**Lihi Lapid:** The betrayal of the women's organizations was very difficult for me. It was so depressing. It was really a betrayal. There was a group that approached me, they call themselves “Me Too Unless You Are a Jew”—which was very, very strong. And it was about women and about women that are kidnapped.

We approached all parliaments, and all the big organizations of women that you always hear from them about anything that happens with women. And you mentioned Malala. I remember how we all put pictures, and we didn't care if she's Muslim, or Christian or Jew, or I don't know, Buddhist. We didn't care. It was a girl that was shot because she wanted to go to school. And here are girls that were kidnapped because they went to a party.

And you know what: I was shocked; I was really, really shocked not seeing Michelle Obama handing a picture of women hostages. But as a politician’s wife I'm used to disappointments and sometimes little moments of joy.

**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.

Lihi Lapid is a celebrated photo journalist, columnist and best selling author: of children's books, cookbooks, and award winning novels. She's also married to Yair Lapid, the former Israeli prime minister and current leader of the opposition.

In 2021, Lihi published *Zarot*, a sweeping tale that explores the complicated mother-daughter relationship, the tolls of immigration, and the reality of marginalized groups within Israeli society. When it came out it received glowing praise, especially from the notoriously harsh critics at Haaretz, who called the novel quote: “A wonderful work written with restraint and wisdom.” And this spring, three years later, and in what feels like, and actually is an entirely different world, the English translation, *On Her Own*, was published by HarperCollins.

Last month, Mitch Ginsburg and I talked to Lihi in our studio in Jerusalem. Adina Karpuj edited our conversation—which ranged from feminism to special needs, from the shock of October 7th to what it's like to have a major work of fiction written by the former prime minister's wife come out in the middle of a war. Here's Lihi.

**Lihi Lapid:** Hi, my name is Lihi Lapid, and I'm a writer and a mother. I grew up in Arad—which is the place you stop for toilet on the way to Masada, right?

So I have this barefoot desert girl view of life. Yair is joking at me sometimes. I'm saying: “I'm from Arad.” And he says: “Honey, you live in Tel Aviv, and you are the most bourgeois ever, but inside of me it's this girl.

You and me met when I was photographer, right? I was a news photographer: very tough, short hair, big motorbike. But after Leor was born I realized…no newspaper wants any mother that needs to breastfeed every four hours. You can’t do it. The motorbike is not a place to put the baby. That was my first time that I realized I'm a woman. Until then I thought: wow, you and me, I can do everything that you can do. And then I was angry; I was angry because actually, they told us all the time that we can do everything.

And then I wanted to do something about it. So I started photographing women and babies in order to show that it's difficult, but it's so sweet and so nice. So I said: okay, photography is not the way to do it. And then I started writing. I did study one year in the University of Tel Aviv: literature. Because I married Yair, and his mother is a famous writer, and his father was a journalist and a writer, and he was…so I wanted to sound smart. But I never thought I would be a writer, never.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Can we maybe hear what your October 7th was like.

**Lihi Lapid:** Oh, wow. October 7th we woke up for sirens. It was so weird for me. Yael, our daughter, she's autistic. She's 27 years old. She was sleeping, And like, wow, it's probably a mistake, I don't need to wake her up and drag her to the safe room. It was difficult to explain to her why we need to rush in and go down. And then a friend SMS me: “Listen, there are terrorists in my sister's house down the block.” And I said: “Yair, Efrat is saying that there are terrorists at her sister's house, do something.” And he calls whatever big chiefs of the army. And he realizes that something is happening. It was an hour that she sends me messages of the daughter of her sister saying: “The terrorists are here. We can’t talk. So don't call us…” and whispering. And I was like, okay, it's crazy, but it's 5, 10 people somewhere.

Yair was all the time on the phone. And then he came to the living room and I told him: “Listen, there are 40 people dead.” And he looks at me and he says: “Much more. Much more.”

**Mishy Harman:** Wow.

**Lihi Lapid:** I have something with Yair that we decided at the beginning of him being a politician—that he doesn't tell me things I'm not allowed to know. Now it sounds not funny, but I always say if the Syrians will take me, I don't want to have any secrets. I want to say everything. So Yair never tells me things that are not allowed to say. But this whisper of him saying, much more, I will never forget this moment that I realized we’re in a different situation.

**Mishy Harman:** So what did you tell Yael? What did you say to your daughter?

**Lihi Lapid:** I remember I looked at her and I said: *okay, I'm not going to even try to explain*. Yael is not talking, so she has all kinds of signs. So she do with her fingers like glasses, which means grandma. And after 10,000 times she asked to go to grandma, I said, maybe it's a good idea, maybe she's saying that grandma is alone. I'll go to be with her a little bit. And, you know, being at my mother's house, looking at my mother sitting in a stairway because there are bombs all over…looking at my autistic daughter sitting next to her with all the neighbors there. It was heartbreaking. It was heartbreaking. It's not the way Israel was supposed to be. It's not the way.

**Mishy Harman:** So Lihi, you're also the president of a large organization in Israel that provides services and employment opportunities for people with special needs. Can you talk a little bit about that aspect of the war, of people with special needs in the war.

**Lihi Lapid:** Wow. First of all, the spectrum of people with disabilities are from people that are totally understanding everything, and people that don't understand what's going on, and everything is collapsing around them. I want to tell one story that maybe will help us.

A woman from Kfar Aza, Keren, the mother of Amit, a

26-year-old young woman with autism. She sat in the safe room for 30 hours with a 26-year-old autistic girl that doesn't understand what's going on. And she held her in her arms for 30 hours. There was no light. Her daughter wanted the iPad or something, and there was nothing. And she hold her. She said that her daughter scratched her totally. She just said all the time to her daughter: “shhh, shhh,” for 30 hours.

Can you imagine this situation? No autistic kid need to be hugged for 30 hours, and put hands on their mouth for him not to shout. It's like, it's really, really, really devastating.

**Mishy Harman:** Could you imagine being her?

**Lihi Lapid:** I don't think Yael would survive it, but yes. I'm telling you since she told me that, I think I'm dreaming about it; I'm remembering that there were tough times with Yael that I'm holding her for three minutes.

Wow. I don't know if I would survive it. I don't know if I wouldn't say: *You know what, that's it, I have no energy anymore.*

**Mitch Ginsburg:** So Lihi, I'd like to switch gears, and talk a bit about the book you wrote three years ago in Hebrew. It's out now in English. Can you tell us a bit about it?

**Lihi Lapid:** Yes, it's about a young girl, 18-year-old. She's running away from bad people, and from bad relationship. And she hides in the stairway. And suddenly, at five o'clock in the morning an old lady is going down the stairs. She opens the light. Nina, the young girl, is trying to figure out where to escape, when the old woman, Carmela, looks at Nina and say: “Dana, my Dana, you came back for me.” And that started a relationship.

**Mishy Harman:** So you know, I just read the book. And obviously you read a book within the context of the time in which you read it. So I read all kinds of things into the book, which perhaps weren't even part of the way that you thought about it. But one thing that was very palpable for me was the fact that the characters find themselves in this really unusual and difficult situation which sort of gets out of hand. No one really intended for any of this to happen. And then suddenly everyone's in a very, very difficult position. And in some ways I feel that's also true of us, sort of on a national level, right, that we found ourselves in a situation that no one really wants. And there's something about how these characters are trying to get themselves out of a situation that they never really wanted to be in which to me resembled something that we are all feeling, or at least that I'm feeling about trying to get out of a situation that we really don't want to be in.

**Lihi Lapid:** I never thought about it, but yes, it's like, if I would come here a year ago, and I would say: “Listen, I have a story, 133 people are kidnapped and held with the Hamas in Gaza for six months. And I'm not so sure if everything is being done to bring them back,” you would think I'm crazy.

**Mishy Harman:** Yeah.

**Lihi Lapid:** And, you know, I talked to my son, and he said, he's not watching the news. And I said: “Why?” And he said: “It's unbearable to see all those people behaving and talking like everything is normal, when nothing is normal.”

And I think we're in a situation that nothing is normal. And in the book, there is this grandmother that she is not the grandmother, and this young girl that she's not her granddaughter, and they are building their own world. And I think in a way it's what's happening to a lot of Israelis now, that we are trying to shelter ourselves inside family, inside relationships.

I have lectures and I see so many people are coming just to be together, just to hold hands, maybe to cry a little bit. And I think, suddenly it lights in a big part in the book that was maybe a little bit in the shadow. Carmela, the old woman lost her child as a combat soldier 30 years ago, and suddenly she becomes so relevant to this time.

What I've experienced at the last six months that the war is going on is that every time that I saw a picture of a soldier that was killed I realized that there is a new Carmela, a new mother that will grieve forever, that will for 30 years…every soldier that will walk on the street she will for a minute imagine that it's her son that is coming back. And when I wrote and I read it I was sad with her. But now when they're 604 more families that a soldier died…for them…everything is different in their lives. So it makes Carmela more relevant now.

**Mishy Harman:** Yeah. So it's a dream for any author to have their book translated and published by an important press like HarperCollins. But we're also at a moment in which well, you know, the brand of Israel is what it is. And you are Yair Lapid’s wife. So what is it like to have the book come out now?

**Lihi Lapid:** You know, I think a lot of people in the stores will pick up the book, turn it, see that it's an Israeli writer, and will put it back. I know, I know, it will happen…unfortunately, because there is something…this story that I wish people that don't like Israel will read it.

**Mishy Harman:** And my last question, Lihi…I thought a lot while reading the book about you, actually. You know, you are who you are, and you hold the positions that you hold, and the prominence that you hold in society, and you're married to who you're married to, and all of that, and you live in Ramat Aviv Gimel. And you came up in your mind with this story, which is a very, very different story of Israel. It's a story of the underbelly of Israel, of places on the periphery, of people on the periphery—which is not your world.

**Lihi Lapid:** I'll tell you something. I was afraid like you, and I send Yair the beginning of the book, and I said: “Listen…say yes or no.” So I sent him a mail, and he send me a mail back, and it was written: “Wow.” It wasn't one of the options.