

One Day in October  
*Forty Heroes, Forty Stories*





ONE  
DAY  
IN  
OCTOBER

Forty Heroes, Forty Stories

YAIR AGMON • ORIYA MEVORACH

TRANSLATED BY

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*The Toby Press*

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*One Day in October: Forty Heroes, Forty Stories*

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*Dedicated in honor of all of the heroes of October 7th  
who, on Israel's darkest day, revealed glimpses of light  
through their heroism, selflessness, and courage, exemplifying  
what it means to be truly responsible for one another  
and reawakening our fundamental value of unity.*

*As members of the South African Jewish community,  
we are inspired by the acts of bravery  
of all the heroes in this book,  
among them*

## *Captain Daniel Perez Hy"ד*

*In dedicating this book,  
we hope that Daniel's legacy of bravery,  
along with the other heroes featured in this book,  
will serve as an eternal testimony to the events of that day  
and inspire all those who read it to unite  
and build a better tomorrow.*





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## *Preface I*

# Why This Book?

**F**or Israelis, the seventh of October 2023 was the day the world turned upside down. Thousands of Hamas terrorists – cruel, blood-thirsty, heartless, and full of hate – crossed the border and slaughtered and mutilated and burned and raped and kidnapped men, women, and children, from the very young to the very old. It was the darkest day in the history of the State of Israel. Within a single morning, Israelis turned from proud citizens into persecuted refugees.

Twelve hundred people were murdered; two hundred and fifty-one were taken hostage. Many thousands were wounded. Millions locked themselves inside their safe rooms, frightened for their lives. Terror struck – with great force and without mercy – and we were left gasping, anxious, and broken.

All this took place on one day in October. Within less than twenty-four hours, history came knocking, and the State of Israel was changed forever. This was the largest, most brutal massacre of Jews in a single day since the Holocaust. The country was filled with grieving parents and siblings, widows and orphans. Social media exploded with posts desperately seeking missing loved ones. Thousands of people from the communities near the Gaza Strip had to flee from their homes and

## *One Day in October*

become refugees. This was Israel's saddest moment, its lowest moment, its weakest moment. And the scars from that dark day – both physical and emotional – will haunt our people forever.



But out of the pillars of smoke and rivers of blood, heroes rose up – heroes and heroines. They emerged from the shelter of their homes, charged into the inferno, and fought like lions to save lives. They snatched the wounded from the jaws of death, dragged the helpless from the battlefield, huddled in their safe rooms to protect month-old babies; threw themselves on grenades to save others; emptied their wallets to pay off terrorists; carried little children out of a hellscape of shot-up and burned cars, and hugged shell-shocked soldiers in the middle of battle.

They are heroes. Like the heroes of old, like the heroes of the Bible, the stuff of stories and legends. Confronting the sadness and loss and depths of hell, they give us hope and inspiration and the chance to tell another kind of story.

On that day, countless heroes risked and sacrificed their lives for their people, for their brothers and sisters and children and future children and the future of the State of Israel. It is this courageous story that we wish to share with the world.



Our journey finding stories of strength and courage from the seventh of October started with the simplest of searches. We started looking for heroes, and within less than a day and a half, we found ourselves inundated with them. Hundreds and hundreds of unbelievable stories. How is it possible that so many regular people – just normal civilians going about their lives – rushed fearlessly into the killing fields to fight evil?

This is mass heroism, both individual and collective. This is heroism that came from every sector of the country – the heroism of women and men; of children, teens, adults, and the elderly; of religious and secular, of Jews and Arabs, of all colors and ethnicities; of Russian Jews,

Ethiopian Jews, Bedouins, Druze, and foreign workers – people of all kinds and all walks of life. Together, they saved countless lives.

In other words, the book you now hold in your hand is only a rivulet of a sweeping torrent of heroism. There are many stories that we missed, heroes who wouldn't – or couldn't – speak; some are still catching their breath and piecing their own stories together. We could produce another dozen volumes of incredible stories of courage from that cursed day. Perhaps we yet will.



The mystic Rabbi Nachman taught that even in the depths of concealment, even during the darkest, lowest, most miserable of moments, there is a hidden spark of exalted divinity, of profound Godly truth. The modern Israeli poet Leah Goldberg insisted that even during the bleakest days, we can dream of forgiveness and kindness, and we can delight in the feel of bare feet treading on soft grass. Taking its cue from both of them, *One Day in October* is a small, earnest attempt to see the good that emerged within the torment and to rejoice in the sweetness of the light.

This book documents all kinds of heroism, in the broadest and most generous sense of the word. There are stories of classical heroism, of the courage under fire of those who faced off against terrorists. But there are also stories of a different heroism. Of an elderly man who sits on the couch and awaits terrorists as a decoy to save his family. Of a midwife who turns her home into a field hospital. Of a surveillance soldier who spends months trying to sound a warning. Of volunteers who struggle to preserve the honor of the slain. All of them are heroes of human dignity who were true to the spark of sanctity within them.



Until now, we've used the plural form; now I, Yair Agmon, want to add something personal. When war broke out around Gaza on the seventh of October, my reserve unit didn't call me up for duty, and I sank into a deep depression. For long weeks I remained home in Tel Aviv, listless

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with shame and frustration, paralyzed by existential fear. All my friends were called up for reserve duty while I was left behind, with children who were too frightened of the sirens to fall asleep at night.

For long weeks, I was stuck in a black and bitter place. Then, miraculously, thanks to my dear co-author Oriya, the opportunity to work on this book presented itself. At first I was sure that I wouldn't be able to do it. I could hardly breathe, let alone read.

But then I began to read the stories, and each successive story made it a little easier to breathe. The stories gave me moments of consolation, boosts of resilience. Even though they were set in the midst of the horror, they all uncovered veins of light that pulsed through that day of darkness.

This book lifted me out of depression. I fell in love with the people I met through these stories, with their hearts, and with their values. Their stories are "a still, small voice" that soars above the noise and turmoil. These heroes don't know it, but they saved my life too.

July 2024

## *Preface II*

# How?

**F**rom this book's inception, we felt that it was important to hear stories straight from the people who experienced them, with as few filters as possible. Here is how we worked on this book with our dedicated team, step by step.

The first stage was to create an initial database of stories of heroism from October 7th. There were hundreds, all of them accounts of true heroes.

The second stage was to choose the heroes whose stories we wanted most to tell. Diversity was important to us. We aimed for a wide range of settings, of acts of heroism, and of people, in the hope of giving the broadest possible picture of the heroism and courage that transpired on that day.

The third stage was to track down and approach potential interviewees.

The fourth and most important stage was to go out and meet our heroes and interview them. In cases where the heroes were no longer among the living, we spoke with those closest to them. Each story was told over the course of an interview lasting between one-and-a-half and two-and-a-half hours, and each story was long and detailed. The purpose of these meetings was not only to get the story, but also to get to

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know the person behind each story, to delve into the intricacies of the human experience, and to ensure that each narrative reflects the tastes, scents, and longings of the person whose story it tells.

Some of the heroes of October 7th are minors. These interviews were conducted by an experienced therapist, Michal Kurnedz, in the presence of an adult family member or friend of the minor's choice.

The fifth stage was to transcribe each interview.

The next stage was to render these transcripts into narratives. With slow, careful, meticulous editing, we shaped each interview into a clear, concise, accessible piece of prose. We were faithful to the transcripts and to the hero's own language and inner world – maintaining their rhythms of speech, repetitions, and exclamations, sometimes at the cost of grammar and syntax, all in order to preserve the interviewee's authentic voice. We did our utmost to portray our heroes accurately and to capture their essence as people. We attempted to investigate “what makes a hero.” We strove to describe the actual sequence of events as accurately as possible and how the hero was feeling at each moment. We tried our best to convey the darkness and misery of that black day as delicately as possible alongside the light, beauty, and human greatness that lit up that darkness. We tried our best to tell the whole story.

Finally, at the end of the writing process, we showed each story to its respective hero, who graciously corrected, commented, and helped us perfect it.

A full list of those who contributed to the preparation of this book can be found in the acknowledgments. To each of them our deepest thanks.



# Map of the Gaza Envelope

## MAP INFORMATION

The information on the map on the following page is based on a combination of official and unofficial sources. We used government reports, including the Bituah Leumi and IDF websites; private initiatives that mapped out and documented the events of the massacre; newspaper reports; and interviews with members of first response teams.

In the event of disparities between different accounts, we relied on the more meticulous account. Similarly, we gave more weight to first-person testimonies than other reports.

It is possible that we made mistakes, and we apologize sincerely if we did. The fallen heroes are forever in our hearts and we have attempted to tell their stories to the best of our abilities.

This list of main sources is arranged according to the extent of use:

- [https://yuval-harpaz.github.io/alarms/oct\\_7\\_9.html](https://yuval-harpaz.github.io/alarms/oct_7_9.html)
- <https://www.edut710.org/>
- <https://www.710360.kan.org.il/5>
- <https://www.kan.org.il/content/kan-news/defense/558406/>
- <https://laad.btl.gov.il/Web/He/HaravotBarzelWar/Default.aspx>
- <https://www.idf.il/המלחמה-חללים-חללי-המלחמה>

| Location                   | Murdered | Hostages | Length of time (hours or days) |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Alumim (kibbutz)</b>    | 31       | 3        | 2 days                         |
| <b>Be'eri (kibbutz)</b>    | 134      | 33       | 2 days                         |
| Ein HaShelosh (kibbutz)    | 4        | 0        | 2 days                         |
| Erez (kibbutz)             | 1        | 0        | 27 hours                       |
| Erez Checkpoint            | 10       | 7        | 10 hours                       |
| Holit (kibbutz)            | 15       | 6        | 13 hours                       |
| Kerem Shalom (kibbutz)     | 5        | 0        | 2 days                         |
| <b>Kfar Aza (kibbutz)</b>  | 64       | 19       | 2 days                         |
| Kissufim (kibbutz)         | 17       | 1        | 21 hours                       |
| Kissufim Outpost           | 32       | 0        | 15 hours                       |
| Magen (kibbutz)            | 3        | 1        | 2 days                         |
| Mavki'im Junction          | 1        | 0        | 1 hour                         |
| Meflasim (kibbutz)         | 1        | 0        | 7 hours                        |
| Meflasim Junction          | 47       | 7        | 3 days                         |
| Mivtahim                   | 15       | 0        | 3.5 hours                      |
| <b>Nahal Oz (kibbutz)</b>  | 16       | 6        | 9.5 hours                      |
| <b>Nahal Oz Outpost</b>    | 66       | 11       | 13 hours                       |
| Netiv HaAsara              | 19       | 0        | 14 hours                       |
| <b>Nir Am (kibbutz)</b>    | 2        | 1        | 20.5 hours                     |
| <b>Nir Oz (kibbutz)</b>    | 31       | 86       | 9 hours                        |
| Nir Yitzhak (kibbutz)      | 7        | 8        | 14 hours                       |
| <b>Nirim (kibbutz)</b>     | 5        | 8        | 7 hours                        |
| <b>Nova Music Festival</b> | 364      | 44       | 7.5 hours                      |
| <b>Ofakim</b>              | 52       | 0        | 2 days                         |
| Patish                     | 0        | 0        | 0                              |
| Poga Outpost               | 15       | 0        | 6 hours                        |
| Pri Gan                    | 5        | 0        | 2 days                         |
| Psyduck Party              | 17       | 0        | 10 hours                       |
| <b>Re'im (kibbutz)</b>     | 18       | 4        | 2 days                         |
| Re'im Base                 | 8        | 0        | 11 hours                       |
| <b>Sderot</b>              | 56       | 1        | 2 days                         |
| Sha'ar HaNegev Junction    | 31       | 0        | 3 days                         |
| <b>Sufa (kibbutz)</b>      | 3        | 0        | 11 hours                       |
| <b>Sufa Outpost</b>        | 11       | 0        | 14 hours                       |
| Talmei Yosef               | 1        | 0        | 1 hour                         |
| Urim Base                  | 8        | 0        | 9 hours                        |
| <b>Yakhini</b>             | 7        | 0        | 12 hours                       |
| <b>Yated</b>               | 0        | 0        | 2 days                         |
| Yesha                      | 3        | 0        | 1 hour                         |
| <b>Yiftah Outpost</b>      | 8        | 0        | 12 hours                       |
| <b>Zikim Base</b>          | 22       | 0        | 7 hours                        |
| Zikim Beach                | 18       | 0        | 8 hours                        |
| Unspecified                | -        | 5        | -                              |



*Egypt*

● Khan Yunis

● Rafah

● Kibbutz  
● Kerem Shalom

- = Locations of major occurrences in the book
- = Other places attacked on October 7th





# You Hold the Door; I've Got the Baby

Shaylee Atary's Story

Age 35

📍 Kibbutz Kfar Aza

**Y**ahav and I met in acting school, and from the day we met until our final moment together, we never stopped arguing about who fell in love first. I always insisted that he hit on me; he always said that I hit on him. Maybe both of us were right.

I started a course of study in Nissan Nativ Acting Studio in Tel Aviv some time after I had been sexually assaulted. I was very, very damaged and closed off. What I didn't know at the time was that Yahav had gone through trauma of his own; in 2008 he went through something that changed him forever. He was in the kibbutz in Kfar Aza when a mortar shell fired from Gaza suddenly landed out of nowhere. There were no bomb shelters back then, no Red Alert sirens, and the bomb fell and killed his best friend Eyal's father, Jimmy Kedoshim, while Yahav was nearby in the yard; Yahav was the first to see him. Sometimes he would tell me about that moment when a human being became a corpse right before his eyes. He was twenty-two years old at the time, a young man, and all his faith in this world just shattered.

I remember that during the first year of study, he performed Meir Ariel's song "Erol" as a monologue, and he was so charismatic. I

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remember watching him as he stood there, lit up by this yellow spotlight, and I remember thinking, “Who is that?” and also, “Wow, he’s talented.” Little by little, we found ourselves working together all the time. Writing together. That was the foundation of our relationship: we were partners who loved to create art together.

Later that year, he asked me to do a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* with him. After rehearsal one night we were tired and put our heads down on this musty old mattress there, and I looked into his eyes, and something suddenly changed. I saw something that made me feel at home. Later, I learned that it was a pivotal moment for him too, when he looked into my eyes. Sometime during rehearsal of that scene, we kissed.



It was a while before we became a real couple. I think he was a little frightened by all his feelings. I would tell him that I loved him, and he would say, “I don’t know if I can,” I’d tell him, “Okay, but I know you love me,” and he’d say, “I don’t know if we’ll make it together,” and I’d say, “It’s okay, you’ll go and come back. It doesn’t matter, okay? You can go and come back.” Like, I was absolutely confident that he loved me; I don’t know why. I knew that he loved me deep inside. I just trusted our love. I told him, “If you need time to understand that, take it.” I knew he’d come back.

In 2016 I was in a terrible car accident. My left leg was broken badly in several places, and I had head trauma. I was in rehabilitation for over a year. I was in a wheelchair for a very long time; all the surgeries failed. I still have a disability and a pain disorder, and I have to walk with a cane. I can do almost everything, but slowly.

At first I was embarrassed to leave my house with a cane. I preferred to limp along even if it hurt. But then I found myself leaving the house less and less. Until one day, Yahav said to me, “Sweetie, what are you trying to prove? Let’s go buy you canes in every color!” And we really did that. We went on a hunt for quality canes. We bought me a purple cane, a gold cane, a blue cane. I had every kind of cane you can imagine; I even had one of those canes with a carved head on top, like some kind of villain.

One evening, we were at home in Jaffa eating pasta – pappardelle – and I was sitting in my wheelchair. Then, while we're eating, Yahav just whips out this little box and opens it, and there's a ring inside. My mouth is full of pappardelle, and I didn't even manage to swallow, and I said "yes" with my mouth full. That was a few weeks after the doctors had told me that I'd probably never be able to walk again; that there was a miniscule chance, but only with another operation that was very risky. I think that Yahav chose to propose to me just then, in the midst of my despair, to give me the strength not to give up, so that I'd give the surgery a chance. Also, he wanted to marry me, I guess.



After my accident, we started going to Kfar Aza more and more. Everything there is much more accessible for wheelchairs; it was very comfortable for me, and Yahav started falling back in love with his kibbutz. Back then, after his trauma, he would work in the field with his father; the earth just healed him, he said. He started talking about raising our kids on the kibbutz, next to their grandma and grandpa. At first I was against it – not because of the security risks there, being so close to the Gaza border, but because I was afraid I'd be bored, that I wouldn't find work. I said to him, "I don't want to. I have this vision: I see myself sitting next to some grubby screen door, nursing a baby and just sad." And Yahav said to me, "I actually have a different vision: I see us sitting in the yard with a joint, with this little bare-bottomed boy next to us, running through the sprinklers." I sat quietly for a moment, imagining it. I said to him, "That actually sounds like a good vision to me." That's how we decided to move.

We lived here for two and half years, a little more. It really was a dream. We're both filmmakers, directors, actors. We made four movies in those two years. He worked nearby in Sapir College, in the School of Audio and Visual arts, as production manager, and I edited films. I worked on a lot of projects from southern Israel. People would come from the big cities in central Israel to work with me in little Kfar Aza.

Yahav's last movie, *Kibbutz Legend*, is a full-length feature that he filmed right here in the kibbutz, with a lot of people from Kfar Aza.

## *You Hold the Door; I've Got the Baby*

Iris Haim acted in the movie too. Her acting was fantastic. I still can't bring myself to look at the footage. So many people who appear in that movie, lots of the extras, were murdered or taken hostage. We filmed several scenes in the kibbutz dining hall; it's totally shot up now. I'll edit it someday. But not now. Not yet.



Yahav's grandfather died a few days before the massacre. On Friday morning, the sixth of October, we buried his grandfather in the kibbutz cemetery. I remember thinking to myself at the funeral: Wow, what a beautiful place to be buried; it's all so green with all the leaves and trees. Yahav spoke at the funeral; he loved his grandfather very much and spoke about how much he meant to him. At the end, he said to him, "Farewell, my friend. We'll meet again!" It scared me, that he said "we'll meet again" – I didn't get why he said that.

That evening, we had a family dinner with everyone who was observing the shiva week of mourning, and everyone wanted to see our daughter, Shaya, who was just a month old, and Yahav held her and walked around and showed her off to everyone, so that everyone would see his baby. Our baby.

On the way home, along the paths in the dark, Yahav and I talked about how special it was, and I remember saying to him, "Whoa, sweetie, the best thing we ever did was moving to the kibbutz," and Yahav said, "Whoa, totally," then kept talking about something else. That was how we felt. We both felt good about our lives. We felt that we were in the right place at the right time.



At six-thirty the next morning we woke to Red Alert sirens and crazy booms. I've never heard so many explosions in my life. I was still in this meditative kind of state, half asleep, because I was waiting for Shaya to wake up for her bottle. I was in shock. I ran to the shelter, and Yahav was already there; he had already started closing the window, and then he closed the door. Our shelter window doesn't really lock because there's



no latch. Our home is in the old neighborhood, where the houses are older and the shelters don't really lock.

Soon after, we started getting all these messages – the kibbutz has been infiltrated, lock your doors, stay in your homes. Just then Yahav realizes that our dog Buckley isn't there. So he says to me that he's going to get him, and I scream at him, "You're not going to get him!" I was scared for him to go out; I didn't want him to get killed. But he didn't listen to me; he just went out and looked for Buckley and brought him inside. Buckley usually barks a lot, but he was startled by all the explosions, and he just sat there quietly. I was really scared. I started praying, and crying, and praying, and crying, and when Buckley saw that I was crying, he came over to me and started licking my tears. To this day, he still licks my tears.

Not much time passed before we started to hear shooting. Just a little at first. And motorcycles. Then we hear voices coming closer, voices getting louder, shouting and laughing, greeting each other, "*Ta'al, ta'al* – come in, come in" in Arabic. And we realize that they're coming closer, and we start motioning to each other in sign language. Not saying a word. We motioned to each other and made an agreement, barely whispering: "You hold the door; I've got the baby." We didn't think they'd come in through the window; we thought they'd enter the house and try and open the door inside.

Then the metal window railing opened. They forced it open, and bright light flooded the room. The shelter was dark and closed before that, and there was suddenly daylight coming in. A terrorist's hand groped around inside, a big, terrifying hand. We were both facing the window. I was behind Yahav, and Shaya was in my arms. There wasn't really time; the terrorist was already in the room, but Yahav still turned to me for one last, brief look. Not a real goodbye. He just signaled to me with his head to run away. His eyes were blank, as if he realized that this was it, this was the end.

If words could describe what he said to me with that look, it would have been something like, "I'm sorry, sweetie." And then he just turned back to the window, opened the handle on the glass and grappled with the terrorist to keep the metal railing closed. The last thing I remember is how his pelvis shifted as he fought against the terrorist.

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He was this slim, almost skinny guy, and his hips moved as he fought. That's my last memory of him.



Yahav stayed in the shelter, and I went outside holding Shaya, and I turned left on the path. If I had turned right, I would have run straight into the terrorists; I turned left by sheer luck. Then I started to run. I was barefoot, without a phone on me, in my pajamas, with that disposable underwear, the kind you wear after you have a baby. I ran, and at one point I felt all this shooting around me; it was a noise I'd never heard before, this sort of buzzing, whistling kind of sound, and I realized that I'd die if I kept running along that path, so I ducked into some bush next to my neighbor's bamboo fence. And I heard them calling after me "*Tá'al, tá'al!* Come, come!" with these whoops of joy, like there was some kind of prize to kill me and Shaya.

I couldn't run quickly because of my leg, so I kept running through the bushes, then I started knocking on doors, and all the houses were locked. I ran from house to house, from yard to yard, but it was all locked, and I was too scared to shout, "It's Shaylee" in case the terrorists heard me, because they were still so close. At some point I realized that I had nowhere to go, so I hid in a small vestibule between my neighbor Yardena's screen door and her front door. Shaya was somehow still sleeping; I prayed that she wouldn't wake up. I prayed and waited there until I couldn't hear the terrorists' footsteps anymore. I peeked through the screen and saw that the terrorists weren't there, so I got up and kept running and knocking on doors and windows.

And at some point I realized that no one was going to open up for me, so I found some little garden shed and went inside and closed the door. It was a wooden storage shed. I looked for something sharp and I remember I found a hammer and another long tool, some kind of chisel. So I held the hammer in one hand and hid the chisel in my pajamas. There was a washing machine in the shed, and I hid behind it and put some kind of planter over Shaya, and her little feet poked out from underneath. So I put another planter over us, and these bags of sand and fertilizer. And I prayed that she wouldn't start crying.

I tried pretending that this was all happening to someone else; I tried imagining that I was a character in a Holocaust movie. A character in an extermination camp, hiding her baby in one of those bunk beds. It's not me right now. We're in a movie. This helped me calm down; it helped me not to allow the fear to paralyze me. And right then, when I had a second to breathe after I had made us a hiding place, it started to hit me – where I was, what was happening. I was dying to cry out to the heavens, but I couldn't let anyone hear me. I was dying to scream. I felt trapped inside my body, and I screamed a silent scream without making a sound.

There were constant explosions and shouts from the terrorists outside. They were happy. Afterward, some people said that they were drugged, but that wasn't my impression. No. They weren't out of it. They ran after me and my month-old baby with excitement, with joy. They *chose* to shoot at me and Shaya. I heard them. They knew what they were doing; they made a choice.

After some time in the shed, Shaya started crying. She didn't like it when I settled down in the shed because she was used to falling asleep to movement. I let her suck on my finger and hoped that she'd calm down. It worked for a few minutes, but she woke up hungry. She hadn't eaten since four a.m. Her crying got louder, and I heard shouts from outside; I sensed that they would be happy to find me. I realized that if I stayed there, I was done for. I had to go outside.



Outside the shed there was a lawn, a huge one, and I knew that I had to cross it to get to the next row of houses. I tried knocking at a door, but no one opened up; so I had no choice but to cross the lawn. I peered through the bushes and saw that on the other side of the lawn, one of the houses there had a laundry room, and the door was open. I decided to run there. I went out of the bushes and starting running, running for my life as fast as I could. Don't look back, don't look back; run run run. I reached the laundry room. When I got there I heard someone whispering to me from the window: "Come in, come in!"

It was Zuli's voice, and it was Zuli and Liron's house. My guardian angels. They have three kids. The house was all locked down, and

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Zuli guarded the door with his handgun. When I went in, his son was terrified of me. He saw me, this big adult holding a hammer, and he started screaming; I guess he thought I was a terrorist. I said to them, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I didn't know where to go." I saw their three kids, and I said to Liron, "I'm sorry I brought her; I'm so sorry I brought her here" because I knew that in that situation, when everyone has to hide and keep quiet, a baby was like a ticking bomb. I thought that I would be the death of them all.

I was so apologetic. I said to Liron, "They were in our bedroom, they came in from the window, they killed Yahav, they murdered him. I didn't know where to go!" And Liron said to me, "It's all okay, you did exactly what you had to do. They killed my sister, too."

To this day, Liron is saved on my phone as "Liron My Guardian Angel." I'll never forget what they did for me. They let me and Shaya in, knowing full well what could have happened to them because of us. Liron already knew that her sister and brother-in-law were dead; that their little girl was taken hostage; she understood exactly what it meant to let us into their shelter.

For twenty-seven hours I was there with her and with Zuli, and with their three kids in the shelter. Twenty-seven hours with a hungry baby. I wasn't breastfeeding, I was never able to nurse her after she was born. Every time she cried, I apologized, and Liron kept saying, "You don't have to apologize."

Twenty-seven hours in the shelter. We became a sort of little family. The kids and I played all these games with Shaya – as if we opened a little daycare. Liron was on her phone and kept trying to send messages for someone to rescue us. Zuli was out of the shelter a lot; he patrolled the house with his gun. The little kids helped me with the baby. They stroked her and held her and made sure that I had toilet paper to keep her clean because I didn't have any diapers for her. They were truly wonderful.

At one point – I don't remember exactly when, it's all a big blur – Zuli came into the room. He turned off the light and said, "Okay guys, we have to go to sleep; we have a long day ahead of us. I don't think the army will come until tomorrow morning." He told us to go to the bathroom, not to flush, and we took turns and went back to the shelter. Then Zuli took this board from one of the kids' beds, wedged it

under the door handle, covered himself with a blanket, and said, "Come on guys, go to sleep! Good night!" He made us feel safe. I saw him and said, "Oh, okay, let's go to sleep." Later on, Zuli told me that he had seen dozens of terrorists walking around outside with RPGs; he understood that a handgun wouldn't be much help and decided that we might as well all go to sleep. At least we'd be quiet.



At one point, while we were sleeping, we heard people come into the house. They shouted, "IDF! IDF! We've come to rescue you!" But Zuli motioned to us to keep quiet. We were lucky that somehow Shaya was quiet just then. Liron and I tried to make out if they were speaking in Hebrew or Arabic. They walked around the house with these heavy footsteps. They somehow missed the door to our shelter, then they simply left the house. Liron and I didn't understand why they didn't come to rescue us if they were really the IDF. Only a few days later, after we were rescued, Zuli told us that they had definitely been terrorists.

The hours dragged on and on and on, and I kept thinking about Yahav. Is he still alive? What's going on with him? There was some kind of rumor on the Whatsapp group that he was wounded and then rescued, but I couldn't calm down. He was always on my mind, and I asked him not to die. I said to him in my heart, "Sweetie, sweetie, you can't do this to me, you can't do this to me!" But from the outside I just looked like a woman rocking her baby.

Shaya was getting weaker; she was becoming limp and apathetic. She breathed in a lot of smoke because the house next to us had been set on fire. I remember watching her, noticing that she was becoming less alert, less responsive. It was a very frightening moment, feeling that your child isn't responding to you. Liron kept trying to reach out to everyone possible to rescue us – she sent messages to the army, to the Shin Bet, to our families, friends, everyone.

Suddenly it was morning. I remember hearing birds outside the shelter. Birds! It was the strangest thing in the world; I'll remember it for the rest of my life. Amid all the shooting and explosions there was suddenly birdsong. And a few hours later, they came to rescue us. Soldiers,

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I don't know from which unit, called Liron on the phone and told her that they're outside, so we opened the shelter and went outside, straight into these armored military vehicles. I remember that out of all twenty-seven hours in the shelter, the hardest part was actually leaving it. I began to cry. The kids tried to calm me down. They said, "Look, Shaylee, the army is here. There's nothing to be scared of anymore," but they didn't realize that I was crying because I was leaving *them*. Because I knew deep in my heart that this was the last time in my life that I would feel like I had a family.

When I left the house, I saw burnt homes all around us and terrorists lying dead on the ground, and I told myself not to look. And I really did stop looking. I just kept my eyes closed until we were out of the kibbutz, and I hugged Shaya, and I prayed to God. At the gas station outside Kfar Aza an army doctor checked Shaya. She was in poor condition; she had red bags under her eyes, and she was barely responsive. We had to take Shaya to the hospital.



From Kfar Aza we drove to Netivot in an army vehicle. From Netivot they took us in an ambulance to Soroka Hospital in Beersheba. Only then, only on those drives when I saw all the overturned cars through the window, burnt cars, and bodies and more bodies; only then did I understand what had happened. Only then did I realize just how many terrorists had come in and how many people were killed. I hadn't had a phone all day; even at the beginning, when Yahav realized what was happening from all the messages they sent on the kibbutz WhatsApp group, he didn't tell me anything. He kept it from me so that I wouldn't be even more stressed. When we arrived in Soroka doctors pounced on the baby. Her medical report said that she was crying without tears, she was so dehydrated. She was given oxygen for two days to clear all the smoke she inhaled from her lungs.

The battles in Kfar Aza continued for three days. They only managed to retrieve Yahav's body three days later. Until then it wasn't clear if he was hurt or missing or taken hostage. I looked for him in every possible place. I felt that I was going crazy. I had seen him fighting; I saw

how his narrow hips struggled against the terrorist. They had shot at me and the baby; there was no reason they wouldn't shoot at him as well.

But then came the news. The moment I understood that's it, he's dead, I screamed, and I couldn't get up off the floor. They said to me, "Shaylee, come to the living room. Come, sit with us in the living room," but I didn't want to get up. I was a rag; I was broken; I couldn't get off the floor. But then Shaya cried, and without thinking I just got up, took her to the changing table, and changed her diaper. Then I made her a bottle, and without noticing I sat down in the living room like everyone had wanted.

Then I asked Yahav's mother, "Michal, do you think that I can retrieve sperm from him even though he's a civilian, not a soldier?" I knew that they performed sperm retrieval on soldiers; I didn't know if the procedure was available to civilians as well. It turns out that you can, but you need a court order; it's a whole procedure. The problem was that there was no time for any protocol; there's a very short window of opportunity from the moment of death until the sperm is no longer viable. And Yahav's body had already been lying there for too long until they found him. But his vision of a little bare-bottomed boy running through the sprinklers didn't leave me. I had to try; I had to keep our family going, and I had already seen what Shaya had done for me when I couldn't get off the floor. She was the only one who managed to lift me up.

So I started making a lot of noise; I reached out to the press and to social media to see if we could cut through all the bureaucracy, I did as much as I could, but in Yahav's case it was too late. The wonderful doctor from Assaf HaRofeh Hospital who performed the procedure told me, with a heavy heart, "The sperm is no longer viable. But you did everything you could." Yahav's body lay there for three days in the heat of our burned-out house. There was nothing left to save. But what the doctor said stayed with me: I had done everything I could. Only then, when I understood that there was no more sperm from him, when I understood there was nothing left to do, when Shaya was okay, when I knew where Yahav was, and that his sperm was no longer viable – only then, when I had nothing else I had to take care of, did I begin to mourn.

An analysis of the scene showed that Yahav had fought the terrorists to the last moment; when he held down the metal railing, they

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threw explosive charges and grenades into our bedroom and burned down the house while he was still inside. Yahav fought his instincts to run outside and stayed inside to keep them from coming in. The soldier who found Yahav told me that they had found his body next to Shaya's stroller – he had used the stroller to block the door that led to our bedroom. It touched me that he had died that way, next to a baby stroller; like, how optimistic is that, to think that a baby stroller could keep out the seventy terrorists that were outside our window.



Yahav sacrificed his life so that Shaya and I could save ourselves. He went up to the window and fought the terrorists to give us time to run. I think about that moment a lot, the moment that he chose to go up to the window. It helps me when thoughts start running through my head, thoughts like, why didn't I say to him, "Don't be a hero! Come escape with me!" – because I know deep in my heart that he would have done it all over again. Because that was Yahav. He would give everything for the people he loved. And he wanted so badly to be a father. It feels to me like that's all he ever wanted in this life. And the fact is that Shaya and I are alive now. Thanks to him, we're still alive.

I think he must have realized that I wouldn't be able to run so fast because of my legs, so he tried to hold them off. Even afterward, after we had left, he could have run outside. I left all the doors open for him. But he chose to stay behind and fight. It's as if he told himself, "It's either me or my baby." He loved Shaya so much, he loved me so much, he loved us too much.

Right now, our daughter Shaya is the only thing that interests me. She's the only thing that makes me feel good. She lights up my life. Each time I break down, every time I crash, she reminds me that she's here. Her diapers ground me; her bottles keep me tethered to reality. She also isn't judgmental; she doesn't understand my tears. She can watch me cry and then suddenly break out into a huge smile. And that smile, that smile so far removed from reality, brings a smile to my face too.

We had an agreement, Yahav and I. We had an agreement, there in that room, when the terrorists broke in: "You hold the door; I've got



the baby.” That was our agreement. We each had our job. And that’s still what’s going on. He’s still holding the door. He’ll be holding that door for the rest of my life. And I’ve still got the baby. And as long as I’m here with the baby, I’ll never let my light go out. With all the trauma I endured, I have to keep going, I have to find my optimism, I have to find reasons to live. I saw him sacrifice his life for mine. We had an agreement. “You hold the door; I’ve got the baby.” So I’m keeping our agreement. And that agreement is what keeps me alive.

The other day, a good friend asked me: “Tell me, Shaylee, if you could be someone else who didn’t go through everything you went through; if you could live a different life, would you do it? Would you switch places with them?” I thought about it for a second, then I answered, “No. I would rather live through this pain another thousand times.”

Because if I were someone else, I wouldn’t have met Yahav, and I wouldn’t have had thirteen wonderful years with him, thirteen years that were larger than life. If I were someone else, I wouldn’t have been gifted with such a love story; I might have gone through life without ever knowing such love. It doesn’t matter how terrible what I went through was; I’m still grateful to have gone through it. I’m still grateful. I’m grateful that I saw him standing there under that yellow spotlight, so talented and goodlooking; I’m thankful that I saw into his soul when he was Romeo and I was Juliet. That I found my home in his eyes. I had a great love, a love larger than life. I have a daughter, and her name is Shaya. And that’s my story now in this world.