

Two stories:

# *Women Write Hope*

**In memory of Vivian Silver**

## **Introduction:**

The brutal terror attack on October 7th, and the horrific war which has been ongoing for nearly a year, have left countless of casualties, victims who have suffered both physically and emotionally, amongst both peoples—Israelis and Palestinians.

We, the peace activists, have lost many friends. One of them is Vivian Silver, may she rest in peace, to whom we wish to dedicate this book. Vivian, who lived for many years in Kibbutz Be'eri, adjacent to the Gaza border, said on every possible occasion that the conflict between Israel and the residents of Gaza must be resolved through peaceful means. Vivian did not just talk—she initiated, led, and was a partner in significant acts of dialogue, cooperation, and assistance between the Jewish and Arab populations in general, and between the residents of Gaza and the communities near the Gaza border in particular. Vivian's murder in such tragic circumstances has left us all with broken hearts.

However, for us, the tragedy is not a cause for revenge. The difficult questions we have been asking since, have led us to reflect on the fact that in the many years since the collapse of the peace negotiations in the early 2000s, we have lived under the assumption that the conflict could be managed. Today, it is clear to us that one of the central lessons from this catastrophe is that the only path to a secure life is the path of peace. In the face of this immense tragedy, we chose not to sink into despair, into a cycle of revenge, but to take action and strengthen the voices calling for peace.

As part of our desire to continue Vivian's legacy, we formed a group of women—Jewish and Arab—who would write a book together about the commitment by women from across the country, of different ages and backgrounds, to promote peace. We listened to the life stories of many women who dedicate their lives to peace, with its diverse interpretations and perspectives, both social and political. The group of women

underwent training led by Professor Amia Lieblich, who hosted the group in her home and generously shared her wisdom and life experience. We are deeply grateful to her for training the group and for all her support since.

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For us, the initiative to write a book that tells the life stories of women working for peace was also a form of healing—a small comfort during these unceasingly painful days. We will continue along Vivian's path and hope that this book will serve as a platform for dialogue in different communities in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, about hope, women's leadership for peace, and the possibility that out of this disaster, we will learn to walk a different path—one of justice, equality, and peace.

With a blessing and prayer for peace,

Ghadir Hani and Dror Rubin

## **Julia's Story-** **"I understood there's something I don't understand"**

Written by Tamar Shalit Barlev

Julia Chaitin, Ph.D. is an Emerita Senior Lecturer from the Sapir College, with expertise in social psychology, qualitative research and peacebuilding. She is a scholar-practitioner who focuses on the Israeli- Palestinian conflict and the long-term psychosocial impacts of the Holocaust and on the victims and their descendants, and she has written extensively on these topics. Julia, who is a resident of Kibbutz Urim in the Otef Aza region, is also a peace/social justice activist who is active in different peace organizations.

Toward the end of the interview with Julia, when I asked her if she had paid a price for her beliefs, peace work and activism, she immediately replied, "Yes, but what is that compared to the difficult lives of the Palestinians?" After further thought, she said, "I have two stories. One from 18 years ago, and one from 3 days ago..."

"The first story took place in 2006 during the Second Lebanon War and involves my husband. Our youngest son was doing compulsory military service in the North as a combat support soldier. He had frightening experiences. My husband, David, used to play bridge every Saturday afternoon. They had a group that played at each member's house in turn. When they played, they would switch off their phones to avoid disturbances.

That Saturday night, my neighbour had invited me to join her for a protest against the war at Rabin Square in Tel Aviv. I told her I wanted to go but wasn't sure because David wasn't home. I wasn't sure which house he was at, but I decided to go and left him a note at home saying I went to the protest with Gili and would return at night.

When we arrived, I called David to let him know we had arrived, and he just said 'okay' and hung up. I realized he was angry. There were foreign media there looking for people who spoke English. Gili wanted me to speak, but I wasn't sure, my son was in the war... I didn't give an interview, maybe just to an outlet I knew he wouldn't see, like Italian television or something like that... On the way back, near Mishmar HaNegev, Gili's car broke down. Gili called her husband, and I called David. I told him what happened, and he said 'okay' and hung up. I realized he was very angry. Her husband took us back, and when I returned home, David was already asleep. In the morning, he said we needed to talk about the previous day. He said, 'You can't leave me a note and go during a war, especially with Daniel being up North.' I said he was right. We reached an agreement

that if it happened again, I wouldn't go without talking to him, but I didn't promise not to go even if we disagreed.

David doesn't think like I do on many issues; he knows I come from a place of the heart but thinks I'm wrong. There are things I don't say at home because I know it would lead to unnecessary arguments. Later, during Operation Protective Edge, I gave many interviews. At some point, he told me, 'We're getting along better than in 2006 because we've learned to talk.' On July 1st this year, during the major event at Menora Arena in Tel Aviv organized by the peace movements, he said, 'Go and bring the peace...'"

As I was listening to Julia, it suddenly dawned on me, and I said to her, 'You're actually practicing at home what you specialized in, learned, taught, and wrote about all these years: conflict management.'

Julia continued.

"The second event took place three days ago, on Saturday night at the kibbutz. We have a WhatsApp group that I manage called 'Forum for Notices and Sharing.' Last Thursday, someone who is fairly new to the community—only three years—whom I don't really know, nor her family, even though she lives quite close to me - forwarded a picture of an H&M shirt with 'Palestine' on it and a call to boycott the antisemitic company. In response, someone else sent a link from Ynet stating that it was fake news. So, I asked that people check their information before sending to avoid misleading situations. This led to very harsh words from that woman about the situation and those who dare to defend the Gazans, despite the killing and destruction here. She said it was a Holocaust and how dare we, we should get a grip, enough with the delusion. I realized she was suffering from trauma. In response, another member, an 82-year-old who has lived here for decades, a wise and respected man, a teacher and historian, wrote about the denial of facts. Just as it is impossible to deny what happened on October 7th, it is also impossible to deny what is happening in Gaza. He also added that the term Holocaust should not be used in vain, and our position cannot be called delusional.

The woman persisted with the accusations. This time they were directed at him. At this point, I felt I could not leave him alone. I wrote that the topic is very charged, and that emotions are running high for all of us. It's important to discuss things in a way that respects one another. We are a community, we meet during holidays, in the grocery shop, on the street.

The woman replied that she is appalled that people in this community care more about the children of the rapists and murderers than about her own daughters. I responded that we all care about and want the best for our community, and then she accused me that on October 7th, I hadn't invited her to our safe room, so how dare I talk about caring for the community. I felt very bad, not knowing what to say. My daughter and granddaughter had been with me, and another neighbour, and we had invited other neighbours. I hadn't thought about everyone, and certainly not about people I don't know. I feel very bad about it. There is no real discussion here, only personal accusations, which may stem from trauma, but I don't know how to deal with it."

Dr. Julia Chaitin, 71 years old, has lived for over 50 years in Kibbutz Urim in the Eshkol Regional Council, northwest Negev. Her home and yard are filled with colourful artworks she has created. For three hours, with breaks, she told me her story of her peace activism, which is intertwined with her life story. I soon realized that Julia is an independent woman who follows her conscience and values, even when they lead to confrontations with her family, her community members, and those who don't like her political views. In an attempt to understand where her independence, perhaps even rebelliousness, stems from, I asked her about her personal history.

Julia was born in the United States. Her father was from Latvia and moved to the U.S. at the age of 16 with his father. Her mother was born in the U.S. When Julia was 7, her parents divorced. She said, "We lived with Mom in a predominantly Christian - Polish, Italian neighbourhood. We weren't the most popular people on the street... although we had friends. In the afternoon, we went to 'Shalom Aleichem,' a school with a focus on culture and history, not religion. We learned Yiddish there. In the fourth grade, they introduced Hebrew, and we celebrated all the holidays from a cultural, socialist, non-religious perspective. Some of our teachers were Holocaust survivors. They seemed to me to be 100 years old... (she laughs) ... and with a strong accent. That was my norm. As a child and teenager, I spent more time in churches than in synagogues. My mom was a very liberal American. For example, in college, her roommate and best friend was Black. Later, at her job in the library, her friends included a woman from China, a woman from Italy—this was very natural at home. Also, all the music, the records at home—Pete Seeger, The Weavers—this was home..."

"In high school, in the tenth grade, I went to a high school where there were also Jewish students, and for the first time, I met Jewish classmates, so I had more Jewish friends for the first time, and then I also heard about the youth movement 'Habonim.' There were also emissaries (*Shlichim*) from Israel—Meir Ariel was an emissary (*Shaliach*) in Detroit... (she laughs) ... I started going to 'Habonim,' and I loved it. Besides that, it's important to remember that we're talking about the 60s—66-67, very tumultuous years in the U.S.—human rights, women's rights, getting the refuseniks out of the USSR, Vietnam... and as a teenager, 16-17, I was very active, writing things, going to protests, but I had no awareness about Israel. We learned in the Jewish school about Israel, but we learned what everyone learned—the Israeli narrative. The word 'Palestine' wasn't mentioned, of course. The Arabs? Clearly, they were enemies; that's what I knew, and all of it charmed me. After I finished high school, I joined a training program of 'Habonim' that spends a year in Israel. I went to Kibbutz Yotveta. We learned about the kibbutz, attended seminars, took trips, and studied in an ulpan. That year, I decided I wanted to immigrate, even though... (she laughs) ... that's the brain of an 18-year-old. I didn't like working in the kibbutz. I loved the ideas, there were people I really liked, it was very different; I came from Detroit to the Arava—a completely different world, in every sense, a very young kibbutz, everyone was young, all sabras, a very good group. I returned home and studied for a year at the University of Michigan. When people asked me where I was going, I said to the kibbutz. Which kibbutz? I didn't know. Again, this is not a brain that plans things. Later, I also asked my siblings—where were Mom and Dad? How did they let me do this? I was 19. I immigrated on May 22, 1972, with two suitcases and \$100. I thought I was so rich. It was so irresponsible... My siblings said that our parents

were sure I would return after six months, and they decided not to argue with me, because that would just push me away. That's not what happened... So, I started out in Yotvata. At that time, David and I became a couple. He had immigrated in 1970 and was in mandatory service, but for less time because he was older. I was accepted to the Hebrew University—it was a program in English, an ulpan in the summer. On the last day, they told me, 'You have an exemption from Hebrew; you can study whatever you want...' (she laughs) ... I didn't expect that... I said OKAY... I invested because I immigrated and wanted to learn Hebrew, and also because I'm a diligent person... I studied English literature and art history, and I lived in the dorms in Jerusalem, and that year, David and I decided to get married. So we got married in August 1973, and I moved to Urim because David was here, and it was important for me to be in the kibbutz.

I worked with children as a childcare worker...(sigh)... and I really didn't deal well; it didn't matter if I worked in the yellow building or the blue one, with two-year-olds or five-year-olds. I tried, I really tried, because you have to do what the kibbutz needs. In 1981, we received a request from the Jewish Agency to go on a mission to Chicago. David was an emissary for 'Habonim' and was on the 'Aliyah Desk.' I really wanted to study because I had stopped studying in Israel. I was a young member of the kibbutz, a mom, a childcare worker. So, during the mission, I didn't want to just sit at home. I studied at the University of Illinois in Chicago, and I studied communication, women's studies—things like that. I always got good grades; I loved it, and I kept accumulating credits, but no degree. I kept asking myself what I would do with that in the kibbutz. We returned in 1983, and during those years, it was not acceptable to work outside; those who did were considered exceptions. When we returned, I worked with children again, and even though I didn't feel good about it, I kept saying—this is what needs to be done. And one day, the penny dropped. I realized that enough is enough. I hate this job. So, in 1985, I said, okay, I want to go study because I understood that every time I have the opportunity, I go study.

At the same time, during that period, those were the years of the first Lebanon War. I started to realize that there was something I hadn't understood. I began to see... it's not that I went and read, but I began to understand that something didn't sit right with me regarding what I knew about the Arabs—the Palestinians. So, I went to study. There was a study committee here... (she laughs) ...there was a committee for everything you can think of."

Julia talks about her struggle to go to study, how she had to justify how her studies would benefit the kibbutz. During her first degree in behavioural sciences, she met Professor Dan Bar-On, who greatly influenced her academic orientation. She joined him in researching the long-term effects of the Holocaust on second and third generations—among Jews and Germans. Later, Julia pursued a Master's degree and did a doctorate on the significance of the Holocaust for second and third generations of survivors. Each subsequent stage in her studies involved a struggle with the kibbutz institutions, which had to approve her continuing education.

Julia continues: "So it was clear to me that I wanted an academic career, and I sought it out. I finished in 2000. Professor Bar-On had established the Prime Peace Research

Institute of the Middle East with Sami Adwan then in Bethlehem and now in Hebron. They held various meetings between Israelis and Palestinians, and he offered me a sort of postdoc on Israeli and Palestinian organizations working on ecology together. I was responsible for the Israeli side, and there was Dr. Fida Obeidi on the Palestinian side, and the research progressed well. It started in April, and in September, the second intifada happened. And of course, that was it; the research came to a halt."

She continues: "I skipped over something. In the late 1980s, the Women in Black movement had started—so I got involved. At that time, I realized there was a story I didn't know, and the word 'Palestinian' does not equal 'terrorist.' I established a Women in Black group here, mostly from Urim, but also other women from the area. We would stand at the Gilat junction, on Fridays at noon, in the Negev, dressed in black, in the height of the heat... not smart... with placards calling to withdraw from Lebanon and to end the occupation. I can say that throughout the years we stood there, only once did someone yell something actually related to the topic. I would take notes; I had a notebook... They said, 'Go home, cook...' And once someone yelled something related to the occupation—he was opposed... It was pretty dangerous back then. There were no traffic lights, and we were almost run over a few times. I didn't think at that time to reach out to women from the moshavim or from Ofakim. I was very unaware of the whole Mizrahi-Ashkenazi divide; I had stereotypes. In the kibbutz, I was labelled; I'm still labelled as the most radical leftist... *she laughs*... It's fine for some people and not OK for others."

I ask: What's "not OK"?

"The siege on Gaza started in 2007, and the Second Lebanon War was in 2006. Our youngest son was in the army then, in the north, and at that time, Gilad Shalit was kidnapped. There were also many collective punishments. So, I put up a petition on the bulletin board in the dining hall, saying that anyone who wants to lift the siege and the collective punishment on the Gazan population should sign. And I already knew, so I made a few copies, put it up, and came back a few hours later—it was not on the board. Someone had taken it down and threw it in the trash. I hung up a new one about three times. A few people signed, but every time someone would come and take it down. So, I said, okay, I went home, wrote something, and distributed it in the mailboxes... (she laughs) ... and I said anyone who wants to sign can put it in my box. I received some, but I also got responses saying I shouldn't dare put that trash in their mailbox... there were some things here and there. But I don't give up. That's not in my nature. There are battles I don't have energy for, but here—why would someone take it down? Whoever doesn't agree—let them not sign. We have a local publication, and I wrote—I understand that not everyone wants to, and that's fine. But we live in a democracy, and whoever wants to should engage. This is a worthy struggle in my view."

In the following years, Julia continued to develop in the academia, completing a postdoc. During those years, she spent two periods of several years at universities in the U.S., where she taught and researched various topics related to conflict management. Since then, she has published quite a few articles in international journals and ten books on the subject. Along with her political activism, Julia tells me about another

struggle of hers. In the kibbutz, all the years she studied and worked abroad, she was classified as being on leave. She requested a clear designation as being a member who worked off the kibbutz, as she transferred her salary to the kibbutz, but her request was not accepted. Julia says that she was probably the only person in the Kibbutz who was the subject of a vote to enable her to remain in the kibbutz as a member's partner, but not as a member. Since then, she recounts, the kibbutz has undergone privatization and today things are more open, but in 2006 it was exceptional, and she felt she needed to fight for her right to continue on the path she chose.

Julia continues her story: "In 2008, I helped establish the conflict management program at Ben-Gurion University. We took a tour with students and went to Sderot, where we visited the urban Kibbutz Migvan. There, we met Eric Yellin and other members, and they spoke about the organization 'Other Voice,' a new organization they had established that forged neighbourly relations with residents of Gaza who believed in a non-violent solution to the conflict. It started as an initiative by Eric, who knew someone in Gaza, and they wrote a blog, which reached *The New York Times*—he was the "hope man", and his friend in Gaza was the "peace man". Outside, it became something big. Here, it didn't get much attention. He thought there must be others like him, and he initiated 'Other Voice.' I said, 'wow, I want to join that'. In June 2008, I joined, and since then I have been a very active member.

We organized seminars with young people from Gaza. Today, it's hard to believe it happened. We held three such seminars with young students from Israel. I facilitated them. We held demonstrations in Yad Mordechai, and we received threats. We did them on Thursday afternoons or Friday afternoons because thousands of cars passed by. We needed the police to protect us because it was very scary. There were days when there were just ten of us there, with signs. And what did they say? "Children in Gaza also want to live". There was nothing written against the soldiers. Everything was in the spirit of 'Let's talk': Peaceful, non-violent demonstrations. And it became something very frightening. I stood there, and someone walked by and threw hot coffee at me. Luckily, the sign absorbed most of it. So, we started calling that spot 'Coffee Corner'... (she laughs). They would come and tear up our signs, and they also said rude things. We always tried to talk to people, but really, during a demonstration, it is tough, and on a busy road. I was responsible for a big conference in 2011—Gaza-Sderot. Four-hundred people from Gaza came, people from the West Bank came. It took place over three days. A resounding success. Media coverage. Then we heard that when the people returned to Gaza—they were arrested by Hamas, and were intimidated by them. They had to flee. Most of my activism is with 'Other Voice'; today, I am also a board member. I also tried to think about what people would be willing to contribute, what wouldn't be seen today as a threat—so I thought—medications. Everyone knows people need medications. That didn't work out too well. My ideology, in general, is—non-violence, human dignity. And even when I'm facing a person who is a racist, I try through dialogue—we keep repeating that. There's no violence in our demonstrations. No shouting. And that was hard for some people. I said—let's shout something positive, not negative. We had to keep repeating that; it wasn't easy."



I ask Julia where this interest in non-violence came from, was it something she studied. She returns to her teenage years, recounting the 1960s and Martin Luther King.

“He is my guru. I read a lot about him, and he was murdered when I was in high school, and then on one of the trips we were in Memphis, at his museum. These things speak to me a lot. Because I say, he said the toughest and most poignant things, but with love. And one can’t talk about peace and be violent. It doesn’t make sense to me. I really, really try. To tell you that I always succeed—not sure. My place on the leftist scale—for non-leftists – and I have no idea what that means - I’m considered a very radical leftist. And among many leftists, I’m not considered a leftist at all. Because I talk to settlers. And I would be willing to go the settlements, to talk to them. And there are people who tell me it’s forbidden. Because it justifies their presence there. I say—I’m not going there to justify that they are there. But they invite me and want to, so I will talk to anyone who invites me and is willing. And I will say my truth. But I will say the truth through dialogue. And that’s hard. I get a lot of criticism. Even in this war, there were people who immediately said—we need to stop the war and reach an agreement. So I said—tell me with whom. And then they didn’t answer. And I said—I’m against war. But what are we supposed to do? Are we supposed to negotiate with Hamas? Before October 7, I would have said yes. But Hamas are murderers. So, this is an example. I’m tired of empty slogans. I want some kind of plan. I don’t need all the details. But something. So, I get criticism from all sides. Even when I talk to people from Gaza. I donate money to people from Gaza. They ask how do I know they’re not Hamas? These are people I know, and I don’t think they’re Hamas, and I know they need water and food.

Another thing I’ve been doing for years is writing to Knesset members and government officials. I send to various people afterward, asking—please send too. I received 2-3 unpleasant responses. I do this—not because I think it changes anything, but because it needs to be said that it’s not okay, and something formal needs to show that someone said it’s not okay. And I work a lot on connecting people.

All these years I’ve been doing research; I truly had and have a huge privilege working in academia, and had the opportunity to research what I believe is important. Now I’m working on my tenth book. At first, I researched the effects of the Holocaust, but most of my work focuses on intractable conflicts, mainly the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Over the years, I have also worked with Palestinian scholars. The new book coming out soon is titled *Striving for Peace Through Personal Narratives of Genocide and War*, published by Cambridge University Press. There’s a series called *Progressive Psychology*, which essentially explores how psychology can help the world. I wrote it with a former student of mine, Elad Avlagon, and it is based on 30 years of research—how narratives are used to promote peace or block it. We built a model of types of narratives, and the examples in the book include Holocaust narratives from Jews and Germans, as well as a chapter on Palestinians and Jews, and between Israeli citizens and Arab citizens. It addresses the issue of coping with trauma and narratives. We have a chapter on sustainable peace—a positive peace with reconciliation—and then there’s the model, with examples, and the last two chapters discuss what can be done from a research perspective and what can be done in the world.”

I have trouble holding back from interrupting... so is there anything that can be done?  
Can the narrative be changed?

Julia responds: First of all, yes. One of my guiding principles is that I never enter a conversation with the intention of persuading people. I always say—give up the attempt to convince. It's a waste of energy. Just as no one will convince me that it's a good idea to slaughter every Gazan, I won't convince them. So once that's taken off the table, it's liberating. Secondly, I know how important my ideology is to me, and it's the same for the other side. I respect them. This is what I believe. Of course, I want everyone to think like I do. But this about creating community through dialogue. It's very Martin Luther King. It's very Buber. I want to change the relationships. We will never agree, but we won't kill each other. Violence is not an option. I don't think I can have a conversation with Ben Gvir, but I would be willing to try. But most of the world isn't Ben Gvir. So let's work with the majority. I've also learned that the only person I can change is myself. Trying to change someone else is destined for failure. I don't operate that way. I also don't believe in compromises. If I'm willing to compromise on something, it means it's not important to me. If I compromise what's important to me, it won't work because it will eat me up from the inside.

Once you understand that what's important is changing relationships, a million ways open up to live a life with tranquillity and sustainable peace. There are many plans that deal with where the borders will be, how the water will be shared. Solutions can be found that are good for both sides if it's accepted that both peoples have legitimacy to be here.”

Then Julia says:

“And we haven't yet spoken about October 7th...”

and I feel my body tense up.

“I say that I was so surprised by the depth of hatred. We lied to ourselves and lied to each other. There are people who are constantly trying to justify and explain why the Other did something immoral. Because they are under occupation, because that is how they are. I don't absolve the Palestinians of their responsibility, but I think that the Israelis are the strong ones, and over the years we have become experts at oppressing them. Therefore, I think most of the blame lies with the State of Israel. But there are things that, as a person, one must say—this is immoral. One cannot justify this. To explain everything away. I know there are narratives, I know what the narratives are, and there are valid points on both sides, but it's not that they are right or we are right...”

So, October 7... as many people say, it started on October 6 ... I had a book come out in 2022, along with three colleagues—*Routine Emergency: The Meaning of Life, for Israelis Living Along the Gaza Border*, in which we interviewed 34 residents of the Gaza perimeter and also conducted an analysis of social media—Facebook, YouTube, we asked people to document their lives. It's a very diverse, narrative book.

So, on October 6, the evening of Simchat Torah, our daughter Noa and our granddaughter Neta came to visit us. It was fun. They went to sleep in the bomb shelter because there's a comfortable bed in there... (She laughs) ... We woke up at 6:30 to sirens that didn't stop. We ran to the bomb shelter and then discovered that we couldn't completely close the door, nor the window ... The sirens continued, and then we heard a huge boom—it hit the clinic building and the administrative building, which is a minute's walk from here. We started receiving all sorts of messages on WhatsApp from the council—to stay indoors, to close doors and windows, and to turn off the electricity. 90% of the people here don't have a bomb shelter because we're over 7 kilometres from the border. 10% do have one. We have one because we built it ourselves. We built it in 2017 because during Operation Pillar of Defence, I was really traumatized. We would stand here in the corridor, closing the doors, ridiculous. And I told David—'I need this for my peace of mind.' So, we built it at our own expense. So—most people have nowhere to go, and also—this house cannot be locked. So, when there was a quieter moment, my friend came to stay in the bomb shelter with us. We turned on the TV, and then we saw the truck in Sderot. I was constantly on WhatsApp with people from "Other Voice," and Vivian, may she rest in peace, from Be'eri, Liora Eilon from Kfar Aza, Roni Keidar from Netiv HaAsara—we're all from here. And what happened ... at 10:58, the last WhatsApp from Vivian that she hears terrorists under her window, and Liora writes that she doesn't know what's happening with her son, and Ye'ela from Kissufim writes that she can't reach her son, and Yotam keeps asking—does anyone know what happened to my parents from Be'eri, and everyone is trying to answer, trying to help, and Marc from Kfar Aza is giving a continuous narrative about what's happening with him. And our son Daniel, who was anxious—he was in the bomb shelter in his house in Be'er Sheva. I didn't want to scare him. I kept it from him. And our son Natan in the U.S. was in a panic. All I thought about at that moment was how to get Noa and Neta out of here. They shouldn't be here. It drove me crazy. The truth is, I thought less about myself. We were receiving many alerts all the time, being in the bomb shelter, and not being able to go out. Only later did we learn what happened at the base, and in the Re'im (very close to Urim). And honestly, there were many people I didn't think about at the time, and only later did I think—how... for example, we have a very good friend from the nearby area—they went through a severe trauma, how did I not think about her. Good friends in Mefalsim, who almost got killed. The IDF almost killed them. Only afterwards... In short, we started receiving messages that this is a closed military zone and that anyone who shouldn't be here needs to leave. This was on Sunday.

Sometime in October, I remembered the book about the Gaza perimeter. Suddenly I said to myself—oh my god, we wrote a book about the meaning of life here... we interviewed people. I went back to the book, looked at the interviewees... what happened to them... one was murdered and kidnapped—Michel Nisenbaum. And one—two of her sons were murdered. Two more were injured, and another two—the daughter and the grandson hid in a closet with the dog, and the terrorists were right next to them. They were there for hours without being discovered. And more and more. Then I wrote to my colleagues and said—we need to return to this. To check its relevance. I said we need to go back to those we can, to ask them. At the time, we asked them—how do they view patriotism and Zionism, how do they see the Gazans, and what do they think will happen here in the next five years. So, the same questions—then and now. We'll make a

comparison. And we're collecting things from social media. A lot around the hostages. So I'm deep into this. People will tell you—October 7, we're still there. We haven't emerged from this. I hear stories all the time, I've interviewed many, I'm documenting. So, I feel I must do this, and on the other hand, it's hard to hold all this pain.

And sometime in December... She laughs... I'm very associative - I told myself, on October 7, 2024, there will be many ceremonies, but they will be about mourning and grief, but I want to do something beyond that. Maybe—a Day of Pain, a Day of Peace. So I wrote something and started sending it to people whom I thought might be interested. Some people said 'wow', and some said 'what are you talking about', 'it's too early', and 'why peace', and proposed hope instead. Apropos compromise, I said no problem—if the idea is understood—let it be hope. There are people for whom the word hope is reassuring. So, there's less resistance. It's important to say—until October 7, I was very active in the national reconciliation process, along with others from the Shared Society Forum. We held meetings, there's a model, and everything collapsed... but that day is in the same spirit, and the issues that will be raised on that day, we will take and continue to work on them. So, this work—I'm very busy with it, because I'm so sad, and I've been sad for months. I'm not a depressed person, and it's hard for me to be sad all the time.

If you ask me—it's not that I have hope. But I know it's impossible, I can't not do something. I need to do something with people I feel good with. And this day that I'm so invested in will be a day of gathering people to share the most difficult things, so we can listen and look at them. I've erased this government. At first, I said—just go home. And now I don't. They should go to prison. I think they are criminals. But I understand that I can't change this, but I want to do something. And maybe the most touching thing, on October 6, I went shopping at our kibbutz store and met Tamar Kedem Siman Tov from Nir Oz, who was a candidate for the leadership of the Eshkol Regional Council. I met her for the first time on Friday morning. She was standing at a kind of booth to talk to people, to tell them about herself. And I asked her a question because I know everyone asks about bomb shelters, education, okay. But there's a question that people don't ask the candidates, so I said—'in the next war, when it happens, and it's clear it will, what will be your stance regarding our relations with Gaza? Because they say we should go in and mow them down. And they are our neighbors, I want to know what you think.' She looked at me and said, 'you know, no one has ever asked me that question. And she said I won't say we should go in there.' Then she paused and said—'you know, I don't want to respond now, I want to think about it.' I was so impressed by this honesty that she said, I really need to think about what I think about this. And she asked who I am, and we talked, and she took my phone number, and I went into the store and told David that she really impressed me in those fifteen minutes, and that maybe I'll vote for her. In less than 24 hours, she, her husband, and their three children were murdered, exactly on what we were talking about. When I understood, I couldn't believe it. It was among the last conversations she had, precisely on this topic. So her father, Gadi Kedem, I got his phone number in relation to the event, said—I'd be happy to talk. I asked when, and he said now. And we had a conversation for about half an hour. First of all, we talked about Tamar, and he said—you really understood her. That's who she is. And he said, what you're planning, it's between perfect and very perfect... that's what I want. So, I felt like I was doing something right.

So really, it's not that I have hope. I see a system here that is monstrous. We don't get used to the sirens. Every time it gets worse. Both here and in Gaza. And we are here, as people against this system, it doesn't give me hope, but in order to survive I need to do something so I won't go crazy."

In the end, Julia says: "We joked a bit about the new kitchen we built a few months ago. Over the months, we've done Zooms with 'Other Voice' on various topics, fundraising... And before that, we always do a round to see where everyone is, people are scattered, some have returned. So, we talked, and then I spoke at the end, and I said, well, I'm a bit embarrassed to say this, we're building a new kitchen... (she laughs) ... I feel a bit uncomfortable about it. And then people started laughing. What did we discover? That people are undertaking renovations; one is building a new kitchen; another is remodelling their house. We don't even know if this place will still be here, and we're investing in the house. So, it's kind of like on the one hand, there are existential issues, and on the other hand, we're continuing with our lives."

***Tamar Shalit Bar-Lev:***

After many years of living in the countryside, I now live in Tel Aviv with my husband and dog, and children who come and go. Professionally, I am a therapist, and I love nature and various forms of art.

The journey to and with Julia was physical in the sense that I traveled to meet her at her home near the Gaza Strip and involved encountering the various "stops" along the way that had made headlines in the stories about October 7th. The journey also involved getting to know Julia—such an interesting and complex woman—and a surprising encounter with the people in her story who are also part of my personal biography. This journey continues to resonate within me: in my thoughts about hope and despair, about the capacity to keep moving, about creativity, sadness, and generosity of heart.

I feel deeply grateful for the privilege of being part of this wonderful group of women who have taken it upon themselves to document the life stories of women who are peace activists, and for Julia's willingness to open her home and heart to me.

## **Ghadir Hani – A Beacon of Justice and Hope**

**Written by Galit Pnina Avinoam**

*Ghadir Hani is a social activist working to advance peace and a shared society. She was born and raised in Akko and at young age moved to the Negev where she worked for many years on women's empowerment initiatives. Ghadir is a founder of the Wadi Attir environmental project and a leader in Standing Together and Women Wage Peace. She also participates in various interreligious initiatives. Ghadir has published many op-eds in both the print and electronic media.*

"I am the voice of women who cannot speak; I am the voice of injustice. Even if just one person stands with me, that is significant for me."

Ghadir Hani, a resident of Akko, began her activism for peace, social justice, and environmental restoration at a very young age. In Ghadir's life story, the words 'peace', 'justice', and 'courage' are mentioned frequently. She defines herself as an activist, a fearless warrior for justice, someone who always takes responsibility and speaks for those whose voices are not heard. This is the source of her motivation, the essence of her story, and from this stem her diverse and endless activities.

Ghadir studied and qualified in various fields—accounting, mediation, teaching, and art therapy. Her work spans multiple fields—she is a social activist, educator, writer, and a member of the leadership of the Standing Together movement and the Women Wage Peace movement. She is a graduate of various social training programs, including the Tikkun movement, the Connecting for Impact movement, the Heschel Sustainability Leadership Fellows Program, the Interfaith Peace Program at Search for Common Ground, and the gender-sensitive negotiation program at Itach Ma'aki. She serves as a mediator and works at the community mediation center in the city of Akko. In recent years, she has often lectured and held dialogue sessions with Jewish and Arab groups from all over the country and from all parts of the political spectrum. She is involved in processes that aim to shape an optimistic vision for the country, such as the constituent assembly. Ghadir frequently speaks at rallies, protests, and demonstrations, whether in the fight for women's rights, against violence in society, against the judicial overhaul, or in promoting the possibility of a shared society. She sees her role as a bridge between members of the different religions, to make peace.

Her activities in the past year, amidst the war, are a beacon of morality and faith in peace. The exhausting work, against all odds, and the heavy price she pays, lead me to believe that as long as there are women and people like Ghadir, there is hope.

I had two meetings with Ghadir. Above all, Ghadir is a modest woman who is always smiling. When I asked her about the various awards she has received in recognition of

her work, she told me, "That's not what's important; you can read about that on Wikipedia."

Our first meeting took place in Jaffa, at the hotel where she was staying, so she could join a farewell gathering for a friend who worked at a nearby embassy. Our second meeting occurred in Akko, her hometown, during tense days in the north, between air raid sirens.

Our meeting began with coffee and date cookies; Ghadir said to me, "You must try the holiday cookies." Ghadir covers her head with a black hijab, and her dress is colorful with a spring pattern. Her face is always smiling, and her voice remains calm and pleasant, even as she shares difficult and painful experiences. Ghadir and I met when we both participated in the Heschel Fellows' Program, a program promoting environmental leadership. Ghadir participated in the program following her environmental activism in the Negev, in Wadi Atir, as part of an exciting sustainability project with the Bedouin community.

"I grew up in Akko," she begins to tell me. "I will be 47 this coming November. My parents, my father is 74 and my mother is 66. I am the eldest daughter among five sisters and one brother. My parents married young, and today our family has 14 grandchildren. From a very young age, as the eldest sister, I was the responsible one, staying home with my siblings to look after them. I remember once I went to a meeting at my sisters' school in place of my parents. But I was also a rebellious, brave child; I remember how we would jump out the window at home and go to my uncle's house. I studied at an Arab school in Akko, and already there I took a significant part in social and cultural activities. As a child, and now as a woman, I am grateful to my parents for all the support they gave me along the way and continue to give me today. My father had a brakes-cutting business, and my mother is a housewife. I feel like I didn't come from a typical Arab family in terms of the division of roles between my parents. We are an egalitarian family, even feminist (she laughs). From a young age, I remember fighting for justice. I remember that my teacher in sixth grade told me, 'You will be a good mother,' and in the end, I am not a mother."

"When I try to remember, I think the first time I fought for justice was at school. One of the kids in class received a punishment that seemed unreasonable to me, and I decided I had to defend him. I wrote letters to the principal and the teachers. I wasn't afraid; maybe that was the difference between me and others. And I felt obligated. I remember that the principal later told my parents, 'Ghadir will be a lawyer.' Of course, I'm very glad he was wrong... (she laughs)."

"I remember that one teacher would always tell me to talk about the books I was reading with the other students in the class. Not long ago, I met him after many years; he is now the principal of that same school. He would walk around with me and say, 'This is the most diligent student I've ever had.' Today we are friends on Facebook."

"At the school graduation ceremony, I was chosen to speak on behalf of the students; these speeches are usually elegant and polite, but I also included my opinions and

criticism of the municipality of Akko regarding inequality. I remember the vice principal telling me, 'Show me the speech before the ceremony.' He read it and said, 'Remove this part.' But when I got up to speak, I said what I had written anyway."

"As a teenager, I was very active, with a strong desire to make an impact. I learned to read old Arabic poetry and became very fond of the the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish. I was active in the community center, in summer camps, and there was my first major struggle, which I led. It was about the high cost of summer camps. I thought about all the children I knew who had no activities in the summer and could not afford such a sum. Their parents didn't have the money. I told myself it simply wasn't not fair. I thought maybe I would organize a camp that would cost almost nothing and that would make the children smile. I think today—where did a high school student get the courage to organize that? In any case, I approached someone from the party that was active in Akko at the time and asked him to help me with the permits I learned were necessary. I started going around the shops in Akko, asking business owners to help with donations. And that's how it went. The hummus place said they would donate food, the grocery store said they would give us supplies, and I managed to convince a transportation company to help us for free. I managed to organize two camps; it was very exciting. I learned that it is possible to change the world, maybe not the whole world, but to do something meaningful for those who cannot always fight."

"Following the summer camps, a friend told me about the youth activities of the 'Hadash' party. I was curious and went. It was the first time I started talking about politics, identity, and discrimination. One of the issues that troubled me was the gap in funding for schools. As a high school student, I participated in groups with students from the Jewish community, and when we would go to their school, I asked myself why their classrooms were new, everything spacious, the bathrooms nice, renovated, with soap. Why wasn't it like that for us? I realized there was discrimination. I refused to accept it. I organized a demonstration in front of the municipality. Students from two schools came; we stood with placards about equal rights and such. The irony is that today I work at the municipality (she laughs), against which I demonstrated then. But maybe over the years I've understood that change happens from within, through hard work."

I know that Ghadir has dedicated a significant part of her life to the residents of the Negev—so I ask, 'How does a young girl from Akko find herself moving to live in the Negev?'

"It was when I was 22. My cousin lived there in Be'er Sheva with her daughter, and I wanted to experience something different from what I had known. In the end, a few months later, she returned to Akko, but I stayed for over twenty years.... Those were the days before the second intifada. I found a job at a community center in the village of Hura, and that's how I began to work and achieve an understanding of Bedouin society in the Negev. It was a dramatic change, coming from a city like Akko, both in terms of Jewish-Arab dynamics and its urban aspects, even though it is not a large city. But the desert is something else. Then, the intifada broke out, and I traveled a lot by public transport, feeling that people looked at me differently, suspiciously. And I was



constantly on the move, carrying a large bag; you can understand how they looked at me... There were even times when they said loudly, 'Maybe she has a bomb.' As if I didn't understand Hebrew. I would get off buses and cry, cry. I asked myself why this was happening, and I thought I needed to do something. Then one day, I met Dr. Amal Elsana' Alh'jooj at the community center. She told me she had established an organization called Ajeec, and that she wanted to promote understanding between the populations and work for equality in the Negev. She invited me to join the meetings she organized between Jewish and Muslim women, and that's how I started getting more and more involved. That's where I first met Vivian (Vivian Silver, the peace activist who was murdered on October 7 in Kibbutz Be'eri; later, Ghadir will talk about their powerful connection. I remember the eulogy Ghadir delivered at Vivian's grave—a heartbreaking eulogy). At these meetings, I realized there was a disconnect. That most people didn't know each other. That fear stemmed from a lack of familiarity. I believed we needed to change reality, but we had to start with the youth. I had an idea for a joint program for Bedouin and Jewish youth—'Youth for the Environment.' Someone put me in touch with the Noar Ha'oved ve'Halomed (Working and Studying Youth movement), and we began organizing meetings through sports, arts, and various activities. It was wonderful to see how meetings could generate connections, laughter, and positive experiences. True, such meetings don't change reality in its entirety, but they help build trust, optimism, and a desire to take action together. In my opinion, that's the foundation from which we need to start."

I ask about the experience of working in the Negev, far from home and surely very different from the society she grew up in.

Ghadir nods and opens with a moving monologue: "I remember when I arrived in Hura, to the community center, trying to understand what activities were available for small children, for youth, for young people—they told me 'Nothing'. The community center there was the first in Bedouin society; everything was still in its infancy, as they say. I was part of establishing the early childhood center in Hura—for ages 3 to 5. I still remember the feeling of seeing mothers and children coming together for activities; it was very moving. But then conflicts began, and sadly, someone burned the center down. The social situation deteriorated, and it affected everyone. As someone who had been part of many activities regarding violence against women, I suddenly found myself feeling threatened. It hurt me deeply to know there was criticism and a negative perception of the activities for women, especially from religious figures. As a Muslim who knows the Quran well, I know that women have an important status. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, treated women with great respect."

"So, in that complex reality, my friends at Ajeec reached out to me and asked if I would like to work with them in the area I focused on: women's empowerment. The word "empowerment," today we understand and are aware that it can be threatening. It took me several good years to realize that a change that can be the most positive and important might make others feel threatened. Without sensitivity, any change can appear as a violation of tradition or culture, and then not only does it not promote social change, it can also be dangerous. But at that time, I was full of enthusiasm and participated in projects that created change."

I think about Ghadir, at a very young age, working in the Negev, surely with women twice her age, and I ask her, "How was it for you, as a young woman, leading activities with women, especially some of whom were twice your age?"

She recounts, "Wow, that's really true what you're saying. I remember thinking to myself, I'm not yet 30, what can I give or how can I make a difference to women who are much older than me? But I realized that they also influenced me, teaching me many things about life. I feel that the work was significant and contributed a lot to the women, whether it was helping them in the field of finances, completing their education, or integrating into the job market. It changed their lives and also had a significant impact on their status at home. I remember many stories, like one woman who excitedly shared in a meeting that her husband had asked her to come with him to a meeting with an engineer, so they could plan their new house together. I remember thinking to myself, this is the house they will live in, what's so exciting about her husband inviting her to a planning meeting? But unfortunately, in a reality where many women have no voice or influence, it's a significant step. I also remember another case of a woman who dreamed of completing her studies and then continued to a degree, and today she is a teacher herself and teaches others. That's seeing a change in reality. I was very proud of our work."

And how did you come to work for peace? How did the journey from those meetings in the Negev between women and youth develop into such extensive and meaningful activities?

"In 2015, I arrived with a group of women that Ajeec had organized—Israelis and Palestinians—to a visit in Jerusalem, at an event organized by Women Wage Peace called "Steadfast Fast." This was after Operation Protective Edge (in Hebrew Steadfast Fast (Tsom Eitan) is a play on the words Operation Protective Edge (Tsuk Eitan)), and it was important and relevant, just like now, to raise public awareness to the dangers of the ongoing conflict. Vivian Silver was there too. It is heartbreaking to think now about what Vivian had always said—if we don't initiate and resolve the conflict, it will ultimately drown us all in blood. It was a very moving event. I think today that it had a great impact on me, on the direction I have pursued since. I started to become more involved, active in various initiatives. I understood that I had an important role in this matter."

"I think another very significant event for me was in 2017. A soldier named Ron Kukia was murdered in Arad by two Bedouin brothers from the Negev. The event created a major rift in the Negev between the populations. It pained me, and I saw an interview on television with Ron's parents, who said a sentence that really caught my attention—they said, 'just as there are bad Jews, there are also bad Arabs', but not everyone is like that. I felt that I wanted to go comfort the family. I reached out to them and formed a strong connection with Levana, Ron's mother. Afterward, I asked for their permission to organize a tree-planting event on Tu B'Shevat at the place where Ron was murdered. A lot of people from the Negev came, leaders and members of the general public. Many young people. I was worried that some would criticize me for how I, as an Arab, a

member of the Palestinian people, was organizing an event in memory of a soldier, but I felt I had to do it; it was the right thing to do for all the residents of the Negev.”

“I believe that no matter how difficult it is, no matter how filled with anger and trauma each side is, we must not lose our humanity. Our humanity is measured especially in difficult times. I have been saying throughout this period that our hearts have room for pain for all who have been killed.”

I know that Ghadir recently received a very prestigious award—the Goldberg Prize for Peace—for her work in promoting peace, specifically from a religious perspective. I ask her to share how she also entered this field and what she believes it can accomplish.

“In 2018”, she recounts, “I participated in a conference in Italy that focused on interfaith relations. I don’t see the conflict as a religious one, but it’s clear that religion plays a very central role in the lives of all the inhabitants of the land: Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze. I think almost everyone defines themselves as traditional in some way. The conference also featured Rabbi David Rosen from Jerusalem, who has been working for decades to connect different faiths and engage with religious leaders. When I told him I lived in the Negev, he mentioned his daughter, Amirit, who lived in the Negev and initiated the establishment of the interfaith forum there. We met, connected very well, and I joined the effort to promote dialogue and connection among the religious leaders in the Negev. The group is still active today and is involved in wonderful initiatives between the communities.”

“A year later, I was invited to join a national group that dealt with this topic, and from there, I established a connection with Dror Rubin, who was the facilitator of the group. Together, we began to promote initiatives in (pre-army) preparatory programs, in Yeshivas (religious seminaries)! At Arab colleges, all centered around religion as a unifying and connecting factor. This work developed in many directions, and together we received the Goldberg Prize. It was a moment of light amidst the darkness of this period.”

I think about the recognition that Ghadir has received for her work. As she requested, I indeed found and read online about the many awards she has received—the President’s Israeli Hope Award, the Sami Michael Award, the 50 Social Heroes Award in Israel, the list of 20 Influential Women in the Negev, and, as mentioned, the Goldberg Peace Prize. She didn’t talk about all of them, so I asked, “What does this recognition mean to you?”

“It’s first of all very moving; it’s joyful. Also on a family level, seeing the excitement at home when I share, hearing my mom tell my uncles. On a broader level, it’s very complex. All these awards, and there’s no peace. Most people I meet have lost hope in peace. I understand them, of course. Those who have lost family members, who have lost their homes, there are so many casualties from the war—how can one really believe in peace? But I always ask others—what’s the alternative? We’ve tried the path of war for so many years. Once, barely, we tried the path of peace, and we failed. So what, shouldn’t we try again? So, every such award is a shot of encouragement. And it’s also a

privilege to share awards with partners, friends along the way, inspiring men and women. It strengthens me because I also feel despair at times.”

“And what does it look like from the inside? What kind of reactions do you receive in your community about this work? Do people recognize you? Do they support you or see you as naïve?”

“That’s a tough question,” Ghadir replies. “The Arab community in Israel is going through a very difficult period. And of course, it didn’t start on October 7. The violence within us is truly an epidemic. Unfortunately, the state not only does almost nothing to stop it, but there are also quite a few who are happy that we are fighting and killing each other. In a reality of ongoing violence, people are desperate. They feel completely powerless. So they become preoccupied family and personal survival. It’s hard to make the Arab public believe that things will change. And unfortunately, those who try might find themselves threatened. I’ve received threats too. They told me to be careful, asked me, ‘Why are you getting into this?’ I filed a complaint with the police, but of course, nothing was done.”

I look at Ghadir, one person who seems to carry the weight of the world on her shoulders. I know how tragic October 7 was for Ghadir, especially because of her close connection to Vivian, may she rest in peace. I hesitate to ask, sharing that I’m afraid to bring up such a painful topic, but it’s important for me to hear her feelings.

She tells me, “I’ve slept at Vivian’s home in Kibbutz Be’eri dozens of times, in that same room—the safe room where she was murdered. On that terrible morning, I see the news, the images we couldn’t imagine we’d ever see. Vivian writes in one of our shared groups that she hears noises outside the safe room. I didn’t understand what she meant at all, but I remembered that Vivian never locked her house; it was always open. I prayed in my heart that maybe this time she had locked it. Then she wrote, ‘They’re in my house.’ Around the same time, another friend wrote that the terrorists were in her house and then she stops responding. You can understand how insane it was that amidst all this, I kept receiving messages from Palestinian friends in Gaza who were partners in all the activities we led. They were asking if everything was okay with their friends in the border area. They were afraid to write to them directly, so they turned to me. ‘How are our friends? How is Vivian? Is everything okay?’ No one could believe that such a disaster would happen. I didn’t know what to do with myself, like everyone else, I suppose. I wrote on social media, even before I understood everything that had happened, that we must not forget the friendships and neighbourliness between us, Jews and Arabs. Perhaps it was naive considering the dreadful news that followed.”

“On that terrible day, as the images kept coming, and we were all in shock, I wrote that, as a Muslim woman, a daughter of the Palestinian people, I strongly condemn this horrific act in every way. To think that someone, in the name of a struggle, could plan and carry out such actions—murder, rape, kidnapping women, children, babies! How is it possible, how is it possible?” Ghadir stops, tearing up.

She continues, "I remember that night, or the day after, I dreamt that Vivian was kidnapped, and that she was reassuring everyone, both the other hostages and the kidnappers, speaking to them in Arabic. Those were the hardest, saddest days. We were sure Vivian had been kidnapped, but we knew nothing. A month later, we were told that she hadn't been kidnapped at all but had been murdered in her home. I had known her for 24 years. She was my manager, a friend, and a partner to the journey. I have so many memories with her, and I feel that everything I do today is both in her memory and in her name."

And how did this disaster affect you? your views? your activism?

"All those years I lived in the Negev, and even afterward, we were involved in various initiatives that today seem like they belong to another era—initiatives between residents of Gaza and those living in Israel near the border. I made many friends in the kibbutzim and the nearby communities. Amazing people. They themselves used to say, if things are bad in Gaza, they will be bad for us, too. Organizations like 'Another Voice' and 'The Road to Recovery' emerged. We initiated joint meetings. I had hoped that Hamas might be on the path to change. When you're in power, it sometimes leads to a certain flexibility. I pushed and wrote that peace is made between enemies, that the most difficult dialogue, but also the most important, is with the extremists. But I could never have believed that something like this could happen. I don't think anyone did. But I can't forget how we had said for years that the situation in Gaza was on the verge of explosion—that poverty, hardship, the siege imposed by Israel—would not resolve itself."

"I really hope that from this disaster an understanding will emerge that a conflict does not resolve by itself. We, who have paid the most painful price, must believe there is another way. And that depends on us. Each side has its own narrative. Each side has endless reasons to be angry for eternity about what the other side did. But in the end, we will find ourselves again in the same reality—two peoples living side-by-side. Each with its own history, with the belief that this is exclusively their homeland. I believe that people can change. And I hope that before we all drown in the blood of this conflict, maybe a different leadership will emerge here that will promote reconciliation and peace."

"That's why I attend meetings with many Jewish groups. I know they always tell me, 'Ghadir, you don't represent the majority.' I'm sure that in a reversed situation, if a Jewish woman were speaking like me in front of an Arab audience, they'd tell her the same thing—'You don't represent the majority.' Most of the people, regardless of which side, are in trauma, in pain. Extremism on both sides is a mirror image. I also believe we women have a very important role. I am part of different groups dealing with this question: how can women gain more influence?"

I smile because I notice Ghadir is wearing a pin on her dress with the numbers 1325, and I ask her about it.

"This is a message that's important for me to convey everywhere. 1325 is the number of the UN Security Council resolution that spoke about the importance of including women in decision-making processes, negotiations, and security. Reality shows us everywhere in the world, as we see here now—war is a man's business. Women are expected to stay home and raise the soldiers who will fight in the next generation. Maybe enough? Maybe it's time to take a different path? I believe women must be part of decision-making. It's not just about gender; it's about a different approach and discourse."

Ghadir smiles as she talks about her work. She says that alongside the despair and anger, she also feels lucky to meet good people along the difficult path. At moments, she winces in pain and shares with me that she suffers from an injury that makes walking very difficult for her. I listen to her and realize that her whole life, from morning until night, is devoted to change and creating a better world. I ask her to share a significant moment when she felt she made an impact.

She tells me about opinion pieces she has written since the war, where she felt she expressed a very important voice that was not heard in the media or public sphere. She shares one piece in which she wrote about how, as an Arab woman, she cried for the mother of Noa Argamani (the hostage who was released in June) who was fighting for her daughter's release while dying of cancer. She wrote that a person's heart should not be limited to pain only for their own people. She has space in her heart for the pain of the hostages and for the countless residents of Gaza who have lost their loved ones."

As we near the end, I ask Ghadir where she sees herself in 10 years. She answers:

"Maybe I will be an ambassador for peace. I will travel the world to talk about how peace is possible. How dialogue is possible, even between enemies. I believe that this is the historic role of the Arab public in Israel—to build the bridge to peace between the two peoples.

Inshallah, I pray every day that God will give me strength to continue on this path."

### **Galit Pnina Avinoam:**

I encountered Ghadir's courage, strength of spirit and humility when we studied environmental leadership at "Heschel". When I wanted to include the list of awards Ghadir has received in the interview, she said, 'Leave it out, I don't feel comfortable.'

As a brown belt in karate, and as someone who ran for mayor of Nes Ziona, I know what it's like to experience painful blows, and I've experienced only a small portion of what Ghadir has endured over the years.

Once when I was designing a house for a client, one of the architects of the Wye Plantation Agreement, I pointed out that the award he received should be placed in a

prominent place. He jokingly responded: 'Great picture, but the agreement wasn't a success.' In the same way, after receiving her last award Ghadir said 'I received an award for peace, but there is no peace.'

I wish that there will be more leaders and ambassadors of peace and justice like Ghadir Hani who will take inspiration from her important work over the years."