**Emanuel Warhaftig:** When I played with my friends in the yard on Shabbos, I remember my father calling me to come up and study with him the *Gemara*, the Talmud. It was very important for him to give us a sound Jewish scholarly basis, foundation.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I’m Mishy Harman and this is Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by the Jerusalem Foundation and *The Times of Israel*.

So Israel is turning 75, and we feel this is a moment for us to step back and take stock. To ask where we came from, where we are, and where - for G-d’ sake - we’re going. And in order to answer those questions, we decided to go back to the basics. Our series - **Signed, Sealed, Delivered?** - looks at our founding moral compass - *Megillat Ha’Atzmaut*, or the Declaration of Independence.

Thirty-seven people signed *Megillat Ha’Atzmaut*. And over the course of the past several months, our team has diligently tracked down the closest living relative of *each one* of these signatories, and interviewed them. We talked about their ancestors and families, about the promise of the Declaration, the places in which we delivered on that promise, the places in which we exceeded our wildest dreams, and also about the places where we fell short.

And it is through these descendants of the men and women who - with the strike of a pen - gave birth to this country of ours, that we wish to learn something about ourselves.

[Emanuel Warhaftig chanting *Megillat Ha’Atzmaut*]

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That’s Emanuel Warhaftig *leyning* - or chanting - the Declaration of Independence using the melody of Torah readings. His father, Zorach (or as most people - including the official Knesset website - called him, Zerach), was an important leader of the Mafdal - the National Religious Party - and the last of the signatories to arrive in the Land of Israel. Emanuel will present one of the *many* political perspectives we’ll be featuring throughout the series.

We’ll be right back.

*[Ad]*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** OK, we’re back. Here’s our producer Adina Karpuj with Emanuel Warhaftig, Zorach Warhaftig’s eldest son.

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**Adina Karpuj (narration):** Zorach Warhaftig was a practicing lawyer when, in September 1939, he was forced to flee war-torn Warsaw along with his pregnant wife, Naomi. They walked across the *last* bridge still standing over the Vistula River and made it into the then-still-neutral territory of Vilnius. From there, and later from Kaunas, he led a heroic effort to save Jews from the two converging military forces: The Soviet Union’s Red Army and the Third Reich’s Wehrmacht.

Pounding on the doors of the world’s flagship *yeshivas* – Mir, Ponevezh, Volozhin, Kaminitz and Belz – the Zionist leader beseeched the rabbis to empty the study halls and order the students to flee Europe by any means possible. Many of the rabbis - who had already been forced to relocate their academies of Torah study during World War I - were reluctant to give that directive; and many of the diplomats - with whom Warhaftig *also* met - were unwilling to provide the necessary travel documents.

But Zorach didn’t give up. He devised a complicated three-part plan according to which he’d apply for permission for thousands of Jews to enter the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean, and *with* those permission slips, he’d approach the Japanese Vice-Consul, who’d provide ten-day visas to Japan. Those, in turn, would help him secure the NKVD’s permission to travel across Russia by train, via Siberia, to Japan, and from there to Curaçao.

Incredibly, the scheme worked, and the effort, during a feverish few weeks in the summer of 1940, saved the lives of up to 6,000 people.

Warhaftig arrived in Palestine in 1947 and served in Knesset for 27 years, including 12 years as Minister of Religious Affairs. He held a PhD in *Mishpat Ivri*, or Jewish jurisprudence, and was instrumental in the founding of the Rabbinical Court system. On matters of settlements and territorial expansion, he was a dove. On matters of religion? More of a hawk.

His most *lasting* contribution, however, was probably his role in authoring the Law of Return – a piece of legislation that goes to the heart of Israeli society, touching upon who is welcome to immigrate to this country and who, for the purposes of the State, is considered a Jew.

He died in Jerusalem in 2002, at the age of ninety-six.

Here he is in a recording from 1961, discussing his faith and the future of Israel.

**Zorach Warhaftig:** After all, our deep faith in God Almighty, and his awesome might and promised help, is what kept us going during our most critical hours. If we will be able to maintain the same kind of faith in the coming generations as well, we will be privileged to witness a full redemption and the full ingathering of the exiles.

**Emanuel Warhaftig:** My name is Emanuel Warhaftig. I’m the oldest son of Dr. Zorach Warhaftig. I would like to emphasize that my father’s name is not ‘Zerach’ but ‘Zorach’ — in English, Z-O and not Z-E. There is also a name ‘Zerach,’ but Zorach is another name. Ben-Gurion liked the name Zerach but the real name is Zorach. I was born in 1940 in Kaunas, then the capital of Lithuania, after my father and mama escaped Warsaw, so my mother was pregnant with me when they ran away. My father and my brother and sister came at late August 1947 in a boat named I think ‘Marine Corps.’ After five weeks, my mother came with me. I remember more the 29th of November, 1947 *[archival tape]* when the United Nations voted for founding in the Land of Palestine two independent states - the Jewish State and Arab State *[archival tape].* We were in Israel only three weeks *[archival tape].* My father was very enthusiastic and excited about the *Megillat Ha'atzmaut*. He took care that several principles will be embodied in the Declaration and will therefore be foundation for the Jewish being and the Jewish law. First of all, it was *aliyah*, and then it was education, and then it was Jewish principles like keeping the Shabbat. Also, my father was instrumental in choosing the symbols of Israel, like the menorah, and like the number of Knesset people. My father saw the Declaration of Independence as the closing of a circle which started with saving the Jews in 1940. There my father saved the Jews from the physical point of view, and in 1948 my father gave them the spiritual future, the way how to live and be part of the Jewish people, the Jewish nation. To sign it was a very exciting, thrilling thing. Because my father for many nights was dream how he will write his signature on the Declaration of Independence. I can translate to you what my father thought about that moment - “I signed with a firm hand, a beating heart, beating from joy.” I think that we can look at the Declaration of Independence as a very important text fulfilled in a big part. It's also for me a source of pride. All the demographs said that Israel cannot contain so many people, there will be three, four million and then the economy will not be strong enough to support so many people. And the Arabs are going to outnumber us. But we said that there will be *aliyah*, and there was *aliyah*! And also the *Torah* world which is very strong. People thought that here in Israel, there won't be much *yeshivot* and *Torah*, but there is. We started with 650,000 Jews in 1948 and now we are more than 8 million Jews. I think that that is the most important source of joy for my father. And of course, the strength of the religious community, the *Limud Torah*, the *yeshivot*, the *ulpanot*, and all this also is a source of pride. My father was in charge of the Jewish activities as Deputy Minister of Religion eight years and Minister of Religion twelve years and also my father was supervising the holy places like *Kotel Maaravi*, *Kever Rachel*, *Maarat Hamachpela*. Let us speak about the settlements in Judea and Samaria. My father had a realistic point of view, that there will come a time that we will have to give back Judea and Samaria, so we should not make a settlement. But when the settlements were founded, my father helped them. Gush Etzion and Ma’ale Adumim, Ofra and Kedumim. I myself, with my wife and children, we were one of the first of the early settlers. We lived in Kfar Adumim for 46 years. Only a year ago we came to Petah Tikvah. My father never told us “don't go there,” and came to visit us with my mother *[election results mash-up].* Now that there is a right wing government, I'm very happy. There are several bad things but we are going to correct them. For instance the judicial issue. I support fully the suggestions of Mr. Yariv Levin who is now Minister of Law *[judicial reform mash-up].*

**Broadcaster:** The claim from the coalition government - restoring the public’s faith in Israel’s justice system. “We go to the polls, we vote, we elect, and people who we didn’t elect take decisions for us. Many look to our judicial system and find that their voice isn’t being heard. That is not democracy.”

**Emanuel Warhaftig:** Aharon Barak and the activist judges took for themselves freedoms which they should not have taken. It doesn't smell to them good? They cancel the law. I don't think that this is a permissible legal principle. My father would be happy in general, but I'm not sure he would be happy about every aspect. I do not think that my father would agree to disturb homo parades. They think other than him, but you should not throw stones and you should not kill! Someone killed a young girl.

**Broadcaster:** Shock here in Jerusalem and beyond at the death of Shira Banki, sixteen years old, stabbed while she was attending a gay pride rally Thursday.

**Emanuel Warhaftig:** But in general, my father would have supported this government. It supports *Torah* institutions, *yeshivot*, *ulpanot* and so on. My father once said, “the State of Israel achieved less than I hoped, but more than I expected.”

[Emanuel Warhaftig chanting *Megillat Ha’Atzmaut*]

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Mitch Ginsburg and Lev Cohen are the senior producers of **Signed, Sealed, Delivered?**

Our staff also includes Yochai Maital, Zev Levi, Adina Karpuj, Jamal Risheq, Hadas Kidron, Shoshana Sarah, Shira Shankhalil, Ross Bordow, Yael Ben Horin and Rotem Zin. Sela Waisblum is our sound engineer. Zev Levi scored and sound designed the episode with music from Blue Dot Sessions. Our music consultants are Tomer Kariv and DJ Yoni Turner, and our dubber is Yoav Yefet.

You can catch up on all our regular Israel Story episodes, as well as all the other **Signed, Sealed, Delivered?** mini-sodes on our site – israelstory.org – or by searching for Israel Story wherever you get your podcasts. You can, and should, also check out our home at timesofisrael.com/podcasts. And of course, follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story. If you're interested in sponsoring episodes of Israel Story, email us at [sponsor@israelstory.org](mailto:sponsor@prx.org).

This series is dedicated to the memory of my beloved father, David Harman, who was a true believer in the values of the Declaration of Independence, in Zionism, in democracy and - most of all - in equality.

I’m Mishy Harman and we’ll be back next time with another installment of **Signed, Sealed, Delivered?** and a completely different perspective on Israel’s Declaration of Independence. Till then, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye.*

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