**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** Okay, welcome to my humble home: ta da! So it's also my apartment and my studio. I'm making wedding cakes over there. *[laughs]*

 **Mitch Ginsburg:** Shall we have a look?

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** Yeah, we can.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Oh, it smells good.

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** Oh, thank you. So, these are the wedding cakes, and all the cakes that I made for JonJon, our son. So you see Mickey Mouse and I don't know…Disneys characters.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** What do you call that one, I forgot.

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** Buzz.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Yeah, exactly. *[laughs]*

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** Infinity and Beyond, and a space something, and Finding Nemo, and panda bear, and Looney Tunes, and mermaid…Okay, this cake it was the cake to my 30th birthday, which was like last month. And it's all of us: me and Yuval and JonJon—even though it was just after Yuval’s death…killed…I don't know how to say it. And I wanted us to have like our still moment as a family, and sailing together. Yuval has a seasickness. I don't know if you say has or had. But this is it.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey listeners, it's Mishy. So as you know, we're continuing our series of Wartime Diaries, which is our attempt to collect slivers of life during these difficult days. It's Yom Hazikaron again: Memorial Day for fallen soldiers and victims of terror. I'm actually recording this intro on Monday, May 6th. Yesterday, four young soldiers: 21-year-old Tal Shavit; 19-year-old Ruben Marc Mordechai Assouline; 18-year-old Michael Ruzal; and 19-year-old Ido Testa were killed in Kerem Shalom. That brings the number of Israeli civilian and military casualties since the start of the war to 1,504. That's 1,504 and families who have joined the dreaded circle of grief, and bereavement; 1,504 families whose lives will never again be the same.

And today we're going to share the story of one such family. A small family, one that was just starting off really. Thirty-year-old Yuval Halivni was a reserve officer who was killed on October 9th. He left behind a wife, Amit Halivni Bar-Peled, who is a pastry chef, and makes amazingly elaborate wedding cakes. And a little boy, JonJon who was less than two when his dad was killed. Our producers Anat Karol-Gordon and Mitch Ginsburg visited Amit in her apartment slash studio in Ramat Gan. Here she is.

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** My name is Amit Halivni Bar-Peled. I married, was married, to Yuval and I have a little son, Jonathan—we call him JonJon. Yuval and I met on a delegation to the United States. We were both in the Scouts. So when we just started our senior year we start dating. And since then, since September 2010, we are together, which means we are together 13 years.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Wow.

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** Yeah, when we were in the army, so Yuval wanted to break up, and then he changed his mind. So we were like on a break for two days, three days, something like this. So after like eight or nine years we moved together. *[laughs]*

And then he proposed. And then we got married on COVID. That's it. It’s funny to describe like 13 years in one memory. It's like before JonJon came to our life it was very clear that I'm going to be the boss. I'm going to be the one that keeps the rules, and Yuval always is going to be the funny guy; the one that you want to spend more time with him. *[laughs]*

And that's how it was. But JonJon got the best dad ever. And always there when I needed.

So another thing I didn't say about our family, that we were expecting another child to join us. I was supposed to give birth to another baby boy; his belly nickname was Oliver. And we did the usual tests when you are pregnant, and some of the tests were okay, and some of them weren't. And then we needed to stop the pregnancy. So on August 2023, I needed to give birth to a stillborn baby.

So during the birth I had a tearing on my uterus. A big one actually. So I lost a lot of blood. I didn't know that… and Yuval just called the nurse. And because of him, thanks to him, she got it on time. When he saw the doctors taking me to the operating room he asked the doctor: “Is she be okay?” And the doctor said something like: “Call her parents. I'm not sure she's gonna be okay.”

On Yuval’s funeral I said that maybe if I would have been dead at that point he would not needed to go to this war and then he would not get killed and then, I don't know, our situation was different. Like Jonathan would still have only one parent, but I don't know maybe…I don't know if it's better that Yuval is gonna stay here, me is gonna stay here. I don't know. I think our story is like it could not be good. That's how I see the situation. It’s like how you don't switch it, it’s like or me or Yuval couldn’t be here. But that's what we have. So we're gonna keep our story together. I don't know. With Yuval here or just on pictures.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Tell us about October 7th for you.

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** Okay. So on October 7th early in the morning, like 6:30am, there were lots of alarms and bombing in Tel Aviv, and I don't know, the whole Israel. So I packed to go to my parents with Jonathan, and Yuval packed his backpack to go to the army. Of course when he packed his stuff we put his orange underwear aside because we knew that when Yuval wear orange underwear it's always a bad idea because these are the unlucky underwear. So we put them aside and Yuval went to the reserve. They took weapons and just went to Sderot. So Yuval and his soldiers went like apartment, apartment clearing the city of Sderot so that people can go out.

Every couple hours Yuval would send me a message, like, “I'm okay and keep fighting.” I asked him once if he wants to talk to JonJon, and he said like: “No I prefer not to talk to him because then I wouldn't be able to keep fighting. Just send me some photos and videos and I'll see that you're okay and that's good for me.”

So anyway, on October 9th, after a long night of fighting, Yuval and his soldiers were chasing some Hamas terrorists and after they killed most of them, Yuval and two other guys bumped into a camouflage position, and the Hamas terrorists that were hiding there just killed them on the spot. Sorry *[she is emotional].* And I got the announcement in the middle of night. It was like 4:30am after they search for me, because I wasn't at the apartment. I was at my parents house, and they couldn't know that. So they needed to wait to tell Yuval’s parents. They supposed to tell us on the same time, exactly, so we won't tell each other.

Okay, how it was. So they rang the bell, and then my mom woke up. And then she needed to wake me up because they couldn't tell her anything until I'm gonna open the door. So she woke me up, and she's like: “Oh, Amit, you need to wake up, the soldiers are at the door.” And I'm like…*they have lots of dead people, why would they come to somebody that’s injured*. Because on my mind, I was like, *okay, Yuval was injured*. Then I went downstairs, and I saw the soldiers. And they were two very tired soldiers that are, I don't know, going from this house to another house. And they were like…I think I was feeling sorry for them. And I saw my parents that were very, very emotional. So I felt like I needed to hold this situation. I need to be strong for mom and for dad, and for everyone—for JonJon that was asleep, and for my parents-in-law that were not next to me, but I could feel them. That's why I moved on so quickly to the practical stuff. Because they come in and they tell you: “Oh, your husband is dead.” And then it's like they cannot even tell me how. I think they didn't even know how. And then because I'm the wife so I need to get all the decisions: where will be buried, and all the other very important decisions, while his parents are alive. And I didn't really understand why are they asking me because I don't know: ask his mother; ask his father. I think they're the one that brought him to this world, and who am I, his wife, to make all these important decisions.

Anyway, a couple hours later I remembered that before you bury your love, you can ask to do *ketirat zeva*

(sperm extraction). So I called the same soldiers that were giving me the notice, and asked them to come quickly and sign me the papers so we can do it. So I talk to the doctor a couple of weeks later, and he told me that it considered to be successful. At first, I thought, I'm going to use it. And then my psychologist told me that on the first year it's a very emotional year, no one really lets you do very hard decisions that you may or may not regret them. So anyway, even if I wanted, the court would not let me on my first year of grieving.

I was very upset because I wanted another brother or sister to JonJon. I just wanted to extend my family like Yuval and I wanted. And then they explained me that I don't know yet anything about life. It's like…it was very, very upset that someone tell you that you don't know yet everything, when you think that you know everything. But I think I appreciate them taking care of me. Because it's like every day I wake up with another decision. One day I wake up and I think JonJon have to have brothers and sisters. And the day after I wake up and I'm like: *Oh, it's just JonJon and me against the world*. So I think I'm gonna take this year to build our family again.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** I wanted to ask about JonJon. I wanted to ask about how you told him.

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** I told him I think on the last day of the shiva. I was supposed to tell him on the first day when I just got the notice, but he didn't ask, so I didn't tell. So on the very last day of the shiva we sat to breakfast, he didn't ask but I wanted to tell him. So it was like: “Oh JonJon do you remember where is daddy.” And he was chewing something. And I'm like: “So Daddy is a hero, and he went to war.” It was the first time that Isaid “war.” “And he got killed, and he cannot come back. But he wanted to, but he cannot come back, and we will not see him again. But we can see him on pictures and videos, and we love Daddy, and Daddy loves us. And Mommy's here with you and Grandma's here with you, and Grandpa…” and like that. The psychologists explain me that I need to tell him who's staying with him. And it was like I was talking, and he was chewing and staring at one point. He's two years old. And he's a very smart kid, and he didn't ask questions. He was understanding, not asking questions. And since then he asked I think only several times, “Where is Daddy?” And I'm like: “Oh you remember the story: Daddy is a hero.” And he's like: “Oh, I'm a hero, too.” And I'm like: “Yes, you are also a hero,” like that. “He went to war…I'm going to war?” “No, you're not going to war, you're still a kid. Maybe when you get older, so okay, but Daddy is a hero, and Daddy is dead.” And I need to say the word “dead” because now he cannot understand it but he needs to practice this word to understand that it's a thing; it's a place; it's something; it’s..I don’t know, a word to get used to it, so later on he will understand what does it mean.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** I was curious because you mentioned his parents. I was wondering what your relationship with them is like.

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** I'm like their daughter, because Yuval and I are together 13 years. Since Yuval got killed, every weekend JonJon and I are coming to Shabbat dinner. We stay to sleep with them. Most of the nights it was like me, my mother-in-law and JonJon sleeping together in the same bed. We were like telling my father-in-law, like go sleep somewhere else. We're gonna stay only the three of us.

**Anat Karol-Gordon:** When you talked about how you explained it to JonJon, you said, “Yuval’s dead,” but when you are speaking about Yuval, I noticed that you sometimes switch tenses, and you're much less certain. So like how do you understand his death?

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** So it depends. It's like most of the time I can say that Yuval is dead. But I don't believe in it. It's like, *oh, he just went some places. It’s like he went to buy at the store something. So yeah, he went dead somewhere and then he gonna go come back from the dead. And it's like, oh, yeah, now he's like, not a really, really, really dead person*. But sometimes it’s like I do feel that he's gone: Mostly on weekends or at night I can really feel he’s gone. But all other times it’s like, okay, he’s just dead somewhere, and he's gonna come back. He's like in the a reserve—lots of men are not at home so it makes sense that Yuval is not at home, so I can believe in that story I tell myself. The only problem in my story is that now all his friends from his unit are at home, and he's not.

**Anat Karol-Gordon:** How's your routine?

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** So my schedule: it's like, I'm waking, putting JonJon in the kindergarten, and then I'm drinking coffee with friends, and then another friend. And then like I think it looks like I'm doing nothing because I didn't go back to work yet. People tell me like: “Oh, you look okay. It's like you are waking up, and you take JonJon to the daycare, to the kindergarten, and you take him afternoon, and you're playing with him, and you don't sleep all day at your bed.” So that's what I do most of the day. And then afternoon I'm a mother. I'm functioning as a mother. I'm like doing whatever: playing, going to friends, like JonJon friends. And then after he go to sleep, so I can switch my coffee with friends to a cup of wine with friends. But I surrounded by lots of friends and family. And I think that's what I do. So in some traditions, like widow suppose to not color their hair, and wear only black, and they don't suppose to be like happy and I don't know… full of life. But I'm young, and I want to live my life.

**Anat Karol-Gordon:**  Do you sometimes think what Yuval would say if he sees you?

**Amit Halivni Bar-Peled:** So Yuval and I have lots of conversation in my head. At the beginning when he just got killed we didn't talk at all. But now he comes a lot and we're talking about how he is very proud of me. Sorry…emotional… *[her voice cracks].*

That like I know him, and he was always like adore me, and always like: “Oh, you're the best, and you're doing that amazing, and you are amazing mother, and you look amazing.” And it's like, I don't know, I think that now he's so proud of how I handle it, wherever he is right now, because right now he's not really dead to me, but wherever he is, so he's very happy of our family: me and JonJon and him.