide to kidnap him and bring him back to Israel to stand trial. And they recruit a legendary anesthesiologist for the job - the magician. Dr. Alef. Dr. Yonah Elian.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** The Mossad's plan may sound very familiar - young agency wants to prove itself by kidnapping someone overseas, sedating him and bringing him to trial - that was Eichmann's story. But Eichmann had not happened yet. This was six years before that.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** And actually, this story is almost kind of an alternate version of the Eichmann story, in which everything that can go wrong does. This is not the Mossad that everyone has heard about. This is not a slick operation. It's an amateur job from the very beginning.

**Ronen Bergman:** The problem was to find him. And they didn't find him in Rome.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** So they dispatch Israeli students to go search for him in train stations across Europe.

**Ronen Bergman:** And it turned out to be just another fiasco because the police in two of these countries realized that something is going on.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** They finally find him by accident in Vienna. But it's not until they lure him to Paris that they manage to grab him. The doctor examines him, injects him with a sedative and, as he will do later with Eichmann, he boards with him on a plane to Israel.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** And this is where fiasco turns into catastrophe.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Because when they land in Israel, the guy they were supposed to bring back to stand trial is dead. The doctor's drug somehow killed him. And this is not only a failure of the mission. The Mossad at the time had a mandate.

**Ronen Bergman:** We do not kill Jews.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** The Mossad does not kill Jews. If these details get out, this will make the Mossad look really bad.

**Ronen Bergman:** There was, by far, less criticism. And there was a naive belief in the public that everything that these people are doing is good, right and just.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** The Mossad chief orders the plane flown back up over the Mediterranean Sea, and the body is tossed out of the plane. They erase his name from the army records. The guy's wife and son are never told. The only civilian in Israel who knows firsthand about this cover-up is Dr. Yonah Elian, and he's ordered to keep quiet.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Fifty years later, Ronen - the journalist - learns about that file in the safe and starts writing articles about this story. And that's when the doctor gets that phone call from the son of the guy who died on the airplane.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** And the doctor quickly gets off that call, and then he calls his own son.

**Danny Elian:** I get this phone call from my father. My father was really distraught - tells me, “listen. The son of this soldier just called me. He wants to meet with me. Do me a favor, you talk to him.” So I call him up, and I told him, “listen, my father's old. He doesn't want to revisit these things. He just doesn't want to. And I'm really asking you to just let this be.”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Danny says he actually explained to this guy, “look, my father doesn't talk to anybody.” And this guy, you know, he's the son of an accused traitor. He's not going to push it.

**Danny Elian:** He said, “well, if at some point later, he wants to talk, let me know.”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** So when I heard this, I called up this guy - the son of Alexander Israel.

**Moshe Tsipper:** Hello.

**Daniel Estrin:** Hi. Good morning.

**Moshe Tsipper:** *Boker tov*.

**Daniel Estrin:** *Boker or*. How are you?

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** I wanted to know what it was like for him, this conversation between two sons, both struggling with the doctor's silence.

**Moshe Tsipper:** You want to come here, or...

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** So we made a plan to meet.

**Moshe Tsipper:** Yeah, Monday afternoon - late afternoon. Yeah. OK.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** But then he canceled. I called again, and his wife told me it was too sensitive. He just did not want to revisit this.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Danny, the doctor's son, wanted to talk with his dad about this. But he wondered, if his dad had refused to talk about his successful capture with Eichmann, how much less was he going to say about this botched operation where he'd failed the mission? So Danny waits for his moment, and he finds his father is actually willing to talk about what happened on that terrible airplane ride.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** He tells him they were in a Dakota airplane, which is a World War II cargo plane with propellers. It's unheated. It's freezing. And there's turbulence, so the cabin pressure is going up and down. And all of this affected how the sedative interacted with the patient, and that's why the man died. And this is not an emotional confession. This is more like two doctors discussing a case.

**Danny Elian:** But I know that this thing - like, that this story, this incident, really sat with my father. I mean, it really stayed with him.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** It wasn't long after that Danny is over at his dad's house. And his dad tells him, “wait here.” And he goes into his room and comes back with a plastic bag with a needle inside and tells him, “this is the needle I used to put Eichmann to sleep.” And Danny says he never even knew his father had kept it.

**Danny Elian:** *[In Hebrew] Ahalan.*

**Daniel Estrin:** Hello. *Ma nishma?*

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** I went back to see Danny.

**Daniel Estrin:** So Dan just took out this silver box out of his briefcase.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** And he shows me the needle.

**Danny Elian:** *[In Hebrew]* If you want to look inside for Eichmann’s DNA, go ahead.

**Daniel Estrin:** Can I hold it? *Ani yachol lehachzik et zeh?*

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** And it's really a striking object. It's made of metal. It's got a handle with a leather grip that scissors out like a switchblade.

**Daniel Estrin:** Oh, wow.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** And in my hand, the needle feels surprisingly small.

**Daniel Estrin:** *[In Hebrew]* It’s really small.

**Danny Elian:** *[In Hebrew]* It’s not small at all. Actually, if you ask me as a doctor, I would say it is very large.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** He says, “this is not a tiny thing at all. If you ask me - I'm a doctor - this is a big needle. It's unwieldy. It's hard to use. It's metal. And a metal needle can cause blood clots, but that's what he had.”

And on the baggie that the needle came in...

**Danny Elian:** “Eichmann needle.” OK?

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Is a small sticker with a note that his father had written in English in this kind of shaky handwriting.

**Daniel Estrin:** Wow. “Eichmann needle.” *[In Hebrew]* That is what your father wrote?

**Danny Elian:** Umm-hmm.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Danny is looking at this note. This is the only piece of his dad's handwriting he has left.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** It was only a few months after the doctor gave his son this needle that he killed himself, at home, alone in his house, and he left no note.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Neither Danny nor his sister thinks his death had anything to do with Eichmann. They think he was getting old and frail and depressed. I've struggled with this question and I still wonder. It struck me that this gift of the needle was like a last will.

**Daniel Estrin:** *[In Hebrew]* Wow, it’s like a last will or something.

**Danny Elian:** *[In Hebrew]* Yes. Perhaps.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** And he says, “yes, could be.”

**Danny Elian:** *[In Hebrew] “Eichmann needle,”* like what? I mean when he kept it, he didn’t need to remind himself that it is Eichmann’s needle, right?

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Danny looks at the label and he says, “it's interesting because he didn't need the reminder, but he wrote it anyway.” And to him, it means his father cared about this history being preserved. Maybe he didn't want his name or his voice associated with it, but he did think this object was worth saving.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Danny and Miri, the doctor's children, they disagree about most things when it comes to their father. They disagree about whether talking more would have helped him and about how often he was gone when they were kids. They even disagree about which of them received this gift. Miri says it was her he gave it to, not her brother. But when he gave it, he left no instruction. It was up to them to decide what to do next.

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** My brother regarded this as a national treasure and said that this doesn't belong to us and brought it to the museum. He said that we owe it to the country to give it to the museum.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** For Danny, this was his big chance to finally get his father in the history books. He got the needle photographed in the newspaper. He called up museums to find a home for it. And eventually, Avner, the museum guide at the Mossad, found him.

**Avner Avraham**: I called Danny. He gave me the needle for the exhibit.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** And that's where I saw the needle for the first time - in that Tel Aviv exhibit, under glass. There's just something so physical about it and intimate. And you imagine that thing in Eichmann's arm. And that was the object that made me want to learn the story of this doctor and find out who he was and what he went through. But if you go to that exhibit today, you're not going to see that needle.

**Avner Avraham:** After a year, he took it from me. I'd be happy to take the needle back and put it in the exhibit. And I also offer him to honor his father and put his name in the intelligence... the Israeli intelligence center. But he didn't cooperate.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Danny decided that this needle did not belong with the Mossad's travelling show. And in this respect, he came around to his sister's point of view. Their father gave them this needle. He did not give them a story to go with it.

**Miri Halperin Wernli:** It was a significant needle for him. I think it meant something to him without expressing what it was.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** On my last meeting, I asked Danny what the needle now means to him.

**Danny Elian**: *[In Hebrew]* The needle is really a needle which is something important to this story. But it doesn’t replace the stories…”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Danny told me, “the needle is an important part of this story, but it does not replace the stories, the revelations, the confessions, that never were.”

**Gregory Warner (narration):** In a way, this needle connects these two stories in the doctor's life, six years apart, where he did the exact same job for his country - injected a wanted man in a plane - with such different results. In one, he was glorified in national triumph; in the other - made complicit in a government cover-up. In one, he was asked to be a hero; in the other, a ghost. So his son decided in the end that the right place for this needle was where his dad kept it - in a drawer.

**Daniel Estrin**: Stay in the family.

**Danny Elian:** Stay in the family. *Ken.*

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** He's going to pass it on to his kids. And then it'll be on them to decide what to do with the legacy.

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

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Gregory Warner and Daniel Estrin. Yonah Elian died in 2011, at the age of 88. He’s buried in Kinneret, next of the Sea of Galilee.

That story was produced by the Rough Translation team - Gregory Warner, Jess Jiang, Mitchell Johnson, Neal Carruth, Will Dobson, Anya Grundmann, Sarah Knight, Andy Huether, John Ellis, Matt Orton and Autumn Barnes. It was edited by Marianne McCune, who also scored the piece together with Mike Cruz. Thanks to Larry Kaplow - NPR’s Middle East editor - and to Karen Duffin, Quil Lawrence, Ann Hepperman, Alex Goldmark, Sana Krasikov and Yochai Maital. You can find the wonderful ‘Rough Translation’ podcast, which I really can’t recommend enough, on Apple Podcasts or anywhere else you find your podcasts.

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I’m Mishy Harman, and we’ll be back very very soon with a brand new Israel Story episode.

#

# **Lisa Miara:** And it hit me as a Jew - gas doesn’t just belong to us.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So till next time, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye*.

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