**Idit Ohel:** I'm a totally different person than I was before; I'm more intuitive; I'm more centered. And I feel that I'm always on the right path for my way, like I'm not letting other people or other things move me like a leaf…no, I'm very centered, like I have good roots. Like Alon is an oak tree. So his name is very… that's why I know he's strong. So he makes me strong also because I know where my place is, and I know what I need to do. So I don't think I was like that before. No, so this is a gift that he gave me.

**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. In late January, Idit Ohel, the mother of 22-year- old Alon Ohel, who was kidnapped from the Nova party, invited me to attend an unusual concert of three of Israel's leading musicians.

**Idit Ohel:** One is Guy Mazig, Shlomi Shaban and Jane Bordeaux.

**Mishy Harman:** And Idit, you chose these musicians because they're Alon’s favorite musicians?

**Idit Ohel:** Yeah, yeah, obviously. Alon loves them, and they're part of his repertoire of music that he loves. You know, he was also at the Nova, so he likes also trance and everything. Anything that has to do with music that's Alon.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** It was unusual because the concert was both incredibly intimate, I think there were about 20 people total in attendance, and massively public. It was the loudest musical performance I've ever heard.

**Mishy Harman:** So Idit, can you say where we are?

**Idit Ohel:** Okay, we are in Zikim.

**Mishy Harman:** Zikim is akibbutz just to the north of the Gaza Strip, practically on the border.

**Idit Ohel:** And we're here to do a very special music concert.

**Mishy Harman:** Special, absolutely: see a huge crane that was brought specifically for the event, hoisted a giant stack of speakers high up in the air. But they weren't pointed at us. We were not the audience. Instead, they were directed south towards the border and towards the visible smoke pillars rising up above Gaza City.

**Idit Ohel:** Hoping that all the, you know, hostages that are in Gaza will hear this music, especially for my son, and we're doing this especially for Alon. Actually,

Gaza's is just right there, so I've never been so close to him. We live in the north. So for me, it's very, you know, exciting, and it's going to be a special day today because, you know, I hope they will hear the music and feel that we are with them.

**Mishy Harman:** Do you imagine him smiling and realizing that…

**Idit Ohel:** That it’s for him…wow, I hope so. I so hope so.

*[singing in Hebrew]*

**Shlomi Shaban:** I’m Shlomi Shaban. I'm a singer songwriter and a pianist.

**Doron Talmon:** Hello, I'm Doron Talmon. I'm a musician. I have a band called Jane Bordeaux.

**Mishy Harman:** And can you tell me how you're feeling.

**Shlomi Shaban:** How am I feeling? Well,

physically I'm feeling kind of drained because each event, each event like that is like you moves like an earthquake.

**Doron Talmon:** And it's difficult to sing while wanting to cry. But it was very…

**Mishy Harman:** I could see that you were struggling with that.

**Doron Talmon:** I struggle with it. Yeah, these days I really struggle with singing and not crying while I'm singing. But I'm trying to tap into the energy of the family, of the hope, the message, the energy, the music. So it gave me a lot of inspiration.

*[singing in Hebrew]*

**Shlomi Shaban:** I’ve been meeting with the Ohel family and it’s inspiring indeed, it's not a cliche. Because their belief in the power of art and music, and their belief in Alon’s inner music as a guardian is truly inspiring, and it's a real belief. And every time I'm meeting them or texting with them I'm in awe, and it's really unbelievable how truly positive they can remain and inspire other people while they're struggling with this tragic story and event.

**Mishy Harman:** I hope that the next time I hear you sing is..

**Shlomi Shaban:** With Alon

**Mishy Harman:**…at Alon’s return home party.

**Shlomi Shaban:** Yeah, he is a great pianist, one must say. A real great pianist. Yeah, yeah. I got a video of him playing one of my songs, actually. And it's truly unbelievable. He's really talented, and I'm really looking forward to meet him, you know, and do something together and amen.

**Mishy Harman:** *Toda* (thank you) Shlomi.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** A few weeks after the concert, our producers Yochai Maital and Zev Levi drove up to Lavon, a tranquil community in the Galilee, for a longer conversation with Idit about music, about spirituality, and about hope. Here she is.

**Idit Ohel:** So I'm Idit Ohel, and I think from the seventh of October I'm Alon Ohel’s mom. I've been his mother from the moment he was born, but I introduced myself as his mother, because I'm here for him, for his voice, I guess. Before the seventh of October, I taught art in middle school, and I do art. I'm an artist myself. And after the seventh of October I'm here to save my son.

**Yochai Maital:** Can you tell us a little bit about Alon.

**Idit Ohel:** So Alon he's my first child, and I think from the moment that he entered this world, he loved music. When he was in my tummy I used to take a microphone and put it on my tummy, and he would listen to Mozart and Bach. That's why when he came out, I thought that he really knew music. And when he heard it, it made him feel really soothed and it helped him I think in all his life up till now. And I think now mostly. Music is really a part of him, you know.

At the age of nine, he told me: “*Ima* (mom), I want to learn the piano.” And I said: “Wow, good idea. Sure, let's try that.” And he loved it. As he grew up, I think he found that music is something that's meaningful for him, you know. So the house always is with music. Music is part of, you know, the house, the feeling of…even today we play Alon's playlist.

**Yochai Maital:** What's on his playlist?

**Idit Ohel:** He loves jazz. He loves Israeli music: Guy Mazig obviously, Shlomi Shaban, Tuna. And he also likes, you know, great pianists, so Elton John. He loves Elton John because he's a good pianist. And you know when he plays—he learned classical music, and he played a lot of that. But as time went by I think jazz was more his thing. And he really loves to improvise. So I wonder if his music would be different, and how it will be different. Sometimes they say that artists make music and write songs usually the best songs and best music when they're down, when they're, you know, like a very dark place in their lives. So maybe from that comes light and beautiful music. And I wonder…

**Yochai Maital:** Can you take us back to your October 7th. How did it play out for you?

**Idit Ohel:** Well, we woke up in the morning. Okay, let's go do our walks. Usually Saturday morning, we go and walk a little bit with the dogs. And then my father calls us and says:

“Do you know where Alon is?”

And I said: “Of course, he's at the party.”

He said: “No, no, no, do you know where Alom is?”

I said: “Why? What's going on?”

“You have to open the news, talk to him. See, I've been sending him messages. He doesn't send me back. He's not answering his phone.”

So I'm like thinking, *Dad, it's okay. He's at a party. Everything is okay.* So at about 7:30 in the morning, 7:50 something like that, my husband sends him a message: “How are you? Where are you?” And at 8:08 o'clock Alon sends us a message saying that he is in a bomb shelter and he's fine. So times passes by, and my daughter calls Alon every 10, 15, minutes, she calls him, calls him. And then around 11:30 in the morning, somebody who answers the phone like in horrified…and this person, she says:

 “Everybody's killing us. They're killing us. Help us, help us.”

And I talk to this person, I tell her: “Okay, what's your name?”

And she says, “Amit.”

“Okay, where are you?”

“I'm in…”

“Do you see Alon?”

“No, I don't see Alon.”

Okay. And I'm just trying to tell her to send me where she is and the phone goes dead. We're thinking, *okay, we know something is wrong.*

At 2:30 somebody takes the phone again, and we hear this person saying that he's in Soroca Hospital. I'm thinking, *okay, maybe Alon is there*, you know. We send him a picture of Alon, and we're telling him: “Okay, this is Alon’s phone, this is a picture of Alon, do you see somebody like this?” And he says: “No, I don't see.”

So my husband decides to go to Soroka, and when he's there, like about an hour trying to find Alon. Maybe he's there; maybe he got really wounded, nobody know who he is, like a Jane Doe kind of thing. And I'm waiting for him. I don't know what's going on. And when he comes he says: “Okay, sit down. I want to tell you something. Alon was kidnapped.” And I'm looking at him, and I'm taking a good breath, like a really good breath, saying, *Okay, you have to breathe, now we really have to breathe.* Everybody's looking at me. My son is looking at me. My daughter is looking at me. My husband is looking, looking at me taking a good breath. And I said: “Okay, so we have to fight.”

And I know from that second that I am not going to be in my bed crying, and I have to be active. And another thing I understand is that I cannot control what's going on with Alon, obviously, but I can control to what house, to what home he will come back to. And he will come to a strong, healthy, loved and safe home. And that's what I have to do. So from the seventh of October that is what I'm doing. So I don't let fear and I don't let grief be in front of me. Because I am not a victim. I was not a victim before, and I'm not a victim after the seventh of October. And when you are not a victim, you don't ask questions like why, and you don't point fingers to who, you just do. You continue doing and being for yourself and others. I was thinking, *how can I connect with Alon?* Obviously, I cannot call him: “Hi honey. How are you? Are you eating?” Okay, so, how can I connect with my son? And I thought of two things from that moment, also music, because music is part of Alon, and also I believe in meditations and energy and things like that. So I'm thinking, *let's do these both things, right?* So I started doing community meditations. And my husband, Alon’s father, Kobi, started to do community runs, because that's also energy, because Alon cannot move, right? So we have to move for him, and we have to bring this energy to him and the music. So putting a piano in the central of Tel Aviv in the hostage square in Tel Aviv. And the piano, it's a yellow piano. And many people ask me: “Why yellow? Why is there a… yellow piano, right? So yellow is sun; yellow is light, and Alon you’re not alone. Alon is saying that there is light upon you, that the person, the musician, the pianist that comes and plays gives light and hope to Alon for playing for him in an energetic way, right? Because he's thinking about Alon when he's playing.

**Yochai Maital:** Yeah.

**Idit Ohel:** The piano did a lot to the square and to the people, and it's a big thing. And I thought, *okay, how can the world know what's going on*? And I thought that maybe if I brought a piano like that to other places in the world, it will be amazing. And on the 100 days was the 14th of January, a piano was set up in Washington Square in New York, and in Berlin, and in Amsterdam. And it was beautiful because many people came and play the piano, and people gathered and learned about Alon’s story and through Alon’s story. understood all the hostages. And I believe it gave hope to everyone.

When I was in Berlin, I met this woman…

it's amazing woman. She's 102 years old. She came to the concert, right, for Alon. And she survived the Holocaust, and she's 102 and she's talking to you like she's 16. And she takes my hands and she says to me… she cannot believe what's happening; it's like Auschwitz all over again. That's what she said. But then she looked at my eyes, right through my eyes, and she comes really, really close, and she said very quiet: “Hope, you need hope. This will save us. Hope.” And I said to her: “Yes, hope, yeah, hope.” I wake up in the morning every day and I think, *okay, what next? What else can we do?*

**Yochai Maital:** Do you have any kind of a routine? Are you able to maintain any kind of a routine?

**Idit Ohel:** Yeah, I meditate every morning and every night before I go to bed. And every morning when I wake up. And then I start with calls. Sometimes I'm being interviewed; sometimes I go to Tel Aviv, to the center, to the square. And sometimes I go abroad and fight for him and tell about his story wherever. You know, when Alon was around with his friends everybody was together, and he was the one that made everybody happy. So if they're all tired and they don't want to go anywhere and go to the party he comes into your house and he has…always like a bottle of wine and a smile on his face and says: “Well, get up, we're going to have fun.” He does that, he does that. He makes people feel good about themselves all the time.

 **Yochai Maital:** It sounds like he's a lot like you.

**Idit Ohel:** Yeah, you think so? Well, he's my son. I don't know if he's like me, but he's very intuitive, and he loves people. He appreciates the little things of life. He was supposed to go live in Tel Aviv on the 20th of October with three of his best, best, best friends. They had an apartment set up, and obviously it didn't happen. And a week ago I opened this…they came to my house

and they brought me this key, and they said: “You see this key? It’s for Alon, so when he comes there's a room set up for him.” They're so kind, you know. They didn't have to do this. You know, they could live their lives and find an apartment for three, but they didn't. They found an apartment for four. They come here all the time, and they come here because they tell me that I give them hope. It's funny, that's funny—but they tell me that all the time. They say: “You know, you are such…you're with such hope. And you see life always pink, you know.” I see life in a pink way. I say: “Really?” “And you give us hope every day. So we need your energy to go through the day.” So they come here, and I said: “Okay, you give me also.”

**Yochai Maital:** I can totally see that.

**Idit Ohel:** It's the only way for me anyway to cope. And even though I'm a strong person, every day is hard. Time is of essence, and they have to come back home now. That is why it was very important for me to do this big thing in Zikim.

*[music]*

You know, bringing live music that Alon loves to him, to make sure that he hears it and gets a lot of energy from that to be able to continue to survive. And also to say that no more, that we have to open the hearts of everybody who is connected to this thing: if it's politicians, the government, if it's Hamas, if it's whoever—to open their hearts and think about what it is to be human.

*[Singing in Hebrew]*

**Idit Ohel:** It's taking too long, and every day it's harder, it's harder.

I talked about energy, and I talked about the fact that I want the music to get to Alon, right? So we sent a post saying that any musician that is singing or playing at their homes, at a concert, doesn't matter. When they're sitting and playing, just think about Alon. Please just think about him. Because when a musician plays, it's like meditation. It has power. And I thought of, just think about him. You will get that. He will get that. And Avishai Cohen and Shlomi Shaban…so many…were so moved by that, that they wrote us that they were doing that and they want to do something more. It came from them.

My son, Ronen, he wrote to Avishai Cohen and the song that Avishai Cohen wrote “Shuv Elay,” it's a song that was written before the seventh of October, but Ronen asks if it was okay for him to do this song with Alon’s friends who are musicians also, and change a little bit the words to “*Shuvu Eleinu*” (Return to Us).

And he was so moved by that he was so grateful. And he said, “of course.” And they went in, they did this clip, and he was really emotional. I think…it's emotional, and very, very strong song… says exactly what we want for them to come back to us.

*[The song, Shuvi Aleinu]*

**Yochai Maital:** “I always ask this at the end of the interview, but is there anything that I didn't ask that you wish that I did ask, or something else that you want to that you would like to add?

**Idit Ohel:** Yes, yes, there's something very important.

**Yochai Maital:** Okay.

**Idit Ohel:** You know, I've been talking and sharing my story and Alon’s story, and I want to ask whoever is listening to do something.

If anyone will just do something good, giving something that's good for somebody else, but think about the hostages when they're doing it, even one hostage. Think about Alon, think about Hersch, whatever. It doesn't matter what age you are. You give your mother a cup of tea—you think about Alon, that is wonderful. And I'm thinking, walk the dog to your neighbor, to a friend, and think about it Alon when doing. Doing a good thing for you, but in a conscious way for somebody, do something that makes you feel like you are doing something meaningful and important to bring the hostages back home. And it starts with small things, and then it depends on each one of you, what you can do, but you have to do. It's not enough just to listen. You have to do something. So, do something. Do something nice. Do.