

Mishy Harman: So like when... when did we actually become friends? The four of us?

Shai Satran: Wow!

[Roe and Shai laugh]

Shai Satran: I don't even know.

Ro'ee Gilron: Well I think it centered around summer camp. You know, we were all in summer camp together, from I think like fifth grade?

Mishy Harman: We were like ten.

Shai Satran: '95.

Yochai Maital: Fourth grade.

Ro'ee Gilron: Fourth grade? But even before that we were on those lame hikes with Noam...

Shai Satran: Right right, '95 is seventh grade and that's like the sleepover camp.

Mishy Harman (narration): If you've been following Israel Story from the beginning, you might know that our show started off as this kind of side hobby of four really close childhood friends - Roe Gilron, Shai Satran, Yochai Maital and me. A lot has happened since then, and we've grown into a large team, but at its core, one of the most wonderful things about this whole project, at least for me, is that I get to hang out with my best friends, and laugh, and argue, and travel. And then I get to call that work. Yes, I know just how cliché that sounds. But it's true.

[Everyone laughs, comes up from under]

Mishy Harman: What?

[Everyone laughs]

Yochai Maital: Tov, guys, let's do a little L'chaim maybe.

Mishy Harman: "L'chaim!"

Shai Satran: To?

Mishy Harman: Friendship?

Shai Satran: To friendship.

Mishy Harman: Besties

[laughs]

Yochai Maital: L'chaim!

Mishy Harman (narration): Hey, I'm Mishy Harman and from PRX this is Israel Story. Israel Story is produced together with Tablet Magazine. And today on our show - "Besties." We have three stories for you, of three different pairs of best friends.

Our first story today is a tale of friendship between two women who come from the most prominent dynasties in the region. Families that, for decades, were more often than not on opposite sides of wars, of military operations, of violence. **Act One - R&R.**

Mishy Harman: So... Ruth, I'll start with you. What... what do you love about Raymonda?

Ruth Dayan: *[laughs]* Everything. I even love her when she's angry and she says things that I... I tell her that she's not right but I don't care because I don't care what she thinks. I really... I love her from the moment I really met her.

Mishy Harman (narration): That's Ruth. She'll turn 99 next month. And she's talking about her best friend, Raymonda Tawil.

Ruth Dayan: I mean, it's not... it's not... People think that when I love someone or I like someone it's for some reason, or there's a reason. There isn't a reason.

Mishy Harman (narration): Raymonda is more than twenty years younger than Ruth. She was born in Acre, to an affluent Palestinian Christian family - the Hawas.

Mishy Harman: Do you remember the first moment you saw Ruth?

Raymonda Tawil: Yes, I saw that lady, beautiful blond lady arriving to the hospital with her car was full of ahhh... I think your car was full of...

Ruth Dayan: I had the dolls.

Mishy Harman (narration): The year was 1970, and the hospital where Ruth arrived, dolls in hand, was in the Palestinian city of Nablus, in the West Bank. Now, that was unusual, to say the least. Just three years earlier Israel had won the Six Day War.

Paratroopers: ברגע זה אנו עוברים את שער האריות.
[sounds of firing, goes under]

Mishy Harman (narration): During the war, Israel had conquered the Golan Heights, the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Mota Gur: הר הבית בידינו, כאן תלמיד. הר הבית בידינו עבור.
[sounds of military communication, goes under]

Mishy Harman (narration): There was total euphoria in the country, almost messianic euphoria.

Rabbis: ברוך אתה אדוני, מנחם ציון ובונה ירושלים. אמן!
[shofar blowing, goes under]

Mishy Harman (narration): Jews returned to Jerusalem's Old City, prayed at the Kotel, the Wailing Wall.

News Reel: It was here that Israeli troops acted more like tourists than fighting men, obviously in awe of their surrounding.
[dramatic music goes under]

Mishy Harman (narration): And the territory of the tiny Zionist State was practically tripled overnight. Military generals were lauded as rock stars, and above it all, stood a single man. The architect of that crushing victory.

News Reel: The sacred Wailing Wall, where Israeli Defense Minister General Moïse Dayan prays, pledging never to give up the Old City.

Mishy Harman (narration): The one-eyed Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan. Also known as... Ruth's husband. And here she was, just three years later, at the height of a period of IDF raids against the Palestinian Liberation Organization and its bearded leader, Yasser Arafat, showing up in a Palestinian hospital, bringing dolls to the same people her husband was fighting.

Raymonda Tawil: I mean it's crazy. People are dying and she's bringing dolls?! Look, Ruth, when she came to visit us the first time in Nablus, she came as a humanitarian - to help the children who were, you know, wounded, you know, with broken legs, broken arms, whatever, wounded from the wars. She was a young woman at the time, beautiful woman, and this is, they say, Mrs. Dayan. And for us, I mean it was a shock. "What is Dayan, what kind of Dayan?" She said, "Yes, Mr. Moshe Dayan," and she said "I am coming to help, you know, the Palestinian children, bringing toys, medicine. What can I help?" You know, at that time I was outbursting, shouting, screaming "we don't need your help. Look, the maimed children, hospital, the corpses, look what is going on. And this is your husband." We told her, "Stop the war! Stop the war! Stop the war! Go

and tell Dayan, stop the war! Stop the killing!” And she, you know, she asked “what do you need?” “Medicine!” “What do you need?” “Medical!” “What do you need?” “Equipment.” “What do you need?” I said, “we have no electricity. People are dying in the hospital. We have nothing!” She had tears in her eyes. So this was our first time I met Ruth Dayan.

Mishy Harman (narration): That meeting - forty-six years ago - was just the beginning of their unlikely friendship. Over the years, they would meet regularly, mainly in Raymonda’s Nablus and Ramallah living rooms, where she liked to play the role of hostess in a sort local version of a grand French literary salon. They would talk politics, debate, argue, all over hot, sweet tea, or, in Ruth’s case, her favorite single-malt whiskey. Their bond changed them both, dramatically. For Ruth, it pushed her to make a very big decision.

Ruth Dayan: I divorced Moshe because of the Palestinian women and that's a fact.

Mishy Harman (narration): For Raymonda, the friendship was even dangerous, and - following many threats - she ultimately had to leave the West Bank.

Raymonda Tawil: People have been killed for a kind of this friendship. My life was threatened all my life.

Mishy Harman: So did you ever think being friends with Ruth could get you killed?

Raymonda Tawil: Of course. Of course. What do you think? I mean... you just say Ruth Dayan, it's easy?

Anthony David: Well, the difficult thing was, ah... It wasn’t always very popular, and it still isn’t, for a Palestinian (especially a Palestinian nationalist) to have an intimate friendship with an Israeli. And in this case, the Israeli was the wife of... of the great general Moshe Dayan.

Mishy Harman (narration): That’s Anthony David, a writer whose book about the two ladies - “An Improbable Friendship” - just came out this Fall. We caught him in New Orleans, in the midst of a book tour.

Anthony David: Ruth is considered the matriarch of the country. She’s the Rose Kennedy. She’s not only a woman in her own right, whose accomplished a great deal, but of course she was the wife of Moshe Dayan, and the sister of the former First Lady of Israel. And she also has children

who are among the most prominent people in the country, including Assi Dayan who was the Brando of Israel.

Gabri Banay: המפקד, סרג'יו קונסטנזה, קשר היחידה.

Yisrael Poliakov: סרג'יו קונסטנזה לשירותך המפקד.

[goes under]

Anthony David: The handsome, dashing, brilliant filmmaker, writer, director, producer.

Reuven Adiv: המצרים מתקרבים אל המוצב, איזו הודעה אתה מעביר בקשר?

Yisrael Poliakov: בקשר למה?

Anthony David: His sister is Yael, who was a member of parliament, and has for many years been on the forefront of civil rights. So, Ruth is the head of this clan, that has decisively influenced Israel's history from the very beginning.

Raymonda Tawil: So Ruth Dayan's name is not anybody. Ruth Dayan name, she even if she is divorced, whatever she is, he is the conqueror of all the Arab countries: Sinai, Jerusalem, West Bank, Golan, whatever it is, he is enemy. But Ruth Dayan is not like this. Ruth Dayan is not Dayan. But she carries a very heavy name. Ruth?

Ruth Dayan: I don't know.

Mishy Harman (narration): Raymonda also came from local aristocracy. Just from the Palestinian side.

Anthony David: The Hawa family has been in the country, in Israel/Palestine for five-hundred years or more. Extremely wealthy family, Christian family, that owned much of the Galilee, including a castle, and villas in Acre and Haifa.

[beat]

When she was a little girl at the age of eight, in 1948, her family lost all of its property. So she carried that with her. In the 70s and 80s, she was this beautiful Jane Fonda of the country, who was defying the occupation.

Mishy Harman (narration): And as if all that pedigree wasn't enough, Raymonda became very closely connected to the top Palestinian leadership.

Anthony David: Of Raymonda's four children, Suha is one, and she in 1991, she was moving between Paris and Tunis when she met Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the PLO, and they got married in a secret ceremony.

Mishy Harman (narration): That's right! Moshe Dayan's former wife and the mother-in-law of his arch-enemy, Yasser Arafat, are... besties.

Anthony David: Yeah! They're best friends and they have been for decades. Since Raymonda is no longer living in the region (she's living in Malta and other places, in Dubai), they speak over the phone quite often, they recently met in Malta, and they maintain a very close friendship, and they share... most of the values they share, even though they quarrel occasionally.

Mishy Harman: How do you become friends with your enemy, basically?

Raymonda Tawil: No, you fight. We fight. We don't speak a lot of times... for months sometimes.

Mishy Harman (narration): And, as if on cue, they got right into it, this time about the number of Israeli women at some demonstration in Nablus.

Raymonda Tawil: Don't think that you, if a woman from Tel Aviv went to speak in Nablus...

Ruth Dayan: No! We were a hundred women, what are you talking about?

Raymonda Tawil: What is hundred women? You will demonstrate a hundred women to Nablus? Never!

Ruth Dayan: Yes, yes, yes.

Raymonda Tawil: Never. I challenge you.

Ruth Dayan: I know, but...

Raymonda Tawil: This is Nablus!! You don't know Nablus. It can't be. I'm sorry.

Ruth Dayan: No, It's okay, I mean...

Raymonda Tawil: But... Understand me, I am not saying that it's not true what you said. What I said maybe is that it is a small group!

Ruth Dayan: It's always a small group.

Raymonda Tawil: Yes but maybe.

Ruth Dayan: No, but that's why I said. I am not political, I'm not like you.

Raymonda Tawil: When I scream and get my anger at her, she is better than anybody in the world. She doesn't react with grudge. She never reacts with grudge.

Mishy Harman (narration): When I asked why there aren't more Ruths and Raymondas, both ladies sighed. They've been around a long time, the two of them. They've seen hope, and they've seen despair. They remember different times - when Jews and Muslims and Christians could get along. Now, they're worried.

Ruth Dayan: Today, it's not like that. I don't think in Tel Aviv, there's anyone who speaks to an Arab. Today, I'm... I don't believe in anything. You see demonstrations of 20,000 who are against the occupation, in the square. What happened? Nothing. Nothing moved! Nothing moves today and so I feel I can't feel what she feels but I am so angry we haven't learned in sixty years to be like human beings.

[music beat]

Ruth Dayan: I've learned a lot from Raymonda about her life and her people. And the same I think she learned about me.

Raymonda Tawil: If we had Dayan, Mrs. Dayan, governing the country, we would have peace since a long time. She is everywhere. She is helping everywhere, she goes to the Galilee, she goes to the villages, she goes to camps, she is everywhere. Ruth Dayan? The sweetest, the kindest, the most human.

Mishy Harman (narration): We recorded this story in Malta, where Raymonda has been living for the last few years. Ninety-eight year old Ruth came to visit her this summer. They were sitting on the couch, and when they weren't wagging fingers at each other, they were holding hands. As difficult as it is - history, power dynamics, fear, wars, intifadas all weighing on this friendship - there is something very simple about it. They're just two women who... happen to love each other.

[end music comes up]

Mishy Harman (narration): Anthony David's truly wonderful book about Ruth and Raymonda is called "An Improbable Friendship: The Remarkable Lives of Israeli Ruth Dayan

and Palestinian Raymonda Tawil and Their Forty-Year Peace Mission.” You can find it on Amazon, where it’s the number one bestseller in the Political Biographies category.

In 1999, the Tel Nof military base near Rehovot was abuzz. It was the 25th anniversary celebration of *Shesh Shesh Tesha*, 669, the Israeli Air Force’s elite airborne search and rescue unit. There were plates full of hummus and eggplant salad, there were bowls of fresh fruit, some music, congratulatory speeches, and mainly... just a lot of all-around merriment. It was a reunion of sorts for generations of soldiers who had served in the unit. All the past commanders were there, a few army top brass, helicopter pilots, extraction specialists. And then, mixed in with all these special forces, was an odd pair - Eytan Sheshinski and Israel Aumann. They looked more like sleepy university professors than heroic Air Force rescuers. And they looked that way because... that’s exactly what they are - one’s a mathematician, the other an economist. What were these professors doing there, milling around all the Air Force types? Well... That’s in our next story. A story which is about rationality. About rational men. Or at least about people who are supposed to be that way. **Act Two - The Center for Rationality.** Here’s Shai Satran.

Shai Satran (narration): University professors aren’t - for the most part - especially well-known public figures in Israel. These two though? They’re household names. Eytan Sheshinski, the economist in the duo, recently headed two huge public committees on the taxation of Israel’s natural resources.

[Hebrew news collage]

Shai Satran (narration): He’s become a symbol of sorts, a defender of the everyman, fighting off gas and oil tycoons. His friend, Robert Yisrael Aumann, well... he won the Nobel prize.

Announcer: It is a great honor to introduce the prize winner in Economic Sciences in memory of Alfred Nobel - Professor Robert Aumann. *[Applause]*.

Shai Satran (narration): We met at Yisrael’s office at the Center for Rationality at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Now in many ways these two men are kind of opposites: Yisrael was born in Germany, and grew up in New York City, Eytan - on the other hand - was born on a kibbutz. They differ politically too - Yisrael’s a hawk, Eytan a dove. They don’t seem to fit together when you look at them, either: Eytan is clean shaven and secular, whereas Yisrael - with his long white beard - looks a bit like a Jewish sage in a children’s picture book. Yisrael’s eighty-five years old, Eytan is seventy-eight.

Eytan Sheshinski: Getting to seventy-nine in a few month.

Israel Aumann: Seventy-nine?

Israel Aumann: *[Sigh]*.

Shai Satran: Do you remember the first time that you met?

Eytan Sheshinski: Like two sweethearts, we don't remember the, sort of, the first kiss or something. No...

Shai Satran (narration): That's Eytan Sheshinski.

Eytan Sheshinski: But where, I can guess it was probably Stanford first '65, '66, '67.

Israel Aumann: First of all, I wasn't in Stanford in the late '60s.

[mumble interruption]

Israel Aumann: I first came to Stanford in '71, I think.

Shai Satran (narration): And correcting him, that's Yisrael Aumann.

Israel Aumann: So... I think it was here actually...

Eytan Sheshinski: Maybe here, maybe here.

Israel Aumann: I think it was here in Jerusalem in the late '60s, something like that. Ok yeah.

Shai Satran (narration): While they couldn't recall their first *meeting*, they do remember a defining moment early on in their relationship: Eytan was giving a talk in the Economics Department in Jerusalem, and getting some pushback from colleagues. The subject was far from Yisrael's field, but he spoke up anyway.

Eytan Sheshinski: So he immediately understood and explained to everybody else - he didn't know anything about it but he explained it perfectly.

Israel Aumann: I still don't know anything about economics.

Shai Satran: You're nobel prize is in...

Israel Aumann: Economics!

Shai Satran: Okay just to make sure that you're...

Israel Aumann: Yes, yes.

Shai Satran (narration): Ever since, Eytan and Israel have been close. Even very close: Their families vacation together, they have friday night dinners together, (usually at the Aumanns, because the Sheshinski home isn't kosher).

Eytan Sheshinski: In the rarer cases that he comes to us we have a whole set of dishes for the Aumanns.

Israel Aumann: We have to invite you once again.

Shai Satran (narration): As we talked, Eytan and Yisrael were sitting side by side. They have this manner with each other that's just completely endearing. Yisrael puts his hand on Eytan's arm. They smile, unconsciously almost, when listening to the other tell stories (ALL of which, it is obvious, they have heard a million times before). Sometimes they mouth each others' punchlines inaudibly. It didn't take long before the conversation shifted to their favorite pastime - hiking.

Eytan Sheshinski: We are hiking together. That's a cementing... That has been going on for years. Here and in California.

Israel Aumann: But not only in California, also in Arizona.

Eytan Sheshinski: Oh we went there.

Israel Aumann: Arizona, New Mexico.

Eytan Sheshinski: And many other hikes in the Sierra mountains.

Israel Aumann: Let me tell a story about that... We were together in the King's Canyon National Park, OK? And just Eytan and me.. several days we were going right? Several days, with horses.

Shai Satran (narration): What followed was this staggering array of outdoor adventures. There was the one with a bear who snatched Eytan's backpack.

Israel Aumann: So the bear sees Eytan running after him and he starts running, OK? Now, Eytan runs faster than the bear and the bear sees this and he drops the pack and he runs off. I don't blame the bear because if Eytan would have been running after me, I would have dropped the pack also. So you can't see Eytan over here but he does look like a little like a bear himself.

Shai Satran (narration): And the time on *Tisha Be'Av* when Israel decided to hike, totally ignoring the fast.

Israel Aumann: You can walk in the mountains while you're mourning. So we walked, 10, 15 miles on *Tisha Ba'Av*. I vomited and uh... It didn't turn out well. dehydrated, d-everything.

Shai Satran (narration): We heard a bunch of these stories, and well...

Shai Satran: It sounds like you have a tendency of getting into trouble together.

Israel Aumann: I don't know. We didn't get into any real trouble..

[Interruptions]

Israel Aumann: Yeah, there was... okay there was, okay I'll tell you that one time.

Eytan Sheshinski: About what we did in Judean Desert. You've heard nothing from nothing yet.

Israel Aumann: In the Judean Desert, there are canyons, OK? And the particular canyon that we were in was called the Hatzatzon Canyon, *Wadi Hatzatzon*. So They're dried waterfalls that are basically cliffs, yes? So you go down these canyons and you have to rope down over the waterfall.

Shai Satran (narration): They reached one such cliff which was over a hundred meters high. Their longest rope? Eighty meters long. So.. they took a detour, along a ledge.

Israel Aumann: You walk along that ledge until you get to a side canyon which is steep but you don't have to rope it down. It's manageable.

Shai Satran (narration): Eytan was walking ahead, Yisrael was right behind him.

Israel Aumann: And Eytan, at some point, he decides to leave the ledge and climb down the steep, almost vertical canyon wall into the side canyon, okay? And I shout to him - Eytan, not there! Not there, OK? And he either doesn't hear me, or he makes believe that he doesn't hear me, OK?

Eytan Sheshinski: I don't remember whether I heard it or not, probably he's right, I was stubborn or something. I just continued.

Israel Aumann: And he hasn't gone more than a meter before he falls, OK? He falls into the side canyon, alright? And he loses consciousness.

Shai Satran (narration): Israel rushed to Eytan's side.

Shai Satran: And what's going through your head?

Israel Aumann: I hope he lives! Okay? That's what's going through my head, alright? And after sometime,

maybe an hour and a half, two hours, a helicopter appears hovering above.

Shai Satran (narration): The helicopter took them directly to the hospital.

Eytan Sheshinski: I just remember I couldn't move my lower part of the body.

Israel Aumann: He was in there about a month. You know, he had a lot of broken stuff, yes. Fortunately, his head was not broken, OK?

Shai Satran (narration): Yisrael and Eytan were rescued by *shesh shesh tesha* 669, the Air Force's rescue unit. Now, *usually* when they rescue civilian hikers it's young reckless kids doing dumb stuff, and not, you know, Nobel laureates. But from the way Eytan and Israel were talking about the saga, it became clear that this wasn't even a one-time thing.

Shai Satran: This happened more than once?

Eytan Sheshinski: Yes, yes. We were pulled by helicopters a number of times, this was just one of those times.

Israel Aumann: Well there was another time, one other time. To Eytan, it happened three times.

Eytan Sheshinski: There was another time - it was him.

Israel Aumann: To me it happened twice, in the same canyon.

Shai Satran (narration): So yeah... Aumann and Sheshinski are the only couple to be rescued by 669... twice. Hence the invitation as the guests of... honor, I guess, to the unit's 25th anniversary.

Israel Aumann: And I should add that we didn't give up at this point. Having tried the Hatzazon twice and not succeeded, yes, we tried a third time.

Shai Satran (narration): That time they made it all the way through. And still, I couldn't help wondering whether we shouldn't, maybe, expect more prudence from the men who in a sense define the very concept of rational behavior.

Israel Aumann: You think we should not have gone and done this kind of thing? You think we should allow the canyon to beat us? You know, there's something I learned from you..first of all this Hatzazon business - its a principal. It's a principle that I learned from you.

Eytan Sheshinski: You fail once, you fail two... It's a system, a matter, perseverance. You stay with the goal.

Israel Aumann: Absolutely, yes. certainly. What does rationality mean? You know what rationality means? You do the best you can to achieve your goals given your information. Now, our goal was to do the Hatzazon canyon from beginning to end, that was our goal. So you don't succeed the first time, you don't succeed the second time, you try again and we succeed the third time, no problem.

Mishy Harman (narration): Shai Satran. *[beat]* Our last story is about a small club. A club of two. And not one you'd really like to join. Danna Harman brings us this next piece. **Act Three - Girls' Night In.**

Danna Harman (narration): It's Thursday night and I'm up in Einat Cohen's apartment in Tel Aviv.

[Sounds of the scratchy record player and The Doors]

Danna Harman (narration): The Doors', Hello I Love you, is playing on an old record player, Einat -- messy blond hair, vivacious, mothering, she's wearing her favorite stripy sweater - is making sweet potato soup in her open space kitchen.

[Sounds of cooking music fades but still playing in background]

Danna Harman (narration): Her friend, pretty Sharon Gilad - who looks a little like an airline stewardess, and, actually she used to be one - has come over with a warm loaf of bread from the bakery around the corner. They open a bottle of red Yarden wine, and they talk, as they often do, about boys.

Sharon Gilad: I'm not dating so much. Einat is dating...
I'm picky. *[Laughter]*.

Einat Cohen: Picky picky stay at home. *[Laughter]*.

Danna Harman (narration): Einat and Sharon, both in their mid 40s, grew up together in the upscale suburbany city of Ramat HaSharon. Although, actually, to say they grew up *together* would be a bit misleading, and to say they were always friends would also be wrong. If anything, they were most definitely NOT friends, and it's only because of some twists of fate - cruel fate - that they re-found each other a few years ago, and re-connected.

[music]

Danna Harman (narration): They first met, according to Einat, when they were tots - in a Ramat HaSharon ballet class.

Einat Cohen: I think we studied ballet together.

Sharon Gilad: No.

Einat Cohen: Yeah.

Sharon Gilad: Ah maybe when we were four, five.

Einat Cohen: Not five. Ten, eleven, twelve.

Danna Harman (narration): The next time they crossed paths – was when Sharon was in junior high, and Einat, a year older, had just started high school, and also, important - had just started dating Nir, the coolest boy in the class. For four years, Einat and Nir were an item. It was high school love, but it was big love. They did everything together and everyone knew they were a couple. After high school, Nir went off to the Air Force to train as a pilot, and Einat, who had always been active in her youth movement, headed out to the *Nachal* – a program that combines regular military service with agricultural or community work.

[music]

She was part of a small group sent to Kibbutz Elrom, which everyone jokingly called the highest kibbutz in the world, because it's in the northern Golan Heights, close to the Syrian border. That's where she met Alon: He was from the the Herzelia branch of her youth movement, and now, at the same kibbutz, they found themselves getting closer.

Meanwhile, when Sharon's turn to go into the military came around, she was sent to the Air Force – where she re-met up with her old crush Nir, who was now, conveniently, single. They fell in love.

Danna Harman: When you and Nir got together, did you talk about Einat?

Sharon Gilad: He said that she was his... mythologist girlfriend... the one that he remembers and loves so much and she really hurt his heart.

Danna Harman: Einat you broke his heart?

Einat Cohen: I didn't know that I broke his heart.

Danna Harman: Yeah.

Danna Harman (narration): Alon, says Einat, was just a friend at first. When he left the kibbutz for active duty in Gaza, he would write her long letters. He would describe what he was up to, and what was going on in his heart, too. She would send him care packages packed with candy - he had a sweet tooth - and update him on the kibbutz gossip.

In time, after the army, after their separate trips meandering around Asia, as so many post-army Israelis do, and back in Tel Aviv as students, that friendship morphed into love. And in 1997, ten years after they met, Alon proposed to Einat, not with a ring, but with a Swatch Watch.

Einat Cohen: We got married, and we were very best friends still, and I was very in love with him.

Danna Harman (narration): A year earlier, Sharon and Nir - the Air Force love birds - had gotten married too. So at this point, Nir and Sharon, and Einat and Alon were two happy couples all living in Tel Aviv. Once, early days, the two couples tried to all get together, but it wasn't all that.

Sharon Gilad: I remember that we went to your house once in Tel-Aviv. You remember something like that?, it was quite... awkward. And then we decided, that we don't have to be in touch.

Danna Harman (narration): So they left it. And time went on: Einat and Alon had two sons – Itamar and Illy, who was named for the coffee brand. And Sharon and Nir had three kids: Maya, Guy and Naomi.

Einat stopped having the occasional coffee meet-up with her ex, Nir, and Sharon stopped thinking about her husband's mythological girlfriend and everyone basically moved on, as people do. So it's not that surprising actually that Sharon and Nir didn't know that Einat and Alon's lives had taken a bad turn. Here's Einat.

Einat Cohen: We went carting and he came back dizzy. It didn't move away for a couple of days, and he start to make test why. They said maybe it's vertigo. And we went in the hospital they send us back, and it didn't stop. And they send us to MRI and then we discovered that he has something in his brain, and we need to... he need to go surgery.

Danna Harman: (narration) For a while, they thought they would beat the cancer. Alon had operations, he did radiation, he travelled to the US for alternative therapies, and went in and out of hospitals, sometimes feeling well enough to bike himself over to the emergency room, and then bike home when he was released.

Einat Cohen: We keep going like it's doesn't there. I mean we did what we had to do, the surgery, the treatment, but we continue like it's something that we just have to pass and it will be ok after that.

Danna Harman: How old was Alon when he found out he wasn't well?

Einat Cohen: 35?

Danna Harman: And how old was he when he died?

Einat Cohen: 42.

Danna Harman (narration): A month before Alon died, when he already so sick he couldn't take a shower on his own, or even get out of bed without help, Einat stepped out to take their older son to a birthday party. She didn't like leaving Alon. She always kept her phone close. But the phone call she got that afternoon was a blow she had not seen coming. It was not about Alon at all. It was about her ex -- Nir.

Sharon Gilad: Nir woke up in the morning he had kind of a bicycle trip with his friends from the squadron...

Danna Harman (narration) That's Sharon speaking.

Sharon Gilad: He said goodbye, and didn't come back. He had... ummm.... *dom lev*. His heart stopped beating... just like, you know...

Danna Harman: Just like that?

Sharon Gilad: Just like that.

Danna Harman: How old was he?

Sharon Gilad: Forty-three. *[laughs]*. Yeah.

Danna Harman (narration): When Einat, at that birthday party, heard the news, she began to cry, and she just could not stop.

Einat Cohen: I just take my boy and said that we have to go, and I really didn't know what to do. And the funeral was on Sunday, And I thought that I should come, but I could not. It was... too much for me.

Danna Harman (narration): Einat felt empty. She felt Defeated. That somehow all this death was, maybe, her destiny. If she had stayed with Nir, she would have been a widow. Instead, she had left Nir and married Alon: And now, he was dying too, and she was about to be a widow anyway.

Danna Harman: Did you tell Alon?

Einat Cohen: Of course. He saw me cry for like one week I think. I think he was... didn't like it... so much, That I'm crying so much not for him but for someone else.

Danna Harman: Who were you crying for though really?

Einat Cohen: I don't know, I think it was.. I was crying for everything. About me, about him, about Sharon, about the kids.

[musical break]

When Alon died, I think I was shock, just shock. I'm not crying, I was just shock. It was like a dream, like a very bad dream. You need to do some stuff, to go, to dress, to go to funeral to meet people I didn't know. I don't remember nothing from the funeral, what I talk, what I did, what I wear. What I... Nothing. It was like, something that you have to do but you don't... it's not you, it's not your life.

Danna Harman (narration): Sharon had a similar experience, going through those early days of grieving:

Sharon Gilad: I felt like I was the... the fly on the wall. I felt like I'm in a movie... of my own I guess? I don't know.

Danna Harman (narration): A few months after their respective husbands died, Einat and Sharon, each separately, ventured out, for the first time, to try and do something fun for their kids. They both chose to go to the same Chanukah musical show. And Einat spotted Sharon in the crowd.

Sharon Gilad: And then we stood before we got into the hall and then she came to me and she said, "Sharon? It's me Einat. You remember me?" *[laughter]*. And I didn't recognize her! So, I said: "Oh yeah! Hi! How are you? And then I told you I heard about your husband and she said you know we should get together sometime... And I said you know what..."

Danna Harman: (narration) It's not like Einat wanted to be friends with Sharon, she says, or thought they should be, it's more like she felt she needed to explain herself: Why she hadn't come to Nir's funeral or the shiva, or reached out at all. She wanted to explain, somehow, that busy with her own grief, she had had no space left for anyone else's. Sharon, on her part, wasn't sure she felt like getting together with Einat at all. But it was hard to say no, she says, so they set a date to meet for coffee.

Sharon Gilad: I was very afraid... I remember that I was very very tense from the meeting. I mean, we met in Ramat HaSharon, you remember? I called my friend and I told

him, "you know, who I am going to meet? I am going to meet Einat. How surreal is that? And... what am I going to talk to her about? I don't know. I have nothing to say to her. The one thing that makes me happy that I am sure that Nir is laughing Like...really.. I mean he's laughing so much. I died and you became friends, it was worth it.

Danna Harman (narration): At first, their friendship was all about, what they call - widow stuff.

Einat Cohen: There's a lot of things that we can discuss that you cannot discuss with other people. Like what are you doing with his stuff... and what you doing with I don't know, his shoes with his shirts, with his... books. With his letters. we we are thinking about the same, the same thoughts.

Danna Harman (narration): But over time the friendship moved on, and took on a different pace.

Einat Cohen: I mean, I think we are now talking about the future. Not the past.... we are talking about now. If it's about... eh... how to meet boys and when you meet them, what boys do you want to meet... What men you want to meet... How to fall in love again... maybe.

Danna Harman (narration): Both Einat and Sharon say that when they lost their husbands they also lost their best friends. Obviously, they were very sad. but they were also disoriented. The person they each had told their secrets to and trusted the most, was gone.

Sharon Gilad: He was my best friend. Most of the stuff that I used to talk to him... I don't talk to anybody.

Danna Harman: There's no replacement?

Sharon Gilad: No.

Danna Harman (narration): At one point, only half joking, the women thought to form a little widows club:

Einat Cohen: Do you remember that we decided to do once the widow evening. Because you know like another widow....and I have another one....now I have another 2....we continue...we have another 3...

Danna Harman: Husbands died how?

Sharon Gilad: Mine... they died in the army.

Danna Harman: Oh.

Einat Cohen: No, but you have the other one also from the heart attack in the office...

Sharon Gilad: She has a partner... so she's not a widow anymore... She's not in the market...

Danna Harman (narration): The idea never went anywhere.

Einat Cohen: so we have like our club. Very small club.

Danna Harman (narration): Einat and Sharon have not filled the gaping hole each of them was left with in her life, but still, they have become important to each other. There is something special there.

Sharon Gilad: We share lots of stuff that happens to us...

Einat Cohen: I don't know how to say it.... It's like something that...

Sharon Gilad: Like a drug (off tape)

Einat Cohen: Yeah, you are like a drug.
[laughter]. Heroin chic.

[music steely dan]

Danna Harman (narration): And that's where I leave them. Just two girlfriends from Ramat HaSharon, hanging out with their sweet potato soup, red wine and Steely Dan, which has replaced the Doors. They're giggling, and chatting about whatever and listening to the rain, which has just started falling outside – and feeling ok. Better, somehow, for having each other.

Mishy Harman (narration): Danna Harman is a journalist for Haaretz. And that's our episode, 'Besties.' Go share it with *your* best friend. And if either of you are new to the show, you can catch up on all of our previous episodes, just search for Israel Story on iTunes, Stitcher, or any of the other main podcast platforms. You can also follow us on FB, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story.

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Before we go, I want to get a really great new podcast on your radar. It's called The Kibitz Podcast, and it's hosted by the hilarious and soulful Dan Crane. Their second episode just came out, and if you check it out, you will hear many great pieces, and... also this:

Dan Crane: So is there anything you would change, if you could go back and do your Bar Mitzvah all over again, what would you change?

Mishy Harman: I think I would maybe try to seize the opportunity and kiss Ganit Gray.

Dan Crane: Ohhh...

Mishy Harman: I feel that you have a certain, like you know, aura on your Bar Mitzvah day that maybe allows you to kiss pretty girls...

Dan Crane: *[laughs]*.

Mishy Harman (narration): 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-Story) to hear all our previous episodes. And, big news, we are coming to the States for a brand new live show - 'Israel in Love' - starting February 10. We will be performing in New York, Philadelphia and Miami, so check out our facebook page and website - israelstory.org - for more details. Thanks to Tammy Goldenberg for help with mixing today's show. Our staff includes Yochai Maital, Shai Satran, Roe Gilron, Maya Kosover and Shoshi Shmulovitz. Amir Factor, Itay Hyman, Rachel Fisher and Sophie Schor are our incredible production interns. This is actually Sophie's last episode with us, but don't worry, you will hear her later in our season... Julie Subrin's our Executive Producer. I'm Mishy Harman, and we'll be back in two weeks with a new Israel Story episode. Till then, *yalla bye*.

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