**Sapir Bluzer:** I remember one time a message we got from a woman. She wrote us that she has two kids - one is three, and the other one is just borned (she was in maternity leave). And her partner have decided to go to the war, protect his country, do what he's supposed to do. And she said, “he came back home, he’s quiet, does not speak, and he doesn't want to be with the children. And he slapped my face. What should I do now?” Now this is a woman who had normal life. From her perspective, she sent a normal husband, and he came back different. Now, what do you do when your partner changed so much? Are you going to divorce or do you understand that maybe he's going through the hardest time of his life and he needs help? Can you be the person who can help him go to a treatment? What do you do?

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I’m Mishy Harman and this is Israel Story. As you know, we’re in the midst of our “Wartime Diaries” series, which is an attempt to collect slivers of life during these endlessly difficult days. And God knows that this last week has been *full* of endlessly difficult days.

Since our show doesn't follow the news, but rather tries to capture something about this period we’re living through, today’s episode won’t be about Hersh, or Carmel, or Almog, or Eden, or Ori, or Alex. It won’t be about the demonstrations, the Philadelphi Corridor or the death toll in Gaza. Instead, it will be about one inspiring woman, whose energy and work have impacted the day-to-day lives of hundreds of thousands of Israelis over the last 11 months.

Sapir Bluzer is a seasoned social entrepreneur, who initiated - and continues to head - “*Forum Neshot HaMiluimnikim,*” the Reservists’ Wives Forum, a lobby organization that advocates for the rights of those whose loved ones have been called up to war. Understanding that the prolonged absence of a husband or partner impacts the entire family structure, the Forum has mapped out needs, advanced legislation and successfully secured massive financial aid packets.

Sapir is also a member of the ROI Community - a global network of Jewish leaders, who work together to tackle urgent challenges in Israel and in Jewish communities around the world. And indeed, interspersed with our other “Wartime Diaries,” over the next few months we’ll be highlighting a few of those ROI leaders, starting with Sapir. Our producers Mitch Ginsburg and Yael Ben Horin sat down with her on a hot summer afternoon on a balcony overlooking the beautiful dry riverbed of Nahal Kfira. Here’s Sapir.

**Sapir Bluzer:** My name is Sapir Bluzer. I'm 34 years old. So I live in Nataf, and Nataf is a very quiet village in the mountain of Jerusalem. I… I'm married to Yair, and we have a daughter, Ya’ara, and she's one-year-old. She was borned two month before the war started. So you can imagine, as a reserves’ wife, I found myself on the Shabbat morning of October suddenly all alone with a two-month-old baby that I'm just starting to understand how to guard her and how to take care of her. It was a very dramatic moment that I realized just after a few month how dramatic it was, but those lonely months allows us to start the Reserves Wives Forum, and it became a center of strength for tens of thousands of families in Israel. So I'm glad it happened.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** And you yourself *could* have volunteered to go to reserve duty, because you hold a very relevant position within the reserves, don’t you?

**Sapir Bluzer:** Yeah. I didn't go to my reserves, even though I’m served as the commander of intelligence in the hostages negotiation unit of the IDF.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** So given that, did you think that maybe *you* should go and your husband should stay home?

**Sapir Bluzer:** It wasn't an option because I was nursing Ya’ara, but I did many phone calls. Like I called Gantz, I called Bennett, I called everyone I knew that can affect the decision-making.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** So how did the Forum start?

**Sapir Bluzer:** So fifty days to the war, I got a WhatsApp message from a friend, and she said “we're a group of mothers of reserves families, and we do want to do something, because we feel transparent and the government does not understand what we're going through and how our life did not go back in any way. And can you help, because you know how to promote policy. That's what you do.” And I say, “of course.” And I joined the WhatsApp group, we were nine women, and I saw that it was many ideas but there was no strategy, and none of them come from my background. So I stopped, and I said, “listen, let's focus on policy, and along that we need to change the perception of the society. We need to do a campaign on the social media, and, of course, the media.” And very fast - on that evening - we were a thousand women on that WhatsApp group. Few days later we were five thousand, like things happened very quickly.

**Yael Ben Horin:** What kind of things?

**Sapir Bluzer:** Ummm… The first move was asking on the WhatsApp group those thousand mothers, “what are your challenges, what you're facing, and tell us what can help you.” And there was hundreds of messages.

**Yael Ben Horin:** And what was in those messages? What did they say?

**Sapir Bluzer:** So the thing is the war is keep happening for us. And as long as our husbands is away, our lives are not as it used to be. You think, ‘yay, I guess now the family is running somehow.’ No! It's become harder and harder.

**Yael Ben Horin:** Can you expand on that? In what ways?

**Sapir Bluzer:** Mostly with the kids and the emotional part. There's many kids who stop talking - four-year, five-years-old. Because being in a family when your father is away and you're scared, you don't sleep at night sometimes, or the kids in the school asking questions, and maybe your father is not going to come back, and things like that. So this is the most crucial… The emotional part is the hardest and unfortunately, this is also the hardest thing for decision-makers to understand. It's much easier to explain to a person like… someone who works in the Treasury Office how it affects our career, than how it affects emotionally our families.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** And I guess that also ends up impacting the reservists too, right?

**Sapir Bluzer:** Of course. And some of the reserves soldiers have commit suicide and this is because of… of those emotional edge. Because how much can you see such hard things through the war, and you go back and you see your family is collapsed, and there's no one who understands you, not in your work and your family, like people don't understand what you're going through. And unfortunately we see the numbers go up of the reserves soldiers who became violent to their family.

**Yael Ben Horin:** And what did you do with all these accounts?

**Sapir Bluzer:** We took everything to a paper, a document that I translate into a policy paper, and after two days we sent it to the Treasury Minister, and three weeks later, we got a phone call. We met the Treasury Minister, and the funny thing is that in the beginning of the meeting, you know what he told us? He said, “I want to thank you, not because you're fighting for your homes and what do you do as just a reserve family, of course, but because it's the first time when we're getting such a whole program that sees the different aspects and also shows us how to deliver it. And we took your program and we made it to the 9 billion Shekels program that the Treasury Office and Security Office led.” And at that moment I told myself, ‘OK, we do something right.’

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Right.

**Sapir Bluzer:** You know, when I'm thinking about what's the position of women in war, my grandma, Esther, she made the *aliah* from World War Two. And my grandma was one of the women who started *Ha’Aguda LeMa’an HaChayal* in the north, which is helping the soldiers, feeding them, giving them strength. It wasn't about policy and writing papers, but it's interesting to think that as a woman in those times of war, she saw her position as strengthening the soldiers. And I see myself fighting for our homes.

**Yael Ben Horin**: So you’re really continuing the family tradition. What… What’s changed between your grandma’s time and now?

**Sapir Bluzer:** In wartime, the difference between the role of a man and women become much more clear. Of course, there's also women who is combat and they're amazing, and they showed how it important is that there's going to be women in combat. But mostly when you see the numbers - OK, 98% of the reserve soldiers are men - our role is here, is at home, OK? And it's not easy. It's not easy to know that your role now is protecting your home and fighting for your home. So the question of what is the position of women in times of war is not an easy answer. Because home is important. And while your husband is away, so yes, now you need to take the two parts, to be mom and dad. I'm just thinking about the specifically about us, the women of the reserves families, that in a way, we were asked to go back to the kitchen. And the reason the Forum was created is because we are women who is not waiting in the kitchen. So I wish that while this country is going to start to rebuild itself, we will see women in the decision-making forums. That it's not going to be the trivial path that because men was in combat and men was managing this war, so now we will think that only man can rebuild.