**Agi Mishol:** I don't decide I will write now about this and that subject. I wake up in the morning and I begin with the birds. The first bird which starts chirping…is that chirping? And it's a little chirp, like she says: “Somebody is awake?” And I know that under the covers, yes, I'm awake. And then I write about it, and then I think: *Well, this is what you write about in these days.* I mean: *Well, I will write now a poem about about the chirping of a bird.* And I think: *Yes, of course, I have to, why not*. They have to remind me and others that this is still exists.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey listeners, it's Mishy. So as you know, during these incredibly difficult days, we're trying to bring you voices we're hearing among and around us. These aren't stories, they're just quick conversations, or postcards really, that try to capture slivers of life right now.

77-year-old Agi Mishol is one of Israel's most prominent, beloved, and widely read poets. Over the years she's won practically every literary prize here. And Amos Oz once said that her poems, quote: “know how to tell a tale, to sing a song, and also to dance.” Her poetry is colorful and playful, full of nature, and love of the land. And that makes sense because in addition to writing, Agi and her husband Giora are also farmers who grow peaches, and pomegranates, and persimmons. They live in Moshav Kfar Mordechai near Gedera. Many rockets have been launched to that region in the last month, including one that landed very close to their home, and damaged their front door. And as you'll be able to hear in the tape, the serenity of the orchards is often disturbed by the sound of fighter jets going to or coming back from missions in Gaza.

In the aftermath of October 7th, Agi was part of an unusual, and utterly devastating literary project. Dozens of Israel's leading content creators: authors, poets, editors, playwrights, journalists—volunteered to write eulogies for the 100 plus members of Kibbutz Be’eri who had been murdered. David Grossman penned a secular *kaddish*, while others received bare biographical information, called up surviving relatives, and then sat down to write parting words for people they had never met. There are apparently times when wordsmiths become essential workers. Our producers Yael Ben Horin and Mitch Ginsburg went to Kfar Mordechai to visit Agi. Adina Karpuj helped edit this piece, and the translation of Agi’s poem “Shelter” is by Joanna Chen.

**Agi Mishol:** I’m Agi Mishol. I'm a poet. I live in Kfar Mordechai. It’s a kind of a village, and we are now in the middle of the harvest of persimmon. And all our existence is now on the trees. And we have to pick all the fruit because they're indifferent to all what happens now.

I volunteered to write eulogies for those who were murdered in Be’eri, in Kibbutz Be’eri, because there were like 70 funerals in one day. And always when it's a war, or tension, I think about this…you know famous phrase about the muse and the guns: this is war, so the muse is quiet, but it's not true.

At the first time when they asked me to do this, I didn't know it was like touching something sacred to write this thing about people I don't know personally. They send information about their characters, and who were they, and what they liked to do, or what they grew in the garden, and what kind of personality. I didn't know them in the morning, but in the evening they were just like friends.

Yona Cohen, she was 72 years old. She was such a wonderful woman, and cheerful, and full of life: a kibbutznikit. And her son, Ohad Cohen, who was 42 years old, he was also a musician. And his little baby, 10 month old…she, the baby too was murdered in his arms. When I saw the graves of the people I wrote…I started to cry because they weren't strangers anymore.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** I wonder if as a poet you feel like you have a certain role in society today with the trauma that we're going through.

**Agi Mishol:** You know the poet Leah Goldberg—she wrote that during war, poets, they must…they don't just have the permission but they must write about love, about nature. They have to remind people that there is beauty.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Can you read for us something that you wrote this week?

**Agi Mishol:** Okay.

Shelter

Now when death crawls around

And pecans push against their shells

I hide inside Hebrew.

Nothing will happen to me in innocent writing

Nothing will happen

If I am absorbed into the letters

If I do not exit the line –

Shrunken into a dot above the i

Packed inside a p

Or the curve of a c

Or the two dripping tears

of a parenthesis.

Beloved holy language –

Now when everything has a time

And everything is horror,

When the orchard reaches out

And the ground is ploughed

I do as Rilke says:

I let beauty and terror happen to me

Without thinking

It’s final.