**Moriah Cohen:** And that morning my son came home and he tells me, “Mom, they told me at my Talmud Torah school that *our* terrorist is gonna be released.” Now this was a real blow, because *I* wanted to be the one who told him, and I wanted to do it in a very, very careful way, because well… in the end this is a kid who saw the knife. Who saw the terrorist with his own eyes. He’d recognize her on the street. And he says to me, “Mom, this is what they told me in the Talmud Torah. Is it true?”

**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.

On Saturday four hostages - Noa Argamani, Shlomo Ziv, Almog Meir Jan and Andrey Kozlov - were heroically rescued by the Israeli security forces, and safely brought home. Alive. This is audio from the beach in Tel Aviv, where a lifeguard shared the news over the loudspeakers.

Still, there are 120 hostages who remain in Gaza, 43 of whom have already been declared dead. And the pressure to sign a deal that will bring them home is mounting from day to day.

Such a deal, of course, has two sides: We tend to focus on what we stand to get, in other words the hostages. To some, to many, that’s really all that matters. But there are also those who emphasize the other side - what we’d be forced to give, the price we’d need to pay, the people we’d need to release. And our episode today brings us *that* part of the story.

Moriah Cohen is 29 years old. She and her family are part of the small Jewish settlement of Shimon HaTzadik, inside the predominantly Palestinian neighborhood of Sheikh Jarah in East Jerusalem. For years this neighborhood has been a focal point of legal battles, demonstrations and violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians.

Two-and-a-half-years ago - on December 8th, 2021 - Moriah was stabbed, right outside her home. Her attacker, a teenage girl, was apprehended, tried and sentenced to 12 years in prison. But then, in November 2023, as part of the prisoner swap between Israel and the Hamas, the deal that brought 80 Israeli hostages back home, she was released. Our producers Yael Ben Horin and Mitch Ginsburg went to talk to Moriah in her home, in Sheikh Jarah slash Shimon HaTzadik. Maya Thomas is our dubber.

**Moriah Cohen:** My name is Moriah Cohen and I live in Shimon HaTzadik neighborhood in Jerusalem. What else? I’m a mother of six, and a math teacher in Ma'ale Adumim, and I actually met my husband through my sister. See, my sister’s husband studied in the yeshiva with my husband, and they set us up on a date. Their yeshiva, it was in the Quarter in the Old City. And he wanted to continue studying at the yeshiva, so we looked for a place close by, right near the yeshiva. It was very, very important to us to live in the Quarter.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** That’s the *Muslim* Quarter, right?

**Moriah Cohen:** It's uh, the “renewed” Jewish Quarter, as we call it. So anyways we were looking for a place to live, and we realized it was a little trickier than we thought. This was at the very start of the stabbing sprees, about eight years ago, and it felt unsafe. I didn't actually know the Shimon HaTzadik neighborhood at the time, it’s outside the Old City, but close enough to walk. And my husband said, “we’re moving there.” So I told him, “well, if it's a quiet and calm place I have no problem moving there, I'm perfectly willing... It's close to everything and it's close to downtown, so why not?” And that's it... we moved here and this is the home where all my children were born, thank God, and we really like it here a lot. For many many years the neighborhood was very calm and peaceful… You know, a normal neighborhood. I mean, yes, it’s true that every Friday there were big demonstrations here, but that was just sort of part of the atmosphere. Something we got used to, not something weird or anything. With time, though, it became less pleasant and more violent. The protestors would throw things at us - it began with apples and things like that, and then slowly slowly progressed to stones, chairs, even Molotov cocktails. What can I say… They got creative here, and all kinds of things were hurled at us. And this house really got hit a lot. It was, like, really like a war over this home.

**Yael Ben Horin:** Could you take us back to that day in December 2021?

**Moriah Cohen:** Ummm… It was a few days after Chanukah. My husband was away in *miluiim*, in the reserves, and I was taking care of the kids by myself. And that morning we got ready and went out and I had to drop off all the kids at their different daycares and kindergartens. It was a cold morning, but sunny, and instead of loading everyone into the car, I thought it would be nice to walk. So I put three of the girls in the stroller because they were really tired, and two other children held on on the sides and we started walking right here on the street below the house. And I noticed a girl with a backpack, sort of just standing around. I thought that she was probably waiting for a friend to walk to school, or something. I don’t know. Nothing unusual. I wasn’t suspicious or anything and I just continued pushing the stroller. And then I stopped at the crossing, at the intersection, right here at the end of the road, and suddenly I felt like this big punch or blow to my back. It was really hard and I yelled out in pain. At first I didn't understand what… what the blow was, I didn’t understand what was going on. But because of my scream my son - who was helping me push the stroller - turned around and started shouting, “Imma, you have a knife in your back. You have a knife in your back.” And that’s when I understood what happened, and I sort of instinctively turned around to see who had stabbed me. I mean, not that there were many options, there was no one else on the street, but still I turned around, and my son pointed to her, to the girl, who was already running away. And he said, “it’s her, it’s her.” I just stayed with my kids and realized that I need help. I tried to flag down some cars and people who passed by, but no one stopped. Maybe out of fear, I don’t know. So I just crossed the road with my kids, even though my vision was starting to get all blurry, you know, from the force of the blow. So I told my son to direct me, to guide me, to tell me if any cars were coming, because we had to move and get away. When we got to the other side of the road people came over and started to help. They separated me from the children, and then a policeman took them off to the side. Someone started treating me, and sort of fixed the knife in place and rushed me to the hospital where they later took it out. But my kids stayed behind, on the street, and the whole way to the hospital that’s all I could think about. I didn’t think about the pain or the knife, just about the fact that I left my kids alone on the street. I mean I knew they were with the police, but I was like, who is taking responsibility for them? And at that point I didn’t know that the girl who had stabbed me, the terrorist, was actually my neighbor. I didn’t realize that. Like I remembered she looked vaguely familiar. But it was only later, when I was describing her to the police officers at the hospital, and when they showed me the footage from the security cameras, that it suddenly hit me that she was the neighbor’s daughter. Like that she lives right here, right in front of us.

**Yael Ben Horin:** How did your life change after that? I mean you were thankfully injured “lightly” and were released home that same day, but what happened then?

**Moriah Cohen:** Well, after I came back from the hospital I was really really scared. I mean my husband was away in reserves, and I was coming back home, to a house that is directly across the street from the family of my attacker. And the police escorted me home and I asked a neighbor to walk with me from the car to the door of our apartment. My husband came home later that night, and we decided that it was crucial that we not convey a sense of fear or panic. And look, everything was really scary. My kids saw me being stabbed on our own street, right next to our house. It’s not like it happened somewhere else. So my husband insisted that the very next morning we continue as usual, that we all walk to the kindergartens together. So we did. Literally the very next day. And what can I tell you? It was really hard for me. Like as we were walking I turned pale and realized I just couldn’t do it. So we said we’d take it slowly, one day at a time. Little by little. But we didn’t want the kids to change their normal schedule. We insisted that life go on, that we not lock ourselves up in our home. And that attitude helped them a lot, I think. They go out, even though we don’t let them go out of the gate by themselves as they used to. But life went on for them. For me the transition was more gradual. I use the car much more, and don’t walk on the street as much as I used to. The car sort of feels like my shield, or my protection. Every now and then the other Jewish women who live around here would take me out for a short walk around the neighborhood, to try and help me shake the fear, or overcome it. But it’s hard. I used to feel very safe here. Very free. And now less so.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** And do you talk about the attack? Is it something that’s discussed at home?

**Moriah Cohen:** Yes. We talk about everything that happened in the attack quite a bit. I believe it's also part of the children's healing process. And they’ve asked questions. They’ve asked about the knife. Like “Mom, what do you have in your back? Do you still have a scar there?” Things like that… Because they didn't really understand the whole story… Look, in the end, they were very little. But I *do* feel that they still have some deep sense of fear. I mean, they get scared, for example, when they see a knife. As far as they’re concerned, it's like every knife you use in the kitchen is sharp and very dangerous. Something that can kill. And I see that they sort of step away, even when I’m just cutting a salad or something. But we do talk about it. They’re also really scared when their dad goes to *miluim.* I think they feel that I can’t really protect them. Because in their minds at least that’s exactly what happened: Last time he went away to reserve duty, I was attacked and wounded. And now we’re in that loop again, because right after October 7th, the very next day, my husband was called up again. And now there’s a war, and they feel I can’t take care of them, that they aren’t safe with me. So we had to explain that I can actually protect them, and that what happened last time shouldn’t have happened, and won’t happen again. It’s sort of like this long process of building trust and confidence that everything will be OK. And then, all of a sudden, they released the terrorist who attacked me, and that shattered all the confidence and feeling of safety I’d been building with my kids. It also shattered the trust, because I’d been telling them that no one will ever hurt us again, that we are safe in our home, in our neighborhood. I had taught them that the authorities arrest the criminals, arrest those who harm us. That they kill people who try murder Jews.

**Yael Ben Horin:** When did you first hear that she was going to be released?

**Moriah Cohen:** Well, the truth is that when they started talking about a deal to return the hostages, I didn’t think there was any chance she’d be released. I mean only two weeks earlier she’d finally been sentenced to 12 years in prison. And then one day someone sent a message in the neighborhood WhatsApp group saying that the lists of Palestinian prisoners who would be released in the swap had just been published and that she was on the list. I recognized her name. And I called my lawyers and I said, “wait, is this real? Does this make any sense?” And all they said was, “look, if her name is on the list that was published then yes.” I couldn’t believe it, and I said, “what do you mean ‘yes’? Aren’t they supposed to notify me about this? That the woman who attacked me, and who lives right in front of my house, is being released?! Like, does it make sense that I walk out my front gate in the morning and just see her outside my house? My attacker?!” I was like, “what am I supposed to tell my kids, like, ‘oh, she’s back?!’” I mean these kinds of things require preparation, and not something I can just drop on them as if it’s nothing. And they said that they can’t really do much. That it’s a done deal. I immediately tried to call all kinds of influential people, Members of Knesset, people like that, to see what could be done. If there was any way to stop her release. See, the way the deal was structured was that there was a group of Palestinian prisoners released each day. And I was trying to get her postponed from one day to the next, hoping that maybe in the end she wouldn’t be released. And then one night, they said, “Moriah, look, tomorrow she’s going to be released. That’s it. There’s nothing to be done. Now usually we don’t witness these releases. I mean most of the prisoners are released back to their villages and we don’t see how they celebrate these terrorists coming home. But here everything was literally across the street. And I was alone here with the kids, because my husband was off fighting in the war. And I said, “I can’t take this anymore. This is my limit. This is where I draw the line.” So I closed all the windows and turned off all the lights and said to the kids, “we’re going to sleep early.” And we did. What can I say? This is our reality. We have no choice, we’re going to have to learn how to live with it. I chose to sort of take a step back and not really “see” it. I kind of deny, at least to myself, that she’s back, and that she’s right across the street. At first there was a police car that was parked outside our house, and they promised me they’d be here to protect us if anything happened god forbid. And they said that I shouldn’t worry because there are security cameras all around the neighborhood. But I was like, “what do you mean you’ll be here? What do you mean I shouldn’t worry? I’m sorry, but I don’t trust the cameras, they won’t protect me and my children. I can’t be calm. And no, you haven’t convinced me that I am safe, or that I won’t be hurt again.” Like, if I bump into her on the street, what will happen? I’ll either run away, or else I’ll find *myself* in jail, because *I* will attack *her*. I simply can’t bear to see her. I can’t. In a way what they did when they released *her* was that they jailed *me*. Like either I lock myself up in my house, shut the door and live in a constant state of fear, or else I end up in an actual prison because I will end up attacking her. And I don’t want to end up in either of those prisons - not a prison of fear and not a real prison. It’s not the life I want, it’s not the life I chose. It’s kind of like being stuck in a situation where you have no good options and don’t know what to do. But I… I don't know, I believe that God is watching over me, that I have some special protection.

**Yael Ben Horin:** And even now you’re not thinking of moving?

**Moriah Cohen:** We asked the kids if they want to move, but we think we shouldn’t. There’s something healthy about maintaining a routine. Like if we moved now, we’d have to transfer our kids to new schools, and that would be damaging to their mental health in a different way. They have their friends, they are surrounded with people who know their story, and know our history. There’s something about living here, together with other people who have gone through the same things we have, which gives us - and them - strength. We wouldn’t have that anywhere else. And besides, we believe in what we do. We’re not here by chance. Like if we felt this was just a random place to live, we’d be long gone. At the end of the day, us being here isn’t just about us personally. We are here for the people of Israel. So that’s why we’re not going anywhere.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Do you mind going out and taking us around the neighborhood?

**Moriah Cohen:** Sure, so right here behind that black gate and the bougainvillea is the terrorist’s home.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Less than 20 meters away.

**Moriah Cohen**: Yes. The court issued a ten meter restraining order. And I joked that each one of us could take turns going outside her house.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Did they offer you any kind of *sulha*, or reconciliation?

**Moriah Cohen:** They wanted to, but I didn’t agree. I think it’s just wrong. I mean, sorry, but do you patch things up with someone who tried to kill you? It’s not someone who tried to rob you or something like that, it’s someone who wanted to kill you. Someone whose goal is for you to no longer be here. I’m not willing to accept a *sulha* with someone like that. I’m sorry. It’s… That’s no *sulha* situation. No way. Sorry.