**Mishy Harman (narration):** A few years ago, Lidar Sapir-Hen - a zoo-archeologist from Tel Aviv University - got a call from two of her colleagues, Joe Uziel and Ortal Chalaf. They were in the middle of a dig in Jerusalem’s City of David, and had just made an unusual find.

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** I think they sent me a picture, and I said, “OK, this small animal is a pig. So excavate it carefully and we want to see exactly how it was positioned when it died and what happened to it. And don’t just take out the bones.”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Following her instructions, they carefully unearthed a complete skeleton of a young piglet, who - twenty-seven hundred years ago - was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** The ceiling fell on it, and it was caught between the vessels on the floor.

**Mishy Harman:** Do you happen to have that pig here?

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** Yeah, I have it here, in a box.

**Mishy Harman:** Can I see?

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** Yeah, Sure. Wait… Ummm. Where is the skull? Here. Yeah. That’s the skull.

**Mishy Harman:** So this is the pig?

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** Yeah, that’s the… Well, it’s divided here to boxes, each box has a different part of the body. This is the box with the skull. You can see it’s very very… It’s very small.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** This summer, when the discovery was published, the piglet became something of a media sensation.

So what’s the big deal, you ask? Why all the headlines? Well, this 8th century BC pig was proof of what Lidar had been saying all along. That pork was consumed in Iron Age Jerusalem.

Now, we all know that the Torah explicitly says Jews shouldn’t eat pork. In fact, it says it twice - once in Leviticus and the other time in Deuteronomy. For centuries that biblical prohibition baffled scholars. After all, wild boars are abundant in the land of Israel, and pigs were domesticated here about ten thousand years ago. So why would the Torah ask us *not* to eat them? I mean in the past, unlike today, you didn’t just go to the supermarket and decide whether you were in the mood for beef or chicken. You basically ate what you could hunt or raise. And - for millenia upon millenia - that included pigs.

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** Yes, wild boar was always hunted here. It was always eaten. Wild boar was just a part of the diet. It was available everywhere. And after it was domesticated they raised it near the house and ate it.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So why on earth then did a group of people, people we’d ultimately come to call Jews, decide that they were going to take a perfectly good source of nutrition and stop eating it?

Researchers from many different disciplines - anthropology, sociology, history, folklore and mythology, even medicine - have weighed in and offered up all kinds of theories as to why pigs became taboo. But despite all those theories, it remained a mystery. And then, in the 90s, it seems as if archeology solved the puzzle.

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** The data basically showed that sites that we identified as early Israelites did not eat any pork. There were no pig bones in the archeological assemblages in them. And sites that we identified as Philistines did have a larger amount of pigs. So the idea was that early Israelites did not eat pig, Philistines ate pig. So probably the decision not to eat pigs anymore was based on a self-identity decision saying, “we are not like them. They eat pigs but we do not.” It’s an ethnical marker.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The Philistines were outsiders who started arriving in the twelfth century BC, probably from the Aegean islands or the Turkish coast. And when they came, they brought over their culinary traditions in which pork was, apparently, a main ingredient. So for the early Israelites to abstain from pork?

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** It was the local people way of saying, ‘this is what define us apart from the new population.’

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And that made a lot of sense. I mean it’s not for nothing that we say that you are what you eat.

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** We see it in many cultures. Even defining yourself as a vegetarian or vegan, it’s not only defining what you eat. But it also defining your ideology, your perception of the world, your symbolic world, who you are, how do you differ from other people. I mean it’s a whole set of values that comes with it.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So it appeared as if the question had been resolved. The reason many Jews today, in the twenty-first century, don’t order a side of bacon - is because more than three thousand years ago our ancestors wanted to differentiate themselves from the Philistine new-comers. *That* was the origin of the pig prohibition. Case closed. Except, it wasn’t really.

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** Well, looking back there were… there were some faults in the data.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** In 2013, Lidar - then a young post-doctoral fellow - decided to review all the data once again and assign clearer dates to the various different bone assemblages.

**Mishy Harman:** And what did you start to discover?

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** I started to discover that the patterns of pork consumption or avoidance are very complex. The more data you have, you see that past people behavior is complex behavior. They don’t work according to what you expect them to work.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** In other words, it wasn’t the clear picture of Philistines munching away on pork chops and disgusted early-Israelites deciding to eschew the animal altogether. Rather, Lidar found, there were periods when no one ate much pork, or when everyone ate some pork, or periods in which pork was eaten mainly in rural areas or mainly in urban centers, or in the Northern Kingdom but not in Judea and so on and so forth.

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** So it wasn’t an identity issue - if you eat or not. There was some reason for people not to eat it. It was economic opportunities.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Pigs, according to Lidar, might have become less appealing at various different periods for all kinds of reasons - they can’t be herded, they don’t plow fields, they don’t produce milk or wool.

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** They can go on the field and eat all of the, I don’t know, potatoes, and everything that you had there.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But still, it seems that even if pigs weren’t a main staple…

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** It wasn’t completely avoided.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Lidar’s research showed that even in Jerusalem, right next to the Holy Temple and at the time of Isaiah and Amos - people kept, and ate, pigs.

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** In every house in Jerusalem from that period, they had one to two percent pig remains. In every house. There was no place that there was completely pork avoidance. But when you find a complete pig in the house it stares at you that there was pig there, and they raised it. It’s a more vivid, I think, evidence, for what was happening there.

**Mishy Harman:** And what does all this mean?

**Lidar Sapir-Hen:** It means… *[laughs]* that they ate pig to some extent. I mean the pig was there.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** It’s true, the little piglet *was* there. But its discovery actually tells a much larger tale - one of cultural and religious evolution, one which allows us to uncover layers of the story we tell ourselves *about* ourselves.

Over time the pig has become such a powerful negative symbol within Judaism, that it’s easy to think that it’s been a taboo for ever and ever. But, as Lidar’s pig teaches us - things aren’t always as black and white as we’d like to imagine.

Hey, I’m Mishy Harman, and after that short archeology lesson… this is Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by Tablet Magazine and the Jerusalem Foundation. Our episode today - **Pigging Out**. We’ve got three wonderful stories, all about the least likely of Israeli animals.

We begin our piggish path with one of Etgar Keret’s most widely-read short stories. In fact, it has even entered the Ministry of Education’s official high-school curriculum. So basically every single Israeli teenager has not only read it, but also been quizzed about it. All you have to do, however, is listen. OK, **Act One - Breaking the Pig**, read by Juliana Mazzola.

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

**Juliana Mazzola (narration):** Dad wouldn’t buy me a Bart Simpson doll. Mom really wanted to, but Dad wouldn’t, he said I was spoiled.

“Why should we?” he said to Mom. “Why should we buy it for him? He just snaps his fingers and you jump to attention.” Dad said I had no respect for money, that if I didn’t learn it when I was little when would I? Kids who get Bart Simpson dolls at the drop of a hat turn into punks who steal from convenience stores, because they wind up thinking they can have whatever they want, just like that. So instead of a Bart doll he bought me an ugly porcelain pig with a slot in its back, and now I’ll grow up to be OK, now I won’t turn into a punk.

Every morning now, I’m supposed to drink a cup of hot cocoa, even though I hate it. With the skin it’s one shekel, without the skin it’s half a shekel, and if I throw up right after I drink it, I don’t get anything. I drop the coins into the slot in the pig’s back, and then, when you shake him, you can hear them jingle. Soon as the pig is so full of coins that it doesn’t jingle when you shake it, I get a Bart-Simpson-on-a-skateboard doll. That’s what Dad says, that way it’s educational.

The pig is kind of cute actually, his nose is cool when you touch it, and he smiles when you drop a shekel in his back, and even when you only drop in half a shekel. But the nicest thing is how he smiles even when you don’t. I made up a name for him, too. I call him Margolis, same as the man who used to live in our mailbox and my dad couldn’t get the sticker off. Margolis isn’t like my other toys. He’s much more easy going, without bulbs or springs or batteries that leak inside. You just have to make sure he doesn’t jump off the table.

“Margolis, be careful! You’re made of porcelain,” I remind him when I spot him bending over a little and looking down at the floor, and he smiles at me and waits patiently for me to take him down myself. I really love it when he smiles, and I drink the hot cocoa with the skin every morning just for him so I can drop the shekel in his back and watch how his smile doesn’t change at all.

“I love you, Margolis,” I tell him then. “Honest, I love you more than Mom and Dad. And I’ll always love you, no matter what, even if you become a punk. But don’t you dare go jumping off the table!”

Yesterday, Dad came in, picked Margolis up off the table and started shaking him upside down real hard.

“Be careful, Dad,” I told him. “You’re giving Margolis a tummy ache.” But Dad didn’t stop. “It isn’t making any noise. You know what that means, don’t you, Davie? That tomorrow you’re going to get a Bart-Simpson-on-a-skateboard doll.”

“Great, Dad,” I said. “A Bart-Simpson-on-a-skateboard doll, that’s great. Just please stop shaking Margolis before he starts feeling sick.” Dad put Margolis down and went to get Mom. He came back a minute later, pulling Mom behind him with one hand and holding a hammer in the other.

“You see, I was right,” he said to Mom. “This way he’ll know how to appreciate things. Won’t you, Davie?”

“Sure I will,” I said. “Sure I will, but what’s the hammer for?”

“It’s for you,” Dad said and put the hammer in my hand. “Just be careful.”

“Sure, I’ll be careful,” I said, and I really was. But a few minutes later, Dad lost his patience and he said, “so come on. Break the pig already.’

“What?!’ I asked. “Break Margolis?”

“Yes, yes, Margolis,” Dad said. “Come on, break it. You earned your Bart Simpson, you worked hard enough for it.”

Margolis gave me the sad smile of a porcelain pig who knows his end is near. The hell with Bart Simpson. Me? Hit a friend on the head with a hammer?

“I don’t want Simpson,” I said and handed the hammer back to Dad. “Margolis is good enough for me.”

“You don’t get it,” Dad said. “It’s really all right, it’s educational. Come on, let me break it for you.” Dad raised the hammer and I caught the tired look in Mom’s eyes and the broken smile on Margolis’ face, and I knew - it was all up to me now. Unless I did something, he was dead.

“Dad,” I said, grabbing him by the leg.

“What is it, Davie?” Dad said, still holding the hammer high in the air. “Could I have one more shekel please?” I begged. “Please give me one more shekel to drop into Margolis, tomorrow, after my hot cocoa. Then I’ll break him, tomorrow, I promise.”

“One more shekel?” Dad smiled and put the hammer down on the table. “You see? The boy has developed an awareness.”

“Yes, an awareness,” I said. “Tomorrow.” There were tears in my throat.

Soon as they left the room, I gave Margolis an extra-tight hug and let the tears pour out. Margolis didn’t say a thing, he just trembled quietly in my hands. “Don’t worry,” I whispered in his ear. “I’ll save you.”

That night I waited for Dad to finish watching TV in the living room and go to bed. Then I got up very, very quietly and sneaked out through the balcony with Margolis. We walked together in the dark for a very long time till we reached a field of thornbushes.

“Pigs love fields,” I told Margolis as I put him down on the floor of the field, “especially fields with thornbushes. You’ll like it here.” I waited for his answer, but Margolis didn’t say a thing, and when I touched him on the nose to say goodbye he just gave me a sad look. He knew he’d never see me again.

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

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Etgar Keret. Or Matias composed and performed the original music in that story, which was sound designed by Yochai Maital and Zev Levi.

Now BLTs and pork chops are not the first thing that comes to mind when you think about Israel. In fact, that’s exactly what our producer Yoshi Fields heard when he went out and asked people on the street about it.

**Yoshi Fields:** Do you know if pigs are grown in Israel? Do you know anything about the industry?

**Woman I:** It’s not kosher.

**Woman II:** It’s not Kosher.

**Yoshi Fields:** I’m curious if you guys...

**Woman III:** Oink oink?

**Yoshi Fields:** Yeah, oink, oink.

**Woman IV**: We don’t have to eat it. We don’t have to eat it.

**Man I:** There’s no pig in Israel.

**Woman V:** We taught not to touch.

**Woman VI:** Tradition.

**Man II:** Even the secular don’t eat. It’s a Jewish State. **Mishy Harman:** And Yosh, even those who did know about the local pork industry, seemed to have a pretty odd belief about how pigs are raised here.

**Yoshi Fields:** Right… Again and again I heard that…

**Man I:** They raise them on docks, like a platform.

**Woman I:** We don’t let them grow on the earth but, like, a bit on something so they are not touching *Eretz Yisrael* *[laughs]* *[in Hebrew]* like…

**Man II:** It’s not on the ground, it's illegal in Israel.

**Man II:** It’s on a platform, that’s what I know.

**Man III:** Three or four stairs above the ground, because it’s not allowed to raise pigs on the sacred land of state of Israel.

**Mishy Harman:** And is that true?

**Yoshi Fields:** Ahhh… Yeah, no. It’s a total urban legend.

**Mishy Harman:** So pigs *aren’t* raised on platforms?

**Yoshi Fields:** No no, they are. But it has nothing to do with Judaism or purity or *kashrut* or anything like that. It’s well… just easier to clean their poop that way.

**Mishy Harman:** Got it…

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Over the last year or so, Yoshi’s spent a lot of time thinking about pigs. He doesn’t eat them (he’s more of a fish-and-the-very-occasional-chicken-breast kind of vegetarian) but he went up and down the country tracing the history of swine in the Holy Land.

**Yoshi Fields:** I did. And the strange thing is that the more you look into the story of pigs in Israel, the less you end up talking about the pig itself.

**Mishy Harman:** What… what do you mean?

**Yoshi Fields:** Well, the ongoing battle - yes pork, no pork - it's mostly symbolic. It’s *really* a battle over the identity of the country - is it democratic? Is it Jewish? Both? Neither? And these questions have shifted over time. As Israel has grown from a fledgling nation to what it is today. Like it or not, the pig and the story of Israel are actually intricately tied. My fascination with pigs all started when I found out about this kibbutz, in the middle of the Jezreel valley - Kibbutz Mizra.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And that, dear listeners, is where our story begins. Here’s Yoshi Fields with **Act II: A “Zionist” Pig**.

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

**Yoseph Hadar:** In that house I did third to sixth grade.

**Yoshi Fields:** So you lived in all of these houses?

**Yoseph Hadar:** I lived, I played, I… we went. And I lived in a paradise. But everything was provided. Dining hall always gave you enough good food. We used to have a lot of parties, especially on the big holidays. We climbed on the mountains there, everything was free.

**Yoshi Fields:** Pioneers in a lot of ways.

**Yoseph Hadar:** Yes, pioneers.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** That’s Yoseph Hadar, a proud member of Kibbutz Mizra.

**Yoseph Hadar:** Born and bred.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The kibbutz is located in northern Israel, between Afula and Nazareth. If you close your eyes and *imagine* a kibbutz - the sprawling agricultural fields, the smell of cow manure in the air, tractors and golf carts rolling past - that’s Mizra. Nobody seems to be in a rush. And Yoseph is a case in point. I met him for what I expected to be a quick tour...

**Yoseph Hadar:** This little house used to be a shoemaker, we used to have our shoes also... I remember my mother carrying a big challah going from the old dining hall... The Silo here has been made into an optometrist...

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** But turned out to be an almost two-hour-long stroll down memory lane. He talked nostalgically about the socialist roots of the kibbutz.

**Yoseph Hadar:** From the beginning the kibbutz shared everything. A woman got a dress from her parents in Poland, it became everyone's dress. I mean, I was told that even underwear was shared.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Mizra was established in 1923 by Polish and Russian immigrants. And despite limited resources, and well, undergarments, they transformed what was mostly swamp land into a livable settlement and profitable enterprise.

**Chen Shelach:** People came here and said, “I'm going to be a new kind of Jew. And I'm going to do things that Jews never did, I'm going to work in the fields.”

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** That’s Chen Shelach, whom I met in front of the dining hall. He’s a second generation Mizran, clean shaven with short brown hair and thin metal rimmed glasses.

**Chen Shelach:** When I see pictures of my grandparents from Warsaw - the few pictures that were left. Very religious and not very modern. They seem to me like another kind of person.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Like many early kibbutzim established in the twenties, Mizra’s story is one of communal sacrifice, of tilling the land, and making a dream into a reality. It’s basically the typical kibbutz tale - except, that is... for one thing.

*[Pig snorting]*

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** *This* is why I’d come to Mizra.

**Yoseph Hadar:** All this area was the pigsty.

**Chen Shelach:** Everybody knew Mizra as the main factory.

**Yoseph Hadar:** We had pigs.

**Chen Shelach:** We were the biggest, the best.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Pigs. And where? In the very place that’s often romanticized as the quintessential symbol of the Jewish state - the kibbutz. Huh?

Now, I should say off the bat that even though there are a handful of religious kibbutzim - sixteen of them, to be exact - the socialist kibbutz movement was, by and large, a bastion of ardent secularism. But still, *pork*?!

I had to find out more.

**Orit Rosen:** Ah, hi, I’m Orit Rosen. I’m a professor at… *[In Hebrew]* Ugh, from the beginning *[laughs]*. Cut.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** I went to Tel Aviv University to speak with Orit. She’s an expert on the early years of the state, and specifically the issue of food during that period. I had been told that if I really wanted to understand how pigs got to Mizra, she was the one to speak to. Orit immediately started talking about a period known as the *tzena*, or the austerity years.

**Orit Rosen:** Between 1948 and 1951 the Jewish population doubled. Around seven hundred thousand new immigrants landed in Israel.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And, as a result…

**Orit Rosen:** Food was getting scarce.

**TV Reel:** Every three minutes one new person comes into the country. Every three minutes the simple matter of food becomes more serious.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The government implemented a ration system.

**TV Reel:** Three eggs per week. One pound of sugar a month. Three ounces of margarine a week.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Instead of fresh eggs there was...

**Orit Rosen:** Egg powder, not tasty. Rice was scarce.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And the fish?

**Orit Rosen:** Frozen, not nice.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Most of all, however, people craved meat.

**TV Reel:** No meat today. How will all these people be fed? Can they be fed?

**Yoshi Fields:** Sopigs were an answer to this?

**Orit Rosen:** OK so it’s a good solution first of all because it's easy to grow. And they grow very very quickly.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** See, unlike a cow - which typically has a single calf in *nine* months - sows are pregnant for less than *four* months, and give birth to around ten piglets at a time. Pigs could, therefore, potentially feed a lot of people, and fast.

And that’s what compelled one man, on one kibbutz, to spring into action. The kibbutz of course, was Mizra, and the man? Was a five-foot tall farmer by the name of Yaakov Rabin.

**Dudi Rabin:** He was a man of humor, with a lot of Jewish culture.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Our story begins in 1955, when a large crate was delivered to Mizra. The contents - a pregnant sow. **Part One:** **A Jewish Pork Startup**.

Yaakov, the man waiting for the sow, had immigrated to Palestine more than two decades earlier - in 1933. He had actually grown up in a religious family from Lithuania. But above all...

**Dudi Rabin:** He was a huge Zionist.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Yaakov died in 1986, but I spoke to his son, Dudi Rabin, who still lives in Mizra. He told me that, ironically perhaps, it was Yaakov’s *Zionism* that made him into a pig farmer.

**Dudi Rabin:** Pig sounds to some Jews like something terrible. But he saw this as a Zionist act. It was part of his Zionist vision!

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** According toYaakov...

**Dudi Rabin:** The Zionist idea was to be one nation amongst all other nations. To take a dispersed and confused people with all its troubles and problems, and to turn it into a people like any other.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Like many other early pioneers, Yaakov believed in creating a new Jew. A stronger, more modern Jew, who stepped *out* of the *cheyder* or *yeshiva* and stepped *onto* the field. Who left past persecutions and pogroms and the Holocaust behind, and shed many old-world traditions.

And if pigs could help that goal, if pigs could help the country, then pigs it was.

**Dudi Rabin:** He thought to himself, ‘I have to distinguish, or separate, between faith or religion, and the needs of the hour.’

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And that’s how Yaakov Rabin of Kibbutz Mizra became a self-appointed savior.

**Dudi Rabin:** He wanted to make sure that the country can feed the people that live in it. To give them food.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Like any good old-school kibbutznik,Yaakov was determined. After that first sow arrived, he bought some more pigs, and converted an old cow shed into a proper pigsty. Two years later, he turned the old kibbutz dairy into a tiny meat factory.

**Dudi Rabin:** Very small in the beginning.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Like the size of a home kitchen small. In fact, they didn’t even have ovens. So for the first few years, they had to do all the cooking in the dining hall kitchen. But ultimately their hard work and patience prevailed and on *Tu BiShvat* 1957 Kibbutz Mizra had its very first pig roast.

**Dudi Rabin:** The first whole pig. All its parts.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Mizra wasn’t the only kibbutz to delve into the world of pig farming. But it *was* the first with a factory, even if it was tiny, and it quickly became the country’s biggest producer of pork.

**Dudi Rabin:** And we started to produce salami, sausages.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Eight-year-oldDudi was one of the factory’s first workers, and still remembers long hours on the makeshift assembly line, his legs dangling off the counter as he tied cocktail sausages into threes.

**Dudi Rabin:** We worked from the early morning till late night. We invested our souls there. For me it was like a home. More than my actual house. I was physically there more than I was home.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Soon,Mizra’s pigs became a core part of an ideology.

**Chen Shelach:** For me it stands for freedom.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Chen Shelach, the kibbutz resident I met outside the dining hall, once again. The pigs, he told me, came to represent a new identity, a sense of…

**Chen Shelach:** Being pioneers.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Dudi agrees.

**Dudi Rabin:** *HaTikvah*, right?To be a free people in our own land.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** But their principles and efforts notwithstanding, Mizra members didn’t know if their “illicit” activity would pay off. If anyone in Israel would, excuse the pun, “bite.”

They anxiously waited to see what would happen when their taboo meat hit the market. But when it did…

**Ronit Vered:** It became very popular. They used to sell it inside a pita, with tahini and some tomatoes.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** That’s Ronit Vered, a food journalist for the Israeli daily *Haaretz*.

**Ronit Vered:** Well, you know, in the fifties, they didn't have a lot of restaurants, of course, because of the austerity and because of the poor economical conditions. But they used to sell it at a lot of these steak places that were located at gas stations. A *‘stekiya’* was like one of the most well-known establishments of food.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** To Mizra’s delight, enough Israelis had an appetite for swine. And well, socialism aside, when there’s a demand, there will quickly be a supply. Before long, many other kibbutzim as well as private farms wanted in on the action.

**Giora Goodman:** From around a hundred-and-fifty kibbutzim, half of them were growing pigs.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** That's Giora Goodman. He teaches at Kinneret College, and *loves* to talk about pigs. In fact, that’s his area of expertise - the history of pigs in Israel in the mid 20th-century. Giora told me that for a brief moment in the late-fifties and early-sixties, pigs were everywhere.

**Giora Goodman:** Pig raising in Israel was at its height in the early 1960s.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** By 1962, there were pig farms in…

**Giora Goodman:** Many, many dozens of places around Israel - in kibbutzim, in farms around Tel Aviv and Haifa, Nazareth, even inside Jerusalem.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** It was - according to Giora - the golden age of pork in Israel.

And this brings us to **Part Two: The Anti-Porkers Strike Back or, “Who is the New Jew?”**

The fact that *some* people ate pork, didn’t mean that mainstream Israeli society approved of eating it. Unsurprisingly, the matter quickly became a heated public controversy, debated...

**Giora Goodman:** Again and again, more than a dozen times in three years, in Israeli government meetings. You’d think they haven’t gotten anything else to talk about.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And why was this such a hot potato? Well, because of course pork occupied - and still occupies - a symbolic place in the Jewish psyche. Here’s Ronit Vered again.

**Ronit Vered:** Pork is always the most emotional part of all these kosher laws. A lot of Jewish people who eat oysters, or who eat shrimp and do mix meat with dairy products, do not eat pork.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And honestly, I get it. I don’t keep kosher myself, but still it was years before I ordered my first BLT. I actually remember that moment well. I picked up the sandwich, took a hesitant bite, felt weird and quickly removed the bacon. I couldn’t really articulate why I had done that. It came from some guttural aversion to pork, originating from some place deep inside of me. A place I didn’t even know existed.

And I guess many Israelis back in the fifties and early sixties felt the same. Most stayed far away from the forbidden animal and its flesh. Even those who *did* eat it, did so in very specific circumstances: Rarely at home, and almost exclusively at those gas station steakhouses. And even there, people used code when ordering - asking for “*basar lavan*” or “white meat.”

This charade played out on the national stage as well. While the pig industry was growing, most wanted to hide any and all traces of its very existence.

**Giora Goodman:** It's like a secret history.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** At the time, Israel was proudly broadcasting all its achievements...

**TV Reel:** Tobacco curing in the friendly sun. In new tires ready to roll.

**Giora Goodman:** If you look at the newspaper articles or the films, documentary films, newsreels, you see how the camera describes every agricultural product.

**TV Reel:** The food industry is the biggest.

**Giora Goodman:** “And here the cattle and here's how we grow peaches” and all that…

**TV Reel:** Fifty thousand cases of the finest Jaffa oranges.

**TV Reel:** Candy is one of the products exported to the United States.

**Giora Goodman:** Everything except one animal - pigs.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And, if you ask Giora, this exclusion - this active hiding of pioneering pig farmers like Yaakov Rabin - was completely intentional.

**Giora Goodman:** These people could move mountains. These are the people, that if it wouldn’t have been pigs, everybody would have been proud.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** But basically no one in the leadership - not the secular, not the traditional, and definitely not the religious - was proud.

The religious establishment was obviously against the presence of pork in Israel, andwanted it banned altogether. For them, a Jewish state meant a state that followed central tenets of *halacha* - religious Jewish law.

On the right, Menachem Begin, who would later become Israel’s prime minister, told the Knesset that the issue of pork was an existential national threat. He recounted with horror how - as a ten-year-old boy in Belarus - he fought with non-Jewish children who tried to force him to eat pork at school, and concluded that, quote, “pigs should never be raised in the State of Israel.” He even called Jewish pig farmers, people like the socialistsof Mizra, “greedy” and “money-hungry.”

On the left, too, there was strong pushback. Both Berl Katzenelson, the intellectual father of the secular Labor Movement, and Nathan Alterman, the famous socialist poet and journalist, published essays about the importance of keeping pork out of Israel.

*They*, however,objected on *nationalistic*, rather than *religious*, grounds. They thought that having a Jewish state wasn’t about imposing religious *law*, but rather about preserving and strengthening Jewish *identity*. One particularly central voice was that of Menachem Hacohen, a former member of Knesset from the Labor Party.

**Menachem HaCohen:** The coming July 26th, I will be young again, I will be eighty-nine. OK, now the questions. What do you want to hear from me?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Menachem himself actually is religious. In fact, he’s a rabbi. But his anti-pork stance didn’t come from his personal commitment to *halacha*. Instead, it was rooted in his conception of Israel as a nation state.

**Menachem Hacohen:** The Jewish State has to have some symbols. Some frame what makes a Jewish State.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Menachem’s political activism days are now long behind him. But since he was an important player in the parliamentary battles over pork, I went to visit him in his office in Jerusalem. The walls are covered with framed black-and-white photos.

**Menachem Hacohen:** You see this man? Ben Gurion.

**Yoshi Fields:** Yeah!

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** In one he’s chatting with Ben Gurion, in another he’s sitting next to Yitzhak Rabin.

**Menachem Hacohen:** I think I have it here.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** He shuffles through some papers on his desk and pulls out a speech on pigs he gave in the Knesset.

**Menachem Hacohen:** Yes, here it is. But I have it in *ivrit.*

**Yoshi Fields:** That’s OK.

**Menachem Hacohen:** OK. *[In Hebrew]* Mr. Chairman, members of Knesset *[goes under]*.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** “There is no greater symbol of the desecration of the people of Israel than the pig. It is an affront to our independence, to all that has kept us together as a nation.”

**Menachem Hacohen:** OK, it’s enough.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Heswitches back to English.

**Menachem Hacohen:** The pig was the symbol against the Jewish people. It’s not exactly like the swastika, but it has the same meanings.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** “It’s not exactly like the swastika,” he says, “but it has the same meaning against the Jewish people.”

And just as it’s impossible to imagine Israel allowing swastika flags or t-shirts to be manufactured and sold in the country, many thought it should be illegal to raise pigs too.

After all, it isn’t just that pigs aren’t kosher. It’s the fact that throughout Jewish history they have been an anti-Jewish symbol. Think, for example, of the Hanukkah story and the Maccabee revolt against King Antiochus who forced the Jews to eat pork and worship idols in the Holy Temple. Or about the Middle Ages in Europe, when antisemitic imagery often portrayed Jews as pigs. Or even about Tsar Nicolai’s army, in which Jewish conscripts were made to eat pork in order to demonstrate their allegiance to Mother Russia. And believe me, the list goes on and on.

So that’s essentially where things stood: The religious were mortified by the idea because of, well… religious reasons. And many others simply saw it as an affront to the notion of a Jewish peoplehood.

At its heart, the debate was - really - about identity. Now that Israel existed, was it time to create a society based on the Judaism of yesteryear, or rather forge a new Jewish future? And if the answer was somewhere in between, how and where do you draw the line?

All this came to a boil with the Pig Law of 1962. According to this new law, which was supported by both religious and secular legislators…

**Giora Goodman:** You could just liquidate the pigs. That's how the law says it.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Pork historian Giora Goodman once again.

**Giora Goodman:** Till this day there are only two reasons why you can go in somebody’s house and search without a warrant. One of them is tax inspectors and the other one is to inspect whether someone is raising pigs there.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The law - which is still on the books today - outlawed the raising of pigs. And the crackdown began almost immediately.

**Giora Goodman:** There was one guy who was given the job, he had this gun, and he would go around all places where pigs were raised.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** That’s right, a hitman - his name was Menachem Bari - was hired by the government to go all over the country to seek out pigs and kill them. Bari was meticulous and kept detailed records. For instance, on August 8th, 1963, he wrote in his logs, “I inspected the Rhuma farms and to my suprise found three pigs there. I destroyed the pigs at the Rishon LeZion dump using a shotgun.” With Bari on the job, it didn’t take long before the pig farms - that had popped up all over the country - began to disappear.

But *that* surprisingly, wasn’t the end of Mizra’s enterprise, or - for that matter - of the nascent Israeli pork industry. See, despite the anti-pork vitriol, there *was* a legal loophole. Israel’s population wasn’t, of course, entirely Jewish. For Muslims pork is *haram*, forbidden, and most - indeed - don’t eat it. But even the most vociferous anti-porkers agreed that local Christians should still be allowed to eat pork, if they wanted to. So three exceptions were made to the law.

Pigs were allowed inzoos, they were allowed in research facilities and most notably, they could be raised in a few Christian towns and villages in the north of Israel.

With no other real alternative at hand, Dudi’s father, Yaakov, moved Mizra’s pigs to Nazareth, a thirty minute bus ride away.

**Dudi Rabin:** My dad took the pigsty to Nazareth. He took care of these pigs till his last day.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** It was, ultimately, a simple work-around.By moving them to Nazareth, the pigs themselves were raised elsewhere, and Mizra could still maintain a small meat factory on its premises.

But the pigs' golden age? It was over. While Mizra and a few other farms did continue to produce pork within the limitations of the law, the country as a whole had spoken, and pork was out.

**Giora Goodman:** Most Israelis to this day, have never seen a live pig, only in films. Only in... Winnie the Pooh has a friend, Piglet. So you know how pigs look.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And then… things got even worse for Mizra. **Part Three: My Plate, My Business.**

In 1977, for the first time in its history, the Labor Party lost power. Menachem Begin’s right wing government was now at the helm. In 1984, Shas - a new Ultra-Orthodox Sephardic party - appeared on the scene. And Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah - the *Ashkenazi* Ultra-Orthodox parties that had, for decades, been on the political periphery, gradually became central players. So it was just a matter of time before religious clashes erupted.

El Al, the national airline, was barred from flying on Shabbat or Jewish holidays. A law against publicly selling bread during Passover passed. There were also attempts to ban soccer games on Shabbat. To close cinemas. And of course, the seemingly dormant question of pork resurfaced.

With greater political power than ever before, religious legislators sought to close any and all loopholes that allowed the forbidden animal to be grown in the Holy Land.

In 1985, a group of politicians - supported by Prime Minister Shimon Peres - sought to amend and expand the 1962 law, by making it absolutely illegal to sell and distribute pork in Israel.

**Yigal Bibi:** This is a Jewish State. There are laws, not many, that are related to Israel as a Jewish State. Not to Israel as a democracy. And I support them. The pig is an impure thing in Judaism. That should be implemented as law.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** That’s Igal Bibi. Igal’s a politician, who served as a member of Knesset for the *Mafdal*, the Religious National Party.

**Yigal Bibi:** So the question is ‘what do we abide by? Judaism or democracy?’

**Yoshi Fields:** And do you think Judaism?

**Yigal Bibi:** Of course! Because we’re the State of the Jewish people.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** To be fair, he wasn’t advocating for a theocracy. He believes in a democratic state. He just thinks that that doesn’t mean that everyone can do whatever they want, all the time. Even democracies, he told me, have rules that limit people in different ways. And he’s obviously right: Even if you’re a nudist, for instance, you can’t just walk down the street without any clothes on. So as far as he, and many other politicians were concerned, a pork prohibition was simply another one of those limitations. A necessary limitation, in fact.

**Yigal Bibi:** It’s a bigger issue even than security. A person who has lost their Judaism, it’s not just that he isn’t Jewish, but it’s also that his children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren aren’t Jewish. So, OK pig, no pig. The most important thing is to save the Jewish people from assimilation.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** But many Israelis saw this as religious coercion. A vigorous secular lobby quickly emerged.

**Avraham Poraz:** Not eating pork, I hope, it’s not the symbol of being a Jew.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Avraham Poraz, one of the founders of the “*Shinui*” party.

**Avraham Poraz:** We should have a country that there’s freedom of religion. And somebody that wants pork, let him have it. If somebody wants to drive on Shabbat, let him have it. If you want to eat on Yom Kippur, or you want to eat bagels on Passover, it's freedom.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** In an interesting development, many secular folks who had previously objected to pork for cultural or sentimental reasons, began viewing it as a matter of civil liberty. It’s not that they suddenly started stuffing their mouths with pigs-in-a-blanket, but they did go out to the streets to fight for the right to do so, if they so pleased.

**Naomi Chazan:** I really went to bat on this one.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** That’s Naomi Chazan. An academic and political activist who would go on to serve as a member of Knesset for the left-wing *Meretz* party.

**Naomi Chazan:** I keep a kosher house, two sets of dishes, even two sinks. I change dishes on Pesach, etc. I really am not a pork eater at all.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Nevertheless, when attempts to expand the Pig Law were put forth, she was enraged.

**Naomi Chazan:** It hit me that it may very well be a very important issue of human rights. Because essentially such a law says ‘we can determine what you will eat and what you will not eat. What can be on your plate and what cannot.’ And this kind of incursion into the most simple daily act of eating because of the beliefs of others is such a violation of freedom of religion and freedom from religion.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** People like Naomi packed the streets. They carried signs with slogans like “I’m Afraid of a Haredi State,” and “Today the Pig, Tomorrow You.”

Some even brought pigs on a leash, claiming it was their democratic right to have them. Folks from Kibbutz Mizra, like Chen, were - obviously - on the frontlines.

**Chen Shelach:** All the Kibbutz was involved in it. Taking a buses, and going to Jerusalem, to the Knesset.It's very clear who is the good guys (we are), and who are the bad guys (the religious).

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And as all of this was reaching yet another boiling point, history stepped in.

*[Tape of Russian imigration]*

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Our final chapter. **Capitalism Saves the Day (Sort Of….)**.

In 1989 the [USSR](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USSR) opened its borders, and shortly thereafter, more than a million Jewish immigrants started pouring into Israel, in what became known as the Great Russian Aliyah. Many of them - like Anna, whom I met outside a non-kosher deli in Jerusalem - were... pork eaters.

**Anna:** In Ukraine I ate everything. Pork too. When I came to Israel, I ate all types of food, including pork.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Decades of crackdowns on Jewish observance under communism had made finding kosher meat in the USSR a difficult task. Over time, pork had slowly crept into the menu and had - for many Soviet Jews - become an integrated food.

Their arrival in Israel was a watershed moment.

Seemingly overnight, the makeup of the country changed, and with it, social (and dietary) norms. In 1996, *Yisrael Ba’Aliyah*, a Russian immigrant party led by Natan Sharansky, gained seven seats in the parliament and joined the coalition. So while Kennest members like Yigal Bibi would continue to fight against pork, the demographic shift basically put an end to the possibility of outlawing it for good.

Once again, just like in the late-fifties, the heightened demand meant one thing, and one thing only: Greater opportunities to supply. Small pork producers like Kobi Tribitch came onto the scene.

**Kobi Tribitch:** In the market suddenly all you heard was Russian. And tons of people. I said, “hold on, there's an opportunity here.”

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** In 1989, Kobi took over his dad’s butcher shop in Tel Aviv. It was called *Tiv Ta’am*. Soon, it started to grow and grow and grow.

Over at Mizra, on the other hand, business was actually shrinking. See, Mizra had decided, back in the seventies, that their best route to survival would be to focus on expensive, high-end, pork products. For a while, this business model worked. It wasn’t a big market, but the factory - and with it the kibbutz - were able to get by. But with the massive wave of immigrants - many of whom didn’t have jobs or extra money to spend on fancy salami - that all changed.

**Dudi Rabin:** Sales plummeted.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** “Nobody was buying,” Dudi Rabin told me as he shook his head.

**Dudi Rabin:** The Russians that arrived at the beginning didn’t have any money. They were looking for different things. Kobi Tribith was selling everything.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Kobi’s cheaper, lower quality pork was all the rage among the new immigrants. Mizra was, essentially, priced out of the market. In 2006, they decided they had no choice but to sell their factory. The buyer? Kobi’s *Tiv Ta’am*. Capitalism, as it turns out, was the final nail in Mizra’s coffin.

It was a difficult moment for the kibbutz, and for Dudi in particular.

**Dudi Rabin:** More than angry I felt hurt.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** As he saw it, it wasn’t just the end of the kibbutz factory. It was the end of a Zionist dream. Half-a-century earlier his dad had brought that first pregnant sow to Mizra. Dudi had spent his childhood tying cocktail sausages and listening to his father talk about pork as an ideological symbol. A rallying cry for socialism, pragmatism and liberty.

**Dudi Rabin:** I did all I could so that the factory would succeed. It stood for freedom. But today people don’t have those Zionist values. Social values don’t interest them at all. What they care about is making money. This country was built on an idea that in order to survive one needs to be united. To get together. Today it is a competition.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And in that competition, Mizra was the clear loser. *Tiv Ta’am* became the biggest pork seller in the country. Today they are the seventh largest supermarket chain in Israel, with forty-one locations.

And Kobi, the new face of pork, didn’t talk about the new Jew, secular values or religious freedom. For him, it was all just business.

While the fight over Israel’s religious identity continues,the pork battles of years past seem to have subsided. A delicate status quo has emerged. Pork is sold in more and more establishments, but is still largely out of sight, at least publicly. In fact, most pig farmers around the country didn’t even want to talk to me, for fear of unnecessarily rocking the boat.

*[Snorting]*

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Though Mizra no longer raises or sells pigs, it does keep a small, snorting reminder of its porcine past.

**Kid:** So Berber. And this is Barbra.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Berber and Barbara. Kibbutz members and visitors feed them and coo over them, but they are no more than pets whose purpose is to delight young children. Children, who are increasingly oblivious to anything the pigs once stood for.

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

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Yoshi Fields. Thanks to Chen Shelach for allowing us to use excerpts from his 2016 documentary film, “Praise the Lard.” We’ll be right back.

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

*[Ad Break]*

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

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And now, back to our episode. Before the break we heard how - over the decades - pigs meant different things to different Israelis: A promise of a new and pragmatic Zionism, a threat to our national identity, an emblem of religious liberty, a prime example of menacing assimilation, a secular badge of honor, and - for folks of kibbutz Mizra - the epitome of the struggle between a socialist Israel and a capitalist one. But not that far from Mizra, in Haifa, pigs - or rather wild boars - stand for something else altogether. Here’s Marie Röder with **Act III - Where the Wild Things Are**.

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

**Marie Röder (narration):** In2001, I turned eight. It was also the year my mother finally allowed me to ride my bicycle to my after-school dance class by myself. I was, she told me with a warm smile, a *big* girl now. The dance studio was a seven minute bike ride from our home in the north of Berlin. Seven minutes… But a big chunk of that ride was through the Tegeler Forst, a thick, dark forest.

And everyone knew that the Tegeler Forst was home to a monster.

On a cold November afternoon, as the sun was setting and the forest was becoming even darker than usual, I entered the woods. First, I heard a crackle. Then, a deep grunt. I looked over my shoulder and froze. The monster was right behind me. Darting towards me at full speed.

I felt the wind whipping against my face as I peddled, as hard and as fast as I possibly could. My lungs were burning, my palms sweating. I was able to gain some lead, but I didn’t think I could keep it up much longer. I was sure the monster was about to overtake me. I glanced back one more time. And that’s when I saw him, the beast. He had dark bristles, long tusks and fierce eyes.

I thought it was the end. But then, all of a sudden, I noticed that he was... slowing down. He even seemed to be *panting*. I caught my breath.

The *monster* turned out to be an asthmatic wild boar.

I got away that November afternoon. But ever since, wild boars visit me in my nightmares. I’m not joking. Even now, twenty years later, I occasionally wake up drenched in sweat. I look around and remind myself that I’m not in Berlin anymore. I live in Israel. I’m safe here.

Or at least, so I thought.

**TV I:** Wild boars are taking over Haifa.

**TV II:** *[In Hebrew]* Some two thousand wild boars are roaming around Haifa these days.

**TV III:** She says the boar attacked her legs with its horns.

**TV IV:** *[In Hebrew]* Deathly scary.

**TV V:** It’s becoming more and more terrifying.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Since the start of the pandemic,Haifa has been under attack. There have been countless reports of wild boars roaming freely around town.

For many Israelis, this was funny, or curious, or even cute. But for me, it was horrifying. My biggest fear had come true: The monster was back in my life.

This time, however, I decided I wasn’t going to just speed off. This time, I was going to face my fears head-on. You can call it DIY exposure therapy, call it foolishness, call it whatever you want. But I was determined. I was going to confront my demon, and look the beast straight in the eye. I packed a bag, threw in some extra batteries for my recording gear, and set out into the city where the vicious creature rules.

But bravery has its limits. I was most definitely *not* going to embark on this terrifying adventure alone.

Step one - meet the expert.

**Achiad Davidson:** Eh, hi I’m Achiad Davidson and I’m an ecologist.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Achiad shows up in a large hat, worn-out sneakers and a polo shirt. He looks less like a fearless adventurer, and more like a dad on a safari. But somehow, I feel safe. If anyone knows about wild boars — it’s him.

**Achiad Davidson:** I just finished my PhD about wild boars in Haifa, in the Carmel city, which I researched in the past six years.

**Marie Röder (narration):** We start our search in Haifa’s Carmelia neighborhood.

**Achiad Davidson:** Carmelia neighborhood is the neighborhood with the most sightings and reports of wild boars in Haifa.

**Marie Röder (narration):** I feel a rush of adrenaline go through my body.

**Achiad Davidson:** In Haifa there’s on average fifty-forty encounters of humans and wild boars per day.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Forty or fifty encounters *per day*!

This is *actually* going to happen. I’m going to meet the beast. My voice starts to shake. I can feel cold sweat on my lower back. I try to calm down. After all, I’m here with an expert. He’ll know what to do.

**Marie Röder:** And Achiad, just for the case we encounter wild boars today, and they would attack us, what would we need to do?

**Achiad Davidson:** I don’t know.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Oh boy.

**Achiad Davidson:** Climb on a tree, or just stand on your legs and like shout, you know like ‘aaaah’, or run.

**Marie Röder (narration):** “Or run?” Where’s my bike when I need it?!

**Achiad Davidson:** It’s a wild animal. If it decides to attack you, you’re in a real trouble. There is a lot of people in Haifa that don’t come out of their house at night because they are afraid of wild boars.

**Marie Röder (narration):** If you ask me, totally makes sense. I gulp, and Achiad notices. He quickly promises that wild boar attacks are extremely rare. But still…

As we walk around, I move into step two of my exposure therapy - know thine enemy. I ask Achiad a million questions about boars. But they’re all really getting at the same thing - how on earth did we get to the point that these menacing, three-hundred pound beasts rule the roost?

For starters, he tells me, this is their natural habitat.

**Achiad Davidson:** Like, you know, they were first here, we built the cities where they lived.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Haifa was built on a slope of the Carmel Mountain. There are dozens of ravines — or *wadis* — running through the city. And those *wadis* are, and have been for millenia, wild boar territory. So in order to keep the boars *out* of the residential areas, many of those wadis are now fenced off. But, that doesn’t seem to work. The boars are simply too clever.

**Achiad Davidson:** They just bypass the fences, no problem.

**Marie Röder (narration):** The city has become their playground. They enter people’s vegetable gardens, take baths in inflatable kiddie pools, and sleep on discarded mattresses and sofas left on the sidewalk. And *wherever* they go, they leave behind a trail of chaos.

See, wild boars are omnivores. They’ll basically eat whatever they can find. So urban environments like Haifa, with plenty of composts and overflowing trash cans are, to wild boars, like...

**Achiad Davidson:** A free diner. And I can't blame them.

**Marie Röder (narration):** But that’s not all. Wild boars, Achiad continues, as we get into the car to explore another site, reproduce at an incredible pace. And what’s more, their main predator — the leopard — has practically gone extinct in Israel.

**Achiad Davidson:** So there’s no leopards, no other big predators, a lot of food and water.

**Marie Röder (narration):** If that’s the case, I ask Achiad, why don’t *we* become the boars’ natural predator? Their number one enemy? Why don’t we just hunt them down and drive them back into the woods? Not really an option, he explains.

**Achiad Davidson:** In areas with high hunting pressure areas, the female wild boars can reproduce earlier. They become, like, sexually mature earlier.

**Marie Röder (narration):** In other words, the more you hunt, the faster they reproduce. What the hell?! They seem to have an answer to everything…

*[audio getting out of the car]*

**Marie Röder (narration):** We get out of the car and walk over to what’s called in Hebrew a *tzefardea* - a massive green dumpster. It has a heavy chain which is tied to a metal pole — a safety precaution against boars going inside and flipping it over. Elsewhere in the city, bins are placed in little shelters, with grates or gates. But once again, the boars have the upper hand.

**Achiad Davidson:** They learn how to open the gate, and take out the bin.

**Marie Röder:** You got to be kidding.

**Achiad Davidson:** Yeah, it’s the twenty-first century, but we can’t find a solution for wild boars, it’s crazy.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Everywhere we look, there are signs of the monsters. And yet, despite Achiad’s expertise, we still haven’t spotted the beast itself. I can’t decide whether I’m relieved or disappointed. Then, as we jump over a fence and descend into one of the *wadis*, Achiad suddenly pauses. I tense up. He points to the leafy ground, and I mentally prepare for step three of my exposure therapy - the encounter.

**Achiad Davidson:** You see, this… this is like a trail of wild boars, this is wild boar feces. Yes, here is another feces.

**Marie Röder (narration):** My heart starts racing. Wild boar feces? We *must* be close. I try to hide my fear, and instead, put on my investigative reporter’s hat.

**Marie Röder:** And how do you know that this is not dog poop?

**Achiad Davidson:** How do you know? Because it’s like dried figs. So if you look here… *[goes under]*.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Long story short?It looks different. Having learned more than I ever thought I’d know about boar poop, we follow a few more leads and trails, till Achiad once again points to the ground. This time? Footprints.

**Achiad Davidson:** You see the ground here, there is a party here every night. They just go through all of the gardens, eat anything they can find.

**Marie Röder (narration):** We hide out in the brush and wait. It’s hot and there’s seemingly endless mosquitos.

**Marie Röder:** I think I’m getting eaten by mosquitos.

**Achiad Davidson:** Yeah, me too.

**Marie Röder (narration):** But we are committed. With every crackling sound, every rustling noise, I turn around, fully expecting to meet the enemy.

Nothing.

Although I've spent the entire day on edge, I'm now surprisingly let down. Achiad comforts me.

**Achiad Davidson:** It’s a wild animal, you can’t invite them.

**Marie Röder (narration):** A few hours later, and with the boars nowhere in sight, we decide to call it quits. My DIY exposure therapy was officially a failure. And what’s worse, in the days and weeks that follow, *everybody* around me seems to come across the animal. I get constant texts and calls from friends and colleagues who share accounts of their harrowing encounters with boars.

**Skyler Inman:** Marie, you’re not going to believe this, but I actually just saw a bunch of boars running across…

**Adina Karpuj:** And all of the sudden out of the trees, comes this enormous wild boar and like dashes the other way like sprints, OK. *[goes under]*.

**Skyler Inman:** I wasn’t even looking for them, but made me think of you.

**Marie Röder (narration):** I read up on exposure therapy online. *Actual* exposure therapy, which — it turns out — is way more sophisticated and elaborate than *my* miserable attempt. On anxietycanada.com it says - in bold letters - “be patient and take your time,” and, “the more often you practise, the faster the fear will fade.”

So, let this be a warning to the boars of Haifa. Step four of my exposure therapy? I’ll be back! ​​

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

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Marie Röder. Marie actually *did* return to Haifa, a bunch of times. But to her delight slash dismay, she never *actually* managed to encounter a wild boar. So on one of those trips, she visited the only place in town where she *knew* there would be a porcine presence: *Ma’ayan HaBira*, the city’s most famous pork restaurant. The only problem? Marie’s a vegetarian. So she asked our production intern Laura Capelhuchnik — a pork-eating Brazilian — to join her. Here’s Marie again.

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

**Marie Röder (narration):** *Ma’ayan HaBira* feels like a mix between an Eastern European tavern, a British pub and a Middle-Eastern *stekiya*. The walls are covered with agricultural tools and musical instruments. There’s even a vintage bike hanging from the ceiling. But the *most* noticeable thing about this joint? The people. It seems as if they are a permanent fixture of the place.

**Marie Röder:** And how often do you come here?

**Elias:** A lot.

**Marie Röder:** Yes?

**Elias:** Yes. *[In Hebrew]* More or less every day.

**Marie Röder:** So you come here for… for lunch?

**Elias:** Yes, for lunch, yeah.

**Marie Röder:** And for dinner?

**Elias:** Also. Also.

**Marie Röder:** For breakfast?

**Elias:** Also. Everything, everything. *[Laughs]*. We eat meat every every time. *[Laughs].*

**Marie Röder:** Wow, wow.

**Uri:** I love people, so this is the place to meet people, you know.

**Atuna:** Everyday I am here.

**Marie Röder:** Every day?

**Atuna:** Every day. Every day for four, five, six hours.

**Marie (narration):** I secretly wonder whether they come here so often because it’s the only place in Haifa where humans are still ahead in the battle against the pig.

Meir - the owner - interrupts my thoughts and greets us as if we’re family.

**Meir Reuven:** I’m the owner of *Ma’ayan HaBira*. My name is Meir Reuven and I born in Haifa and I live in Kiryat Ata.

**Marie Röder (narration):** He tells us all about the history of the place; how his immigrant parents opened it in the early years of the state.

**Meir Reuven:** I was seven years old. After the school I came to here to help.

**Marie Röder (narration):** And how, over time, it became a favorite dive for local harbour workers. Today, he says with satisfaction, it’s basically an institution.

**Marie Röder:** And what’s on the menu?

**Meir Reuven:** Varenikes, Kreplach, Kishke, Regel Crusha. All of the… All of the food is Jewish food.

**Marie Röder:** But usually Jewish food doesn’t have pork in it, does it?

**Meir Reuven:** But in Romania and Poland it was with pork. My mother was from Romania and my father was from Poland.

**Marie Röder:** And do you have anything for vegetarians?

**Meir Reuven:** What… what is this vegetarian?

**Marie Röder (narration):** Well, at least Laura would be well-fed.

**Waiter:** This is a pork. It’s smoked spare ribs.

**Laura Capelhuchnik:** Ah, OK.

**Waiter:** Enjoy.

**Marie Röder:** Can you describe how it tastes like?

**Laura Capelhuchnik:** It’s a little bit spicy. But also very soft. It’s delicious. This is a lot of meat. Probably I won’t eat dinner. No, I’m just kidding.

**Marie Röder (narration):** We stay for a while, chat with Meir and the other diners, joke around and have some beers. It’s all very nice. And safe. But not for a single minute do I forget that the wild beast is still lurking just outside.

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

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Zev Levi scored and sound designed this episode with music from Blue Dot Sessions. Sela Waisblum mixed it all up. Thanks to our wonderful dubbers, David Harman, Asaf Bar Yossef, Ksenia Miliutinskaia and Boaz Dekel, and to Zvi Lederman, Niva Ashkenazi, Michael Vivier, Alicia Vergara, Michael Friedman, Wayne Hoffman, Esther Werdiger, Yuval Cherlow, Jeffrey Yoskowitz, Matan Abrahams, Anne Silber, Haim Oron, Roee Gilron, Sheila Lambert, Erica Frederick, Jeff Feig and Joy Levitt.

You can catch up on all our past episodes on our site - israelstory.org - or by searching for Israel Story wherever you get your podcasts. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story. Lastly, if you’re interested in sponsoring episodes of Israel Story, email us at [sponsor@israelstory.org](mailto:sponsor@prx.org).

Our staff includes Yochai Maital, Zev Levi, Yoshi Fields, Skyler Inman, Naomi Schneider, Adina Karpuj, Elie Bleier, Sharon Rapaport and Rotem Zin. Sonia Epelbaum, Laura Capelhuchnik, Tanya Huyard and Matthew Litman are our wonderful production interns. Jeff Umbro and Jesse Adler, from The Podglomerate, are our marketing team.

I’m Mishy Harman and we’ll be back next time with a brand new Israel Story episode. So till then, *Shalom shalom*, oink oink,and *yalla bye.*

--- END ---