**Gidon Lev:** I’m Gidon Lev. I’m almost 89 years old. And I've lived in Israel approximately 65 years. I'm a Holocaust survivor, an ex kibbutznik, a Democrat, liberal: all the good things.

*[laughs]*

Maybe some not so good.

**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.

There's a lot of Holocaust rhetoric in the air. Bibi Netanyahu has said on several occasions that Hamas militants are worse than the Nazis. And this week, the Israeli delegation to the UN wore yellow stars at the Security Council. All of it’s controversial of course, and many people, including many Holocaust survivors, have different feelings on the matter.

Gidon Lev from Ramat Gan probably isn't exactly what you imagine when you think of a Holocaust survivor. For many years he lived in Kibbutz Zikim on the Gaza border, where he milked some 200 cows a day. Nowadays, get this—he's a veritable Tik Tok celebrity, with nearly half a million followers, and quite accurately likes to refer to himself as the rascal. When the war broke out he experienced a lot of trauma, and took shelter in Ein Gedi on the shores of the Dead Sea. Our producers Mitch Ginsburg and Adina Karpuj went to visit him.

**Gidon Lev:** So in 1938, about three months after the Germans had entered Karlovy Vary, my parents and grandparents decided they can't anymore: impossible to be here. So they decided they're going to move to Prague—let the Germans have this, we're going to the east, to Prague.

And I remember my birthday was in March. I was born March 3rd. And I received a beautiful tricycle: red tricycle with black handlebars. And as we went to the train station in the middle of the night with suitcases and bed rolls and boxes of stuff— everything we could carry. Of course I brought my love tricycle with me. And I come to the train, and holding it up and trying to pick it up. And my friend said, “nein, nein,” “no, no, no, you can’t take it.” For the little boy three years old it's a minor tragedy, a minor tragedy. Three months after we arrived in Prague, Hitler came and declared, “There is no more Czechoslovakia Republic.From now on you are part of the greater Third Reich.”

I remember my grandpa, his name was Alfred, he used to take me to the park around the corner. And there were swings there, and slide. And we would come there and I would run—especially to one specific swing in the shape of canoe, quickly climbing…I was four or five years old. And he would of course push me. I was in seventh heaven. And one day we come there, “no, no, no…” He comes running after me, “nein, nein, nein,” “no no, no, you can’t, I'm sorry, you can’t.” I started crying. And “Why? What did I do? Why are you taking me out?” With my little fist I hit him. He said, “Peter, I’m sorry. Look, you see the sign, it says, ‘Juden verboten’” (Jews are not allowed).

These kinds of things were so oppressive, depressive, suppressive. And the Germans did it step by step. And then finally every Jew has to wear an identifying Jewish star. This is actually my mother's. This is what my mother had to wear. But my mother was a little bit of a rebel. You see this pin on the back. Well, we had to buy these. I think it was 10 koruna. I don’t know, it’s a lot of money. Since everybody wears every day something else, right, once a sweater, once a blouse, once a coat, depending on the weather. So you had to buy a dozen or more: a lot of money. We didn't have it. So she said, “I'm buying one. I use a pin.” This is the pin. And she pinned it on her blouse or on her coat or on her sweater whenever she went out. So this was more or less the step before the transportation started.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Okay, I wasn't going to ask you about this yet, but I think I have to now. You know, I was reading the paper this morning and I saw that Israel's ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan, wore a yellow star just like that. How did that make you feel? What did you think about that?

**Gidon Lev:** I think it's okay. Except I think it looks too phony. Why didn't he go to trouble and find a few people who have a real one, like I have, and say, “Can you lend it to us. I’ll wear one that your mother wore.”

**Mitch Ginsburg:** So interesting, I never could have predicted that that would be your response, but it's very interesting.

**Gidon Lev:** Sometimes the details of something are more important than the actual action.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** I wanted to just read to you if I could…

**Gidon Lev:** You can.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** What the head of Yad Vashem said about this. I don't know if you saw, but he tweeted yesterday, “We were saddened to see the members of the Israeli delegation to the UN donning the yellow star. It disgraces both Holocaust victims and Israel. The yellow star symbolizes the Jewish people's helplessness, and the Jews being at the mercy of others. Today, we have an independent state and a strong army. We are the masters of our fate. Today, we shall wear a blue and white flag not a yellow star.” What do you think about that?

**Gidon Lev:** Don't agree with him. Absolutely do not agree. It doesn't show…make us weak. Doesn't mean that we're only victims. But yes, we were victims. And this horrific attack that took place, the way it took place, did absolutely…me, an 89-year-old survivor of the Holocaust, remind me of that period. It almost feels like the Hamas had German, Nazi instructors: what to do, how to do it, when to do it…it’s exactly what the Germans did. They came into a town, a village, a ghetto, removed all the Jews, lined them up, had them dig a ditch, shot them, and if they weren't happy…that they went too slow, they corralled them into a synagogue and lit the synagogue with live people inside, and burn them to death. Anybody trying to escape was shot on the spot, right by the window, right by the door. These horrific atrocities were exactly what the Hamas did here. I didn't think such a thing could happen again.

I hope we get these guys and finish it off. But it's a very, very big problem to do this in a way that doesn't harm innocent people. And there are many of them. I have absolutely no objection that the Palestinians should have their homeland too. Not in Israel, next to Israel. We don't have to be lovers or friends. We can just exist next to each other. And if that ever happens, this entire area will change—become a haven for everybody.

I have one daughter who lives in California in Santa Cruz. And she's a liberal, left wing. She's a wonderful human being. But we had a very harsh discussion, and I pointed out to her…if Israel wanted to level Gaza, in one day there would be nothing left of Gaza. But who wants to. Fact is the American air force was bombing, excuse the expression, the shit out of the Germans. The Americans—that's what they did. They bombed civilians, shmivilians. They were all German Nazis as far as we're concerned, even though that’s not so true.

We are not perfect, but essentially we try as much as is possible to avoid civilians. The fact that Hamas uses civilians as a way of protecting themselves and to show the world how terrible we are, that we don't care about humans, is a big lie. We fight back. That's why the world is against us because we fight back. The world loves Jews: dead Jews. My tendency is to fight back. I'm not any more prepared to step aside.