**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey guys, it’s Mishy. We’re working on the final episode of the season, which will be coming your way very soon. But today, as a special bonus, we’re going to share a behind-the-scenes peek into the way episodes come together. Yes, it’s the how-the-sausage-is-made episode, or - as we like to call it - **The** **Stories We Killed** special.

Now, over the course of this season, we will have told twenty-seven stories. But those twenty-seven stories represent just a tiny fraction of the stories that came across our radar in 2020. As you can imagine, when people know you’re in the storytelling business, *everyone* has a story for you. We get countless pitches - from friends, from listeners, from organizations, from publicists, and - most of all - from our families.

**Yochai Maital:** Just so all of you guys know - I mean, Mishy knows this - I probably get an average of like one point five pitches a day from my father. *[laughter]*.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And - of course - everyone on our team of producers has his or her own story antennae up and running. We read a ton of blogs, follow promising social media groups, scour local newspapers and magazines, talk to people.

We take notes, dream dreams, write up summaries, and then bring all these ideas to our pitch meetings.

**Mishy Harman:** Cool. So you think there is a story here?

**Joel Shupack:** Yeah, I mean, it's not like high-stakes drama, but I think it'll be kind of a more beautiful postcard story.

**Zev Levi:** But then like, nothing, there's no... the story doesn't *go* anywhere. There's nothing surprising. There's nothing I can imagine other than emotion...

**Skyler Inman:** I disagree. Like now that I'm thinking about it… How does it affect her moving on from this event?

**Yochai Maital:** Well, I mean, the one big pitfall is that it seems like this is like a very disgruntled liminal character.

**Joel Shupack:** Right.

**Yochai Maital:** I mean, he's like, he's an antihero, not a hero.

**Mishy Harman:** OK, moving on.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Only a small percentage of the ideas make it out of the pitch meetings. And even most of *those* stories won’t make it to the finish line. Because, like everything else in life, stories die.

And *we* are the killers.

**Mishy Harman:** We killed that, correct?

**Zev Levi:** Yep, that’s right.

**Yoshi Fields:** Yep.

**Yochai Maital:** Yep.

**Skyler Inman:** Yep.

**Yochai Maital:** Burn it!

**Mishy Harman (narration):** We kill stories for all kinds of reasons, and at various different stages along the way. Some fall apart almost immediately (people don’t want to talk, key facts turn out to be wrong, the story just isn’t as promising as it seemed). Others get axed after we’ve spent months recording multiple interviews, writing full drafts, even scoring music, but for some reason the end result just doesn’t feel right.

Now, declaring a story dead is always a bummer, but it isn’t *necessarily* a bad thing. To begin with, we save you a lot of mediocre material.

**David Leischman:** So this is vanilla and what I’m trying to do is create the ice cream revolution. Roasted caramelized bananas. These are Uzbeki raisins.

**Joel Shupack:** Oh wow.

**Niva Ashkenazi:** Yeah.

**David Leischman:** But the real boom that you’re going to get is in the raisins. You want to try this much?

**Joel Shupack:** I’ll try that.

**David Leischman:** OK.

**Joel Shupack:** Oh, I like that one a lot. That’s good.

**David Leischman:** You want more of that?

**Joel Shupack:** No. How about, yeah, just give me a little bit.

**David Leischman:** Here’s a little bit.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And secondly, I like to think of it as a sign of professionalism. We did our best, tried something cool, took a chance, and - well - it just didn’t pan out. The ultraorthodox man from Beit Shemesh didn’t - surprise surprise - want to go on tape about the gay sex he had in his yeshiva. The mysterious grave in the Galilee and the love triangle story behind it were super intriguing, but all the central characters were already dead. The Bedouin camel racer from the Negev turned out to be a walking cliché... and on and on and on. Hundreds of story cadavers along the way.

And with me to discuss those story cadavers is none other than Skyler Inman. Hey, Skyler.

**Skyler Inman:** Hey, Mishy! How’s it going?

**Mishy Harman:** Good, how you doing?

**Skyler Inman:** Pretty well.

**Mishy Harman:** So, Skyler, you joined Israel Story in early 2020, and if I’m not mistaken, your very first story was killed.

**Skyler Inman:** That’s correct, emmm... *[Skyler and Mishy laugh]* my first assignment for Israel Story was to tell the tale of a very famous Israeli sandwich. Sabich.

**Mishy Harman:** So, tell everybody what a sabich is.

**Skyler Inman:** Well…

**Guy Sasson:** It’s boiled egg, fried eggplants, hummus, salad, tchina, and there is an Iraqi sauce, yellow sauce. It’s called amba.

**Skyler Inman:** That’s Guy Sasson.

**Guy Sasson:** OK, my name is Guy, Guy Sasson, and I work in sabich, we can call it *The Original Sabich*.

**Skyler Inman:** *The Original Sabich* is the name of Guy’s restaurant. It’s this tiny hole-in-the-wall place in Ramat Gan, which Guy runs with his twin brother.

**Mishy Harman:** OK.

**Guy Sasson:** Sometimes they ask, “do you have falafel, or shawarma?” And I say, “no! We have sabich!”

**Skyler Inman:** And according to their family, Guy’s dad - Ya’akov Sasson - along with his business partner, *invented* sabich.

**Mishy Harman:** Wait, you can “invent” sabich?

**Skyler Inman:** That was also my question. Because for someone to claim they “invented sabich” it’s kind of like... someone saying they invented the peanut butter and jelly sandwich. *[Mishy laughs]*. So to me, it sounded like a great story.

**Mishy Harman:** So, what happened?

**Skyler Inman:** Well, as soon as I showed up to Guy’s house in Holon, I knew that I was in for a *ride.* All around his apartment building was construction scaffolding. And for people who may not have recorded before, construction noise is like the kiss of death in our business. *[Mishy laughs]*. We make a big effort to record in the absolute quietest conditions.

**Yochai Maital:** *[In Hebrew]* Say, would it be possible to turn off the AC, or will it…

**Interviewee:** *[In Hebrew]* No, no, just press there.

**Yochai Maital:** *[In Hebrew]* And also, sorry to bug you, but can I also take the fridge out of the electricity?

**Marie Röder:** I’m sorry to interrupt, can you maybe close the door because the… because of the sound.

**Bassam Zaghari:** *[In Arabic]* Namy, please close the door.

**Yochai Maital:** Are those pigeons?

**Skyler Inman:** I think that was my stomach growling. *[Yochai and Skyler laugh]*.

**Yochai Maital:** Oh my G-d.

**Skyler Inman:** You have very good ears.

**Yochai Maital:** Sounded like a pigeon. *[Skyler laughs]*.

**Skyler Inman:** And so I was, you know, frankly, freaking out. And I asked Guy, “is there renovations going on in the building?” And he said, “no, no, not yet. They haven’t even lifted a hammer. They probably won’t start renovations for another few weeks.” And…

**Guy Sasson:** It start ‘61, 1961, two years after they start to sell sabich all week.

**Skyler Inman:** So in ‘63?

**Guy Sasson:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Skyler Inman:** They’re starting today to make noise…

**Guy Sasson:** I told you, the other… the other noise it didn’t… was in *my* building. The noise now it’s for TAMA. The other noise is…

**Skyler Inman:** It’s good that they decided to start today!

**Guy Sasson:** Yeah *[laughs]*.

**Skyler Inman:** As luck would have it, pretty much right as I started to talk with Guy, the renovations began. And they didn’t, you know, start slowly. It was with energy. *[In Hebrew]* Possible?

**Guy Sasson:** *[In Hebrew]* Yes.

**Skyler Inman:** *[In Hebrew]* Maybe a neighbor in another building? *[laughs]*.

**Guy Sasson:** *[In Hebrew]* A neighbor in another building?

**Skyler Inman:** *[In Hebrew]* Maybe?!

**Guy Sasson:** *[In Hebrew]* Who will give us his apartment? *[Skyler and Guy laugh]*.

**Skyler Inman:** *[In Hebrew]* Yes. *[Mishy laughs]*. So, Guy and I eventually drove to his mom’s house, which was only a few minutes away, and we continue the interview from her bomb shelter. It was quiet enough, for sure, but the kind of unexpected and unsettling, you know, change of scenery made me feel a bit flustered, and the interview just didn’t dig as deeply as I was hoping it would. So before I left, I told Guy that we would have to schedule another interview, and he replied with this sort of unenthusiastic, “ehhh… if I have time, maybe…” *[Mishy laughs].* Even *then*, I think, the story probably would have been in hot water, but a few weeks later, Corona arrived. And with that the chances that we’d actually be able to finish the story kind of just evaporated into thin air.

**Mishy Harman:** And, what was it like having your first story killed?

**Skyler Inman:** Um, I’m gonna be honest with you, it wasn’t fun. *[Skyler and Mishy laugh].* At first, it was hard not to take it personally and kind of feel like it was a failure. But the more I heard from other producers on the team, I realized it’s kind of just par for the course.

**Mishy Harman:** Yeah, totally. And Skyler, for this special you talked to some of the other producers on the team and asked them to choose their favorite killed story of the season.

**Skyler Inman:** That’s correct, I did.

**Mishy Harman:** Alright, so take it away!

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**Skyler Inman:** So, Yosh, as we always ask all of our interviewees - can you please introduce yourself?

**Yoshi Fields:** My name is Yoshi Fields. I'm a producer at Israel Story. And I'm not used to being interviewed.

**Skyler Inman:***[Laughter]* So, what is your favorite killed story of the season?

**Yoshi Fields:** So basically we started looking into this story a couple years ago now, I think. And the story is basically of these two roommates who can't get along. They're fighting about everything - about who's doing the dishes, about how they're using their common spaces. And it's actually between these two women who are in their sixties. And they're basically like apples and oranges. As different as you get. One is religious, and is very into following rules.

# **Hanna Lea Van Cleef:** She used my pots to do her dog’s food. So that afterwards I could not use my pot!

**Yoshi Fields:** The other one is into, like, free flowing spirituality and into breaking rules.

# **Margaret Torrini:** She was insistent. “You have to do that-that-that-that-that!” Like this, you know. Like a gestapo.

**Yoshi Fields:** And so sort of the idea was we wanted to approach the story and see if we could follow these two women and hear their stories. And see if we might help bring them together in a way, try to help them see the other side, and try to work things out. And really, I think they were open to it. Like they agreed to sit down together.

**Skyler Inman:** And how did it go?

**Yoshi Fields:** Not well. *[Yoshi and Skyler laugh]*. It didn't go well at all. And in fact, like they, they could barely look at each other. I think it took them like a good hour or more into the interview or into the mediation, if you will, until they looked at each other. And even then it was like, really there was no, there was no room for seeing the other person's side.

# **Hanna Lea Van Cleef:** She has absolutely no respect for someone else. She does as she pleases. It's not the way that a human being behaves when he's at someone else's place.

**Yoshi Fields:** They were really stuck in their way of seeing things.

**Hanna Lea Van Cleef:** Margaret, for everybody who makes *aliya*, it is hard. Not only you. Because G-d is molding all of us.

**Margaret Torrini:** Israel is OK for me. It’s *you* who are not. Don’t put God inside of that.

**Yoshi Fields:** And, and maybe that leads to sort of how it... how it sort of fell apart.

**Skyler Inman:** Right, tell me about that.

**Yoshi Fields:** I think there are like two main reasons. One was, there were all these big themes that like sort of begged almost to be looked at.

**Skyler Inman:** Like what exactly?

**Yoshi Fields:** So I think religious versus secular issues are some of the, you know, hottest-debated conflicts in Israel today. So, here was this opportunity to look at it in such a minute way, right? Like, literally, these two individuals fighting things over in the kitchen.

**Skyler Inman:** Yeah.

**Yoshi Fields:** But the bottom line is those ‘bigger ideas’ didn’t really hold water, at the end of the day. And also, these are two grown women, right? Like, they’re not twenty-year-olds forced to live together in a college dorm. So there was the obvious question of why are these two grown people, who seem to really not like each other, staying together for months and months and months? And ultimately, we couldn’t really find a satisfying answer.

**Skyler Inman:** Yeah, I remember, it was like they didn’t even reflect on that. Like living together wasn’t even a choice they were making.

**Yoshi Fields:** Yeah, and the second reason I would say that things sort of fell apart is that as a storyteller, right, we're always looking for, you know, a big story arc or some personal development or reflections. And that's really not what happened. And after a year, finally one of them got really fed up and moved out. We talked to them after the fact. And they both were sort of still looking at it the same way.

**Margaret Torrini:** Oh, I am sick of Hanna Lea. I am just sick. I just want to throw up, and I don’t want to hear from her anymore. I am just thanking G-d that I am… having been able to survive all these things.

**Yoshi Fields:** Like, there was really no movement of like, “oh, I hear you, you're saying this, and I feel this. Or… There was just... there was none of that.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** We’ll be right back

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** And now back to our episode.

**Zev Levi:** Hello?

**Skyler Inman:** Hello hello.

**Zev Levi:** Hey Skyler, how’s it going?

**Skyler Inman:** Good how are you?

**Zev Levi:** Very well, thanks!

**Skyler Inman:** Why don’t you introduce yourself to begin with?

**Zev Levi:** Sure! My name is Zev Levi, I'm the Managing Producer at Israel Story.

**Skyler Inman:** Alright, and which story did you choose?

**Zev Levi:** Uh, it never got a name. But we called it “Animal Holes.” The pitch of the story is, there are a group of Israeli government officials whose job it is to go to Israel's borders and put holes in them. *[Skyler laughs]*. I thought that was so out of left field, that that was interesting enough to follow wherever it would go. That that is an interesting premise.

**Skyler Inman:** And why exactly are they making these holes?

**Zev Levi:** The holes are there to prevent animals inbreeding, basically. If you separate groups of animals from one another, then they just kind of develop all the weakest, you know, recessive degenerative genes, and it’s bad for the environment.

**Yoav Motro:** If you want a border, say against what. If you want it against people, then let’s make a border against people, it doesn’t have to be against animals.

**Skyler Inman:** So, why did we never hear the story of these border hole makers?

**Zev Levi:** Yochai looked at that and said, “I don't think that that's crazy. Obviously, there's going to be someone who's going to try and preserve nature in the face of this security threat.” And before the second interview, Mishy (who I think agrees with Yochai on this), said to me, “make sure that your interviewee is funny. That's what we need.”

**Yoav Motro:** There's lots of extinctions and lots of changes, and there is a biodiversity crisis.

**Zev Levi:** It wasn't funny, it wasn't punchy, it wasn't, you know, engaging on that level. It was... it was just interesting. An Israel Story piece needs to be more than just an interesting series of events. I mean it needs that, but it can’t just be that. The listener needs to form some sort of relationship with the person that we interview.

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**Skyler Inman:** Could you introduce yourself?

**Yochai Maital:** Sure, my name is Yochai Maital. I'm one of the producers of Israel Story.

**Skyler Inman:** And what’s your favorite killed story of the year?

**Yochai Maital:** So, I sent you tape from my interview with Ari Nagel.

**Skyler Inman:** And who is Ari Nagel, for the uninitiated? **Yochai Maital:** So Ari Nagel is a New Yorker. He has a very strong New York accent. You can hear it right away.

**Ari Nagel:** Hi, my name is Ari Nagel. I'm a math professor in Brooklyn.

**Yochai Maital:** And he is somebody who has fathered many, many children all over the world, including several in Israel.

**Ari Nagel:** I have four brothers, two sisters, and a lot of kids.

**Yochai Maital:** How many kids do you have?

**Ari Nagel:** I have thirty-three kids. The last one was born in may.

**Yochai Maital:** Wow.

**Ari Nagel:** And the next one is due in August, in Taiwan. And the one after that will be due in Israel in September.

**Yochai Maital:** Oh my goodness.

**Ari Nagel:** And then the one after that is in October in New York, New Jersey.

**Skyler Inman:** OK, so, Ari is actually known by another name as well, right?

**Yochai Maital:** Yeah, I'm trying to avoid it, ‘cuz he doesn't like it. *[Skyler laughs]*. He doesn't like that name. But he is known as "The Sperminator."

**Ari Nagel:** I'd rather, I wasn't called ‘sperminator.’ You know, I just want to be called something that doesn't have sperm in my name, you know? Is that too much to ask? Why not just call me dad?

**Yochai Maital:** Yeah, I do believe the *New York Post* actually gave him that unwanted title.

**Skyler Inman:** To be fair, I don’t think anybody has ever liked the name that the *New York Post* has given them.

**Yochai Maital:** That’s probably true.

**Skyler Inman:** So what was the Israel Story angle of the pitch?

**Yochai Maital:** Not only was he Jewish and actually from an orthodox, very orthodox background even though his, you know, very open shocking actions are not exactly in line with the teachings of the Talmud, should we say… But he's also, you know, he has good connections to Israel, including a few kids that he's sired in the Holy Land. And some of them by the way, are like in orthodox circles, and others are like in, you know, lesbian Tel Avivi circles. So I was just imagining these two children of Ari Nagel growing up, maybe, you know, a block away from each other, or a neighborhood away from each other, but in such different realities. That just seemed like such a… Like a crazy thought to me.

**Skyler Inman:** There’s a moment in the tape where Ari actually sort of propositions you to become a part of the story. *[Yochai laughs].*

**Yochai Maital:** I'm actually going to be in Israel in August.

**Ari Nagel:** I guess if you are going, do you mind taking it? It's less than three ounces. So you'd be able to carry it on the plane with you.

**Skyler Inman:** OK, what is Ari actually asking you to do here?

**Yochai Maital:** So actually at the time of this interview, Ari was helping this Israeli lesbian couple conceive, and, I mean Ari’s, you know he’s a math professor, he can’t just hop on a plane every time the intended woman was ovulating…

**Skyler Inman:** Emm hmm.

**Yochai Maital:** So they were looking for… basically a… semen courier… I guess you could say? *[laughter].*

**Ari Nagel:** The only thing is that you have to keep it body temperature, so that it will stay alive. Maybe you could stick it up your *tachat* to keep it… to keep it the body temp…

**Yochai Maital:** Keep it really warm.

**Ari Nagel:** Is probably the best way, yes. And then you could transport it that way. But don't worry, I will wrap it up tight. We don't want it to leak in there *[laughter].*

**Yochai Maital:** What can I say? Yeah, you get into really interesting situations in this line of work sometimes.

**Skyler Inman:** So, why didn’t it become a story in the end?

**Yochai Meital:** Oh my gosh, I mean… Actually listening back to this tape, I'm also wondering that *[Yochai and Skyler laugh]*. I feel like we should revive this story. No, I mean, honestly I really enjoyed meeting Ari. He was an amazing and… and funny and compelling guy to interview. So I really had a good time with this. But if I’m trying to think more from an editor’s perspective, why we ended up killing this piece, I think… Well, I mean, it’s weird to say this but I have three kids and one wife and I feel like I have more drama in *my* life than Ari has in his life with, you know, dozens of kids and many many baby mamas around vying for his attention and trying to get him to come to birthdays, etc. etc. So really there was a problem of just not enough conflict and tension, I guess. I mean Ari really is one of the most chill people I have ever met. But again, I mean, you never know, sometimes killed stories do end up coming back from the dead.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Skyler Inman produced that taste of the many many stories you didn’t hear this year. Now most killed stories never see the light of day, but occasionally we do go back to our story graveyard, remember a lovely piece that just wasn’t right at the time, and resurrect it. This season, for instance, we told the story of Hodaya Azulay, the horse trainer from the settlement of Netzarim, in the Gaza Strip. And that was a pitch that had been killed back in 2011, only to resurface nearly a decade later. So who knows, maybe one of the pieces will - as Yochai just said - be revived. And maybe not. In any event, we have one more not-killed episode coming your way soon, before we end this season. So till then, shalom shalom, and *yalla bye.*

*[End Song]*

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