



BRING MAYA HOME NOW!

Excerpt from the article "Wounded Israel"

by **Brigitte B. Nussbächer**

On the last evening of our visit to Israel in wartime, in April 2024, we have a special encounter that leaves a mark on our souls and includes a legacy. This article is the fulfillment of our promise.

The Last Evening in Jerusalem

On April 17, 2024, the last evening of our 10-day [visit to Israel](#), we are sitting on our beautiful roof terrace at the Bezalel Hotel in [Jerusalem](#), updating our website "[ARC to ISRAEL](#)" with [pictures](#) and impressions of the last few days - and enjoying the sunset.

There is one other couple besides us, a quiet couple, dressed in black. He has broad shoulders, she is slender and delicate. What strikes me about her is her hair, which hasn't been dyed for a few months. As the woman is very well-groomed, I wonder, if this is connected to a special event.



Shlomo and Smadar Goren. Private photo.

We want to take a selfie because of the beautiful light, and unexpectedly the man offers us his help. We introduce ourselves and start talking. They, Smadar and Shlomo, tell us, that they have come to Jerusalem, to speak to the Chief Rabbi and the President, Yitzchak Herzog about the body of Smadar's sister in law, who was abducted to Gaza and is still there.

Suddenly the atmosphere has changed - the idyll has shattered. We are faced with naked, unvarnished suffering! I cautiously ask, if they would like to tell us more and they sit down with us.

We learn that Smadar Goren's brother Avner lived in Nir Oz, a kibbutz on the Gaza border, with his wife Maya and their four children until October 7, 2023. A happy family - two of the children at university, one in the army and the other one preparing for the army.



*The family of Maya and Avner before 7.10.2023.
Photos Smadar Goren.*



Smadar with her brother Avner before 7.10.2023

The Tragedy of Nir Oz

On October 7, at the time of the massacre, Maya and Avner were staying in Nir Oz.

The kibbutz, founded in 1958, 2 km from Gaza, was one of the worst affected places. There are harrowing records of that day, the last communication of desperate people, who do not understand what is happening, who witness terrorists invading their homes, whose houses are set on fire and thus become death traps. They plead for help that does not come. [Elikatsoff's film](#) summarizes the heartbreaking messages and bitter images. (www.timesofisrael.com/kibbutz-nir-oz-as-it-happened/). The village is destroyed, the houses in ruins or burnt down. When the army finally arrived, it found only death, ashes and unbearable pain. Of the around 400 inhabitants, 40 were killed and 79 kidnapped!

Avner, the father of the family, tried to find safety in the shelter that morning - in vain. The terrorists broke down the door and killed him. Maya had gone to the kindergarten in that morning, to prepare for the next day. She was defenseless against the terrorists and was kidnapped. Shlomo tells us, that they received a video about what happened to Maya at that time - but they don't show it and don't want to talk about it.



Both Avner and Maya were murdered by Hamas. Photo Smadar Goren.



Avner's body was identified only 10 days later. He was buried in Nir Oz, the kibbutz, where he was born and spent his entire life.

Maya's phone was located in the Gaza Strip ... On December 1, the family was notified by the IDF (Israel Defense Force) that Maya had also been murdered.

A married couple, both 56 years old, tragically torn from life.

Four children were left orphaned: Assif, 25, Bar, 23, Gal, 21 and Dekel, 18.

You Can Feel Their Tears, But You Can't See Them

The light of day fades as Shlomo and Smadar talk. Their voices are quiet and very controlled. Deep sadness comes through, but no reproach, no anger and no hatred. You can feel their tears, but you can't see them.



Shlomo and Smadar tell us the story of their family. Private photo.

I thank them for their openness and ask, how they can bear to tell, what happened over and over again. Their answer is very clear: “by doing so, they commemorate their loved ones. They see it as their duty, to tell this story because the struggle is not over yet”.

Seven months later, 36 hostages from Nir Oz are still held by Hamas. It is known, that at least 10 of them are no longer alive. The family has been waiting for over 200 days for at least Maya's body to be returned.

In Judaism, dealing with the dead is of great importance. A corpse must be treated with respect and buried completely (i.e. all body parts and spilt blood), preferably within 24 hours. Not being buried and being thrown to the scavengers as prey is one of the most disastrous things that can happen to a person (Jer 16:4). The desecration of corpses is one of the worst means of humiliation and deterrence, because it threatens the possibility of remembrance and therefore, the preservation of existence.

As a result, the inner wounds of the whole family cannot begin to heal, until they at least have the opportunity to bury Maya in honor.

What many people in other countries have long since closed and forgotten is still very much alive in Israel. The [pain of the hostages](#) who are still being held - dead or alive - in the Gaza terror tunnels is omnipresent here.



Pictures of the abductees at Ben Gurion Airport and on Rothschild Boulevard Tel Aviv. Photos private.

The posters are everywhere, there is no conversation that doesn't involve the hostages. Without their return it is, as if life can only go halfway on. As Smadar puts it: "a tragedy that still continues and breaks so many families".

How Can We Celebrate Passover and Liberation as Long as the Hostages are Being Tortured in Hamas Tunnels?

In 2024 Passover is celebrated in Israel from April 22-30: the feast of liberation. How are they supposed to celebrate this festival with the children of the murdered, if Maya's body is still in Gaza and has not been liberated?

That is, why Smadar and Shlomo have been to see the Chief Rabbi and have an appointment with the President. They want to make sure, that the liberation of the hostages, living and dead, remains a priority for the Israeli government. A week later (when we are already back home) Smadar writes to me, that the appointments were successful, that "they were listened to with great interest and treated with great sensitivity".

Smadar and Shlomo have taken responsibility for the four children left behind, brought them in and are looking after them. The other remaining inhabitants of Nir Oz were evacuated. They had one wish, to stay together, because they lived in the kibbutz as one big family and will continue to try to help each other. After 7 months, it is completely unclear what their future will look like. They cannot return because the whole area is still a war zone and Hamas has not yet been defeated...



We will stay in touch. Private photo.



It's gone quiet on the roof terrace. A few hours ago we were strangers - and now? We share their suffering and have a common heritage. We embrace each other and agree to stay in touch in the future.

We give them a [donation](#). Not that they asked for it. On the contrary: It is difficult for them to accept it, even though their small family has grown from 5 to 9 members as a result of the Hamas murders. But it is important for us, to show with acts, that we share the burden.

Because what gives them and all relatives (of hostages) strength, is to see "that other people in the world also carry their pain - both private and national - in their hearts, understand the scope of this Black Shabbat tragedy and are committed to bringing back all those, who have been kidnapped". They thank us heartfully for sharing their story and supporting their struggle.

Mayas Legacy

Meeting Smadar and Shlomo brings our trip to a meaningful conclusion. Our aim was to visit affected families, to stand by them, [tell their stories](#) and [help them](#) practically and financially. This is our last appointment: unplanned, but no coincidence! Impressive like hardly any other.

This article is the fulfillment of our promise. We pass on Maya's legacy to the world through the message of Smadar and Shlomo: "Don't forget what happened on October 7th! We must fight Hamas and we must not stop until we have defeated them and freed our hostages! [Be at our side!](#)"



May Maya's memory be a blessing! Private photo



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