**Hotelier I:** Hello. Thank you for calling the TRYP Bat Sheva Jerusalem Hotel.

**Hotelier II:** Calling the Crowne Plaza Haifa Hotel.

**Hotelier III:** Thanks for calling Orient Hotel.

**Hotelier IV:** For calling Beresheet Hotel.

**Hotelier V:** Thanks for calling the Norman Tel Aviv.

**Hotelier VI:** For reservations, please press one.

**Hotelier VII:** Please hold.

**Hotelier VIII:** Please wait.

**Hotelier IX:** Please wait a moment.

**Hotelier X:** *[In Hebrew]* TRYP Jerusalem Hello.

**Zev Levi:** Hi, I was wondering if you had any rooms available for tonight?

**Hotelier XI:** This specific hotel is closed, sir, until further notice.

**Hotelier V:** Unfortunately, the Norman is currently closed due to the ongoing coronavirus situation.

**Hotelier XII:** There are many hotels that did not open.

**Hotelier V:** Wishing you all the best until we see you again.

**Hotelier XIII:** *[In Hebrew]* Thank you and see you soon.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That was our Managing Producer, Zev Levi, trying - unsuccessfully - to book a hotel room.

Now, to say that hotels suffered during the corona is obviously a *massive* understatement.

In March, Israel closed its borders, and since then - according to the Central Bureau of Statistics - international tourism has dropped by ninety-nine percent. Yeah. Ninety-nine percent. And few people know this as well as Jason Gardner.

**Jason Gardner:** Born and raised in Ellenville, New York, in the Catskills, upstate. I made *aliyah* twenty-six years ago. Been in Jerusalem ever since. Been married now… Oh my G-d, my wife would kill me now, but I think it’s twenty-four years. Twenty-four year married, with four kids. Live here in the heart of the Baka, German Colony area in Jerusalem.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Jason’s a sales and marketing manager for *Isrotel*, a chain of nineteen high-end hotels throughout Israel.

**Jason Gardner:** In the midst of building another eight hotels as we speak.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The *Isrotel* hotels include Beresheet in Mitzpe Ramon, The Carmel Forest Spa near Haifa.

**Jason Gardner:** Royal Beach, Tel Aviv, Royal Beach, Eilat.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Mitzpe HaYamim near Tzfat, the Orient in Jerusalem.

**Jason Gardner:** Our *Cramim* Hotel which is a lovely spa which sits on a vineyard right outside of Jerusalem, between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And on and on and on. All told, the chain has about five thousand hotel rooms. Usually, they’re pretty full.

But, needless to say, that changed dramatically at the start of the pandemic.

**Jason Gardner:** People saw the writing on the wall, and most of them just started canceling like crazy. Dropping like flies.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Overnight basically, all those five thousand rooms emptied out.

**Jason Gardner:** All of a sudden we just had a complete freeze and complete halt. It went from… You know you can drive a Ferrari from zero to a hundred in six seconds or something like that. So it went down from hundred to zero in absolutely no time at all.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Most hotels need to have an occupancy of thirty to forty percent just to break even. So, one after the other all nineteen *Isrotel* hotels closed their doors.

**Jason Gardner:** So it was basically within the first two weeks of March, we went to a complete shutdown.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Jason’s office is in the Orient Hotel, in the German Colony in Jerusalem. And after it closed, he’d go visit every now and then.

**Jason Gardner:** And the first time I walked in I had tears in my eyes. It was very very difficult. It was very depressing. Seeing it completely dead, completely shut, was absolutely heartbreaking, and it really hit the soul.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But amid this industry-wide gloom, there was a glimmer of hope. One category of hotels that managed not only to stay open, but stay full. Corona Hotels.

Hey, I’m Mishy Harman, and this is Israel Story. We’ve reached the fifth stop on our **“Alone, Together”** journey, in which we’re exploring life in Israel in times of corona. And today, “**Enjoy Your Stay.**”

We’ve got two stories for you, about two very different *kinds* of corona hotels - one for people who already *had* corona, the other for Israelis returning from abroad and quarantining so as to make sure they *didn’t* have corona.

Our first story comes from our friends at Rough Translation. Rough Translation is a wonderful NPR podcast and radio show that follows familiar conversations in unfamiliar territories. They travel the world, bringing us fascinating tales that offer new perspectives on questions we’re all thinking about. One of my favorite recent Rough Translation episodes was called “The Global Legacy of George Floyd.” It included five short accounts - from the Netherlands, New Zealand, Syria, Brazil and Kenya - all about the ways in which racism, oppression and policing are being discussed around the world.

You know, we live in a time in which it seems harder and harder to step out of our own little bubble. But Rough Translation’s host Gregory Warner, and NPR’s Jerusalem bureau chief Daniel Estrin are about to introduce us to an unlikely community in Jerusalem where it was almost impossible *not* to mix and mingle.

Now, you’ve heard Daniel on our show many times before. He’s brought us the tale of a mysterious hitman in Eilat trying to contend with the city’s crow infestation; he’s told us about the successful campaign to end wildflower picking in Israel; he’s shared the beautiful, and ultimately devastating, tale of a love affair that had a checkpoint in the middle, and just last season he uncovered the story of the doctor who anesthetized Adolf Eichmann in Buenos Aires.

Back in April, Daniel was - of course - *mainly* reporting about the corona outbreak in Israel. There was a lot of uncertainty, and also a lot of down time, just waiting around at home to see what would happen. Then, one day, Daniel was…

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Kind of sitting on the couch with nothing to do, and my partner and I are in our apartment, and we're not going out, like, a hundred meters from our home. And we're watching Instagram together.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** They scrolled through popular memes - home olympics, people getting all dressed up to go out to the living room, things like that. They’d laugh, and then…

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Like, every once in a while, I'll be like “whoa, check this out.”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And one of those “whoa, check this out” posts was a video.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** You see about a dozen people in a carpeted hotel lobby doing this funny Macarena move together. It's Zumba.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But it wasn’t one of those mass Zumba classes on Zoom that were all the rage in the early days of the pandemic. Instead it was a real life class, with real people standing right next to each other, breathing on each other, sweating together even. And this could only happen because they were all residents of an unusual establishment - a hotel for people who had all already contracted the virus.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** In the video, it's mainly young Israelis. You see a guy wearing what looks like a T-shirt he got in the army, and there's a girl in a *hijab*. And that is what caught my eye because Israeli society is pretty segregated. Arabs and Jews tend to live in separate cities and go to separate schools. I mean, yes, you will see them both in the market. But seeing them together in an exercise class by choice, having fun - well... this is going to be interesting.

And there are so many other videos like this coming out of Hotel Corona, with people doing things that I can't do with other people, like sunbathe. They can give each other high-fives and hugs and dance and party together.

Rooftop yoga. Karaoke.It's like watching reality TV.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Daniel, you should know, usually hates reality TV.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** But Hotel Corona is like this alternate reality, like the reality TV show I actually do want to watch right now.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Andin many ways these posts that Daniel, and many others, started to follow, really *were* like reality TV. The premise? Hundreds of people - Jews, Muslims, religious, secular, young, old - all recovering from COVID-19 and now forced to live together in a hotel until they were no longer contagious. And this absurd reality was playing out, in real life, all over the country. Here are Daniel Estrin and Gregory Warner with the story of one such **Hotel Corona**.

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**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** So I'm Noam, and I am corona patient number 3555, which is a very symbolic number here in the Middle East because when you have three fives, it's good luck.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Noam Shuster Eliassi is an Israeli comedian. Before the coronavirus, she'd just gotten her big break - a booking for her one-woman show in Washington, D.C., and gigs all over the place. And then her shows were canceled. She flew back to Israel and passed out at home. It felt like her lungs were on fire. After a short stint in the hospital, she was dropped off by ambulance at the Dan Hotel in Jerusalem, a nine-story hotel with tennis courts and a spa, now leased to the government to house recovering COVID-19 patients.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** When I got to the hotel, the doors open. And that's it. Immediately, the doors shut, and there is… there is no going out for me anymore until I get released, until I have two negatives.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Two negative tests - then she's allowed to leave.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** You feel like you're, like, an alien. And then I walked in, and I was like, “hey, is anyone here?”

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Up two flights, she finds the reception desk encased in plexiglass.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** I just saw this very nice religious guy with a *yarmulke* asking how I was and letting me know that they're here for us.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** So my name is Baruch Shpitzer. I'm the reception manager at the Dan Jerusalem Hotel.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Of the hotel's nearly four hundred employees, Baruch is one of only about four dozen who agreed to keep working here when the patients arrived.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** For me, it was simple. I knew from the beginning that I'm going to stay. There is a say in the hotel industry that it's like… also like a virus. If it catches you, it's very hard to go out.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Besides, he worried if he wasn't here, the army might send soldiers to do it.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** It would have been like a... like a military camp. To run the hotel as a hotel and not give the guests a feeling that they are in jail, you have to have hoteliers.

**Gregory Warner:** Yeah. What is different about it? What's the hospitality part that you bring to it?

**Baruch Shpitzer:** We welcome the guests. We speak to them to get them out from the shock that they're in when they're coming into the hotel. And then there is a small interview when they're coming in. “What's your name? How old are you? From where you’re coming from?”

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** He asked me in the check-in do I keep Shabbat, how religious I am.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** Of course, I know according to names if they are Jews or non-Jews.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** The reason for these questions is that Baruch has to play matchmaker. He assigns people roommates for their time in the hotel.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** Oh, I wish he had a man for me. I think he could choose well for me *[Noam laughs]*. The room assignments were really, really good.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Assigning rooms in a place like Israel, it's not easy.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** For example, one person was Ultra-Orthodox, and we've matched him with an Orthodox.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Those two could not stop fighting over the TV - as in, one wanted to watch it; the other said it was forbidden to turn it on. So Baruch separated them and made a note to ask about that in the entrance interview. And then another day, another complaint.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** Someone came to me - “listen, I don't want to be staying with this guy.” I told him, “listen, why? You're an Arab, and he's an Arab. You are twenty years old, and he’s twenty years old. So what's wrong?” “No. But I'm coming from the North, and he's coming from the South.”

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Baruch says his job is to make every patient - every guest - as comfortable as possible in a time of uncertainty. And he says that means being with your own kind - people who pray like you pray, people who think like you think.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** We are trying to do the best match we can, and I can say that ninety-eight percent success.

**Gregory Warner:** Really?

**Baruch Shpitzer:** Yeah. In my experience, it's easier for them if it's as similar as possible.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** My name is Aysha Abu Shhab. I'm nineteen years old, and I'm from Rahat city in the Negev.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Aysha is Muslim and Bedouin, and Baruch didn't need to assign her a roommate. She arrived at the hotel with her twenty-one-year-old brother. They're both janitors at a hospital. That's where they got the virus.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** It was strange a little bit. Like, we… we eating in our room. We didn't go outside. We didn't check up with the people.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** She says it just felt weird not to be interacting with the other guests.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** I love to know people. Like listening to them, sharing with them stories.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** And so when she hears Baruch announcing dinner over the PA system…

**Baruch Shpitzer:** *[In Hebrew]* Dinner is now served on the fourth floor.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Aysha goes down, gets her individually wrapped supper tray and looks around for a place to sit.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** The religion Jewish was together.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** She sees the religious Jews are sitting with other religious Jews. The secular are with secular.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** And the Arab was together.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Everybody's sticking with their own kind. Aysha grew up in a Bedouin city in the desert speaking a Bedouin dialect of Arabic. She knows about sticking with your own kind. But when she was seven years old, her mom brought home an American couple to stay with them. They were academics studying Bedouin polygamy (Aysha's dad has two wives). Aysha's mom saw these guests as an opportunity.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** So they starting to learn us English, and we starting to learn them Arabic.

**Gregory Warner:** The couple was writing about you?

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** Yeah. And they was living with us for two years.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Her mom would tell her, “be curious about people. Ask questions. It'll help you.” And so now, holding her tray of food in Hotel Corona, Aysha scans the room for the friendliest face. And she makes eye contact with an older religious Jewish couple, Amram and Gina.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** So they were… nice. They was laughing all the time, so I chose them.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** It was so easy to talk to them. “How did you get the virus?” one would say. “Well, how did you?” By the end of the meal, they are singing and laughing together.

Aysha felt this moment was so special she recorded it on her phone, which began happening a lot at Hotel Corona. People would have a nice chat over lunch and immediately pull out their phone to just capture this moment. And these were the kind of videos that Daniel Estrin started watching.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** The first hotel guest I started following on Instagram was Noam, the comedian. I remember she did this comedy show in the hotel lobby. There's no stage. There's no mic. And she's kind of shouting so everyone can hear her.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** My body was weak. My mental state was weak. It was like, ‘Noam, you're not going to be very good and very funny right now. And it's fine.’ I'm not going to lie. It's not the funniest stuff. It's like ‘my number is 3555. I have three times khamsa, khamsa, khamsa - you know, five, five, five. So I'm going to bring you my good luck with my number. Hopefully, you'll get out of here.’ And they're like, “no, we don't want to get out of here. What are you talking about? We want to stay.” And I'm like, “so who here is really sick and who here caught it on purpose licking a bench outside in order to get in the hotel for free? You losers.” Seriously, that's the feeling you don't know who's sick and who's trying to get a free ride in the hotel, I swear.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** So you know people wonder if it's too soon for corona jokes? In this hotel, it was not too soon.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** And then I said that maybe we can start a Tinder that is just for corona patients. And the first date can be going to visit Grandma and Grandpa, no fear. So of course, I did, also, part of the show in Arabic. It's also an attraction for the Jews. They're like, “oh my God. You're doing comedy in Arabic. What's happening? What's your story? What's… what’s going on?”

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Noam's backstory, it is the kind of made-for-TV biography that you might want in a reality TV version of this hotel. She is a straight-talking, cynical political comedian who grew up learning Arabic as a kid, which is weird in Israel. Most Jewish Israelis who speak Arabic learned it in the army as military intelligence. But she learned it growing up in a hippie village in Israel that was intentionally built to have fifty percent Jews and fifty percent Palestinians.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** Neve Shalom, Wahat al-Salam. In English, it's the Oasis of Peace. I was set to become the poster girl of the, like, ‘give peace a chance’ movement, you know? My best friends are Palestinian, you know? We're singing songs for peace, football for peace, trees for peace, pancakes for peace.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Her parents always told her she was the model of what Israel should look like, but Israel was becoming more and more polarized. The inequalities between Israelis and Palestinians, and government policies against Palestinians, were becoming more stark. Still, she made peacemaking her job. She started working for the U.N. organizing dialogue groups, reaching out to Israeli Jews who are the most skeptical of peace, like ultra right-wing religious groups. But both sides seemed to be moving away from the ideals of compromise she was raised to believe in.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** I found myself often very alone with a narrative that doesn't really resonate or doesn't apply to a lot of people.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** And then before she was supposed to give a speech at a peace conference about her work, the U.N. canceled the program. She lost her job.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** And at that conference, instead of going up and being the analytical U.N. peacebuilding Noam, I started telling jokes *[Noam laughs]*. And it was probably the best thing that I did.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Noam was so much more successful making fun of the divides than trying to bridge them. She got gigs all over the U.S. and a fellowship at Harvard to write her one-woman show, "Coexistence My Ass," which she says is about coexistence and about her ass.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** And I don't need to be careful anymore. I can make fun of the Jews, and the next joke would be making fun of Palestinians. I am now not making an order out of the confusion. I am making a mess out of the confusion.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Making jokes in the Middle East, you never know who you're going to offend. And of all the audiences Noam faced as a peace activist or as a comedian, the crowd in the lobby of Hotel Corona seemed like the most diverse.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** It was just a bunch of old, young, religious, secular, Arab, Jewish... everything... just sitting in the lobby laughing (sometimes not laughing), screaming, coughing *[Noam laughs]*. Coughing, definitely coughing.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** She starts making jokes about this one supermarket cashier who ends up infecting her entire village. And it turns out the cashier is in the audience.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** And the girl was like, “yeah, that's me. I did it.” She was in the show *[Noam laughs]*. So I was like, “you're the cashier in the supermarket? You made all your village have corona?” And everybody was laughing.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** A lot of this footage was filmed by Aysha, the hospital janitor who came to the hotel with her brother. She'd never been to a live comedy show before and never even been in a room where Arabs and Jews shared a joke before.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** And laughing on something, like, come on.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** The next morning, Aysha comes down to breakfast. And when she looks around to decide which group she's going to sit down with today, she realizes that something seems to be different.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** All the people - Jewish, Arab - they starting to sitting together, talking together, eating together, sharing a lot of stuff.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** If before everyone was sitting in their own group, now they're all mixed. And it's not just Aysha breaking the ice. People are approaching her.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** And I ask them about them religion, like about the Jewish people. Like, why, when the women get married, she started to cover her hair and why the guys wearing the *kippah*. And they explain me a lot.

**Gregory Warner:** Had you ever asked those questions before?

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** To a Jewish? No. Like, most of things, like, it's hard to talk about.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** And the Jews asked her some of the most sensitive questions that a Palestinian citizen of Israel can face. Like, do you consider yourself Israeli or Palestinian? But the question here felt friendly, genuinely curious.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** They didn't judge me. Like, I am Arabian. I am Muslim. I am that. No. I'm human that you can talk to me like there is no difference between us.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** And I was like, ‘wait, where is racism? Where is all the problems? Where is all the prejudice? Everybody is getting along here in this hotel. What's happening here?’

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Noam's even more surprised when their Instagram stories from inside the hotel start being picked up by Israeli TV.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** The media saw that we love sharing. So every day was like, this reporter is speaking to this person, and another reporter is speaking to me. So when we were filming other people, we were like “hey, guys, make some noise for Channel number blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** At one point, Noam posts a picture on Facebook of her arm around a woman in a sweatshirt and a *hijab*. And she tags it ‘a Jew and a Palestinian stuck in the Dan Hotel in Jerusalem.’ As with so much out of Hotel Corona, it goes viral.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** Thousands of shares, thousands of likes. All the popular pages in Israel posted it.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** The post was reposted by a big Israeli TV channel, and the comments came from an even wider audience from all over Israel. When a post like this goes mainstream in Israel, you can be sure it will attract some nasty comments.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** The usual comments would be like, “oh, wait. Once you're out, she will send her boy to bomb you.” “Oh, now you are getting along, but later she will throw a stone at you.” And I'm going through the comments, and I can't find one negative comment. The usual racism, the trolls, the hatred, the separation that I'm used to seeing outside just didn't exist.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** So sure, the people here could share a joke or even a photo. But how would these new friendships hold up under stress? Well, Aysha remembers this one day she was walking back to a room and this guy in front of her collapses.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** He's look like Vincent van Gogh.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** He's gaunt, pale and bearded. He's a young Orthodox Jew now having an asthma attack on the hallway carpet. And as Aysha rushes over to help, she also stops and wonders - am I allowed to touch him?

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** Like, I'm a Muslim. Maybe I’m… I cannot talk to him, I cannot touch him.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Maybe if I help him, he'll be offended. So she calls the medics, but they have to put on all this protective equipment just to enter the hotel. They need her to step in.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** And I ask the medical what I have to do.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Don't let him fall asleep, they tell her.

**Daniel Estrin:** Do you think you saved his life?

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** Actually, maybe. I don't know. But maybe he doesn't want anybody to know that.

**Daniel Estrin:** To know what? Like, that he had an attack or that you helped him or…?

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** Both of them.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** At first, she didn't even tell anyone what she'd done. She didn't want to offend them. Then she worried maybe he'd have another attack, so she started telling people. And this older Jewish nurse told her she'd done something really great.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** She told me, “you can be a doctor, not a nurse.”

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Aysha confessed to her that she'd always dreamed of being a nurse, not just a hospital janitor.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** And we start this conversation like maybe we can help each other.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Aysha had never had a mentor outside her family, let alone a Jewish mentor.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** By early April, Hotel Corona had been open less than a month. And Baruch, from his desk behind the plexiglass, could see that the guests were getting along. But he was worried about Passover.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** Well, Passover is a holiday of family.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** He was worried that the guests would feel their isolation even more on this holiday that's all about family. They might get depressed.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** And we wanted to find a solution to that problem to give them the opportunity to have a proper Seder.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** But seder is a lot to figure out. It's family style eating, not individually wrapped supper trays. How do you keep the food hot during readings and songs that can last well over an hour, and how do you set it all up in advance before the guests arrive to contaminate the space?

**Baruch Shpitzer:** 'Cuz once one of them touch anything, it can't go back.

**Gregory Warner:** And did anyone have any crazy ideas like... like sending waiters with hazmat suits?

**Baruch Shpitzer:** Ahhhh… No ‘cuz there were no one that were willing to do that.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Eventually, the hotel management decided to just open up the banquet hall to all the guests, and they'd serve the food and just do the seder themselves. But there was another problem. The young guests were dying to film this for their families back home and for TV, but Ultra-Orthodox Jews forbid electronics on religious holidays. The Ultra-Orthodox in the hotel did not want their holy commemoration of the exodus from Egypt to be Instagram famous. Noam tried to reassure them.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** We're not going to take our phones out. We're not going to dress in a way that will insult them, you know?

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** But some of the Ultra-Orthodox guests made a request to Baruch and the hotel management.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** It wasn't demand. It was a polite request - “we want to celebrate traditionally, and the young people wants to celebrate differently. And if you don't mind, if it's possible - to divide it.”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Please divide the banquet hall.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** One for the Ultra-Orthodox and one for the rest.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** In a video posted just before the seder started, someone shows the setup. There are the tables on the secular sid, with all the bottles of soda and the little individual Seder plates. And then there is an actual floor-to-ceiling wall which makes a complete separate room for the traditional seder for the religious people.

To Noam, this wall wasn't a practicality. It was a symbol.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** It reminded me of the world that I'm used to before the corona. It reminded me of our default that we prefer separation rather than the compromise that comes with uniting.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Noam remembers walking into the room on the secular side and seeing the wall.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** ‘Oh, Noam. You were so cute to think that you found something unique here in this hotel. Let's see how this goes.’

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** So the sun is setting. The Seder is about to begin and I talked to one of the people on the religious side, Amram Maman. He's sixty-six years old. He's not Ultra-Orthodox, but he's Orthodox.

**Amram Maman:** *[In Hebrew]* I remember that I came…

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** He says he remembers coming in with his wife, Gina. She took one look at that partition wall, and she tells him, “I can't do Seder like this. I'm going to cry.

**Amram Maman:** *[In Hebrew]* “I’m going to cry any minute.”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Amram says he also hated the idea of having a divided Seder, but if he took down the wall, it could spark a fight. The Ultra-Orthodox could walk out in protest, and then the young people might pull out their phones and film that. But Amram just couldn't do the Seder this way.

**Amram Maman:** *[In Hebrew]* I said, “give me two minutes, I’m taking the barrier down.”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** He tells his wife, “give me two minutes, and we're going to move this barrier.” It's too big for him to push alone, so he calls over some younger guys. And they start to slide the wall when an Ultra-Orthodox man jumps up. But he's not there to stop them.

**Amram Maman:** *[In Hebrew]* He says to me, “Maman, I’m so happy you are taking this barrier down. We won’t have a separation.”

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** He tells them, “I'm so happy you're moving this partition,” and he helps them. And all together, they push that divider back into the corner. And then as one room - a hundred and eighty people - they bless the wine. The Seder begins.

Aysha and other Muslim guests in the hotel are there, too, celebrating with them.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** They invite me to sit with them, to eat with them.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** And by the very last night of Passover, Aysha is sitting at the Ultra-Orthodox table.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** And it was a great conversation. Like, we take a shots.

**Daniel Estrin:** A shots?

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** Yeah.

**Gregory Warner:** What?Of wine?

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** *Lo.*Not me - them. But I joined them, like, sitting with them, not to drink, of course.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** We do have a couple of video clips taken from the end of the Seder. After the prayers, when people just couldn't help it, they discreetly pulled out their phones and filmed the *Dayenu*.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** I've seen it on the film, and I was shocked. They had a beautiful Seder. They were celebrating together. They were, like, a small community but, like, a huge family.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Baruch remembers watching this video being struck by how different this was from Seders outside the hotel walls. The government was forbidding people from hosting any guests. Police set up checkpoints on Passover night to block movement. Baruch, like all Israelis, had to do Seder at home.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** With my small family. My parents sat by themselves, and my mother-in-law sat alone.

**Gregory Warner:** Can I ask a strange question? Do you ever feel jealous that they get to be together and touch each other or be next to each other and you have to keep your distance?

**Baruch Shpitzer:** Yeah. Yeah. When you see them together and, you know - they don't have the - all the rules and the barriers that you have now. I believe that a lot of people in Israel - a little bit of envious *[Baruch laughs]* of that. People won't forget this Passover for a long time.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** While Baruch played these videos over and over for his friends, Noam played the experience over and over in her head, trying to make sense of it.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** I was sitting in my table and watching other people remove barriers, not me.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** All her life, she'd been told that it was her job to bring people together, a job she felt she'd failed at.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** You know how amazing it is? I wasn't the one to remove the barriers. Oh, my G-d. I wish things outside could be like this.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** And she wondered what it was in this hotel that allowed people to find such common ground without slogans, without the U.N., without any pancakes for peace.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** Is it the fact that Jews and Arabs get the same in the hotel? Same food, same terms.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Was it that people were being treated equally or that they'd all faced down the same disease?

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** That we are realizing how much the well-being of one is the well-being of the other? And how will I think about this experience when I go back to the real world?

**Gregory Warner (narration):** We called Aysha just as she was heading back to the real world. Her brother had just gotten his second negative test.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** Like, we will go home, sharing with the family.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** But she's not going back to her old life at her janitor job. This experience has taught her too much.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** A lot of stuff that I didn't know about myself.

**Gregory Warner:** Like what?

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** How smart I am.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Her new friends convinced her to enroll in nursing school, and they can guide her. While her mom always encouraged her to be curious about people, it wasn't until she got stuck in this hotel that that translated into real friendship and even opportunity.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** Watching these videos from Hotel Corona, I've been wondering, what if a lot more Israelis went through this experience of being stuck together, you know, in a place where the normal rules of society are suspended? Like, would that change Israel? And actually, a lot more corona hotels have opened, but most of them are segregated, not mixed like this one.

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** Wow. I didn't know that.

**Daniel Estrin:** Do you think it's a good idea to have these separate hotels?

**Aysha Abu Shhab:** No.

**Daniel Estrin (narration):** I called the Army commander in charge of the quarantine hotels, and he told me that there are so many Ultra-Orthodox Jews who caught the virus, they made special hotels just for them. He says they wouldn't come to mixed hotels. It's easier to convince people to come if they know they'll be with their own kind.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Hotel Corona no longer hosts recovering patients, and when we last talked to Baruch, he was saying goodbye to the last of those guests. When he first opened the doors and started assigning roommates, his fear then was that people from different backgrounds would clash, but they did not. In fact, they became friends.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** And I believe that if they'll have to spend time in a hotel - Jews and Arabs together - maybe they will... everything will be OK. Which... but that's the meaning of being Israelis.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** That's not the meaning of being Israelis. It's just how humans are. I once interviewed a reality TV show producer who confessed just how hard it is to get people to fight enough to keep it interesting. He said you have to cast characters and exploit the right moments, stoke the conflict because people, he says, as individuals are frustratingly good at getting along. That is what Baruch discovered. But he is also a hotelier and a practical one. He agrees with the army commander that segregated hotels, they're just easier to get people to come to and easier to manage.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** Yeah, of course it's easier, although we call them guests, and we will remain calling them guests. But we cannot forget that they are sick.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** He feels it's unseemly to take whatever magic happened here and try to impose that on the rest of the nation. This is a moment when people are feeling vulnerable and deeply uncertain.

**Baruch Shpitzer:** And we have to do the best we can to make them feel comfortable.

**Gregory Warner:** Right. So you don't see this as an opportunity to recreate Israeli society?

**Baruch Shpitzer:** No 'cuz we are not in a Love Boat or... Life is not a movie.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** Good luck telling that to the cast of Hotel Corona.

And, before we go, just one last moment from our interview with Noam.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** I'm really in a movie that I can't describe, umm… one second.

**Gregory Warner (narration):** When Noam was talking to us from inside the hotel, this announcement comes on over the PA.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** Oh, my G-d.

**Daniel Estrin:** Tell Tina what he just said.

**Noam Shuster-Eliassi:** I wonder what happened. You see, I'm talking to you about this utopia, this great hotel. And while we're recording, someone tried to escape.

**Daniel Estrin:** Someone's escaped?!

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Daniel Estrin and Gregory Warner. That story was produced by the fabulous Tina Antolini, and edited by Lu Olkowski with help from Derek Arthur, Jess Jiang and Autumn Barnes-Fraser. John Ellis composed the music, with additional scoring from Blue Dot Sessions, and mastering by Isaac Rodrigues. A huge thanks to our dear friends at Rough Translation. If you don’t already listen to their show, you really should. Look for Rough Translation wherever you get your podcasts.

OK, so there’s something truly heartwarming about the corona hotel we just heard about. Jews and Arabs mingled, secular people and religious people learned to respect each other. And despite that last minute jail-break there, it all felt very... kumbaya.

But as we started to look into it, we began to hear other stories as well. Stories that were a bit less Eleanor H. Porter’s *Pollyanna* and a little bit more Jean-Paul Sartre’s *No Exit.*

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** This is an experiment that would never get approved by any ethical committee. Putting all these people in a hotel room, closing them, not letting them go out. Making them completely lose control over their lives and see what's happening. You know how people react.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That’s Sivan Goren Arzony, and she and her family found themselves in a different kind of corona hotel. Not one for people who had *already* contracted coronavirus, but rather for Israelis returning from abroad, who were put in quarantine hotels so as to make sure they weren’t sick, and weren’t going to bring the virus into the country. And, as you’ll hear in our next story, by Dina Kraft, Sivan experienced a darker side of corona hotels. **Act Two - The Place In Between.**

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**Sivan Goren Arzony:** In Tibetan Buddhism, there's this idea of the bardo. Bardo is something in between things. So when you sleep, it's this phase between day and day. Or, death is a bardo, so I felt like it's this experience between.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Sivan is from Kibbutz Gal’on, not far from Kiryat Gat and Beit Guvrin. She’s thirty-eight, and is the mother of three adorable children - ages seven, five and two.

She has a beautiful shy smile, a great laugh, and lots and lots of freckles. It’s easy to imagine her pushing a carriage full of kids down the Kibbutz’s sleepy paths, on her way to milk the cows. But, well, that’s not quite her life.

You see, Sivan’s an acclaimed young scholar from the Hebrew University. She studies ancient Indian poetry, religion and languages.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** So I work on Early Malayalam, the language of Kerala (it's a state in South-Western India) and Sanskrit and on Manipravalam, which is a combination of these two languages.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** When the pandemic hit, Sivan and her family were far away from the Kibbbutz. On the other side of the world, actually; in Somerville, Massachusetts.

She’s currently in the middle of a three-year postdoc at Harvard’s prestigious ‘Society of Fellows,’ working on a book about the rise of local poetry in Kerala in the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries.

And Sivan is one of those scholars who sort of live the tenets of what they study: She’s calm and soft-spoken, reflective and meditative.

All that’s to say that she was perhaps better equipped than most of us to deal with all the uncertainty and craziness that COVID introduced.

Before long, Sivan and her husband settled into a rhythm of home-schooling, playing with the kids in the backyard, and still - somehow - managing to carve out time for her research.

Things seemed... manageable-*ish*.

Till, one day in mid-April, she got a phone call from her mom, back on the kibbutz.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** It was a Thursday.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Sivan's father, Arnon, hadn’t been feeling well lately, and had gone in for some tests. Now, the results were back.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** They discovered that it was pancreatic cancer, which is a really bad diagnosis. And things started deteriorating really rapidly.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** The initial shock of this news quickly gave way to deep sadness. The prognosis was grim. But Sivan had to think practically: If she wanted to see her father again, she’d have to fly to Israel. Fast.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** We started realizing that we might really have very little time. Because the statistics are very bad.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** But, of course, this was all at the height of COVID. Flying, especially with three little kids, wasn’t a trivial matter. And what’s more? Sivan knew that - as per the Israeli government’s guidelines - as soon as they arrived, they’d be carted off to a “corona hotel,” where they’d need to quarantine for two full weeks.

Still, that all seemed like a small price to pay. Maybe it was all a blessing in disguise.

In fact, aboard the more-or-less empty flight over to Israel, Sivan went back and forth between extreme anxiety about her sick father and more relaxing thoughts about the all-expenses-paid government-mandated hotel vacation.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** I sort of imagined us in the room with a Dead Sea view. And I was like, ‘OK, it’s going to be fun, I mean, not fun, but we’re gonna have the view.’

**Dina Kraft (narration):** But nothing, she soon discovered, went according to plan. It began with their homecoming which was… let’s just say… a bit different.When Sivan and her family usually land at Ben Gurion, a large group of cheery relatives are waiting in the reception hall with balloons and homemade welcome signs.

But this time they were greeted by a bunch of Home Front Command reserve soldiers. There were no hugs or kisses. Instead, they were asked to fill out endless forms and handed some bottled water and pre-packaged sandwiches.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** It was cheese and coleslaw. My kids didn't like them. So yeah...

**Dina Kraft (narration):** They were then told to board a crowded bus.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** They were sort of very dusty, and you're like, ‘this bus wasn't sanitized.’

**Dina Kraft (narration):** And whisked away.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** At that point, you already lose control over your destiny.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Sitting on the bus, Sivan still fantasized about a relaxing vacation. G-d knows she needed it.

The kids could splash around in a pool, she’d take in some rays.

At first she’d hoped for a sea-side breeze, but as the bus started making its way inland, she began imagining stunning desert sunrises instead. That’s when the bus pulled up to a nondescript, concrete building at the entrance to Jerusalem. But Sivan, an eternal optimist, was still hopeful.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** The one thing I was like hoping to see are balconies. There must be balconies. It's a hotel!

**Dina Kraft (narration):** But as she looked up and down the building, she couldn't spot a single balcony. Perhaps they’re all on the other side, she thought to herself.

Her kids were increasingly cranky from the long trip, and all she and her husband wanted to do was get to their room. A young soldier told them to wait in the hotel’s narrow lobby. There, they received a military-style debrief, which outlined their lives for the next two weeks.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** We’re going to get boxed food three times a day. And twice a day we have thirty minutes where we can go to get some air in the patio.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Sivan and her husband exchanged worried looks. Their imposed vacation was starting to sound more and more like a prison sentence.

They were assigned two adjacent rooms on the sixth floor, and got into the elevator.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** I was still trying to avoid touching elevator buttons at that phase.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** The rooms had a connecting door, but sadly no balcony. In lieu of that, there was a window looking out on a busy highway that was under construction.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** So you have all these like trucks and... I don’t know... cranes and it's a very loud highway.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** The window, alas, had no bars or grate.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** So I'm like, “OK, we can’t keep this window open because our little monkey is going to jump out from the sixth floor.”

**Dina Kraft (narration):** It suddenly dawned on Sivan that this would be her life - for the next fourteen days.

Three hyperactive, jetlagged kids stuck in two small rooms with closed windows.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** When I saw the room I felt like it was a mistake. Like, it's going to be a nightmare. Like I did something bad to my kids. I just didn't know how we're going to do it.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Perhaps leaving Massachusetts, with what now seemed like their dream-like backyard, was a rash decision. But it was too late. Amid screams and kids jumping up and down on the beds with their shoes on, Sivan and her husband began unpacking.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** I think maybe ten minutes after getting into the room, we started hearing these screams and we open the window, and - in the beginning - I was like looking for someone on the street, like a dead body because I thought that someone jumped.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Sivan might have just been projecting her own inner state, as there were luckily no bodies laying on the ground. But she could clearly hear what sounded like a couple yelling from one of the floors down below.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** She started screaming that she's gonna jump if they don't like let her out. And the man was shouting, *[In Hebrew]* “Home Front Command, you’ve abandoned us.”

**Dina Kraft (narration):** “Home Front Command, you’ve abandoned us!” (Trust me, it’s a bit catchier in Hebrew...).

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** It was like a pun.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** They closed the window, wondering whether the next two weeks would be like living in an insane asylum.

But even if that was the case, Sivan was comforted by the idea that a corona hotel - especially one staffed by seemingly-serious masked soldiers enforcing strict rules - would be a safe place to quarantine. After all, they had returned to see her dad, and - given his state - they had to beextremely careful not to contract the virus.

If indeed everyone stayed in their rooms, other than the staggered yard time, they’d be safe. They’d shut out all the yelling from other rooms, and - as maddening as it might be - they’d create a little sixth-floor nest for themselves.

Then, there was a knock at the door.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** And these two people come.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Two other hotel ‘guests.’

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** And they're smoking in the hall which even in Israel is not *[Sivan laughs]* OK, and they're like, “are you OK?” And we're like, “not really.”

**Dina Kraft (narration):** It turns out that they too had heard the screaming, and mistakenly thought it was coming from Sivan’s room. They were just trying to be good neighbors.

But all Sivan could think about was that not only were they smoking inside, but they were out and about, clearly violating the guideline to stay in their room. She asked…

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** Are you like going freely in here?

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Their answer?

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** “Yeah, we... you know…”

**Dina Kraft (narration):** She thanked them, closed the door and started hyperventilating.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** This is just insane. And we're here with the kids and this place is so bad. It's a horrible place…I just didn’t know how we're gonna do it. I felt depressed and sort of panicked.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** As if all that wasn’t enough, the entire building soon reeked of pot, which seemed to be coming from the floor below.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** Floor five was the floor of the like the young people.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Said “young people” had opened a WhatsApp group so they could invite everyone to the party.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** “Come to floor five” and they send these videos of like alcohol, the drugs. There was one guy who had a birthday. So they ordered a cake and, you know, punched it on his face.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Yeah, not quite what the Home Front Command soldiers and hotel staff had outlined in their debrief.

But it just got worse: Looking out their now firmly shut window, Sivan could spot people sneakingout the back of the hotel to buy a shawarma at a nearby kiosk.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** And so it made the whole thing feel even more stupid because people are coming in and out. We didn't, of course.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Most of the other ‘guests,’ it became clear, had little regard for the rules. Many of them were lounging around the common patio - i.e.the outdoor yard they were supposed to visit twice a day, in small groups and for thirty minutes at a time. And no one seemed to be bothered by these blatant infringements, either. In fact, the hotel staff had even set up a little table with instant coffee and sugar in the corner.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** There was also soy milk, which I found nice of them to arrange.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** And yet…

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** I don’t know, two hundredpeople were touching that milk box. And my son, I caught him like licking the little lid of the milk box one day, *[Sivan laughs]*. OK...

**Dina Kraft (narration):** As that first day came to a close, they lay down on the bed, defeated. It all felt somewhat pointless. They had travelled halfway around the world, just to find themselves locked up in a hotel, which felt more like a cross between a prison, a mental asylum and a youth hostel in Ibiza.

When they first entered the hotel, Sivan was extremely serious about social distancing. But it didn’t take long before the laid back atmosphere at the corona hotel took its toll.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** I just dropped it. I just stopped.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Gone were the masks. Gone was the hand sanitizer. Gone were the repeated warnings to her kids not to touch the elevator buttons.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** We completely stopped paying attention to the corona, because we felt like... you can't socially distance and be strict about anything when you're trying to like survive this place.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Given the general disregard for *any* semblance of safety protocols - it seemed like their chances of contracting the virus - in the *very* facility that was designed to make sure they didn’t have it - were pretty high.

They felt as if they were stuck in a Kafka novel.

The fifth floor partiers continued to send WhatsApps invitations and circulate videos. But as Sivan watched yet another video - this one of a guest dousing himself with milk - a call interrupted the fun and games.

It was her mom.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** And she's like, “you know, he can't walk anymore. He can't eat. And it's very bad. And I don't know if you're gonna make it, you know.”

**Dina Kraft (narration):** On top of everything else, it now seemed entirely possible that it would all turn out to be for nought. That she wouldn’t make it to see her dad, which - of course - was the entire reason for bringing the family to Israel to begin with.

Sivan had reached her breaking point. And what does a gentle, collected and soft-spoken expert of ancient Indian poetry do then? She summoned all her courage, and went to talk to the man who - in every possible way - controlled her destiny: The twenty-something Home Front Command officer in charge of the hotel.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** And I started crying to this random person that I don't know. And I told him, “if this is the end, it's not right that you're keeping me here.”

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Sivan, I should say, isn’t a crier. Definitely not someone who breaks down in front of strangers. But she was desperate.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** I didn't have to fake it, but I would fake it if I needed to because that was the only way. You know, if you don't cry and scream, no one's going to do anything about you because you're just behaving well.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** Well-behaved women, the famous quote goes, seldom make history. They also don’t usually get a free pass to leave their corona hotel.

If there was ever a moment to channel her inner pushy Israeli, now was the time.

**Dina Kraft:** Do you think that's kind of an Israeli thing? The crying and the screaming and then they’ll pay attention to you?

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** Yeah.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** And I guess... she’s right, because, well... it worked! The young soldier took pity on Sivan and decided - just like that - to grant her a twenty-four-hour-long pass to go visit her dad.

Sivan didn’t ask any questions, and quickly set out for the Kibbutz. On the drive down south, her mind was spinning. She was worried, guilt-ridden and excited, all at once.

She was finally on her way to do what she had come for - to see her father.

But she was also afraid. Afraid of infecting him, or the rest of the family, or just other folks on the Kibbutz.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** There were no… no positive cases in this Kibbutz and there are many old people around.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** After all, with all the hedonistic negligence at the hotel, she had no idea whether or not she had contracted the virus.

But none of this mattered now. She was on a mission and nothing - not law-breaking corona hotel guests, not Home Front Command regulations and not even disapproving elderly *kibbutznikim* - would stop her. She walked into her father's room.

**Sivan Goren Arzony:** With the gloves with the mask. I was very nervous. I locked the door so that no one else can come in.

**Dina Kraft (narration):** She was careful to stay six feet away from his bedside. He told her not to worry. She’d be doing him a favor by giving him corona, he joked. Sivan smiled. And her father smiled back.

She had made it on time.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Sivan and her family went through many ordeals till they were finally allowed to return to the Kibbutz for good. And when they did, Sivan’s dad was waiting for them. He was very weak, and couldn’t really play with his grandkids all that much. But they spent a lot of time together, laughing and sharing stories. And then, on July 1st at 11:20pm, Sivan’s dad, Arnon Goren, passed away.

This story was produced and reported by Dina Kraft. Dina writes for the Christian Science Monitor and Haaretz, and is the host of Hadassah’s wonderful podcast *The Branch*. *The Branch* tells stories of everyday relationships between Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs, and I highly highly recommend it. You can find it at [hadassah.org/thebranch](http://hadassah.org/thebranch) or anywhere else you get your podcasts.

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**Hotelier XIV:** Thank you for calling the hotel. To make a room reservation, please press one.

**Ariel:** *[In Hebrew]* Hello, this is Ariel speaking.

**Zev Levi:** Hi Ariel, I was wondering if there are rooms

available for tonight?

**Ariel:** No, unfortunately the hotel is full for today.

**Hotelier XV:** We’re almost full till the end of the month. Sorry.

**Hotelier XVI:** We do have a few rooms that are still left. The hotel is quite full.

**Hotelier XVII:** No sorry. Just for next week.

**Hotelier XV:** Let me see what I have left. We’re almost completely full. We have three rooms available. Total forty-four in the hotel.

**Zev Levi:** Can I just ask, when did the hotel start being booked up?

**Hotelier XV:** This week actually. Last couple of days we’ve been filling up rapidly. Tomorrow and Friday we’re completely full. It’s because Israelis can’t leave *[laughs]*, they’re taking vacation in Tel Aviv.

**Zev Levi:** Well look, that’s terrific. Thanks so much for your time.

**Hotelier XV:** You’re very welcome, sir. Bye bye.

**Zev Levi:** Ciao.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Foriegn tourists still haven’t really returned to Israel, but as you just heard, many of the hotels are back in business.

**Jason Gardner:** The *Isrotel* chain, for example, took the decision of opening in June, after they saw the enormous requests... the amount of requests from the local domestic tourism saying that they’re looking for hotels, they’re looking to get out of their homes, and they want to escape and… Even, you know with the... with the risks involved of being around other people.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Jason Gardner, the sales and marketing manager for *Isrotel* we heard at the start of the episode.

**Jason Gardner:** I can tell you, our hotels are absolutely flourishing. July and August were wonderful months. We very very sorely miss our international tourists throughout all our hotels. Very sorely miss them. If anybody’s listening to... whoever is listening, I can tell you directly - ‘we sorely miss you.’ But ahhh… the hotels have been full.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And that’s our episode. Thanks to Henriette Chacar, Hussein Shakra, Daniella Cheslow, Assad Joubran, Elizabeth Senja Spackman, Robert Krulwich, Karen Duffin, Sarah Gonzalez, Sana Krasikov, Mira Burt-Wintonick and NPR’s Middle East editor Larry Kaplow. Thanks also to Brigadier General Yoram Lerdo, Atar Nussbaum, Danna Harman, Charlotte Halle, Kurt Hoffman, Wayne Hoffman, Sheila Lambert, Erica Frederick, Jeff Feig and Joy Levitt.

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 wherever you get your podcasts.

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Joel Shupack scored the episode with music from Blue Dot Sessions and sound-design help from Yochai Maital. Sela Waisblum mixed it all up. Israel Story is produced in partnership with Tablet Magazine. Our staff is Yochai Maital, Zev Levi, Joel Shupack, Yoshi Fields, Skyer Inman, Sharon Rapaport and Rotem Zin. Abby Adler, Marie Röder and Carly Rubin are our wonderful production interns. Jeff Umbro, from The Podglomerate, is our marketing director.

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

**Ishai Golan:** My death is within spitting distance. I’ve already accepted that. Any minute now I’ll be gone, but what’s with the tears?

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

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