**Mishy Harman (narration):** August 9, 2001 was a very big day for me. I still remember almost everything about it. I was eighteen years old, and the moment I had long been awaiting - with a combination of excitement and dread - had finally arrived. I was going into the army.

Since I was one of the first of my friends to be enlisted, everyone was there to send me off. And as we all hugged and said goodbye, I realized this was the start of an entirely new chapter in life. I was proud to serve and defend my country, of course, and I was extremely happy about the unit that had selected me. But I was also very conscious of the fact that my previous life was over.

I had just finished high-school, and had enjoyed a month of pure freedom. And now, that freedom was going to disappear: The night before, my long curls had been sheared, and I went from looking like a hippie teenager to a neophyte serviceman.

I hauled my big bag - filled with all kinds of unfamiliar gadgets my older brother said would get me through basic training - onto the bus to the *bakum*, the military base where new IDF recruits get sorted into units. And that was it. I was physically and mentally leaving my life in Jerusalem, and venturing into the unknown.

At the *bakum* I went through a *sharsheret chiyul* - a series of stations at the end of which you’re formally part of the army. In one station I got my uniform, in a second my dog tags, and in a third my military ID. I clearly remember the station where they x-rayed my teeth, in case I ever had to be identified by dental records alone, and the one in which I was asked who should get the monetary compensation - sixty thousand shekels if I recall correctly - if I died.

Just after lunchtime, I was officially a soldier. And honestly, it was a good feeling. It was now my turn to protect my country.

At the exact same time as all this was happening, 22-year-old Izz al-Din al-Masri walked into a Sbarro branch in the center of Jerusalem - a place where I would often hang out with friends - and blew himself up. Fifteen Israelis were killed and more than a hundred and thirty were injured.

*[Newsreels from the day of the attack]*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** It was one of the most devastating attacks early on in the Second Intifada. And it was an attack that till this day, remains etched in the minds of many many Israelis.

**Mishy Harman:** It’s August 9, 2021. Just before 2pm. I’m standing on the corner of Jaffa and King George streets, right in front of what used to be Sbarro and is now a *Ma’afe Ne’eman*, a pastry shop. It’s a sweltering day, it’s like a million degrees outside. Dozens and dozens of people walking around. Stepping into the Café Ne’eman. Excuse me, do you guys speak English?

**Woman I:** Yeah.

**Mishy Harman:** Can I ask you a question?

**Woman II:** You could try.

**Mishy Harman:** OK. Do you know what happened right here exactly twenty years ago?

**Woman II:** Yes. The Sbarro suicide bomb. Yeah.

**Man I:** Yeah, there was a big explosion in Sbarro.

**Man II:** Arab terrorist came and it exploded.

**Woman III:** Yeah, it was a terrible day.

**Man III:** Right here was a man with a bomb.

**Man IV:** Yeah, it was a bombing, terrorist attack. It was Sbarro pizza.

**Woman IV:** Yes, I remember Sbarro.

**Man IV:** It was twenty years ago today? Wow, time flies.

**Woman IV:** Wow, I’m getting emotional.

**Mishy Harman:** Why?

**Woman IV:** People was killed because they are Jews. That’s why.

**Mishy Harman:** Do you remember that day?

**Man V:** Yes I do, actually. One of my sister’s friends were here, and was killed.

**Woman III:** I know two people who were here when it happened.

**Mishy Harman:** Who were killed?

**Woman III:** No, injured.

**Woman V:** Two of them - Michal and Malki - from my neighborhood, Ramot in Jerusalem, they were killed, and you talk to me now and I feel that it happened today.

**Woman VI:** My daughter had a classmate whose family was decimated at the Sbarro *[in Hebrew]* terrorist attack.

**Woman V:** My daughter is their friend. She is now thirty-eight, mother for seven children, and they stopped their life at fifteen, fifteen-and-a-half.

**Man VI:** You know, I was born in 1993, when the Oslo process was signed between the Israeli government and the PLO. And they say that we are the babies, the children, that will eat the fruit of the peace. But my childhood memories is terrorist attacks.

**Mishy Harman:** And what goes through your head when you pass through here?

**Woman III:** Ummm… A mixture of sadness and like a sense of eternity that no matter what happens we’re still here.

**Man IV:** I mean human beings are ultimately resilient. We’ll bounce back from almost anything. We bounced back from a Holocaust.

**Woman VII:** It’s the story of the Jewish people, the Jewish people they know how to come up from the tragedy and continue and move on and rebuild.

**Woman III:** We are the Jews. We are very strong. And we are growing from the ashes. And we keep on living. Keep on living.

**Mishy Harman:** Thank you.

**Woman III:** You’re welcome.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I’m Mishy Harman, and this is Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by Tablet Magazine and the Jerusalem Foundation. In our episode today, **Sbarro - Twenty Years Later**, we go back to the attack, and hear from some of those who lost everything on that dreadful dreadful day. Just a quick warning before we begin - this episode is all about grief and pain following an incredibly violent act, so it might not be suitable for all listeners. With that, here’s journalist Danna Harman with **Act One - The Victims.**

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**Danna Harman (narration):** One of the more trivial things that always stuck with me about the Sbarro terror attack was what a diverse crowd happened to be at the fast food restaurant on that hot August afternoon in 2001.

**Esther Shoshan:** My name is E sther Shoshan. I was born in Argentina. I grew up in Paris. I was married in Geneva.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** My name is Shmuel Greenbaum. I grew up in Brooklyn, New York. Traditional Jewish family.

**Arnold Roth:**I'm Arnold Roth. I was born in 1952 in Melbourne, Australia, to parents who - like everybody that I knew - were Holocaust survivors.

**Avivah Raziel:** Hello, my name is Avivah Raziel Erenfeld. I’m the mother of Michal Raziel. She was my youngest daughter. She was sixteen years old.

**Uriel Maoz:** I’m Uriel Maoz. Almost fifty-two years old. I am the bereaved brother of Tehila, who was killed in Sbarro in Jerusalem. That's it, That’s me.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Those are voices of the ones that were left behind. The ones who were *killed* were their kids. Their wives. Their sisters. Esther’s ten-year-old girl. Shmuel’s pregnant wife. Arnold and Aviva’s teenage daughters, best friends from the *Ezra* youth movement. And Uriel’s sister, Tehila, the pretty eighteen-year-old shift manager who’d just opened up a third cash register because it was so crazy busy that day. So crammed.

It was an especially popular Sbarro branch, a Kosher one, at the heart of downtown Jerusalem. So, it was always, to be fair, pretty crammed. But August 9, 2001 was even busier than usual. It was the middle of the summer break, school was out, *yeshivas* were off too, and many parents had taken vacation days to be with their kids.

There was a family of five, originally from Holland, that stood in Tehila’s line. There was an older man, from San Paulo, Brazil. And there was a young doctor with her eight-year-old daughter who’d just arrived from Tblisi, Georgia, to start a new life in the Jewish state.

So yes. They *did* have that in common. They were all Jewish. Jewish, and I guess, fond of pizza. And also unlucky. Very unlucky.

Besides the possibility that they might have never gathered in Israel to begin with, the victims of that terror attack could have simply missed a bus that day, or chosen a Falafel place down the block, or even stopped at the corner to tie their shoelaces and lingered for a moment. Or. Or. Or. One’s mind, *my* mind at least, races with possibilities of how they could have been anywhere else. Anywhere but there.

But, they were there.

**Esther Shoshan:** The summer break was coming to an end, and the school year was about to begin, and we needed to buy some school supplies. So everyone came with me. All the girls. We got everything we needed, and then we decided to go into Sbarro. We never ate there. I had never eaten there.

**Danna Harman (narration):** That’s Esther, who’s the granddaughter of the famous Moroccan rabbi and miracle worker, the Baba Sali. Like her grandfather, she too has strong intuitions about things, and when she walked into Sbarro that afternoon, she says, she felt something was off. She wanted to leave. And besides, there was no room to sit except for in the upstairs gallery, where the AC wasn’t working too well and the lighting was dim.

But she’d already coordinated with her eldest daughter, who’d gone to park the car together with her youngest daughter. They had set to meet at Sbarro, and that was that. This was - mind you - before everyone had cell phones to change plans over and again.

So Esther stayed put with her three middle daughters and took the not-so-great seats upstairs. That’s another ‘what if’ moment that actually ended up saving *her* life, although not that of her daughter Yocheved, who walked back down with another sister, Miriam, to pick up the food.

**Esther Shoshan:** So we sat down, and the girls said, “OK, it's time to go pick up our food.”

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** I spoke with her in the morning, she was very excited. Shoshana was always very excited. She was a passionate person, passionate about life. I think she didn't tell me that she was going to Sbarro. I don't remember if she told me or not. She just told me I think that she was going to a friend.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Shmuel Greenbaum wasn’t even in Israel on the day of the attack. He had accompanied his wife Shoshana to Israel but had returned to Brooklyn a week earlier, because his boss didn’t agree to give him any more vacation days. Shmuel was upset about it at the time, but there wasn’t much he could do. So Shoshana, who’d just turned thirty-one, stayed in Israel by herself.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** She was... ummm… she wanted to make the world better.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Shmuel and Shoshana were newlyweds.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** There was this one matchmaker who set me up with different people, a lot of them really not appropriate or…

**Danna Harman:** What was important to you?

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** I wanted somebody who... somebody who I was attracted to actually.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Shoshana had grown up in LA. Like Shmuel, she had become religious a little later in life, and also like him, was considered a bit old, in that religious community, to be unmarried. They were both over thirty when they met. And they clicked right away.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** I couldn't hold myself back, after the fourth date I proposed.

**Danna Harman:** Really?

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** Yeah.

**Danna Harman (narration):** They met over Thanksgiving, and by spring-time, were married. A couple of months later, as part of Shoshana’s masters program in Jewish education at Yeshiva University, they traveled together to Jerusalem for her to take part in a six-week-long study abroad program.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** And we were kind of nervous about it, because the Second Intifada had begun already. And there were terrorist acts going on.

**Danna Harman (narration):** As it turned out, though, those weeks together in Israel were like the honeymoon they never had. Shmuel would walk with Shoshana on her way to classes, and then, in the late afternoon, once the day had cooled down a bit, they would go on long strolls together, discovering hidden corners of the city. They felt it was the beginning of a lot of good things.

Uriel Maoz, Tehila’s brother, was born as Cedric Lafour in Paris, France, where his parents trace their Gaelic Protestant roots way back. His dad was actually studying to be a priest, until he felt the calling of… Judaism. And so the entire family converted - Uriel was just four at the time - and moved to Israel.

Uriel’s dad became as orthodox and devoted to his Judaism as he had once been to his Christianity. He was ordained as a rabbi in Jerusalem, and then moved up to Zfat. Then back to Jerusalem. Uriel’s parents eventually divorced, and his dad went on to marry again, and again, with Uriel picking up half- and step- brothers and sisters along the way. Uriel grew especially close to two of those sisters, Tehila and Mili, his dad’s two daughters from his second marriage, who were roughly a decade younger than him.

Those girls, a bit lost between the various households and blended families, began looking up to Uriel as a father figure of sorts, he says. They even lived with him for a while when they were finishing up high school, and working at Sbarro to make extra cash. “Were they good friends?” I ask him.

**Uriel Maoz:** They were great friends. They were best friends. They were glued to each other.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Both Tehila and Mili had wanted to take work off that day, but couldn't find someone to cover both their shifts. So Tehila told her younger sister that at least one of them should go.

**Uriel Maoz:** Have fun, enjoy yourself. I’m the shift manager, I am responsible, so I will stay. But you should go!

**Danna Harman (narration):** Just before 2pm,the terrorist, Izz a-Din Shuheil al-Masri, entered Sbarro. He was only a few years older than Tehila.

**Uriel Maoz:** He was dressed up as a hippy. A guitar case with peace and love stickers.

**Danna Harman (narration):** He stood in line - Tehila’s newly-opened line - ordered something to eat and, well, I don’t know if he ate or not, but about ten minutes later, he blew himself up. The guitar case was packed with explosives, but also with nails, nuts, bolts and screws, all to assure maximum damage.

**Esther Shoshan:** I didn’t know what happened. Everything was suddenly black. And quiet. I thought it was a power outage. But then someone yelled, “it’s a terrorist attack, it’s an explosion. Everyone get out. Get out.” But I didn’t want to run out, I wanted to find my children. And then I saw bodies on the floor, and chunks of flesh, and limbs and we were trampling on top of the bodies, and being pushed outside. And I kept on saying “no! I’m going back to find my daughters. Where are they? Where are they”?

**Danna Harman (narration):** Esther’s oldest daughter, along with the youngest one – remember they had gone to park the car – arrived at Sbarro literally seconds after the bomb went off. They rushed inside and saw their ten-year-old sister Yocheved laying on the floor.

**Esther Shoshan:** And where the heart was supposed to be, we saw this big black hole. Poor girl.

**Danna Harman (narration):** They also saw that their other sister, fifteen-year-old Miriam, was on fire.

**Esther Shoshan:** They tried to put out the flames, then she was rushed away in an ambulance.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Miriam, it would soon turn out, had sixty nails lodged in her body, a hole in her right thigh, third degree burns on forty percent of her body, and a ruptured spleen.

**Esther Shoshan:** Oh, she suffered so much. She still suffers tremendously. Things still aren’t OK. We thought she would never be able to get pregnant but, thank God, today she has kids.

**Uriel Maoz:** I grabbed my keys and ran to my jeep.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Uriel, Tehila’s brother, was working as a security guard at the time. He heard the call for ambulances broadcast on his walkie-talkie.

**Uriel Maoz:** I drove like crazy, it took me seventeen minutes to get to the center of town. The worst thoughts race through your head, like ‘please God that she’s only badly injured.’ That's the prayer.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Avivah heard the news on the radio. She was at Hadassah hospital, ironically, where she worked as a nurse.

**Avivah Raziel:** And I said, “wow, there must have been a lot of young people there because Sbarro is in the center of town, it’s a pizza shop and kids like it.” And then, of course, you call home, everybody calls home to see whether... So my son-in-law answered, he said, “yeah, everybody's alright. Everybody's there. I said where is Michal?” And then I tried calling her and she didn't answer the phone. Then I said, “so maybe we should calling the hospitals.” You know, because then it was sort of… I’m not a worrier… I don’t… Now I am.

**Arnold Roth:** We didn't know where Malki was. We didn't know what had happened to her for twelve full hours.

**Danna Harman (narration):** When Arnold and his wife Frimet couldn't reach their daughter Malki, they started racing from hospital to hospital. They frantically walked up and down hallways full of people wounded in the blast. They got directed off into rooms with social workers and repeatedly filled out forms like zombies. There was blood and confusion and screaming and silence and people mumbling guilty prayers that their kid, their wife, their father will somehow be the one spared.

**Arnold Roth:** We walked into a scene from Dante's *Inferno* when we arrived at the emergency room at Hadassah.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Arnold was taken to a hospital bed where doctors were busy trying to save a child's life. It was not Malki. He was led to the basement morgue, and shown a corpse of a child – but that wasn’t Malki either.

**Arnold Roth:** She was already in a place far away, at the government pathology lab in Yaffo.

**Danna Harman (narration):** At 2AM, Arnold got a call. It ended twelve agonizing hours of unfathomable panic, but replaced them with something even worse.

**Arnold Roth:** It really was as if everything that I'd learned in life until that moment, evaporated. I was in complete *terra incognita*, no idea what to do. Only that something totally unjust, something against everything that I’ve ever learned about good and evil, has happened. The floor was really falling from under me. I… My wife was standing next to me when I took the phone call from one of our sons. And she reacted by beginning to scream and then walked out of the house, ran out of the house, into the night.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Avivah and her entire family were also scrambling to find Michal.

**Avivah Raziel:** And then my sister came back. She said “it's her.” I remember the… the hands going ‘it's her, it's her… you can go down, you can go down and see for yourself, but it's her. It's her.’ I said, “of course I want to go down to see her. I want to go down to see her. I want to see *her*, you know, to say… I don't know to say goodbye to… Something!” So we go down to the morgue and of course, the morgue was locked and we had to wait for the guy who would come and unlock the morgue. Then we walked in and they're all in drawers. They pull out a drawer and it wasn't Michal at all. It was the other girl and she looked awful. And then they pulled out the other drawer and then it was Michal, and Michal’s face looked not not… not bad, I mean, she had these signs on, you know, that you got from… you don't know, but you get from *resisim* you’ve got these black marks.

**Uriel Maoz:** Tehila was taken to Hadassah Ein Karen, and fought for her life for an hour-and-a-half. I mean the doctors fought for her life. She was already gone. Like half her brain was blown away. So, there wasn’t much to do. In a way, I’m glad she didn’t make it. She would never have been able to live normally.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** So a few hours later they called and… and… and her uncle was crying. And you know, he couldn't couldn't control himself. And so I made arrangements.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Shmuel got on a plane.But Shoshana’s parents, Alan and Shifra, who were at home in LA, couldn’t get a flight that would get them to Israel in time for the funeral, which according to Jewish tradition, always takes place as soon as possible, even that very same day. So Shmuel was there at the funeral without them. Shoshana was their only child, and… she was pregnant.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** She was expecting her first child.

**Danna Harman:** Your first child.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** Our first child.

**Danna Harman:** Yeah.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** Thank you.

**Danna Harman (narration):** What happens in the aftermath of such a violent and shocking tragedy? What happens once the middle-of-the-night funerals and the crying and the numb days of *shiva* all end? Once the media coverage wanes, and the country returns to its normal pace?

What do you do with the absence of the person who was, only moments ago, part of your everyday life? Where do you park your grief? Anger? Confusion? How do you make sense of it all? What narrative does it fit into, and is there a way to honor the memories of those killed, that somehow feels right?

Each family has its own way of looking for answers. The Roths, for example, focused on two things: For one, they started a charity in their daughter’s name - the Malki Foundation - that supports families in Israel (Jews and Muslims alike, by the way), who have disabled children. It’s a cause close to their heart, because their youngest child is severely disabled herself, and big sister Malki was, says her dad, the best ever sister when it came to caring for and protecting her.

The other thing the Roths focus on is justice. While Izz a-Din al-Masri, the suicide bomber, was - of course - himself blown to pieces in the attack, one of his accomplices, someone who is often referred to as the “mastermind behind the operation” - the one who not only scooped out and choose the crowded branch on the corner of King George and Jaffa Streets, figuring out the busiest time and day, but who also accompanied the bomber by taxi and then by foot to the very doorstep of Sbarro - is, today, a free woman.

Ahlam Tamimi, an attractive, twenty-year-old university student and part-time journalist from the Palestinian village of Nabi Saleh, walked away from the blast, turned towards Damascus Gate, got into a taxi to Ramallah and immediately went on a local Islamist TV station called *Istiqlal*, to report on the attack she had just helped orchestrate. She was, within weeks, tracked down by the *shabak*, arrested, tried by a military court and sent to sixteen life sentences in jail. She was later asked by a TV crew making a documentary film whether she knew how many children had been killed that day. She knew the answer, of course, but played it up for effect. “Three,” she said. She was corrected - “eight” - and then (and this is what you can’t hear in the tape) she allowed a slow and pleased smile to spread across her face.

**Arnold Roth:** I cannot understand how so many people are at peace with the idea that this woman who trumpets the murders that she carried out, she trumpets the fact that she sought Jewish children and she succeeded, and she was disappointed - she says it explicitly - that she didn't murder more of them is still free.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Tamimi was released in October 2011, as part of the controversial ‘Shalit Deal’ - that was when an Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, who had been in Hamas captivity for over five years, was released in exchange for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners sitting in Israeli jails. Two-hundred-and-eighty of them, like Tamimi, had “blood on their hands.”

And not only was Tamimi released, but she was allowed to travel to Jordan where she remains today, free, married to her cousin, whom she got to know while in jail. For years, Interpol had an arrest warrant out for her, but dropped it just recently. And Tamimi? She’s busied herself, over there in Amman, hosting a Hamas TV talk show about Palestinian prisoners, giving interviews and posting on social media. She is in no way repentant. Quite the opposite.

The Roths cannot stomach this.

Malki’s mother, Frimet, is American, so Malki too, had US citizenship. And this gives the family legal recourse: They have successfully petitioned the US to demand that Jordan extradite their daughter’s killer to America, to stand trial. Thus far, Jordan has not obliged, and - for a host of complicated reasons - the Americans don't seem to be applying much pressure.

**Arnold Roth:** There's a great deal of a much more negative emotion than the simple emotions of a father or a mother grieving for the loss of a greatly-loved child. There’s a great deal of anger, in our case, a great deal of anger.

**Danna Harman (narration):** The Roths have been fighting to bring Tamimi to justice for many years - talking to any diplomat or politician who will listen, writing scathing op-eds and articles, appearing on TV.

**Arnold Roth:** It's really quite a challenge in life, not to sound like a crank while not letting go of the issue, even as the years go by. And what we've sought to achieve hasn't happened yet. So I can only say there's a tightrope walking act that we're engaged in, and we won't be giving it up.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Arnold is aware that many may look at his quest for justice, and see, instead, revenge, or even obsession. He disputes that narrative time and again.

**Arnold Roth:** We are not bitter and twisted and foaming at the mouth.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Or...

**Arnold Roth:** I may look to you like a foaming at the mouth lunatic…

**Danna Harman (narration):** Or, again...

**Arnold Roth:** Even saying that, it makes me feel like - and sound like, and fear that I'm being perceived as - a crank. But I'm not a conspiracist. And I'm not a birther. And I don't have views on the Rabin assassination.

**Danna Harman (narration):** But this is what feels right to him.

Avivah, whose daughter Michal was killed alongside her best friend Malki, respects the Roths’ campaign to bring Tamimi to justice. But it’s not her journey. First of all, her daughter, unlike Malki, was not an American citizen so she can’t weigh in on the extradition demand. But it goes deeper than that.

**Avivah Raziel:** I'm not involved in that at all.

**Danna Harman:** How come?

**Avivah Raziel:** Because I don't want to be involved in it. Because it costs too much pain and it costs too much *ogmat nefesh*. And, you know, and I don't need this.

**Danna Harman (narration):** “*Ogmat nefes*h,” says Avivah. That means anguish.

I ask her if, twenty years later, the anguish lessens. If there are any respites from the grief. I ask if those what-could-have-beens still roll around and around in her head all the time.

**Avivah Raziel:** I stopped very quickly asking ‘why’ because there's no answer to the ‘why.’ It's useless to ask why.

**Danna Harman:** Yeah.

**Avivah Raziel:** It just makes you ummm… It just frustrating. And it's, it's, it doesn't help you to ask ‘why.’

**Danna Harman (narration):** Who am I to say, really, but it somehow seemed like, of those I spoke to, Avivah had emerged healthiest from the ordeal. Years before the Sbarro attack, she had lost her husband to cancer. He was in his thirties, and she was left raising four children on her own. Maybe, I wonder, she just had more training in grief.

**Avivah Raziel:** I’m not bitter. What's the point of being bitter? I have three more children, *baruch hashem* they’re all married, eighteen wonderful grandchildren, healthy *baruch hashem*. I mean, what do you’ve got to complain about?

**Danna Harman (narration):** Thenoise you hear in the background of this recording is because we interviewed Avivah at a summer fair in Ramot, her old neighborhood in Jerusalem. That’s where Michal, together with the Roths’ daughter Malki, grew up. It’s an annual happening - music performances, raffles, cotton candy - organized in Michal and Malki’s honor by youngsters from their youth movement, all of whom - at this point - were born after the two girls were killed. Proceeds from the fair, by the way, go to the Malki Foundation.

**Avivah Raziel:** I think a sixteen-year-old has to have her life celebrated. In my opinion, to memorialize and to make it heavy and sad and everything, it's not my way. I think that we should remember them, all the good things they do, and the happy times and we talk about Michal a lot, and remember silly things that she did and funny things that she did, and annoying things that she did. And… You know she's part of the family all the time.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Avivah has come to the bazaar this year with four of her grandchildren, who are pulling her in every which way. Two want pizza. A third wants to go play on the grass, and the last one wants to sit in the stands and listen to the concert. Things seem OK. Normal. Except, of course, there’s never a real respite, Avivah tells me. There’s a sadness that remains forever, above or beneath the surface.

**Avivah Raziel:** When I started to realize that I couldn't memorize her. I found it difficult to memorize her in my mind. And I thought to myself, ‘what kind of mother are you that you are you can't remember your daughter?’

**Danna Harman (narration):** Though Shoshana *was* an American citizen, Shmuel has also chosen not to focus his energies on the Roths’ campaign.

*His* focus, instead, has been on something else altogether - spreading the gospel, so to speak, of kindness. He started planning it out already on that long flight back to Israel, to make it in time for Shoshana’s funeral. He soon launched a whole organization called “Partners in Kindness,” he wrote a book called *A Daily Dose of Kindness*, and he began sending out a newsletter, also called *A Daily Dose of Kindness.* On all these channels he promotes and spreads information about - well - how to be kind. That’s his response to terror, he says. That’s what makes sense for him.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** When you're going through a traumatic life experience, the whole world looks gray. Everything is negative everything is… you're afraid of everything, it's negative. But when you see other people in the world doing positive things, it can pull you out of it. And that's helped a lot of people. And people write to me, about different experiences that they've had, and how the emails pulled them out of it.

**Danna Harman (narration):** But while his approach has helped others, Shmuel himself hasn’t really managed to find solace, or even a way forward.

He still lives in Brooklyn, but tries to come to Israel every year on the anniversary of Shoshana’s death. He visits her grave and spends time with her parents, who moved here from Los Angeles after she was killed.

We meet up for our interview during his annual visit, at his friend’s apartment in Beit Shemesh. We have to keep shushing the family’s eight kids who are peeping into the living room, and hanging down over the partition to the kitchen nearby. They’re all interested in - and trying to eavesdrop on - our conversation.

Having kids, a lot of kids, means everything in the orthodox Jewish world, Shmuel says by way of explanation.

**Danna Harman:** Do you have kids?

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** No. No. My wife was killed when she was expecting.

**Danna Harman:** And you never remarried?

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** I hadn't met the right one. That's actually why I'm in Israel now.

**Danna Harman:** Oh.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** Yeah.

**Danna Harman:** Why now?

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** Because I've exhausted my possibilities outside of Israel. So I thought there was some great girls in Israel. Let's try here.

**Danna Harman:** Did it take you twenty years to be ready for it or no you were ready just the right girl wasn’t..

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** It wasn't ready. It was… It was.. You know, sometimes… Sometimes it wasn't the right girl, sometimes maybe I was too picky.

**Danna Harman:** Funny that with Shoshana, you weren't picky at all. She was… just felt right and that was that.

**Shmuel Greenbaum:** She was exactly what I was looking for.

**Danna Harman (narration):** A lot of the families of the victims speak of, or hint at, a lingering sense of guilt that weighs down upon - and disrupts the lives of - those who keep on living.

Esther says that those suffering most in her family are her eldest child, Rachel, and her youngest one, Chaya Odelia - the ones who went to park the car - and just missed the blast.

**Esther Shoshan:** They’re stuck in life. They can’t do many things. They have a lot of fear. They are constantly afraid that something is about to blow up, that there is about to be an attack. So it's hard, it's hard for everyone, till now.

**Danna Harman (narration):**On that fateful day, as Rachel was dropping off her mom and siblings at the restaurant, a back-seat argument broke out between two of the younger siblings. Both wanted to stay with Rachel and go park the car. Rachel was exasperated and informed her mom that she simply couldn’t deal with two annoying little sisters at once.

**Esther Shoshan:** So Yocheved gave in to Chaya.

**Danna Harman (narration):** And then she was killed.

**Esther Shoshan:** Until today Chaya keeps on saying, “it's because of me, it's because of me, it's because of me.”

**Danna Harman (narration):** Other families have their own versions of that same story. Uriel, once very close to his younger sister Mili, the one who didn’t go to work at Sbarro that day, hints that their connection these days is more strained.

**Uriel Maoz:** It's really hard for me to see Mili. First of all, she just looks exactly like Tehila. Exactly. And I eat myself up because I prevented Mili from going to see Tehila’s body.

**Danna Harman (narration):** I suggest that - as her big brother - he was just trying to protect her.

**Uriel Maoz:** Yeah. I didn't want that to be the last image she had of Tehila. She was just fifteen. Today, I no longer know if that was the right thing to do. Mili resents me. She feels like I didn’t give her the opportunity to say goodbye. Today, in hindsight, I think I would have allowed her to see Tehila.

**Danna Harman (narration):** In fact I get the feeling that relations between everyone in the Maoz family are strained.

**Uriel Maoz:** You know, we all went our separate ways. I don’t go to family memorial services anymore.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Uriel has developed his own mechanisms for memorializing his sister Tehila. Original ways, to put it mildly. But ones that work for him nevertheless. Almost immediately, he turned to dark humor.

**Uriel Maoz:** Laughing is healthy, so you're allowed to joke.

**Danna Harman (narration):** He posts provocative messages online, making fun of what he calls the whole “bereavement industry,” in which he feels he’s supposed to play a very prescribed role.

**Uriel Maoz:** Here’s the original Facebook post. I took a photo of the terrorist who blew himself up at Sbarro, and took a pic of my sister standing at the cash register, and I added speech bubbles. She asks him, “mister would you like another slice of pizza?” and he answers “no, I’m about to explode.”

**Danna Harman (narration):** Many people, as might be expected - members of his own family, members of the other families of the victims and just the general public - didn’t like that post or any of the others he has come up with since.

**Uriel Maoz:** I got kicked out of the “black humor” Facebook group.

**Danna Harman (narration):** But he doesn’t really care.

**Uriel Maoz:** I’m proud of myself.

**Danna Harman (narration):** He makes jokes about the terror attack, because - I guess - he thinks laughing is just as good as crying. But, that said, I imagine he has done his fair share of crying over the years, too. And, he’s the first to admit that he is not well.

**Uriel Maoz:** I have borderline personality, complex post trauma, fibromyalgia. Would I be different if death hadn’t come knocking on my door? Who knows. It might have come out under other circumstances. But the attack was the straw that broke the camel's back. So now I’m a camel with a broken back who keeps marching.

**Danna Harman (narration):** Two years *after* the Sbarro attack, Uriel was in Mahne Yehuda - the famous outdoor market in Jerusalem - when another devastating terror attack took place. Seventeen people were killed and over a hundred injured. Uriel had been inside a bread shop, and was somehow not harmed. But then, he recalls, amidst the chaos and the cries for help, he just walked out of the shop, like a zombie, navigating between piles of torn limbs and streams of blood, without offering a helping hand. He - a former first aid responder and security officer - simply walked home. His days of helping others were over. He could not, he says, even help himself.

He subsequently left Israel and tried to live in France, with his second wife. But he couldn’t outrun his ghosts. He would feel claustrophobic when stuck in closed spaces. A stalled underground metro could make him break out in a sweat. One time, a window display at a department store – it was a mannequin wearing inner tubes as part of a summer sale – totally freaked him out.

**Uriel Maoz:** I just froze in front of it. I freaked out. Because I was sure he was about to press a switch and blow us all up. I thought it was a suicide vest.

**Danna Harman (narration):** A few years later he returned toIsrael. One evening he found himself at his sister Tehila’s grave – he has no idea how he got there – with a hammer, ready to smash the tombstone. He *hates* what his father has had engraved on that tombstone, he explains, starting with the three letters - *hey, yud, dalet -* affixed to Tehila’s name. They stand for…

**Uriel Maoz:** *Hashem yikom dama.*

**Danna Harman (narration):** *Hashem yikom dama.* May God avenge her blood - and are, traditionally, added to the name of anyone killed in a terror attack.

**Uriel Maoz:** I don't want *hashem yikom dama*. I’m not looking for revenge. It won’t bring her back.

**Danna Harman (narration):** But still, a hammer? He needed, and received, help.

These days, Uriel has made his peace with the tombstone, and visits the grave from time to time with his kids - he has four - or with friends. He usually brings along a six pack of beers.

**Uriel Maoz:** I crack open a cold one and say ‘*l'chaim*,’ to life!

**Danna Harman (narration):** He pulls out the weeds, lights a candle and recites a prayer.

Often, he wears a spaghetti strainer on his head. This, he tells me, is because *his* god, he has decided, is the flying spaghetti monster. It’s as good a god, he says, as any other.

Much of the interview with Uriel took place in his trailer van, which has no electricity, no running water and no proper toilet. He’s parked out on a friend’s open field, somewhere in the Jerusalem hills. He lives here with two of his daughters and a dog called Churchill.

It would have been nearly impossible to find this place, except for the fact that Uriel has registered it on Google Maps. It’s called *Tehilat HaChaim* - a play on his sister’s name, Tehila. *Tehilat HaChaim* means ‘In Praise of Life’ or ‘The Glory of the Living.’

The Israeli government doesn’t allow permanent structures to be erected without permission, so Uriel has to move his camper van every few months. That’s why he always has feelers out for anyone who might let him park on their property. And wherever he ends up, he registers on Google Maps. It’s easy, and he shows me how. Three months ago, he says, he was parked near a chicken coup in Kissalon. He registered that place as *Oz HaTehila*, another play on his sister’s name, which means ‘The Strength of Glory.’ Before that there was *Tehilat HaChaim Choref*, or ‘In Praise of Life, the Winter Version.’ And so it goes.

**Uriel Maoz:** How else would I be able to give people good directions to a random forest clearing? I tell them to plug in *Tehilat HaChaim* and it brings you right up to my tree.

**Danna Harman (narration):**No matter where he is, he is with Tehila.

Esther, like Uriel, keeps the memory of the dead close by, day in and day out. Herself one of nine children, she’s the mother of eight.

**Esther Shoshan:** Rachel, Chida, Kerova, Miriam Sarah, Israel, Nachman, Yocheved and Chaya Odelia.

**Danna Harman (narration):** She always includes Yocheved, even though she’s been dead for twenty years.

**Esther Shoshan:** She is here. You don’t see her but she is here.

**Danna Harman (narration):** A few years after the attack, she divorced, and remarried Mordechai, who himself has nine kids. Towards the end of our interview, Mordechai comes in, and together we look at old pictures of Yocheved, whom he never met.

Mordechai then shows me something that looks like a mystery word puzzle. You know, those games where you scan rows of random letters in a grid and try to discover words hidden within? But in this particular grid the letters aren’t random. They are verses from the Bible - from the Book of Exodus - written out horizontally. And then someone has circled words vertically, and on the diagonal - words that are all associated with the Sbarro bombing: “pizza,” “terror,” the Hebrew date of the attack, and even “Sbarro.”

Mordechai then points out that when you look at the pattern created by all the circled words - it looks a little like a map. It sounds crazy, I know, but when I tilt my head and compare the pattern to an actual map of downtown Jerusalem he puts alongside it, I can see what he’s trying to show me. The pattern does look - a little - like a map of the intersection of Jaffa and King George streets in Jerusalem.

So, what does this mean, I ask him and Esther, who’s nodding beside him.

**Mordechai Shoshan:** It’s all written in the Bible. Everything that happens is written.

**Danna Harman (narration):** This too, I suppose, is a way of dealing with it all. A way to make patterns and sense of the senseless. And a way, perhaps, to not only maintain faith, but to strengthen it. Everything, Mordechai and Esther seem to be telling me, even that we cannot fathom, is preordained. It all happens for a reason.

There were others, many others, who were killed or injured on that terrible August day twenty years ago.

I’m going to go back there, as I end, to that extra line Tehila opened up.

Who else was in it? Laly Shimshilshvili had made *aliyah* eight months earlier. A newly-minted doctor back in Tblisi, Georgia, and the young mother of two. She and her husband had decided to make their lives in Israel, even though they had no family here. Laly was top of her ulpan class, motivated to master Hebrew so as to pass the Israeli medical exams - exams she never ended up taking. Her eight-year-old Tamar, out on a special mother-daughter date, was also killed that afternoon.

Frieda Mendelshon, a sixty-two-year-old grandmother to thirty-eight grandkids, was there too. An ultra-orthodox woman, she rarely, or maybe even never, ate at a restaurant. But she had just done some blood tests in town, at a hospital around the corner, and was feeling a little weak. So she walked into Sbarro for a quick bite.

And then there’s the Schijveschuurder family - Mordechai and his wife Tzira, both children of Holocaust survivors, who were there, at Sbarro, together with five of their eight children. They had the horrible horrible luck of standing right next to the suicide bomber when he blew himself up. Only two of the kids, an eight-year-old and a ten-year-old, survived. Both badly injured. Three older brothers, who hadn’t joined the family on the restaurant outing that day, were called in to identify all the bodies. The parents, along with fourteen-year-old Ra’aya, four-year-old Avraham and two-year-old Hemda were then buried side by side, in a neat row at the *Har HaMenuchot* cemetery, overlooking the Jerusalem hills, and right above - as it happens - Uriel’s sister’s grave.

We reached out to some of the remaining Schijveschuurder siblings. One brother, Schvuel, politely told us that they were tired of talking to the press.

I get it. There’s rarely a story about the Sbarro attack that doesn’t seek out the photogenic Dutch Jewish family cursed by tragedy. ‘How are they doing?’ journalists want to know. ‘How are they coping?’

This happens, especially as - over the years - it’s become clear that, no, they are not all coping. Schvuel has been arrested several times, on drug charges mainly. Once, as part of a dispute with the state over the planned location for a memorial site for the Sbarro victims, he stood waiving a Nazi flag alongside the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway. Another time he was arrested when found, confused, vandalizing the memorial for slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in Tel Aviv, and calling for the release of Yigal Amir, Rabin’s assassin. His sister Chaya, protesting the Shalit prisoner exchange which included terrorist Ahlam Tamimi, stood outside the home of the Shalit family with a sign saying she wished they would be hit with a terror attack.

There were other casualties, too: Sixty-nine-year-old Giora Balash from Brazil and twenty-six-year-old Tzvika Golombeck from Carmiel. And what about all the families that get less attention, the families, say, of those who were injured, but not killed.

Who shows up at their homes to record their stories? Who asks them if they’re OK today, if time has solved their wounds. The answer is, no one, really.

One woman, Chana Nachenberg, who was thirty-one at the time, was at Sbarro with her two-year-old, Sara. Chana remains in a vegetative state to this day. Sara, her toddler, was one of the few in the restaurant who - miraculously - came out unscathed. She’s all grown up now, and a mom herself. She’s written about how she used to visit her mother every day for years, jealous of friends whose moms would talk to them, hug them, ask them about school. That, she says, would have been really nice.

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

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** And now, back to our episode, **Sbarro - Twenty Years Later.** When we decided to dedicate an episode to the Sbarro attack, and the ways in which those affected by it have coped over the last two decades, we began debating whether or not we should reach out to the perpetrators, or the families of the perpetrators, in addition to those of the victims. But - and I want to be honest here - that felt like a difficult step for us, as Israelis, to take. In mainstream Israeli society, there’s essentially an unwritten rule that giving a platform to anyone who carries out, or supports, or is sympathetic to, terror is wrong. For many, trying to understand the motives, or personal circumstances, of those who commit horrific acts of violence is tantamount to condoning them.

We ultimately decided, therefore, not to reach out to any of the terrorists themselves - some of whom are still in jail, and some of whom were released as part of the Shalit prisoner swap in 2011.

After much deliberation, we did, however, decide we would try to find the family of the suicide bomber, Izz al-Din al-Masri. Let me be clear that in no way is this an attempt to equate the experiences of the families of the victims and that of the man who murdered and maimed innocent civilians. We’re not trying to explain anything away. And though it has never been claimed, let alone established, that the al-Masris had any prior knowledge of the attack, we recognize that for some listeners the mere idea of hearing from the family of a suicide bomber is triggering and problematic. And if you’re one of those listeners, I suggest you skip the rest of the episode. But the reason we decided it *was* somehow worthwhile to talk to members of the al-Masri family was because their lives also changed dramatically the moment their son blew himself up, and their voices and perspectives are ones we don’t often get to hear.

It was obvious that this was a super sensitive assignment, and we spent many months searching for the right person for the job. Till we found him. Elhanan Miller is an orthodox rabbi and a journalist. And the reason he was so perfectly suited for this delicate task was that three years ago, he managed to track down and interview Hussam Badran, a senior member of Hamas’ armed wing - the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades - who had been one of the masterminds behind the Sbarro attack. So, in a very real way, this wasn’t Elhanan’s first time around the block. OK, here’s Elhanan Miller with **Act Two - The Perpetrator**.

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**Elhanan Miller (narration):** A month before Izz al-Din al-Masri entered the Sbarro pizza restaurant in Jerusalem with a guitar case full of explosives and metal shrapnel, he was walking with his mother in downtown Ramallah. The two village folk were running some errands when they encountered the mother of a *shahid*, a Palestinian youngster who had died fighting the Israelis.

“Wouldn’t you want to be the mother of a *shahid*?” Izz al-Din asked his mom. “No, I wouldn’t,” she replied. “First let me die, then do whatever you want.”

This summer, bright andearly on a Tuesday morning, Yochai Maital, Danna Harman and I set out from Jerusalem on an unusual, and personally challenging, reporting assignment.

Along the way, we picked up our fixer, Nuha, who lives in the outskirts of Ramallah.

**Nuha Musleh:** *[In Arabic]* Hello, how are you?
**Elhanan Miller:** *[In Arabic]* Hi, good morning.

**Yochai Maital:** *[In Arabic]* Hi.

**Nuha Musleh:** *[In Arabic]* Good morning.

**Elhanan Miller:** But you speak English well, right Nuha?

**Nuha Musleh:** *[In Arabic]* Well, of course, but I speak to you in Arabic because I respect you. I respect you, I speak in Arabic, that’s it. Otherwise I’m… Of course I can speak English. The others speak English, ha?

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** We were heading to the village of Aqabah, which is nestled on a hilltop northeast of Nablus, overlooking fields that even in the middle of the sweltering summer seemed green and lush.

**Nuha Musleh:** Jordan Valley is an amazing picturesque area. Beautiful. Wadi el-Bidar. It's a beautiful valley with greenery and water running on both sides of the road. *[In Arabic]* Beautiful!

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** The two-and-a-half-hour car ride from Jerusalem to Aqabah winds through West Bank back roads, and majestic biblical landscapes.

**Nuha Musleh:** Remember we're going east, east, east. We’re going on top of the Jordan Valley.

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** As I looked out the window, I kept reminding myself that these were the exact same sights that Izz al-Din al-Masri saw as he made *his* way, in the opposite direction, from Aqabah to Jerusalem, to carry out his suicide attack on that hot August day twenty years ago.

**Nuha Musleh:** Can you please stop here? *[In Arabic]* Hello my brother, how are you? Where do I go up to reach…

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** It’s hard to describe the thoughts going through your head on your way to the home of a man who murdered and injured so many innocent people.

**Nuha Musleh:** *[In Arabic]* Thank you, have a great day! So we don't go peak left, we go straight left.

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** We were going to visit Fatima al-Masri, the terrorist’s mother, and Imad al-Masri, his older brother. I was hoping they could explain what had motivated Izz al-Din to end his life at twenty-two, and why - in doing so - he chose, as his last action in this world, to take with him as many Israelis as he possibly could.

As a journalist, it's easy to justify the need to hear all sides of the story, even if that means meeting the devil himself. But as a human, things aren't that simple. After all, I’m *not* an objective observer of this conflict. I’m on one side of it. Izz al-Din al-Masri would have gladly blown me up too, had I happened to be there that day. In fact, I used to go to that Sbarro branch quite often during those years, and one of the victims - Malki Roth - was my neighbor. So it all felt very close, very personal.

I had taken on this task, but - as we called Imad, the brother, for directions - I kept on asking myself, “why?” What business does a rabbi have visiting the family of a suicide bomber?

**Nuha Musleh:** Imad al-Masri, left, *[in Arabic]* buddy. Thank you. We’re coming. OK so we go back two hundred meters, he’s at the carpentry shop.

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** Honestly, I wasn't exactly sure. And I was still trying to figure it out when we pulled up to a small carpenter’s workshop in the center of Aqabah.

**Nuha Musleh:** *[In Arabic]* Good morning mister Imad.

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** Imad - a smiley, mustached man - greeted us, and motioned for us to follow him.

**Nuha Musleh:** He's driving in front of us.

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** We drove on a narrow road up a steep hill.

**Nuha Musleh:** Oh, their house is right there.

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** And reached the al-Masri’s quaint village home. Imad led us to their large porch, overlooking vegetable patches and olive groves. Fatima, the mom, dressed in a loose black *jalabiya*,greeted us. The first thing I noticed was her necklace. A picture of her dead son, the suicide bomber, was dangling from her neck. I took a step back and sat down. After being served the customary coffee and tea, we started talking.

**Nuha Musleh:** He is saying, basically “whatever I say I want recorded and I will say what I believe in.”

**Elhanan Miller:** *[In Arabic]* What was Izz al-Din like? Tell us about Izz al-Din.

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** I asked Fatima what Izz al-Din was like as a kid. “To tell you the truth,” she answered, “we didn’t know much about him because he didn’t tell us. He was devout, a loner, and didn’t mix much with women. He divided his time between the mosque and his closed bedroom,” she continued. “He’d come home from work and shut himself in his room reading the Quran.”

She recalled a time when Izz al-Din had rushed home from a protest in the village. He was covered in sweat and clearly rattled. The demonstration had gotten out of hand, he told her, and he and his friends had been showered with Israeli rubber bullets. Several of them were hurt, others arrested. Fatima was obviously worried. “Be careful,” she warned him, “the Jews already have your name.”

“If they want to arrest me, let them arrest me,” he replied. “If they want to kill me, let them kill me. Can things get any worse than they already are? If you hide your son and another mother hides her son, who will liberate Palestine?” “Is all of Palestine your responsibility?” she asked.

Fatima went back and forth between two modes of speaking about her son. Most of the time, she referred to him as a hero, a martyr, a *shahid.* Someone who sacrificed himself for the larger Palestinian cause. “We were proud of him,” she told me. “Everyone was.”

But occasionally she would drop the nationalistic rhetoric, and speak of Izz al-Din as her son. Her cute, smart boy who would bring her small gifts and was always glad to lend a helping hand around the house whenever she’d ask. It was clear she’s still grieving for him.

“No mother would allow her son to carry out such an operation if she could stop him,” she said. But she - obviously - couldn't.

I asked her why she thought he did it. “Izz al-Din didn’t do it for the money,” Fatima replied, “but for the sake of God.”

In the summer of 2001, she explained, Israel had assassinated Hamas militant commanders Jamal Mansour and Jamal Salim in Nablus. Six others were killed in that attack, including two brothers - ages eight and ten - who were standing on the street waiting for their father to pick them up from summer camp. “When Izz al-Din saw this, and a few other attacks,” she said, “his blood boiled.”

On August 8th, 2001, he told her he was going to meet up with friends in Ramallah. She - of course - made nothing of it. The following day, he blew himself up. News of the attack quickly spread across the West Bank.

When it reached Fatima, she was out with her sister. Her initial reaction was to feel sorry for the suicide bomber’s mother. A few hours later, following the afternoon call to prayer, she received a phone call notifying her it was *her* son who had carried out the operation.

Their small house quickly filled up with people. Some were shouting and others were cheering, reciting the *takbir*. Then, she fainted and was carried away to her brother’s home.

With what seemed to me like a pinch of nostalgia - Fatima described how, overnight, the family became the pride of Palestine. “Wherever we went,” she said, “people saluted us for his martyrdom, praise be to God.”

I tried, repeatedly, to ask about her pain, but Fatima never really opened up. Instead, she preferred to focus on the glory. And I say glory because being the family of a *shahid* carries not only great prestige within Palestinian society, but also significant financial benefits. To this day the al-Masris receive a monthly stipend from the Palestinian Authority.

That financial assistance came in handy in 2002 when, ayear after the bombing, IDF engineers showed up and demolished Izz al-Din’s home.

Imad, Izz al-Din’s brother, showed me the still empty plot of land upon which their old house once stood. The neighbor's roof, he told me, had collapsed from the explosion. The windows of the nearby homes all shattered.

Imad al-Masri is in his late 40s. As his mother spoke, he listened carefully, chiming in with the occasional comment or clarification. But when he shared his own memories, his soft spoken demeanor gave way to sudden outbursts of emotion and pent up anger. Most of his ire was directed not towards Israel, but rather toward the Palestinian Authority - the PA - which, according to him, had crushed the Second Intifada, and continues to harass its proponents. Imad himself has sat in PA prisons for supposedly hiding arms. He said he was held in horrible conditions and hinted that he had been tortured.

Though he claimed he doesn't belong to any political party, Imad was once detained for hanging a Hamas flag on the wall of his home, a decision which - by the way - he stands by.

“The prophet Muhammad,” he explained, “raised a flag that said that ‘there is no God but Allah.’ Look,” he continued, “we are Muslims. The Palestinian flag, the Jordanian flag, the Israeli flag - they were all created by imperialism. I am not part of Fatah, or Hamas, or the Islamic Jihad. I’m just a regular Palestinian.”

“But look at our leaders,” he told me. “They all own real estate, they all have business interests. No one cares about the people anymore.”

To my surprise, he even argued that Palestinians would be better off if Israel regained control of the West Bank. “We will continue to regret Israel’s withdrawal from the West Bank for another hundred years,” he predicted and then added that “if you offered Palestinians an Israeli ID, 99% of them would take it.”

Needless to say, hearing this from the brother of a suicide bomber threw me off.

Like his mother, Imad appeared to be somewhat ambivalent, or inconsistent, whenever I brought up his little brother. At times he spoke about him with a great sense of pride, and at times he seemed to lament his unnecessary martyrdom.

He said he feels like a sucker for having sacrificed a family member. “The whole attitude of Palestinians has changed,” he went on. “Society now sees self-sacrifice as futile.”

“People ask themselves, ‘why should my son die and yours live? Today, the predominant sentiment is ‘every man for himself.’” And that - as far as I could tell - is now also Imad’s position.

“I say this with no shame at all - if I saw my son carrying the Palestinian flag, I’d cut his hand off. I don't want my son doing any action for Palestine. I want him to study, to become a doctor, to help the public.”

A few years ago, in an attempt to give his kids a shot at a better future, Imad even tried to leave Palestine and emigrate to Europe. But it didn’t work out, and the family remains - stuck, as he put it - in Aqabah.

**Nuha Musleh:** They prepared lunch for us.

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** After several hours of what was an incredibly intense and often bewildering conversation, Imad and Fatima invited us into the dining room for lunch. The table was full of delicious-looking food - rice, chicken, kebabs, salads of all kinds, olives, fresh bread.

**Nuha Musleh:** Please eat a lot because the more you eat the more they actually think you appreciate them.

**Elhanan Miller (narration):** Nuha, in case you didn’t hear that, said that we should eat a lot, because the more we ate, the more they would think we appreciated them.

But *did* I appreciate them?

At some level, I had come hoping they would denounce violence and terrorism. That hadn’t happened. And - to be honest - I wasn’t exactly sure what *had* happened. I mean, they seemed like nice people. Decent and genuine. Confused and themselves struggling. But they also appeared to miss, or ignore, the horror of what their son and brother had done. The enormity of the pain he had inflicted, and continues to inflict, upon so many.

The sight of the table and the abundant platters of food made me anxious. I hadn’t planned on eating non-kosher food, but even more than that, eating with the al-Masris at all felt like crossing an emotional line. Breaking bread is significant in Arab society. In any society, really. It’s a sign of respect, an act of intimacy.

I sat down uncomfortably and moved around in my chair. Out of courtesy for Fatima and Imad, I tasted some of the salads and put a few olives on my plate. A loud voice in my head kept on asking the same question over and over again: What on earth was I doing here? What business did I - Malki Roth’s neighbor - have sharing a meal with her killer’s family?

After lunch, as we were saying our goodbyes, Imad asked for my number. For weeks afterwards he would text me on WhatsApp. It was a weird mix of messages - one day he sent a long poem exalting his brother's martyrdom, and the next he shared a funny meme. Most of the time, he'd just sort of check in, and ask how I was doing. I would always reply. Politely, but briefly.

I’m still trying to understand what Imad actually wants from me. Is he trying to build a bridge? To make amends for his brother's horrific act? Is he maybe just lonely, searching for friendship? And is he really oblivious to the absurdity of it all?

The last text I got from Imad was an invitation to their family restaurant in Jenin. I still haven't responded.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Elhanan Miller. Yochai Maital produced this episode, and Zev Levi and Yochai Maital scored and sound designed it with music from Blue Dot Sessions and Serge Quadrado. Sela Waisblum created the mix. Thanks to our dubbers - Noa Bar, Gal Klein and Dor Gil - and to Nuha Musleh, Daniel Estrin, Gregory Warner, Eliana Sagarin, Sarah Zalta, Wayne Hoffman, Kurt Hoffman, Sheila Lambert, Erica Frederick, Jeff Feig and Joy Levitt.

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

I’m Mishy Harman and we’ll be back next time with the final Israel Story episode of the season. So till then, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye.*

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