**Gadi Vitner:** I was born in Be’er Sheva, I grew up in Be’er Sheva.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That’s Gadi Vitner. Today, Gadi’s…

 **Gadi Vitner:** Fifty years old.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But forty years ago, when Gadi was just ten, he was sent out on an errand that basically landed him where he is today.

**Gadi Vitner:** My mother sent me to buy milk. I find a puppy, I just take the puppy, bring it to my mother and she said, “no, no, no, he’s not going to stay here. Sorry.” And she took me, together with the puppy, to the shelter, the SPCA Be’er Sheva.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The SPCA, or *Tza’ar Ba’aley Haim*, is the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. They mainly give shelter to abandoned and injured cats and dogs and try to find homes for them. They also have a lot of educational activities and raise awareness for the well-being of animals. The Israeli chapter was actually founded long before the State, in 1927, during the British Mandate.

Anyway, Gadi and his mother stepped into the local Be’er Sheva branch, and Gadi couldn’t believe his eyes.

**Gadi Vitner:** I remember, I was in shock. I saw so many dogs barking and barking, and I was so sad like I understood it’s not a good place for them. And they was begging like begging to me, they want that I come and you know and play with them and talk to them, and maybe hug them. So then I realized that I need to come almost every day. And then I start to come, almost every day - after school, instead of school, in Saturdays, in holidays. That was my all childhood.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Gadi became an extremely committed volunteer.

**Gadi Vitner:** Cleaning the shelter. Walking with the dogs around, selling cookies and lemonade to make donation for the dogs and cats. Everything, everything, really. It’s in my heart, I don’t know. It’s something that I grow with. I cannot see animals that suffering and they need help and not to do anything.

**Mishy Harman:** And did you convince your mother to let you keep the dog?

**Gadi Vitner:** I tried to but I didn’t success. But after she… they agreed that we have a dog, and we adopt a dog in Be’er Sheva, and we have a dog. But the first one, that she said “no,” it’s change my life, I think. I think, ‘cuz she took me to the SPCA. Who knows, maybe I didn’t know the SPCA if she didn’t take me there.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Gadi ultimately left Be’er Sheva and moved to Tel Aviv. But one thing hasn’t changed.

**Gadi Vitner:** From then I didn’t leave the SPCA.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** For the last twenty years he’s served as the organization’s spokesperson. And let’s just say he’s been pretty busy since the pandemic struck.

**Gadi Vitner:** In the corona time, it’s starting very bad. A lot of people start to aband the animals. We was scared that, wow, what’s going to be? Now we going to have so many animals that people want to throw away. People was a scared if they can bring disease to them, you know, the corona. If they pass the corona, or they… I don’t know, is this contagious or not contagious? People was in panic a little bit.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The number of abandoned animals spiked, and - amid all the uncertainty and chaos of those early days - Gadi and his colleagues tried to reassure the public.

**Gadi Vitner:** We tell the people, “don’t be afraid, it’s not contagious from animals to human beings, and from human beings to animals, don’t be afraid.” And then something happened.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Suddenly, SPCA shelters around the country were packed. But not with abandoned animals. Instead, they were packed with people seeking to adopt a quarantine companion.

**Gadi Vitner:** You know how many people want to adopt dogs and cats in the corona time? I think the virus corona did something great for the abandoned animals. Almost all the shelters in Israel are empty now. Adoption, adoption, adoption, adoption, adoption, adoption. Every day adoption, a lot of adoption. I never see that before. Never, never, never, see that before. Unbelievable, it’s something that… I don’t know what to say, thanks you corona? Wow. It’s very good for the dogs and the cats. But I don’t want the corona stay, for sure, I don’t want. But I want the dogs and cats find good place.

**Mishy Harman:** And what do you think it is that during corona suddenly everyone wanted to adopt a dog?

**Gadi Vitner:** People don’t want to be alone. People want to take care of someone. People want to be together, hug someone maybe. And the children was at home alone, and they need someone to be with them, it’s good for the children, of course. So that’s the reason.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** One of those new dog owners is Zion.

**Zion Mizrachi:** My name is Zion Mizrachi. I am twenty-nine soon, years old. I live in Tel Aviv, in Florentine. And my dog name is Kimmy.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Before corona Zion was a stage manager. But on March fifth, he was let go. He’s always loved dogs, and thought that one day, in the future, he’d adopt one.

**Zion Mizrachi:** It’s a huge commitment, basically. And I always thought when I… when I’m in a relationship or something maybe I will get a dog, but it’s not the situation at the moment. It’s just I… during the corona I felt like I… It’s kind of dark to say it, but I don’t really have a reason to wake up in the morning. Yeah, I felt like a dog can be perfect for the situation.

**Mishy Harman:** What was the first night like when you brought her home?

**Zion Mizrachi:** It was like to have a baby, I swear. It was… I woke up, I think, at 6am, because I heard some noise, and I was like, “what… what’s up? What’s up?” And she was completely fine actually. She’s the perfect dog. She… she’s really quiet, she never barks. I talk with her a lot, and I have someone to take care of. I don’t know it’s something that’s in me, I guess. It’s a Moroccan thing - to take care of someone. And I… Yeah, I am really happy about it. I’m really happy that she’s here. I feel the bond between us growing more and more. For now the only thing I really care about is Kimmy. It’s like she’s my little baby. *[Zion and Mishy laugh]*.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But not everyone’s as committed as Zion. And as happy as Gadi was to see so many animals find new homes, he was worried that something else might be going on here. You see, back in March and April when Israelis were ordered toquarantine at home, one of the only legal ways of venturing out of the house was to walk your dog.

**Mishy Harman:** Do you think that some people actually adopted a dog so that they could get out of the house?

**Gadi Vitner:** I’m sure. I’m sure. I’m positive. I’m positive. Yes, yes, yes.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He and his colleagues were afraid that as soon as the government would ease the quarantine restrictions, folks would just return the dogs. They did their absolute best to screen people and enumerate the various responsibilities of having a pet.

**Gadi Vitner:** Dogs are not telephones, are not plants, are not pillows. They have a heart, they have feelings, we cannot hurt them.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And that spiel more or less worked. Of the two-hundred plus dogs that were adopted from the SPCA’s Tel Aviv shelter during corona, only twenty were brought back.

**Gadi Vitner:** Twenty dogs? It’s sad, but it’s OK. It’s OK. For now, it’s OK. And I hope it’s going to stay like that. I hope.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The *other* hundred and eighty, are - as far as Gadi knows - as happy as could be. Including, well… the two dogs that he *himself* adopted.

**Gadi Vitner:** In the corona, we adopt two dogs. *[In Hebrew]* It’s Lili and Bambi. That’s their name, and we love them and… So now we have three cats and two dogs. Happy, happy house. *[Gadi laughs]*.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** I asked Gadi about something Zion had told me. That the act of rescuing, of saving, really went both ways.

**Zion Mizrachi:** Yeah, yeah. I can definitely say that she saved me in some way.

**Mishy Harman:** Do you think that for some people saving a dog was actually a form of saving themselves?

**Gadi Vitner:** Yeah, I think you said it right. People save another life, to save their own life. It’s a… It’s a good way to save yourself, if you take a dog, you take care of a dog, you walk with a dog, you give love for the dogs, the dogs give you big big love back, and I think it’s yeah, it’s win-win situation.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I’m Mishy Harman, and this is Israel Story. As you probably know, we’re in the middle of our “**Alone, Together**” miniseries, in which we’re exploring life in Israel in times of corona. We’ve already crashed various life celebrations that took place during quarantine - a circumcision, a wedding, a birthday. We’ve ventured back to the earliest days of the pandemic and met both patient no. seven and the nurse who cared for the country’s first casualty. We’ve tried to understand the Haredi community’s experience of simultaneously battling both high infection rates and widespread discrimination.

And today - our fourth stop on this journey - we turn our attention to **Lifesavers**, and no, not those lifesavers.

And not- as you might expect - the doctors, nurses and medical staff who are on the frontlines day in and day out. But rather, to the delicate interplay of saving and being saved.

If G-d forbid you find yourself in a medical emergency In Israel, you dial 101 for *Magen David Adom*. But more often than not, before an ambulance will show up, someone else will appear on the scene, often riding a motorcycle. These are the volunteer medics of a national organization called United Hatzalah, or *Ichud Hatzalah* in Hebrew.

And those extra moments? They can literally be the difference between life and death.

*Ichud Hatzalah* has a massive network of trained volunteers. The vast majority of them are regular people going about their daily lives. But because there are so many of them, and because they’re scattered all over the country - from Druze villages to Ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods - there’s almost always someone nearby whenever an emergency arises.

Hatzalah means rescue. And that was the name that Rabbi Hershel Weber gave a new volunteer emergency service he created in Brooklyn, New York, back in the late 1960s. The idea was to improve rapid medical response to the local Hasidic community of Williamsburg, and also to act as a bridge between EMTs and the largely Yiddish-speaking population. Hatzalah, or *Hatzoloh* as it was known in Yiddish, quickly took off, and before long expanded to other Jewish neighborhoods in New York, and even to other states.

The idea of Hatzalah made Aliyah, so to speak, in 1989. And it was all thanks to a teenager from Jerusalem. A guy called Eli. For more than three decades now, Eli and Hatzalah have been synonymous. But as we’ll hear in our story today, sometimes being *saved* is much harder than you’d imagine. Here’s Joel Shupack with **“The Most Important Seconds.”**

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**Joel Shupack (narration):** As they see it, the Beer family of Jerusalem is totally ordinary.

**Avigail Beer:** Our family is a regular family.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Except that they all happen to be, well... Superheroes.

**Avigail Beer:** We just do our thing. Eating breakfast. Saving lives.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** See what I mean? *Completely* normal. This is the eldest daughter, Avigail.

**Avigail Beer:** I’m Avigail Beer. Twenty-four years old. Single.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And this is Avigail’s father, Eli.

**Eli Beer:** So my name is Eli Beer. Beer like the drink.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Though he looks like your average middle-aged dad - more Clark Griswold than Clark Kent - his whole life is about one thing: Saving people in distress.

He’s the founder and president of United Hatzalah, an organization that responds to roughly eighteen hundred calls a day, and has - according to the Israel Heart Society - reduced the rate of cardiac-arrest deaths in Israel by as much as fifty percent.

**Eli Beer:** We get an alert on the phone and we just stop everything we're doing and we run out and we get there in ninety seconds.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** They don’t transport people to the hospital themselves, but rather administer emergency care at the scene, till *Magen David Adom* arrives. Now, private emergency medical services exist around the world, of course. But Eli’s is unique.

While most focus on a specific neighborhood or community, United Hatzalah covers the entire country. There are Jewish volunteers, Muslim volunteers, Christian volunteers, Druze volunteers. Religious, secular, you name it. And what’s more? Their services are completely free. Wherever there’s an emergency, Eli’s volunteer medics show up, wearing *their* version of a cape: A bright orange safety vest.

For Eli, Hatzalah is absolutely everything.

# **Avigail Beer:** Hatzalah is his entire world. It’s the only thing he cared about.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** For more than thirty years now, he’s been single-mindedly focused on saving lives. At least, that is…

**Eli Beer:** Till the ambulances show up.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And then...

**Eli Beer:** I go to the next one.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** On to the next emergency. He’s been the first responder at countless catastrophes - car accidents, bombings, stabbings, heart attacks.

But these days, like a true superhero, Eli spends most of his time flying. Literally.

# **Avigail Beer:** We actually call him *avinu she’ba’shamayim*.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** That’s “our father who is in heaven.”

# **Avigail Beer**: ‘Cuz he's in the sky traveling from city to city and from country to country, all the time.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** See, while the rest of his family is busy making breakfast and saving lives in Jerusalem, Eli crisscrosses the globe, raising money for United Hatzalah. In fact, he's only home for a total of two months out of the year. Two months! That means he misses birthdays, anniversaries, Shabbat dinners, holidays, all in order to spread the gospel of better ambulance networks around the world.

But what happens when this Hatzalah Superman meets his kryptonite?

Every superhero has an origin story. Bit by a radioactive spider, sent from the planet Krypton, sculpted from clay and raised by Amazons.

Eli grew up in *Bayit Vagan*,an Orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem. And, like all superheroes, he was originally pretty unremarkable.

# **Eli Beer:** I was like a little geek, you know, and I wasn’t such a popular person.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** But on June 2, 1978, he saw something that would change the rest of his life.

As he was walking home from school with his older brother, the number twelve bus exploded right in front of them. He and his brother were safe but six people were killed and nineteen were injured. Young Eli was traumatized.

**Eli Beer:** I was so bothered by what I saw, and I... I grew up with this desire to go ahead and save peoples’ lives. That led me to joining an ambulance when I was fifteen years old.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Many Israeli teenagers volunteer as EMTs - emergency medical technicians - with *Magen David Adom*. They undergo training, get to ride in an ambulance, and hopefully help people in need. For Eli this was *almost* a dream come true.

**Eli Beer:** I helped a lot of people. We transported people,

we bandaged people, but I never actually got to save anyone.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And then a year-and-a-half into volunteering, the *Magen David Adom* dispatcher got an urgent call. A seven-year-old boy across town was choking on a hot dog.

**Eli Beer:** And we were the ambulance that was sent to save this child.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** They put on the siren and sped off. But…

**Eli Beer:** It was terrible traffic. It took us twenty-one minutes to arrive. By the time we got there we heard the screaming and yelling from the mother and while we were working on this kid, a doctor who lived a block away, he was actually walking his dog and he came into the apartment. And he started helping us. And a few minutes later he said just bring a sheet to cover him. There was nothing to do. In that moment I had like an epiphany: This child could have been saved if this doctor would have known twenty minutes earlier. He lives in the neighborhood. He’s a block away.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And that epiphany? It was the seed that ultimately grew into what is now United Hatzalah.

What if, Eli thought, every block had an undercover medic, a regular person with a secret identity. People who would go about their day as usual, and then - at the drop of a hat, or the beep of a pager - would transform into lifesavers and rush to the scene, just as a citizen was in trouble?

He pitched his idea to *Magen David Adom*, but they weren’t interested. So he decided to go at it himself. One small snag? He wasn’t even eighteen years old yet.

**Eli Beer:** Nothing comes easy. Anything that comes easy is not a real good idea.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He collected some friends, and together they bought a police scanner (to find out about emergencies), and some walkie-talkies (to alert nearby volunteers).

**Eli Beer:** We heard the address, we heard the name, we heard everything, and we would actually respond to the call, that’s how we did it.And that's how we started with fifteen people with *chutzpah*, chasing emergency calls.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Then one day, it finally happened. Eli was working at his father’s bookshop, casually listening to his walkie-talkie. A call came in reporting a car accident in front of a bakery just down the street.

**Eli Beer:** And, uh, I just ran out of the store. I think I left the store without any people watching over the cash register. It took me thirty seconds to get there. I got to a man who was laying on the floor, bleeding terribly from a car accident, the car hit him. People surrounding him, they didn't know what to do and I knew what to do.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** The guy from the bakery was trying his best to help.

**Eli Beer:** He was running in and out of his store, trying to bring things to, for me to stop the bleeding. Tissues, napkins and I stopped his bleeding by using my *yarmulke* on my head because I had no bandages on me.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And believe it or not, it worked. Eli Beer had finally saved someone’s life.

# **Eli Beer:** It was the best feeling in the world. Once I saved one person, that was it. You're done. It's like a drug addiction, you know? You don't want to stop.

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**Joel Shupack (narration):** Word of the dramatic rescue traveled fast.

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# **Eli Beer:** So I became like a little hero in the neighborhood and actually, uh, uh, it was good also for the female, uh, situation of mine because I was so geeky and *[Eli laughs].*

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Pretty soon people wanted to join him.

# **Eli Beer**: Like within two months we were thirty and then we were forty-five and sixty and eighty and a hundred.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Even the guy bringing tissues from the bakery became a volunteer. And as for Eli’s “female situation”? Well, just a couple years later, he married Gitty, who he refers to as his, quote, “second wife.” His first, of course, is Hatzalah.

So that’s how it all started.Eli had gone from a geeky kid to a local superhero. Today, after many organizational twists and turns, mergers, splits, renamings, etc. United Hatzalah has six thousand volunteers, all working together with a common goal: To save lives.

**Eli Beer:** We're there for the most important seconds of a person's life.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** In mid-March 2020, Eli was in Miami, at the end of a long fundraising trip.

**Eli Beer:** I was in India, I was in Canada, I was in New York, I was in Qatar.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** By then, COVID was all anyone was talking about. But there was also a lot of confusion. Official guidelines were changing by the day, and different countries seemed to be implementing very different policies. Many American states were still carrying on as usual, but Israel - acting more decisively, perhaps - had already started to shut down. Eli thought it was overkill.

**Eli Beer:** I actually said this to people - “all these reactions that countries are doing are ridiculous.”

**Joel Shupack (narration):** It was Purim and he went to a party at a local *shul*.

**Eli Beer:** I dressed up as Superman.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Yeah. But before long, he wasn’t feeling so super any more.

**Eli Beer:** The next day after that, I felt a little weird.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** It started with a mild fever.

**Eli Beer:** Ninety-nine.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Despite his general scepticism, Eli played it safe.

**Eli Beer:** I canceled all my meetings and all my events. And a few days later, I had a hard time breathing. So I called my friend who’s a doctor and he says, “just go to the hospital.” I thought they're going to say, “ah, you're fine. Just go back home.” But they said, “you have to go into ICU.”

**Joel Shupack (narration):** His blood oxygen level was dangerously low.

**Eli Beer:** They took a test and the next day they said I’m positive. COVID-19.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** At the start of what was sure to be a crucial period for his organization, a time when the world would need as many superheroes as it could possibly get - Eli was suddenly out of commission.

He was taken to an isolated wing of the University of Miami hospital. Doctors and nurses were covered head to toe in protective gear.

**Eli Beer:** They looked like they were flying in space.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** His family knew where he was, of course, but they weren’t too worried. He was, after all, Eli Beer.

# **Eli Beer:** Eli Beer wasn’t something that would die. You know, that’s what they thought. Three days later my situation got worse and worse. And they said they had no choice but to put me into a coma. Put a pipe in my lungs, and intubate me. Well, I'm a volunteer of Hatzalah for thirty-two years, and I know what intubation means. It's not something we do to people who are healthy and in good shape. You do this to people who are very sick. They gave me some time to digest it and they gave me time to speak to people.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He recorded a video message for all his fellow Hatzalah volunteers.

**Eli Beer:** Hi everyone, this is my fourth day in the ICU in Miami.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Eli was doing his best to seem confident and resolute. But honestly, it’s like watching Samson after losing his strength.

**Eli Beer:** My situation is difficult, my breathing is getting worse. The doctors recommended to put me to sleep and intubate me.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** His eyes were hardly open, his breath extremely labored.

**Eli Beer:** So, I need you to keep davening, keep doing *mitzvos* and continue supporting United Hatzalah. It’s so important. Right now I can’t do my job and raise funds for Hatzalah and make sure that peoples’ lives are saved. I hope to meet you out of the hospital soon, healthy. And I hope you’re all healthy and no one should ever get sick with this terrible disease. Have a good *Shabbos*.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Back in Jerusalem, Eli’s worried family was gathered together for Shabbat. Here’s Avigail again, his daughter.

# **Avigail Bee**r: It was *Shabbos*, really late after the meal. We were sitting, the entire family - except my mom (she fell asleep) - and we were just doing this big puzzle. It's a boat in the ocean and you could see the sunlight going down. It's a beautiful puzzle. The phone rings. And we stopped doing the puzzle.

**Eli Beer:** I called three or four times. They didn't answer because Shabbat.

**Avigail Beer:** We keep Shabbat ‘cuz we're Orthodox.

**Eli Beer:** Eventually they answered. They knew it was serious. If I call them on Shabbat, this was serious. This wasn't a joke.

**Avigail Beer:** When I answered the phone, I told him, “Daddy, it's Friday night, why are you calling?” He wasn't really breathing well, so he was really hard for him to say the words. So he started crying and he said that he loves us, and that we should continue saving lives and doing good things in Israel.

# **Eli Beer:** I told them, “listen, I'm going to be away for a few days. I'm shutting my phone, they’re putting me to sleep. Don’t worry, they have great doctors here, they know what they’re doing.” I knew I have a fifty percent chance of not recovering. I knew they knew, and they knew I knew, and it was like a... it wasn't said.

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**Joel Shupack (narration):** And with that, it was time.

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# **Eli Beer:** So once they put the, you know, the medication to put you into a coma, you don't have time to think. It takes thirty seconds or less. It was like I have to breathe, this is it, and you disappear.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** If you too would like to sponsor episodes of Israel Story, contact us at sponsor@israelstory.org. Now sponsoring an episode is an amazing way of telling the entire Israel Story community, folks in literally 194 countries around the world, about your brand, your company, or your organization. We’ve even had individual people who chose to celebrate a loved one by sponsoring an episode in their honor. And, no less important, sponsoring our episodes is a way to support our work, and to allow us to continue to produce the content we’ve been bringing you for the last five seasons. So, it really is a win all around. Again, email us at sponsor@israelstory.org.

And now back to our story and to Eli Beer, the superhero from Jerusalem, who had just been put into a medically-induced coma in Miami. Here’s Joel.

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**Joel Shupack (narration):** It was March 20th. Passover was less than three weeks away, and Eli’s family hoped he would be home by then.

**Avigail Beer:** In the beginning we were really optimist. Our father is... is a lion.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** But days passed, and Eli continued to sleep.

**Avigail Beer:** After a few weeks, nothing changed.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** On March 31st, eleven days after Eli was intubated, United Hatzalah organized a virtual mass prayer for his recovery.

The following week, as Eli lay unconscious in his hospital bed in Miami, the rest of the Beers - in Jerusalem - cleaned the house and prepared for the Passover Seder.

**Avigail Beer:** My mom decided this Pesach’s going to be the best Pesach, and no one’s gonna cry in the table and we’re just going to have fun even though our father is not with us. So we were all reading and singing. And my sister, she's twelve year old, she started saying the *ma nishtanah*.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** The *ma nishtanah*, the four questions.

**Avigail Beer:** Um, and she said, “*ma nishtanah halailah hazeh.”*

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Why is this night different from all other nights?

**Avigail Beer:** That our father is not with us. And then she started crying. We all started crying and my mom said, “stop crying, we’re not crying this meal.”

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Later that evening, a Hatzalah alert popped up on their phones. And true to Eli’s final instructions, Avigail and her mother ran off to help deliver a baby in the neighborhood.

The very next day, Eli was finally stable enough to be taken off the ventilator. But his condition was still very precarious.

**Avigail Beer:** So after twenty-one days, they woke him up. He looked very bad. He didn't know what's going on.

**Eli Beer:** When they woke me up, I didn’t know where I was. Once they put you to sleep, you don't know what's happening. You, you go into a world of terrible, scary miseries. You go into dreaming very bad things.

**Avigail Beer:** He was like weak and he lost a lot of weight and he couldn't even talk. In the middle of us speaking to him, he started throwing up.

**Eli Beer:** A few hours later, my situation got much worse. I got a terrible pneumonia.

**Avigail Beer:** And then they call us from the hospital and they said they had to put him back on intubation. And that's the moment that we said, “OK, maybe it’s not going to be good ending. Maybe he's going to die.”

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Half a world away, Eli’s eyes remained closed. But it wasn’t a calm sleep. Instead, it was filled with feverish hallucinations. In his mind, he was traveling all over the world, skipping from one disaster to the next.

**Eli Beer**: I dreamt about trying to save people and everyone's dying and like people were drowning in a... in a flooding. The world was falling apart in my dreams.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** For Eli, this was his worst kind of nightmare, because he couldn’t do what he does best - save lives.

On April 14th, nearly a month after Eli had first gone under, his daughter Avigail was out delivering medicine to a family in Jerusalem. Her phone pinged. She looked down and saw a WhatsApp message. It was an image.

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# **Avigail Beer:** And suddenly I saw my father.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He was still hooked up to IVs and oxygen tubes.

**Avigail Beer:** But he looked alive!

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He was awake and breathing on his own. She immediately called her father at the hospital.

**Avigail Beer:** And I started crying. He said, “Avigail, what are you crying? Like I saw you two days ago.” He didn't know what he's talking about.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** See, in Eli's reality, he hadn't been in a coma. He'd been navigating a series of global catastrophes, and failing to save anyone. Over, and over again.

# **Eli Beer:** When I woke up, I was in the worst situation emotionally that I ever been in my life. I seen terrible things in my life. I saw bomb attacks. Never felt so distressed like I felt when I woke up.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He was disoriented, and confused.

# **Avigail Beer:** And then he started talking about a diet we have to take and, and he's gonna buy a lot of vegetables and we're going to start a diet. I'm like, “what diet? I… We thought you're dead.”

# **Eli Beer:** I took quite a few days for me to get back to myself.

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**Joel Shupack (narration):** Eli had awoken from terrifying dreams into a terrifying reality, an altered world. And there was a lot of catching up to do. Painful stuff.

# **Eli Beer:** In one month that I was away, everything shut down. People were dying, people were hospitalized in bad situations. Three cousins of mine, young people, passed away in New York.I realized it was a miracle that I woke up.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** As he started to grasp the real world nightmare that was still raging outside, it blended with memories of his hallucinations.

Eli had no idea what was real anymore. As someone who’d spent so many years dedicated to the most important seconds of life or death situations, Eli was now blindsided - traumatized even - by having been saved himself.

And that’s when our Superman came face to face with another type of hero: Not a saviour, exactly, but a healer.

# **Eli Beer:** Dr. Maria from the hospital, she was holding my hand like two days later, or three days later. And she was telling me, “Eli, let me tell you what happened to you.”

 **Joel Shupack (narration):** The hospital’s psychiatrist carefully guided him through his feelings.

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# **Eli Beer:** She actually brought me back to reality.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** But while he was working through all these emotions, carefully discerning fact from figment of imagination, his family in Jerusalem was simply rejoicing.

**Eli Beer:** They were so happy. Uh, I actually saw a video of them all dancing in the living room.

**Avigail Beer:** We put on music and full volume. We just put like happy songs. We actually put this, the song *Happy*, *[Avigail sings "clap along, if you..."].* Our neighbors called, they're like “everything OK?” ‘cuz you know the, the house was like silence for, for a month-and-a-half. Everyone was like really sad. And then this music, full volume. I felt like I won the lottery.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Once he had regained enough of his strength, Eli Beer came back to Israel on a special flight. His whole family came to the airport to meet him.

**Avigail Beer:** You know, after so many days in the house, we put the pajamas away and we really got dressed. We got there so early ‘cuz we just... we do want to miss the landing and everything.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** They were given permission to wait right on the tarmac, together with hundreds of United Hatzalah volunteers, all wearing their signature orange vests, and - at least attempting - to stand six feet apart. Eli’s struggle had garnered a lot of media attention, so there were TV and radio crews waiting as well.

**Avigail Beer:** The plane landed. They open the doors and suddenly we see our father.

**Eli Beer:** You know seeing a thousand people coming to greet me, it was like crazy.

**Avigail Beer:** And he started saying *Shema Israel*. Everyone was crying.He started going down the steps by his self.

**Eli Beer:** Probably one of the best days of my life, if not the best. Walking down the steps of the plane.

**Avigail Beer:** It was really hard for him, and he had a mask on for oxygen. We started hugging him and kissing him. He said he wanted to kiss the land, he wanted to go down on the floor and kiss the land, but it was too hard for him, he couldn’t lay down so... He was pretty tired and he just wanted to go home.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Eli did indeed eventually go home, and started his long path to recovery.

And just like the end of any good comic book, after a daring escape from the forces of darkness, our hero is out of trouble and even more committed to saving lives.

**Eli Beer:** And that's what I'm going to spend my time doing for the next ninety-five years.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** But he’s also changed. He now knows something that years of giving CPR or treating bloody wounds could never have taught him.

# **Eli Beer:** As a lifesaver, I finally understand what it is to be on the other side.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Because here’s the thing. Superheroes have always been great at saving people physically, and then letting someone else clean up the mess.

Healing bodies is one thing. But it’s not everything.

It’ll be a while until Eli is fully recovered. He goes to physical therapy every day. And when he does regain his strength, I imagine he’ll be a little less Superman and a little more Dr. Maria.

His work will always be focused on the most important seconds of peoples’ lives. But if his brush with mortality taught him anything, it’s that those seconds are just the beginning of the healing process.

And as I look around at a world in so much need of repair, I think someone who understands that is just the kind of hero we need right now.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Joel Shupack. Joel also scored that story, with music from Blue Dot Sessions and sound-design help from Yochai Maital. As always, the episode was mixed by the one and only Sela Waisblum.

You can hear all our episodes, including the previous parts of our COVID-19 miniseries “**Alone, Together**,” on our site - israelstory.org - or by searching for Israel Story on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcasts.

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Before we end, a quick request: One you’ve heard me - and every other podcast host - ask a million times before. And that is to help us grow by doing something very simple - going to Apple Podcasts, rating us, and writing a short (and hopefully glowing) review. Believe it or not, that really makes a difference and helps us become more visible to new listeners.

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I’m Mishy Harman, and we’ll be back very soon with part five of **“Alone, Together.”**

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** I said that maybe we can start a Tinder that is just for corona patients, and the very date can be going to visit grandma no fear. *[Noam laughs]*.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So till then, stay safe, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye*.

**Gadi Vitner:** So now we are in the yard, the shelter, we make a tour. Come on, I show you. Dogs? You want to see dogs? Dogs! Let’s go to see dogs. Rabbits? We have also rabbits if you want. Here, I show you rabbits. *Shalom, ken, ken, shalom.* Maybe you going to adopt one?

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