

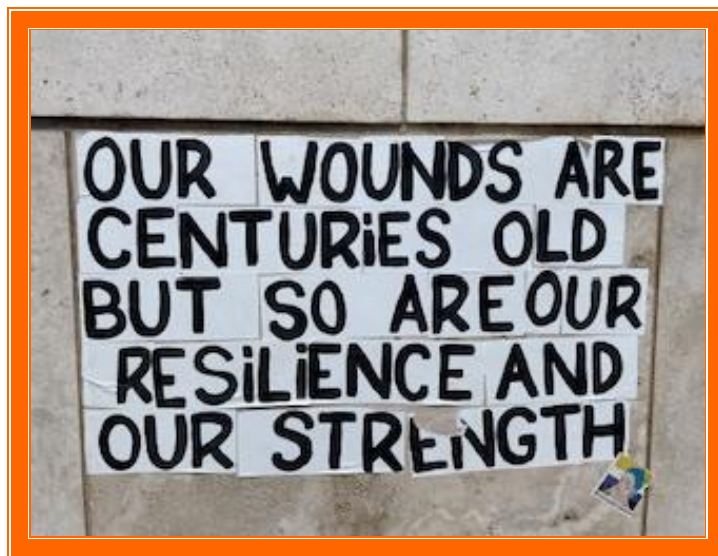


# WOUNDED ISRAEL

## The Legacy of October 7th: Part 2

by Brigitte B. Nussbächer

### *Fragments of Hope, Human Greatness in Death-Threats, Fight for the Hostages*



*Inscription of a wall in Tel Aviv. Private photo*

*The images of the devastation along the Gaza border will always remain in our memories. Read about the nightmare come to life in the first part of the article: [The Legacy of October 7 - Destruction and Death](#).*

*The tragedy is going on, but in all the suffering there are also stories of incredible human greatness and preservation on October 7.*

### Music as a Protective Shield

And once again we head south to Yated to visit a family of musicians. [Julia and Shaul](#) are originally from Moldova. His grandparents were killed during the Holocaust near Babyn Yar, Kiev. During his childhood he was not aware of his Jewish roots and only discovered them later. This ultimately led him to immigrate to Israel in 1996. In 2017, he built his house in Yated himself. Julia and Shaul have three children. Their eldest son, whom we also meet, is in active military service in the Navy.



They have been performing for over 20 years in Israel and around the world as soloists, a virtuoso duo with a wide range of styles, instruments and colors as well as special vocal skills! They have also performed repeatedly in Germany and have thrilled their audiences. But we get to know them in private. They tell us, how they experienced October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Yated is located seven kilometers from the Gaza border. This means that the people here were warned in advance and had a few minutes more time. It therefore didn't hit the village quite as hard as those directly on the border. Shaul played music during the attack to ward off the spirit of death they felt - it gave everyone a sense of protection and security. They were evacuated by the Israeli army because there were terrorists everywhere and the area was not safe for a long time. The incredible suffering, he saw around him really affected him. He was speechless for a week. Not being able to be at home, worrying about his son and the home he had worked so long to build, gnawed at him. The inner emptiness only began to subside when he slowly started to hear about miracles that had taken place in the midst of all the despair. And so he found his way back to prayer.

After three months, they were finally able to return. His son, who had been wounded during his first time in the Gaza Strip, recovered and was then deployed as an instructor in the army. Shaul and Julia began to perform again, because Israelis cannot live without music.



*The musician couple Julia and Shaul. / The family has returned home to Yated. Private photos*

In his opinion, Israel should learn from these events: not to give up voluntarily the land that God has given the Israeli people, not to forget what has happened and to fight evil. Shaul is happy to sense a greater openness to God among the Israelis and more solidarity.

At the end, they sing a very tender, touching song for us. They have big plans for their place and for the future. Find out more on their website <https://www.musicfield.co/en/sj>. It is wonderful to experience their warm hospitality, to see them in their now restored, cozy house and to feel their hope.

## The Miracle of Kerem Shalom

Our last trip to the south takes us to the forecourt of hell.

[Kerem Shalom](#) is only 30 meters from the border with the Gaza Strip and 300 meters from Egypt. The city of Rafah with all the terrorists and refugees is only one kilometer away. On the way there, we come across two military checkpoints. We have to identify ourselves and explain why we are there, then our details are checked and finally we are allowed to drive on.



We meet Rony and Ofer at the entrance to the kibbutz and can hardly believe it: blossoming trees, birds singing - an absolute idyll greets us. At first glance, you think you are in paradise - at second glance, you realize that it is a broken, abandoned paradise. They tell us their story. Kerem Shalom used to be a small kibbutz with 230 inhabitants. Due to its extremely exposed location, directly on two borders, there is not just a fence here, but a high wall.



*Kerem Shalom lies directly on two borders. / The wall was breached by terrorists: the three darker pink panels and the white one were replaced after the 7.10.23. Private photos*

This fence was blown up in four places by terrorists on the morning of October 7<sup>th</sup>. The time of day was a stroke of luck: half an hour later, everyone would have been in the synagogue. The break-in was quickly noticed, although there was confusion because the terrorists wore Israeli uniforms and were therefore difficult to distinguish from the Israelis at a distance.

A total of over 200 stormed into the kibbutz in waves - but unlike other kibbutzim, they met with resistance here. The head of security at Kerem Shalom had defied the order to store the weapons in the weapon's room on his own responsibility. As a result, the security forces were able to defend themselves immediately. There was a fierce battle for hours, but despite all the resistance, considerable damage was done: bullet holes can be seen in many places.



*Houses damaged by terrorists in Kerem Shalom. / Bullet holes, signs of fighting with Hamas in Kerem Shalom. Private photos*



## The Rescuers

People were also injured. Very seriously, in fact. And this is where the dramatic and touching story of Rony and Ofer begins. Both are medical first responders. Ofer used to be head of the security service himself. When they were notified that urgent medical help was needed, the two reacted with incredible human greatness and courage. Instead of worrying about their own safety, they leave their bunker and make their way through the hail of terrorists' bullets to the injured. Rony says, that she has never been so scared of death in her life until that day. But they manage to reach the wounded and fight for their lives - successfully.

After seven hours, the kibbutz runs out of ammunition. The situation is desperate. But then the military arrives - just in time and much earlier than in the other villages, because the head of security had already contacted the army directly in the morning. Slowly, the soldiers manage to bring all the inhabitants to the center of the kibbutz under escort. Rony wipes up the blood of the wounded, so that the children don't get such a big shock. She is a teacher and is a good judge of children's souls. Afterwards, she feels for a long time that she can no longer get clean herself.

The evacuees are taken by bus to Elad in the south. There are only two dead in Kerem Shalom. All the others were rescued. The result of miracles, but also of smart decisions, commitment, courage and boldness. On the journey, Rony looks after the children - it distracts her. Later comes the low point: she has no memory of the next five days.

So many months have passed since then. They have not yet been able to return home. Even after all this time, Hamas is still firing rockets at Kerem Shalom. Rony has found work again as a teacher where they were evacuated, but things are tougher for Ofer. They would actually like to come back. They fell in love with Kerem Schalom long ago, without realizing how dangerous the location is. At the moment, they still have no prospects for the future: the war, which is taking place just a few meters away, continues because the Israeli hostages have not yet been freed and because Hamas is not willing to surrender. That makes everything very difficult.

Their message to the world is: open your eyes and understand the thinking behind these acts. It can and will happen again elsewhere, if it is not fought. They are traveling around the world, trying to explain exactly that. Their urgent request to us is, to pass on, what we have seen and recognized. We promise to publish their story on our [ARC to Israel](https://www.arc-to-israel.org/en/) website, send it to online magazines we know and tell it at our Israel event.



*Rony and Ofer saved the lives of terror victims on October 7. / We remain connected. Private photos*

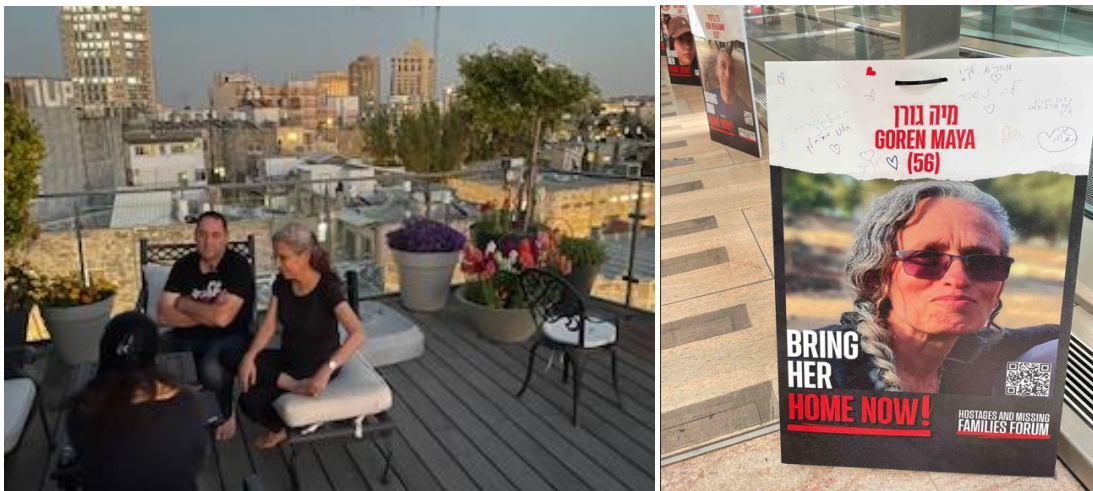


What strikes us when we meet them: of all the people we visited, these are the only ones, who not only cared about their own safety, but also thought about others and were even prepared to risk their lives to help others. And they have a stronger and more positive effect on us than all those, who never left their shelter. Now the question arises: were they able to care for others, because they were strong, or is it their care for others that ultimately made them stronger themselves?

## The Last Evening

Our days in Israel has flown by. We have had incredible experiences during this time (see also "[Wounded Israel – The Tension Field](#)"). We still can't really comprehend and categorize some of it. The weight of the experiences, the images that burned themselves into our minds and the pain, we encountered, are difficult for our souls to process. We always try to capture as many of the impressions and emotions as possible in writing, so that we can report them authentically and vividly. So we worked on our Israel website "[ARC to ISRAEL](#)" every evening. And that's why, for the first time, we have time to sit on our beautiful roof terrace on our last evening.

This day we are home at our [hotel](#) in [Jerusalem](#) earlier than usual and can watch the sunset. Because of the beautiful light, we want to take a selfie, when another couple on the terrace offers to help us. We start talking and learn that Smadar Goren's brother, Avner, and her sister-in-law, Maya, were both killed in the massacre in Nir Oz; Avner in the shelter, Maya in the kindergarten where she was preparing everything for the next day. Maya was also taken to Gaza and her family has been waiting for over 8 months to at least get her body back. The internal wounds cannot begin to heal, until they at least have the opportunity to bury her with honor. (see article: "[Bring Maya Home!](#)")



*Smadar and Shlomo tell the family's tragic story. / They have been fighting for over 7 months to at least get Maya's body back. Private photos*

Nir Oz, a kibbutz founded in 1958, 2 km from Gaza, is one of the hardest hit places. Of the approximately 400 inhabitants, 40 were killed and 79 kidnapped. Seven months later, 36 hostages are still being held by Hamas. It is known that at least 10 of them are no longer alive. The town itself has been destroyed, many houses have been burnt down along with the residents, who sought shelter in them. This video summarizes impressions: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/kibbutz-nir-oz-as-it-happened/>



When the army finally arrived, it found only death, ashes and unbearable pain. The inhabitants, who were still alive, were evacuated. They had one wish, to stay together. Why? Because they lived in the kibbutz as one big family and will continue to try to help each other.

## Bring Maja Home!

Smadar is now taking care of her brother's four orphaned children (in addition to her own 3 children). She and her husband saw the Chief Rabbi and have an appointment with the President. They want to make sure, that the liberation of the - living and dead - hostages remains a priority!

What for many people in other countries has long been over and forgotten, is still a burning issue in Israel. The [pain for 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./ Every meter of Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv is a reminder of the abductees. Private photos*

The posters are everywhere, there is no conversation that doesn't involve the hostages. It's as if life could only go halfway without their return. As Smadar puts it: "a tragedy that is still going on and breaking up so many families". Distressingly, abroad, the agony of the remaining hostages is irrelevant to many.

In the meantime, the sky has gone dark. The lights of [Jerusalem](#) shine like diamonds. Even at night, this city is unbelievably beautiful. But we don't have time to enjoy this beauty right now. We hand over the last donation and promise to give the message of Smadar to the world: "Don't forget what happened on October 7th! We must fight Hamas and we must not stop until we have brought them to their knees and freed our hostages!" Ten days later, we published the article "[Bring Maya Home Now!](#)" on our website [ARC to Israel](#).

Our [aim](#) was to support affected families, tell their stories and [help](#) them practically and financially. This is the last of our - planned and unplanned - appointments brings our trip to a meaningful conclusion.

## The Tragedy is Still Going On

Almost eight months have passed since the massacre and yet it seems like it was only yesterday.

Since October 7<sup>th</sup>, Israel has been fighting a bitter war with [Hamas](#) for the return of its hostages. There have been countless deaths in the Gaza Strip as Hamas abuses humanitarian facilities and uses the Palestinian civilian population as shields for itself. It is a tragic fact, that the terrorist organization would much rather accept Palestinian casualties, than release the criminally abducted Israeli hostages.



In addition, it rejects all mediation proposals presented and makes unfulfillable demands, such as, the extradition of a multiple number of convicted, life-sentenced Palestinian murderers for every hostage alive or dead. At the same time, Hamas continues to regularly assert that it will - in accordance with its [charter](#) and central goal - ensure that October 7th is repeated as often as possible.

And so, eight months later, over 120 Israeli hostages - alive or dead in the meantime - are still being held by Hamas. Rockets are still being fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip. Not only Israel suffers from Hamas terror, but also the Palestinian population. All these losses are ultimately victims of the Hamas leadership, which is not willing to make any compromise that respects Israel's existence.

Hezbollah fires dozens of rockets at Israel from Lebanon every day. The entire population of this region also had to be evacuated as a result. But for the world, this intolerable situation seems to be quite normal. In any other country, this would surely lead to massive international backlash and consequences!

The support that Israel receives from the world public is implausibly - nevertheless! - decreasing with each passing day! UN resolutions demand a ceasefire and humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip from Israel without condemning the Hamas massacre. Israel has to give answer for South Africa's genocide accusation at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. On May 20th, 2024, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Karim Khan, requested arrest warrants against Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Gallant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in connection with the war in Gaza.

On May 24<sup>th</sup> the International Court of Justice (ICJ) demanded that: “ Israel must immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”. This judgment is presented by almost all media, in all countries, as a demand to end the offensive in Rafah immediately. Although Israeli hostages have been rescued in Rafah in the preceding days, a majority of terrorists are based there, Israel has uncovered dozens of Hamas smuggling tunnels leading to Egypt and has found numerous rocket launching ramps in close proximity to the Egyptian border, the majority of the world wants only one thing: for Israel to withdraw from Rafah...

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, Norway, Spain and Ireland officially recognize the Palestinian state without Israel's consent, while the USA and other countries are considering doing that as well.

## Remembrance



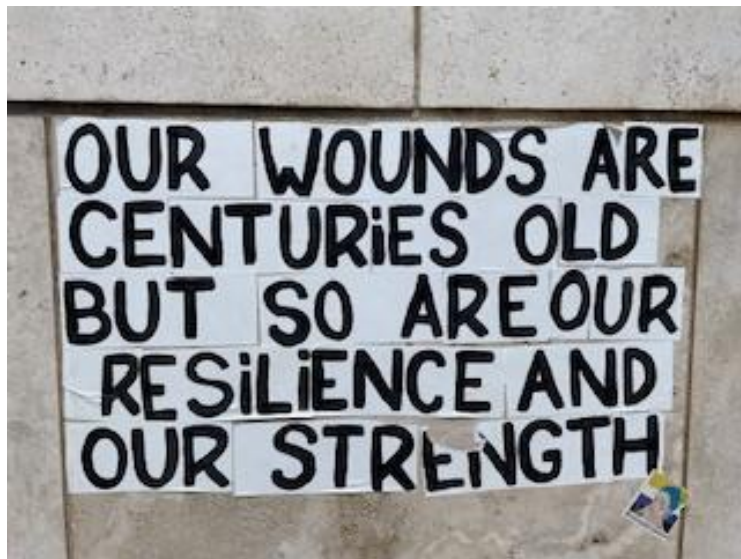


*Commemoration of terror victims and fallen soldiers. Private photo*

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, Yom HaZikaron was celebrated in Israel: the day of remembrance for the fallen Israeli soldiers and the victims of terrorism - since the founding of the state. It is a particularly bitter day this year. More heartbreaking than any memorial day since the Yom Kippur War; for many the most painful memorial day of their lives. So many open wounds that are still bleeding - all the victims, all the hostages!

During the minutes of remembrance, everything stands still in Israel: work is interrupted, cars on the highway stop, everyone shows their respect, many pray! Anyone who has experienced this, will never forget it! Wreaths are laid. Everyone thinks of those, who have sacrificed or lost their lives because Israel - even AFTER its founding - still has to fight for its survival and has to mourn new terror victims every year.

The current figure on May 14<sup>th</sup> 2024 is 25,034 soldiers and security forces killed and 5,100 civilians killed in terror attacks. A staggering 30,134! This is the price, Israel has paid for its independence - to this day!



*A rocket turned into a flower vase in Ralph's garden. / Inscription on the wall of a house on Rothschild Boulevard, Tel Aviv. Private photos*

But despite all the suffering and grief over the centuries, it was the Jewish people, who showed the world, how not to lose hope and how to rise again from the ashes and rubble. How to prevail against all odds, how to turn deadly missiles into flowerpots. This is Israel!

**"Our wounds are centuries old, but so are our resilience and our strength".**

And with this impression, we set off on our return journey: as before and despite everything –

**Am Israel Chai - the People of Israel live!**







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