

Mishy Harman: Hello?

Danna Harman: Hi, Mishy?

Mishy Harman: Hey, Danz, how you doing?

Danna Harman: Hi! *beseder*, what's up?

Mishy Harman: Danz, I want to ask you something, how how many times did you talk to Mom and Dad today?

Danna Harman: Ummm, let's see what time it is, it's about four o'clock. I've spoken to Mom once, Dad once, Mom once, four times in total I would say.

Mishy Harman: And ahh... is that... is that a normal day or is that a low frequency day?

Danna Harman: [*Danna laughs*] That's pretty normal at around this hour usually there are a couple more phone calls back and forth in the evening. So sometimes, sometimes they call me together. When they call together from the house usually it starts with both of them on the line each one on a different telephone and then at some point Mom goes, "David I can't hear anything, close the phone." [*Danna and Mishy laugh*]. And then Dad closes the phone, and then me and Mom have a whole conversation: Who, when, what, what did, what, what, what, what, what, what, what... We finish the conversation, we hang up, and then Dad calls me back. He's like, "Hey what's new?" I'm like, "What's new?! I just had a whole load down with Mom." He's like, "Yeah, but I wasn't there for it." We have the whole thing over again between me and Dad. [*Danna and Mishy laugh*]. Then usually they'll call again late at night cuz' no one's sleeping over there at the household, and then Mom's half asleep and Dad's talking to me and then we hang up and crash to sleep, and then first thing in the morning, I'd say seven thirty, eight, someone calls me and they're like, "Hey what's new? What's up?" [*Danna laughs*]. What could be up? What what more could have happened?

Mishy Harman: And and how old, how old are you Danz?

Danna Harman: [*Danna laughs*] I am forty-five years old.

Mishy Harman: Okay, one one second, I wanna, I wanna bring Oren up on the line, ummm... so one second I'm just gonna, let's let's let's let's call Oren.

Danna Harman: OK.

Oren Harman: Hello?

Mishy Harman: Hey Ori!

Oren Harman: Hey Mish, how's it going?

Mishy Harman: Good, Danz is on the line too...

Danna Harman: Hi Ori!

Oren Harman: Hi Danz!

Mishy Harman: Ori, listen, I have a question, how many times a day, on average, ahhhh... do you speak to Mom and Dad?

Oren Harman: Oh I don't know, I'd say about between ahh... four and five. *[Mishy and Danna laughs]* I mean ahh... you know, every morning ah... at around nine o'clock, just as I'm about to leave the house, that's when the first phone call comes.

Mishy Harman: Okay, okay. *[Danna laughs]*.

Oren Harman: And ah... I've got a foot out the door but it's ah... it always ends up being about fifteen minutes of ah... discussions of your love life, and Danna's love life, and stuff like that.

Mishy Harman: Uh-huh.

Oren Harman: That's the first phone call.

Mishy Harman: Yeah.

Oren Harman: Then around you know twelve in the afternoon, lunchtime, I'd say that's when the second phone call comes in.

Mishy Harman: Uh-huh.

Oren Harman: And about two or three times ahhh... you know towards the evening and once before I go to bed. How many times you speak to Mom and Dad?

Mishy Harman: I'd say I talk to Mom and Dad on average ahhh... somewhere between let's say five and seven times a day.

Oren Harman: Really?!

Danna Harman: Mish, that's cuz' the rest of the time you're actually at the house, so they don't need to call you, cuz' you're there, with them. Every time I call them or speak to them, you're in the house!

Mishy Harman: Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh *[Danna laughs]*.

Danna Harman: Nachon, Oren?

Oren Harman: Yeah, of course.

Mishy Harman: And, tell me something, do you think that it's normal that we talk, that we talk to Mom and Dad so much?

Oren Harman: Sure it's normal! A

forty-three-year-old, forty-six-year-old...

Danna Harman: No...

Oren Harman: And a thirty-four-year-old talking to their parents on average fifteen times a day? [*Mishy laughs*]. I'd say it's pretty normal.

Mishy Harman: One sec, let's let's bring Mom and Dad on the line a second. Hello?

Dorothy Harman: Hi Mish, how are you cookie?

Mishy Harman: Hi, *Imma!*

David Harman: Hi Mishy!

Mishy Harman: Hi *Abba!*

Dorothy Harman: Hi!

Danna Harman: Mom, hi!

Dorothy and David Harman: Hi!

Oren Harman: Hi *Abba, ma nishma?*

Dorothy Harman: Hi *tootzileh!* Hi everybody.

David Harman: Hi!

Danna Harman: Hi guys, hi *Imma'le*, hi Dad [*Dorothy laughs*]!

Mishy Harman: How's it going?

David Harman: Hi cookie.

Dorothy Harman: Nice to hear your voice, great. What's up with you guys?

Mishy Harman: Good ahh... *Imma!* Who do you talk to the most from... you know, from all the kids?

Dorothy Harman: You of course! You're here, I speak to you all the time.

Danna Harman: [*Danna laughs*] Told you!

Dorothy Harman: You know that Mish! You're the one who calls us most of the time.

Mishy Harman: I call you?!

Dorothy Harman: Of course.

David Harman: Of course.

Oren Harman: Yeah, how many times does Mishy call a day, *Imma?* How many times?

David Harman: Half a dozen.

Dorothy Harman: At least! I mean half a dozen is is is...

Danna Harman: At least...

Dorothy Harman: Is a small amount. Yeah.

Oren Harman: A very low estimate [*Dorothy laughs*].

Dorothy Harman: Yeah, right, you know. We check it, we check in all the time.

Danna Harman: We like being in contact.

Dorothy Harman: Right!

Mishy Harman: *Imma...*

Dorothy Harman: Listen, everybody's making fun of us, but it's it's silly, because I think we're very lucky, we want to be in touch, we like to share all our things that's going on. All the stories. So, everybody else is missing out. For us it's wonderful that we have three such great kids and we love to talk to them, and they like to talk to us. That's the truth!

Mishy Harman: Yeah, it's cozy, no? Danna it's cozy.

Dorothy Harman: It's two ways, it is cozy.

Sometimes it gets a little much, right Dan? Dan, sometimes you feel like it's a little overbearing.

Danna Harman: I'm just not a big phone talker honestly. I'm like the less phone talker in the family.

Dorothy Harman: Right.

David Harman: Rarely ever happens that I call Mishy and his phone isn't busy.

Mishy Harman: Cuz' I'm talking to Oren or Danna.

[Dorothy, David and Danna laugh] Do you think there's any connection between the fact that we're all so close, and talk so often and the fact that um, well I guess let's say that those amongst us that did get married, got married kinda late in life?

Dorothy Harman: Listen... You know, don't blame us for you guys not getting your act together. Get married. That'd be lovely. Then we'll talk more with the grandchildren. Goodbye!

David Harman: Dan, *b'teavon*.

Danna Harman: Bye.

Mishy Harman: Bye.

Dorothy Harman: Bye.

Danna Harman: Bye, bye everybody.

Mishy Harman: Bye.

David Harman: Bye.

[music comes up]

Mishy Harman (narration): Hey, I'm Mishy Harman, that was my... (slightly over-the-top) family, and this is Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by PRX and is produced together with Tablet Magazine. Our episode today - "**Thicker Than Water,**" stories about how it really is, at the end of the day, all in the family.

We're gonna be delving into the world of family bonds, we're gonna see how they're formed, and strengthened and challenged, in a bunch of different ways. And we'll do that through the stories of two families - the Griffels and the Kosovers - who are both happy families, but are not, in any Tolstoy-like way, alike.

OK, before we get to today's stories, I have something really important to say. This episode is about families. And when we began our program, almost three years ago, the Israel Story family was so small it could basically fit in my livingroom. In fact, it did. Many times. But since then we've grown and grown and grown, and now there are tens of thousands of people in the Israel Story family. And today, for the first and only time this season, we're going to ask you to do what family members so often do - to help us out. To support our show.

We began Israel Story because there was nothing like it out there. Sure, there was 'This American Life,' whom - as Ira only half-jokingly pointed out in our very first episode - we totally "ripped off." But on a more fundamental level, there was very little human-interest, complicated, nuanced content coming out of, and about, Israel.

And that's what we wanted to share. Not the Israel of the news - a place of violence and conflict and terror. And not the Israel of the advocacy groups - a place of start ups and microchips and innovative cherry tomatoes. The Israel we wanted to explore was all about its people. About its diversity, and richness, and complexity. We wanted to paint a picture of our a home - a place that was simultaneously beautiful and ugly. That cracked you up one moment, and brought you to tears the next. That was heartfelt, and bizarre, and informative. And mainly? Just real.

And in order to do that we pour our hearts into this show. We travel up and down the country, searching for the best stories that capture Israel today. We've met an Eritrean refugee who translated Anne Frank's diary into Tigrinya, and an ultra-orthodox mom who adopted four babies with Down Syndrome. We explored six different Rabins in today's Israel - twenty years after the assassination - and visited all the people living at 48 Herzl Street throughout the country, all the way from Kiriyat Shmona to Dimona. We've spent months investigating every corner of Tel Aviv's Central Bus Station, and opened up old ideological wounds from the 1950s in Kibbutz Ein Harod. Sometimes our stories have taken us even farther away: This season we've ventured to Malta, to record the tale of the friendship between ninety-nine-year-old Ruth Dayan and her bestie, Raymonda Tawil. We've reported an hour long episode, together with RadioLab, from Nepal, where Tal and Amir went to pick up their triplets and were surprised by the earthquake. We've traveled to Peru to meet Ukranian-born, ex-Israeli *shamans*, and to

Bristol, where Nathan Filer and Emily Parker told us the tale of how their daughter was conceived in a detention center outside of Ben Gurion Airport. We've even turned one of our pieces, a love story between two men - an Israeli Jew and Palestinian Arab - into a twenty-minute-long Broadway-style musical.

We bring you all of these stories, along with many others, for absolutely nothing. And now is your chance to give back to the show you love in whatever amount works for you. With your generous help we'll be able to do even more - to increase the quality of our reporting, take more storytelling risks, and follow more extensive story lines. Your donation will make that happen.

Now, I know you think that might be overstating it. But believe me, it isn't. We count on listener support to make this program possible. By becoming a supporter, and even more so, a sustaining monthly supporter, you're playing a vital role in the creation of Israel Story. Our show is independently owned so when you support Israel Story, you are supporting us.

As a podcast listener, you have a ton of choices. (I read somewhere recently that there are 300,000 active podcasts in English out there today). You've chosen Israel Story and I want to say thank you, because our aim is simple - we work for you, the listener.

So, go to israelstory.org, that's israelstory.org, and click on the red donate button in the upper right corner. As you'll see, we have all kinds of support levels for you to choose from, from ten Dollars all the way to a thousand, including a custom amount, so there's something there for everyone. The site is mobile friendly, and all donations are tax-deductible.

What helps us most is if you check the "become a sustaining, monthly contributor" box. So consider supporting us by choosing a donation that makes sense for your bottom line, while helping us with ours. If you want to join the growing Israel Story family and become a supporter at any level, from ten Dollars a month to two hundred, *now is the time*. Visit israelstory.org, and click on "donate."

Thank you all so so much! People like you, who care about Israel and care about storytelling, are the reason that Israel Story exists, and we hope - with your help - to continue this magical storytelling journey of ours for many years to come.

Yalla, now let's tell some stories.

We've all got our anchors in life. People we can trust will be there no matter what. Like a rock. For many of us it's our parents. But what do you do when that rock crumbles to dust? Shoshi Shmuluvitz brings us the story of one woman, a thirty-six year old physical therapist from Jerusalem, who has been searching for that stable family bond her entire life. **Act One - The Missing Moms.**

Tali Griffel: I'm always looking for a mom, just to be clear. Like, growing up I always had moms who took me in, not full time, but I always spent several nights a week at my best friend's house and I always very much loved a couple mothers and loved talking to them and loved spending time with them and they reciprocated. And it was never a replacement, but you know, you need support in your life.

Shoshi Shmuluvitz: Tali Griffel was born in the desert city of Eilat, at the southernmost tip of Israel. She was immediately put up for adoption, and the couple who took her in — an American dad and a Canadian mom — lived in Jerusalem. That's where she spent the first five years of her life.

Tali Griffel: I have very vivid memories of a few scenes. Just like looking for ladybugs in like an overgrown lot behind my building. I remember cauliflower and bechamel sauce for dinner, that my mother used to make, that I really loved.

I have a few memories with my parents, but maybe not as many as I'd like.

They separated when I was 4 and I think she wanted to stay here and raise me here and he wanted to be in America and I think that was like the big split.

Shoshi Shmuluvitz: Her dad moved to DC, while Tali and her mom stayed in Jerusalem.

Tali Griffel: I was very sad because I was very very attached to my father and I think it was very hard for my mother because I don't think she necessarily wanted him to go either. As a child, I felt she made him leave. I mean I try not to like beat myself up about what I may or may not have done when I was four. But I probably could have been easier for her. Like I might have made

it harder than than it already was.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: Her father was an ocean away, but he called every week and he visited. And Tali's mom, Anita, adored her, she was her rock. And she was always her champion.

Tali Griffel: I remember riding my bike, my mother taking me down to the commercial strip and riding my bike down there, which I loved to do and I remember once getting knocked off my bike. An older child ran into me with his bike and I remember her just grabbing the kid by the collar and holding him in the air and screaming at him.

She was reserved, tall, like naturally elegant, kind, smart, and when she kissed me there were like sparks sometimes. Like electric shocks, but I remember being like "ow!" when I was little. I just remember having a calm house that there was somebody who I could turn to who was there and stable.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: But when she was five years old, that sense of stability and safety was broken.

Tali Griffel: We went on vacation with family friends for Sukkot, just my mother and me and her friends from the university. We camped out in Sinai on the beach, at Ras Burqa.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: These were the years after Israel and Egypt made peace, and the beaches of Sinai became a popular vacation spot for Israelis.

Tali Griffel: There was a dune right above where we were camping out and we had gone down and it was very very fun and of course we were children so we wanted to go again. And a few of the adults took us up and a few stayed down to organize the meal. And the second time we went up there was an Egyptian soldier outpost there and one of the Egyptian soldiers opened fire on our group.

I definitely remember like the moment of transition between laughter and gleeful noises of children at the beach to like terror and screams and and something very very awful and very very wrong is happening. So a

few of the children were able to run down the dune and were safe but everybody who was on top just got stuck there. And I was there with my mom and she threw herself on me.

I was there for quite a while. More than an hour. I remember feeling like hot sand, blue sky, feeling my mother's body weight on me and I remember seeing blood and not knowing if it's me or her, what's happening. If I was OK or not OK or I just was in shock and at some point after the shooting stopped the other soldiers told me to come forward so I did. And I just was sitting there. One of the adults from the group who hadn't gone up negotiated with them in Arabic. Just said like let the girl come down, let the girl come down and the Egyptian authorities wouldn't let ambulances come. So time just passed.

And yeah... my mother just bled to death.

And then they let me run back down the hill towards where we had come from and then I was taken to the border and at the border we were driven back to Jerusalem.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: Tali was the only survivor at the top of that sand dune. Seven others were killed, three of them children. They were Tali's friends. Tali's dad flew in from the US, and took her to her mother's funeral.

Tali Griffel: I think that I understood but I pretended not to understand for a long time. I kept asking my dad when is she getting out of the hospital even though the funeral had happened and I understood that nobody was getting out of any hospital. You know, when I lost her, I lost the center. I had gone through so much that nothing felt calm anymore.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: A few weeks after the funeral, Tali's dad packed them up, and brought her over to the US to live with him.

Tali Griffel: He always very much encouraged me to talk about it. And like obviously he took me to a child psychologist when I was little. But the psychologist pretty much gave me like an all clear after a few sessions and just said keep talking to her and if

anything arises come back. But conversations about my mother were very hard to... it felt very artificial and forced, and I didn't know how to start it and it always felt like he didn't know what to say, and the dialogue wasn't open because it was so far away and so distant. I also, I mean I was in shock for about a year in terms of being afraid of everything: Fire, water, being outdoors. So it took a while for me to become a normal kid again. But I think that process was a little bit easier in America cuz' it was just... nothing reminded me exactly of what had happened. Like it really was just like cut. Start something new.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: It helped that Tali and her dad became a team of two. He was always supportive of her, and *she?* made it her business to be the perfect kid.

Tali Griffel: Very agreeable, easygoing, adaptable. I was very much looking to not cause trouble. There was no boundary testing. There's things that maybe some other kids needed to be told, that I would never have needed to be told — in terms of like how to talk to my father, I would never would've said something rude. It was just very important for me to keep the one parent that I had happy.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: In the years that followed, Tali got good grades, became captain of her high school soccer team, and got into Brown. But before starting college, she decided to spend a year in Israel, learning Hebrew on a *kibbutz*.

Tali Griffel: It wasn't so great. [*Tali laughs*] And I thought it was kinda like a second rate country compared to America.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: She went back to the U.S. and started college - but she found it kind of empty and meaningless. And then it hit her:

Tali Griffel: I was sitting on a bus, I was looking at the stars, and I said to myself, "Oh I have to go back to Israel and join the army." Like in one moment it was just in my gut and I said, "That's absolutely what has to happen." I just I needed to learn Hebrew, and then I needed to go in the army. I just needed to be Israeli.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: Tali wasn't religious, she even wasn't much of a Zionist; and yet, she was propelled to come back to the place where she had lost her mother. It was as

though she was righting a wrong.

Tali Griffel: It was like a path that I was diverted from. I left so much of me behind when I left when I was five. I think a lot of it had to be with like what my mom would expect and want me to do. Because she was a Zionist. She spoke perfect Hebrew, and she made *aliyah* at age 28. Her Hebrew was really gorgeous, hardly accented and her friends were all Israelis and everything that I've heard and that I know about her is that she really was attached to Israel and to Jerusalem.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: So, after her freshman year of college, Tali moved to Israel and joined the army. Like her mother, she became fluent in Hebrew. She reconnected with their old friends in Jerusalem, and with the place she used to know.

And then, after the army, when she was twenty-one, she became curious about something she'd never taken much interest in before: Her biological family. Tali had always known she was adopted.

Tali Griffel: It was just a fact and I was very comfortable with it and I certainly didn't think about it while all these big life changes were happening.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: But now, she was back in Israel, all grown up, and beginning to think about one day having a family of her own. It was time for her to find her roots, and that meant finding her biological mother.

Tali Griffel: I walked into the Child Welfare Ministry, I sat down with one of the social workers, and I asked to open my file, and she said OK. And then we made a date for a couple weeks later, and she had a lot of information about... mostly about my mom, a little bit about my biological father.

I mean I was very relieved, because you can imagine a million different awful scenarios of where you might have come from. You can imagine that you're a drug addict's child, or a result of a rape or something really - I mean that's probably what most adoptions are. And in this case it was actually just a story of a mother who was too young with a child already. Like she'd given birth to a girl fourteen months before she gave birth to me, and she was only twenty-three.

But the notes, I mean, were so flattering. She was, they said, you know uh intelligent, lovely, attractive. So those are all very happy things to hear if you're interested in finding out about your past. And it also said that the father wanted to keep me and that she insisted on giving me up for adoption. So then she said she would try to contact the mother and that she felt optimistic and that she would be in touch with me as soon as there was anything to report.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: Tali was elated. Soon, she'd have a mom *and* a sister. Her mind filled with visions of the reunion.

Tali Griffel: I imagined that we would meet in some formal setting and have like a very gentle opening to this new world. And there would be you know some emotion involved after all these years.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: Three weeks later, the social worker called her back in. She had some bad news.

Tali Griffel: She had gone to visit Hadas, my biological mother, and when she went up to see her, she... an eleven-year-old boy answered the door and then after that when Hadas had come to the door she said don't ever come back here, and she closed the door in her face. That was the end of that. Like I was - it was - I was really disappointed.

I think I held it together at the office and I was like, "Oh yeah, OK, haha OK yeah fine." And then when I got home I just cried a lot, a lot, a lot. It was just like a devastating blow that I didn't see coming because I didn't think I cared that much and I didn't think she'd say no. So like the double combo of discovering that you really really care and she said no made it like a lot for me to bear.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: It was like losing a mother for the second time. And now that she knew more about her biological family, she just couldn't let it go. Everywhere she went, she found herself wondering - could that woman be my mother, over there by the bank machine? Or that one, sitting at the cafe?

Tali Griffel: Which is kinda like this haunting sensation.

Shoshi Shmuluvitz: It went on like that for years. Then, when Tali was twenty-five, she got a call.

Tali Griffel: It was the social worker from Jerusalem and she said, "Where did you go? Where did you disappear to? I've been looking everywhere for you. Do you know your sister came in and she wants to meet you. When can you come into the office?"

Shoshi Shmuluvitz: They scheduled an appointment for the two women to meet.

Tali Griffel: And the day of I was nervous, excited, like the day of a wedding.

Shoshi Shmuluvitz: Tali stepped into the office to meet her biological sister, Moran.

Tali Griffel: I think it took about a minute of just looking.

Shoshi Shmuluvitz: They were wearing exactly the same thing: Birkenstocks, capri pants, red tank tops, the same brand of handbag - one had stripes, one had polka dots. And after the initial surprise at *that* wore off, they checked out each other's thumbs.

Tali Griffel: Our defining feature.

Shoshi Shmuluvitz: They both have these same funny hammerhead thumbs — a genetic anomaly.

Tali Griffel: And then we started talking and then it was like a snowball. We just had a lot to catch up on. We just talked about everything. We talked about our childhood, about our parents, about our partners, about our interests, about work, about basically about life.

Shoshi Shmuluvitz: That's how it started, and now, ten years later, the sisters have inside jokes and finish each other's sentences.

Tali Griffel: We choose to be together, we've been together for major life events. Morani's been at the birth of two of my kids. I can't think of anybody else that I would want with me at the births. I mean she stood there with like a shower on me, rubbing my back for ten hours. So that you know getting wet in her clothes like that, that's just the person that I feel like I want with me

in those major events.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: Eventually, as the sisters grew closer, their mother Hadas agreed to meet Tali.

Tali Griffel: We walk in after twenty-six years of not meeting and she's like, "Hey, want a beer?" And I was like, "Okay." That's how it all begins, like that was minute one of our life. And then I had a beer and we were sitting outside and we had really like a lovely evening, but we didn't talk about any of the heavy stuff. It took many years to talk about the heavy stuff. We did it in drops. Little drops. And I still don't feel like we talked about all the issues that there are to talk about.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: All those years longing for a mother — and now, it was clear that they were not going to have the mother-daughter relationship that Tali had envisioned.

Tali Griffel: In terms of Hadas I feel like it's an evolving relationship. And it's an adult relationship. I'm not meeting her as a child, I'm not looking for a new mom. If at twenty-one I had met Hadas and she had been open to me then I think she would have taken on a mother role in a way that right now has not happened. But it would have been somebody that I would have come to for support when I needed it. My father, he's always worried that like my mother will be replaced and it's so not an issue. It's almost comical to me how different they are. And I think about the two of them, they're so not interchangeable.

I really wish my mother who raised me could be here to be with my children. I mean that's really like... if I could have a wish, that might be my wish. The person I want to eternally please, that's the person who I hold in my mind as when I raise my children I want her to be proud of them.

Shoshi Shmulovitz: Today, Tali has the big family that she always wanted to be a part of: Three young kids, a loving husband and a big black poodle. Their Jerusalem apartment is bright and tidy and filled with the trappings of family life: Toys in big plastic bins, tiny toothbrushes on the bathroom counter, a photo of Tali and her daughter riding a tandem bicycle on a family picnic. Despite the trauma of losing her mom so violently, she's built a strong, harmonious family. And, in that sense, Tali has become the mother she was always searching for.

Tali Griffel: When I see my kids playing together it's like the world is lined up perfectly. When they're happy and they're together, I don't have much to do with it, but I feel like it's my greatest achievement. And that they can just enjoy each other's company makes me feel so much better about the future that if I'm not here that they can have each other.

Mishy Harman (narration): Shoshi Shmuluvitz is a producer on our show. OK, so our next story is about a different kind of familial bond. One that's both super noisy and totally quiet. And as you'll hear in just a moment it's not the most trivial choice for a radio piece. **Act Two - The Radio Babe.** Here's Maya Kosover.

[Recording from the radio archive]

Sarah Doron: Hello to all the children who are listening to the merry choir. This is Sarah Doron...

Maya Kosover (narration): When I was little my parents kept the radio playing in my room all the time.

[Flipping through radio stations]

Radio Interviewer: Shmulik how do you live with this double identity where...

Maya Kosover (narration): There was a chest of drawers next to the crib where I slept. The radio sat on top of it. It would be on for hours and hours, every day.

[Classical music, flipping through stations]

Radio Announcer: Presenting Army Radio's best Hebrew hits, with our host Erez Tal. Good evening, hello hello, and happy holidays to our listeners at home...

Maya Kosover (narration): The radio was like another member of the family. I like to think that's the reason I fell in love with the medium.

But this story isn't about radio, really. It's about the people who made me listen to it.

[Song on the radio]: Listen listen, and come closer to the radio - you, little boy from the village and you, little girl from town, we'll tell stories and sing together, come and gather 'round.

Maya Kosover (narration): My dad's sixty-five, my mom's a year younger. They're both retirees who are still energetic and beautiful and spunky. This story is about them. The only thing is that when it airs, all they'll hear is...

[quiet]

Yeah, my parents can't really understand that magical notion of voices booming out of a box.

Recently, I asked my father to describe a radio for me.

Eli Kosover: Radio? It's a device that speaks. You can hear all kinds of stories, and songs.

Maya Kosover (narration): We'll be dubbing my dad from now on, because his English isn't great. But even if you understood Hebrew, you probably wouldn't be able to make out what he just said. "Radio," he explained, "it's a device that speaks to you. You can hear all kinds of stories, and songs, and sounds."

Eli Kosover: But actually, I don't hear anything. Sometimes, when you were a baby, I would crank the volume all the way up, and put my hand on the speaker, so that I could feel the vibrations and imagine the sounds.

Maya Kosover (narration): My dad, Eli, got meningitis when he was two months old. He recovered, but was left deaf for life. My mom, Mira, was born that way.

Deaf people talk funny because they've never heard how people are "supposed" to talk. They can imitate the movements of the lips, they can use sign language, but as far as they're concerned, language is not about sound.

That's not to say that the homes of deaf people are quiet. Actually they are quite loud: There's a lot of noise that the deaf people aren't even aware of - cabinet doors slamming, things falling, people yelling. But the sounds of a deaf home are different than those of the outside world. They are random, and jolting. And speech sounds completely different.

That's why the radio was constantly on when I was a baby: My parents wanted me to learn how "hearing" people speak. And this introduced me to a whole world of sounds. Here's my mom.

Mira Kosover: I would turn the radio on and play songs for you, and I would invite grandma over to tell you stories, because I can't tell a story properly. I mean with the voices and all. It would always come out like "ttttt," and that wasn't fun for you.

Maya Kosover (narration): But my mom's wrong, I actually *did* like the way my parents told me stories, in their odd voices, without paying any attention to rhythm or rhymes.

[Enter Music]

You want to hear what I mean? Well, in the mid-eighties we got a cassette player, and my parents would buy a lot of books on tape for me. Here, for instance, is a recording of a children's story called *Dira Le'Haskir*, or 'An Apartment for Rent.' It's *the* classic Israeli children's book.

Reuben Shefer: Apartment for Rent. Among the vineyards and fields in a beautiful valley, stands a tower built of five stories. *[goes under]*.

Maya Kosover (narration): Now here's my dad's rendition:

Eli Kosover: And who lives in this tower? On the first floor, a fat hen. *[Hen clucking]*. Every day she is home in bed, turning this way and that, she is so fat she can hardly bend. On floor number two lives the Cuckoo *[kookoo, kookoo]... [goes under]*.

Maya Kosover (narration): For me this was just normal. After all, I'd been hearing my parents' voices ever since I was born.

It's almost impossible to imagine what it must be like to learn how to speak as a deaf person. I mean, we all learned by imitation, but my parents - they had to imitate a language they had never heard.

Aviva Stein: We hired all kinds of private tutors when your mom was really really young.

Maya Kosover (narration): That's my savta Aviva, my mom's mom.

Mira Kosover: When I was little, savta sat down next to me with a mirror and showed me how to speak. She took my hand and put it on her lips and mouthed out each letter.... Mmm... zzzz... just like that. And then she'd start with words: Ba ba ba... And I would practice this way. Abba abba.

Maya Kosover (narration): My grandmother taught my mom how to pronounce each letter, each syllable, each sound, how to follow the movement of the lips, the way the tongue sticks to

the roof of the mouth with the letter “N” compared with the way it touches the front teeth with the letter “L.” The difference between “B”...

Mira Kosover: Bbbahh.

Maya Kosover (narration): And “P”...

Mira Kosover: Puh.

Maya Kosover (narration): When you’re supposed to pucker your lips, and when you need to produce a blast of air.

Mira Kosover: Puh puh.

Maya Kosover: Savta, you didn’t speak in sign language at home, right?

Aviva Stein: No! We didn’t know how to, it wasn’t allowed.

Maya Kosover: What do you mean it wasn’t allowed? Who said it wasn’t?

Aviva Stein: The teachers, the school principal. “You go ask Doctor Heiger, tell him Aviva Stein sent you...” They told us not to speak to Mira in sign language. That way she’d be forced to learn how to read lips and communicate with hearing people. And that’s exactly what happened.

Maya Kosover (narration): This was in the fifties, and things today are very different: Most deaf people speak sign language *and* read lips, and according to many studies on the subject, there is no conflict between the two skills. On the contrary. But back then, in the early days of the state, they didn’t really know how to raise deaf children; my parents’ childhood was sort of a sustained period of trial and error.

Mira Kosover: When I was about three years old, my mother put me in a kindergarten for hearing people. But the other kids’ parents didn’t want me there. They saw me as some sort of a weird kid. As if I was retarded, and could actually infect the other kids. I remember my mom was really hurt.

Aviva Stein: Those “holier than thou” ladies. Oh yeah. I remember them very well. Anyway... we ended up sending your mom to the deaf kid kindergarten.

Mira Kosover: At that point they conducted an experiment and moved a bunch of us to the Balfour School in Tel Aviv. It was the first time in the history of the

country, that they experimented with placing deaf kids in regular classes...

Maya Kosover (narration): Recently, my mom pulled out a faded newspaper clipping from 1963 to show me. The article described that innovative classroom experiment. Smack in the center of it was a black and white photograph of a beautiful girl with big eyes looking up at the chalkboard.

Mira Kosover: That's me! I used to like to look in the mirror and imagine that I could hear and speak like normal people, you know clearly, and fast, and fluent... But of course I wasn't like everyone else. My mom would explain to me what everybody was saying - and I was a very curious girl. I would constantly interrupt her and ask: "What's she saying? And now what's he saying? And what are you saying?"

I had a really good friend at the time, Hanna.. She was hearing. She lived in the building across the street, and we could see each other from our balconies. We'd spend hours together, talking without sound.

People who passed by on the street would watch and think that I was talking to the sky or to the trees, and didn't know that I was talking to a friend on the opposite porch.

Maya Kosover (narration): I had known that my mom had hearing friends growing up, but it was only after I began talking to my parents for this story that I learned about my dad's hearing girlfriend.

Eli Kosover: Before I met your mom, I dated a young hearing woman. Honestly, when it was just the two of us, things were very good. But when we were outside, in public, we had a problem. I was handicapped and couldn't hear what everyone was saying. I was missing out on all the laughter and the stories. So in the end I told her that we weren't such a good match after all, and we broke up. But it was on a good note.

Maya Kosover (narration): I ask my dad how he met my mom.

Eli Kosover: How we met? Go ask *imma*...

Maya Kosover: But she's always doing the talking, you should talk a little too...

Eli Kosover: Fine... How did we meet? I think it was at a *Shemah* event, I don't know.

Maya Kosover (narration): My dad isn't quite sure, which I find a bit funny, but he thinks it was at the *Shemah* club, which is a nonprofit that assists the deaf and hearing impaired. My mother, in what seems like a much more credible account, claims that it was at a party - and that she had her doubts about him.

Mira Kosover: He started hitting on me.

Maya Kosover: Abba, is that true?

Eli Kosover: I don't remember...

Mira Kosover: Like a madman he started hitting on me, but I wasn't sure about him.

Maya Kosover: You don't remember any of this?

Eli Kosover: I had a lot of women [*rolling laughter*].

Maya Kosover (narration): Now my dad's blushing.

[*Eli laughing in the background*]

Maya Kosover (narration): My mom runs into the bedroom and returns with a small suitcase, yes a suitcase, stuffed with dozens of love letters from my father. Another new discovery for me. But actually, it makes sense: When they met, in 1970, my dad was living in Haifa and my mom was a Tel Aviv girl. They couldn't speak over the phone, and the fax machine, which would later change our family life forever, was still a thing of the future.

Mira Kosover: You see I'm stubborn: You keep telling me to throw things away, throw things away, so I hid it.

Maya Kosover: Imma, I tell you to throw away *garbage*, not these things!

Mira Kosover: You see, Maya?! Even you can be surprised!

Maya Kosover (narration): Though he sheepishly denies it, my dad courted my mom like crazy. And It worked!

They got married and moved to Haifa, where they both worked as technicians for big military industries. They were the only deaf people in their departments, which wasn't easy. They had a hard time moving up the company ladder, and would constantly have to ask what was being said around them. That was during the day. But at night their life was completely different: They were part of a vibrant local deaf community - a commune of sorts, made up of people who'd all known each other basically since childhood. When they got together, there was - ironically - lots and lots of talking. And Social gatherings of deaf people, at least in Haifa, last forever: They play

party games, dress up in costumes, do imitations of each other, put on plays. There's something (and I mean this with the greatest love possible) so joyful about their evenings that it's almost childlike.

These meetings are such a big part of life for Haifa's deaf community, that some of them actually wanted their children to be born deaf as well, so they fit in.

But my parents thought differently. They felt comfortable in their deaf world, of course, but when they started talking about having kids, they prayed that we'd be able to hear.

Mira Kosover: We really really wanted to have hearing children, because we realized how limiting deafness can be. It's an obstacle, for sure. There are many things that we're missing out on and I wanted you to have a better life than ours.

Maya Kosover (narration): After two-and-half years of marriage, they had my older brother, Oren.

[pause]

Maya Kosover (narration): He could hear. Here's my savta again.

Aviva Stein: When he was a little boy, Oren wasn't embarrassed about his parents. He'd invite his friends over all the time, and he'd never try to hide his mom and dad. Everything was just normal, his parents were deaf.

Oren Kosover: Yeah, of course I remember that.

Maya Kosover (narration): That's him, my brother Oren.

Oren Kosover: Some of the kids used to laugh behind my back, and make fun of how Mom and Dad spoke. They thought I didn't know, but I did, of course. Like, you know how Dad sort of sounds like a robot when he talks?

Maya Kosover: Yeah, of course! Can you do an imitation of him?

Oren Kosover: *[Oren imitates his father saying "Oren"]*. Well, when I was a kid, I'd stay out till late playing soccer on the street. And at some point, dad would open the window and yell down at me to come up for dinner. And he'd be like "Oren" *[Oren imitates his father saying "Oren"]* I didn't like it so much as everyone would laugh. So

I ask him to make an agreement between us that he would just whistle really loudly instead and I would come back home.

Maya Kosover (narration): I was born seven years after Oren. And I too... can hear. Well, I can hear in one ear. So Oren and I, we were always sort of a team. Not the usual dynamics of a normal family. Even the basic things are different:

Maya Kosover: So, when we were babies, like how did you know when we were crying?

Mira Kosover: We had a sound activated light that would flash in the whole house when you'd cry, and I would get up easily.

Maya Kosover (narration): But deaf or not, some things were just the same:

Mira Kosover: Abba wouldn't wake up, so I would go like this...

Maya Kosover (narration): She showed me how she'd elbow my father in the ribs.

Mira Kosover: So he would have to get up and help me. Don't forget, I was a working woman, and I had to get up early to go to work.

Mira Kosover: This one time, the light was flashing all night and didn't stop. I was all nervous and didn't know what to do. I got up and saw you were fine, Maya, calm and quiet and asleep. So your dad said that the machine must be broken, and that I should switch it off, or take out the battery. But I couldn't do it. I was too afraid. So I remember I didn't sleep that night, and the light went on flashing and flashing. In the morning I noticed that the radio had been blasting all night and that's why the light was flashing.

Maya Kosover (narration): Apparently it didn't take me long to understand that my parents couldn't hear. My mom tells me that when I was six months old and started to crawl, I would pull at her pant leg to get her attention. A year later, at eighteen months, I was already translating for her when my savta Aviva would call on the phone from Tel Aviv. I guess I learned all of this from Oren. Today, Oren has three kids of his own, and it's hard for either of us to imagine them - having to go through the challenges we had with our parents.

Yuval Kosover: I'm Yuval Kosover and I am six years old and I'm in first grade.

Maya Kosover (narration): Yuval is Oren's oldest daughter. I suggested that she talk to her dad, in English, for our sake, about what it was like to have deaf parents. As you can hear, English is still kinda new to her.

Yuval Kosover: Abba, what was it like to grow up in a deaf people's house?

Oren Kosover: Yuvali, for me it was something quite natural because that's all I knew. And what do you think it was like?

Yuval Kosover: Hard!

Oren Kosover: You know, saba and savta would ask me and Maya to talk on the phone for them.

Yuval Kosover: Why?

Oren Kosover: Because they couldn't hear what the other person was saying, so they didn't know what to answer.

Yuval Kosover: So you spoke instead of them?

Oren Kosover: Yeah. When I was three-and-a-half years old, they put an advertisement on the newspaper that published the car they wanted to sell. The phone call started to ring in the house, I was answering them and eventually I managed to sell the car on behalf of their name. Can I imagine if I would ask you to answer every call that I get instead of me?

Yuval Kosover: No!

Oren Kosover: Why not? Because it would annoy you?

Yuval Kosover: Yes!

Oren Kosover: I know! But Maya and I had no choice, we had to help. Does that seem hard?

Yuval Kosover: Yes.

Oren Kosover: But there were good things too!

Yuval Kosover: Like what?

Oren Kosover: Well, for example, when you make noise in the house what do we always say to you?

Yuval Kosover: *[In Hebrew]* Sheket Bevakasha! Quiet!

Oren Kosover: Right! But think about it, we didn't have anyone to tell us to be quiet. We lived in a building with thirty-two apartments and guess which apartment was the noisiest?

Yuval Kosover: Which?

Oren Kosover: The deaf people's apartment! All day long there was yelling and screaming and all kinds of drama. Like have you ever seen *Saba* and *Savta's* special clock? The one the goes like "trrr..." [*vibration clock in the background*].

Yuval Kosover: Yes!! I know it! I know it!

Oren Kosover: So you know it's really loud and it would shake the whole floor, and the poor neighbor from downstairs suffered for like thirty years from that clock. It would wake her up at five in the morning every single morning.

Yuval Kosover: [*Yuval laughs*].

Maya Kosover: Yuvali, so what do you think about *Saba* and *Savta* now that you hear all these stories?

Yuval Kosover: Hmmm... I think I have a special saba and savta... They don't hear, like they have a plug in their ear, but it isn't a plug. But it's ok: You can talk to them in sign language or speak slowly and clearly, and then they can understand.

Maya Kosover: Do they talk like everyone else?

Yuval Kosover: Ahh... yes, but a bit slower.

Maya Kosover: But do their voices sound like the voices of normal people?

Yuval Kosover: Yes.

Maya Kosover: Yes?

Yuval Kosover: Yes!!

Maya Kosover: *Ken?*

Yuval Kosover: *Ken!!*

Maya Kosover (narration): I asked my mom whether she felt *we* were actually running the house when we were kids. "No," she said.

Mira Kosover: We only asked for help with the phones. That's it. And even for that we had to bribe you! Most of the other errands we did ourselves, like any other parents.

Maya Kosover (narration): I think my mom's mainly talking about me there. I remember that I didn't like to be the "responsible adult": To pick up the phone and speak on their behalf, or to translate conversations and sometimes even fight with the person on the other end of the line. But I'm not gonna lie - there were some major advantages as well...

Mira Kosover: Yeah, you guys didn't always tell us the truth: You'd skip class a lot. What do you think? That we didn't know what you were up to?!

Maya Kosover (narration): She's right. I guess there was sort of an unspoken agreement between us: Phone services in exchange for benefits. I don't think my teachers ever caught on to my screening technique. During parent-teacher conferences I'd constantly 'mis-translate.' Whenever a teacher would report that I needed to spend more time studying and less time yapping, I'd sign to my parents that she'd said I was an excellent student, in fact one of the best in the class.

It wasn't just school-related benefits: Whenever my friends needed a place to hang out, where they could make noise late into the night, our house was always the first choice. We were allowed to laugh about everything in our house. Nothing was off limits. Especially deafness.

Maya Kosover: Do you remember when we would do imitations of *imma* and *abba's* friends?

Oren Kosover: Of course! [*Oren laughs*]. It was the national sport at our house.

Maya Kosover: Do you want to do one?

Oren Kosover: Will it be on the radio? [*Oren laughs*]
Awesome. "Abshi! Ophir!"

[*musical beat*]

Maya Kosover (narration): Our story began with the radio playing next to my crib. And I guess that's not so far from where it ends. Today I'm a radio producer, and teach courses in radio as well. My life is full of sounds and voices, and music, and language. So consciously or not, I guess, I chose to do the thing that is farthest from deafness.

My parents don't totally get it. I mean they do, and they are proud of me, but they also don't. When I told my mom that I'd been hired as a producer for *Israel Story*, she asked if I could get rich from that. And she didn't like the answer. But even though she jokes about all this, she knows exactly how I got into this profession.

Maya Kosover: It makes sense, Imma. You know why?
Because my entire life what have you asked me for?

Mira Kosover: Stories.

Maya Kosover: Stories, stories, stories. You love stories.
And that's what I do now. I tell stories.

Eli Kosover: But we won't hear your stories, so what do we do?

Mira Kosover: We need a translation.

Maya Kosover (narration): So there we are. My parents need a translation to be able to “hear” my stories, and you need a translation to be able to understand theirs. And me? I’m in between, translating back and forth, just like I did for so many years over the phone. Some things, I guess, never really change.

Mishy Harman (narration): Maya Kosover is a senior producer on our show. We wanted to make this piece accessible for deaf people as well, so if you’d like to read it, or share it with someone who can’t hear the audio version, there’s a full transcript on our site - www.israelstory.org.

And that’s our episode.

[music comes in]

Before we go I wanted to tell how about a fabulous new podcast from PRX and Esquire Magazine. It’s called “Esquire Classic,” and is hosted by public radio’s David Brancaccio. In each episode you’ll hear the backstory to some of Esquire’s most intriguing non-fiction stories and essays. Just a few days ago I listened to their latest episode, and - as cliché as this sounds- I literally could not bring myself to get out of the car. It’s called ‘Old’ and it’s an astonishingly intimate portrait of Glenn Sandberg, age ninety-two, who reflects about what it actually feels like to be close to the end. It’s all about mortality and love and companionship, and the things in life that matter most, and how those things we once held as so important sort of fall away with time. While I was listening I kept on thinking about my beloved *savta*, my grandma, who died three months before her ninety-ninth birthday a few years back. Anyway, it is really touching, so you just check it out. Esquire Classic, on iTunes, Stitcher or anywhere else you get your podcasts.

That’s also where you can catch all of *our* old episodes. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, all under Israel Story.

And... I’m reminding you, one more time, to go to our site, israelstory.org, and donate to our listener drive.

On a somewhat related note... we are looking for a sponsor. We have a wonderful audience, people like you, who are all interested in and engaged with Israel. So if you want to support our show, and reach what has become a lot a lot of people, email us at sponsor@prx.org.

Lastly, in our previous episode, I told you about our upcoming *Yom Ha’Atzmaut*, or Israeli Independence Day, live show tour in the States. And now we have dates. Our show - “68 and Counting...” - will be coming to New Orleans on May 11th, New York on May 15th and 16th, Palo Alto on the 17th, and Chicago on May 19th and 24th. Email us at livetour@israelstory.org or follow us on social media for more info and tickets.

There were many folks who worked hard on this episode - thank you to our friends at Galei Tzahal: Maya Gayer, Ben Katan, and Or Levy. To Josh Berger, who ate dinner alone while my sister Danna stepped out to talk to her family, for the seventeenth time that day. To our wonderful partners at PRX, and especially to Kerri Hoffman, Kathleen Unwin, Gina James, Maggie Taylor and Laurel Earhart. To the one and only Adrienne Mathiowetz who has come to Israel to work on a big surprise we have coming your way. And to Mitch Gisburg, Moran Gutman, Federica Sasso, Ike Fisher, Chanoch Lipperman, Marganit Lipperman, Pnina Goldstein and Julie Fisher.

Israel Story is brought to you by PRX - the Public Radio Exchange, and is produced in partnership with Tablet Magazine. Go to [tabletmag dot com slash Israel Story](http://tabletmag.com/slash/Israel%20Story) to hear all our previous episodes. Our staff includes Yochai Mital, Shai Satran, Roe Gilron, Maya Kosover, Shoshi Shmuluvitz and Rachel Fisher. Amir Factor, Itay Hyman and Katie Pulverman are our incredible production interns. Julie Subrin's our Executive Producer. I'm Mishy Harman, and we'll be back next time with a brand new Israel Story episode. Till then, *yalla bye*.

-- END --