



Rony & Ofer: Inner Strength

Part 2 from the cycle: [Facets of Restoration](#) (Evacuees)

By Brigitte B. Nussbächer



Rony and Ofer have left traces of blessing for those around them throughout their lives. Their courage and commitment in the most difficult situations have saved many. As long as Israel is home to souls like theirs, hope will endure – and the future will find its light.

Sometimes you meet people who have a hidden inner strength. You can't see it at first glance because their courage is quiet – not worn for the world to see, but it's there whenever it's needed. They carry heavy burdens quietly and discreetly and become saviors - for those around them. Rony and Ofer are such people.

We [met them for the first time in April 2024](#). Before October 7, they lived in Kerem Shalom (Vineyard of Peace). However, the name is a desired program that has unfortunately not become a reality, as the small kibbutz is located just 30 meters from the border with the Gaza Strip and 300 meters from Egypt. Kerem Shalom was brutally attacked by Hamas terrorists on October 7.

The Lonely Road

When we are in Israel in April 2024 to see the situation with our own eyes and report on it, Rony and Ofer agree to show us [Kerem Shalom](#). It is our last trip to the south that year and it takes us into the forecourt of hell, because the town of Rafah, where terrorists and refugees from Gaza are crowded, is only a kilometer away. From the kibbutz lookout point, you can easily see into the neighboring countries and Rafah - as long as you are ready to make yourself a target. It is the time just before the Iranian attack on 14 April and before the Israeli army enters Rafah in May.

It will be a lonely journey. The highways here in the evacuated south are very empty anyway. We seem to be the only ones on the road that day. We were contacted by the German Foreign Office the day before. We were advised to stay close to the shelter and prepare water, food and medication. We



asked about its location at our hotel. We were shown a storage room with reinforced walls and a metal door - our temporary shelter.

The headlines in the Israeli media read: 'Israel is preparing for a direct missile attack from Iran within 24 to 48 hours!' Washington instructs its employees and diplomats not to leave their domiciles. No matter which media you look at, the warnings are screaming at you everywhere. But Rony and Ofer don't cancel the appointment, even though both they and we, from Jerusalem, have a journey of several hours. For them, it is a very practical example of how to defy danger and not to give in to violence and fear. As residents of the border region, they have a lot of experience in this.

For us, the situation is an absolute novelty. When in the last 70 years in Western Europe have you been advised not to leave your house because of the danger of a military attack? But we are not here as tourists. We have come with the aim of [making ourselves one with Israel](#), to lend a hand and [help](#) where we can; [to be contemporary witnesses](#). So, we decide to go anyway.

We ask what we should do if we are surprised by an attack on the road: leave the vehicle, lie down on the ground and protect our head with our hands. There are no other means of protection on motorways and country roads. Thus 'equipped', we set off.

On the way to Kerem Shalom we come across two military checkpoints. We have to identify ourselves and explain why we are there. We see a lot of astonished, disbelieving faces. At the second checkpoint, our reasons are not enough. I call Ofer, who explains the situation to the soldiers in Hebrew and confirms that we are allowed to visit the kibbutz, which is part of the restricted military zone, with them. The soldiers relax, smile and finally we are permitted to drive on. We have the feeling that we have literally left all protection behind us.

We meet Rony and Ofer at the entrance to the kibbutz and can hardly believe it: blossoming trees, birdsong - an absolute idyll greets us. At first glance, you think you're in a Garden of Eden - at second glance, you realize it's not anymore. And we are here alone with them - all the inhabitants were evacuated after the massacre. They tell us their story.

Once a Garden of Eden

Kerem Shalom was a small kibbutz with 230 residents. Due to its extremely exposed location, directly on two borders, there is not just a fence here, but a 6 metre high concrete wall. This wall was blown apart in four places by Hamas terrorists on the morning of October 7 (including the white and the three intense pink panels). The time at which it happened was a stroke of luck: half an hour later, many would have been in the synagogue. But this way the border infiltration was quickly noticed, although there was confusion because the terrorists wore Israeli uniforms and were therefore difficult to distinguish from the Israelis at a distance.



Kerem Shalom lies directly on two borders. / The wall was breached by terrorists: the three darker pink panels and the white one were replaced after 7.10.2023. Private photos

A total of over 200 Hamas men stormed into the kibbutz in waves - but unlike other kibbutzim, they met with resistance here. The head of the Kerem Shalom security team had - on his own responsibility - defied the instructions of the Ministry of Defense to store the weapons in the armory. As a result, the security team were able to defend themselves immediately. As desperate as the situation seemed, they did not stop fighting back, even though they were hopelessly outnumbered. A fierce battle raged for hours. Despite all the resistance, considerable damage was done - bullet holes can be seen in many places.



Houses damaged by terrorists in Kerem Shalom / Bullets, sign of fighting with Hamas in Kerem Shalom. Private photos

The Miracle of Kerem Shalom

People were also injured very seriously. And this is where the dramatic and touching story of Rony and Ofer begins. Both are paramedics. When they were informed that urgent medical help is needed, the two react with incredible human greatness. Instead of worrying about their own safety, they leave their shelter and make their way through the hail of terrorists' bullets to the wounded. Rony says that she has never been so scared of death in her life as she was that day. But they manage to reach the wounded and fight to save their lives - successfully.



After seven hours, the ammunition in the kibbutz runs out. The situation is desperate. But then the Israeli military arrives - just in time and much earlier than in the other communities, because the head of security of Kerem Shalom had contacted the army immediately in the morning. The soldiers slowly bring all the residents into the town center under escort. Great relief for everyone who arrives, even though many are injured. Rony wants to avoid giving the children another shock, so she mops up the blood of the wounded. She is a teacher, art therapist and used to hold courses. She is a good judge of children's souls and knows all about trauma. That's why she takes on this sad task, but afterwards she feels for a long time as if she can not get clean herself.

The evacuees are taken by bus to Eilat in the south. On the journey, Rony looks after the children - it distracts her. Later comes the low point: she has no memory of the next five days.

Her message to the world is: open your eyes and realise the thinking behind these acts. It can and will happen again elsewhere if it is not combated. Their urgent request to us is to pass on what we have seen and recognised. We promise to publish their story on our website [ARC to Israel](https://www.arc-to-israel.org/en).

They shared their experiences so calmly and naturally that it takes time for us to understand how extremely courageous and fearless they really were. And what a miracle it is that only two people were killed by the terrorists in Kerem Shalom. That not a single person was kidnapped! The destruction here in the community is also significantly less than in the kibbutzim of [Nir Oz](#) or [Kfar Azza](#), which we will see later. The result of miracles, but also of smart decisions, commitment, courage and boldness.



Rony and Ofer saved the lives of terror victims on 7 October. Private photo

What strikes us when we meet them: of all the people we have visited, they are the ones who cared not only about their own safety, but also thought about others and were even prepared to risk their own lives to help them. And they appear stronger and more positive to us than all those who did not leave their shelters. Now the question arises: were they able to care for others because they were strong, or is it caring for others that ultimately made them stronger themselves?

April 2025

Eighteen months have passed since then. They have not yet been able to return home. After three months in Eilat, they were relocated to Ashalim, a small community 35 kilometers south of Beer



Sheva - in the middle of the Negev desert. Rony has found work here again, but it ends in the summer of 2025. They would like to move back to Kerem Shalom. They once fell in love with the kibbutz, without realising how dangerous its location was, and this love has remained. At the moment, they still have no prospects for the future: the war is still going on because the Israeli hostages have not yet been freed and Hamas is not prepared to surrender. That makes everything very difficult.



Reunion in April 2025. Private photo

We [meet them](#) in [Jerusalem](#) in April 2025 and are very grateful to them for traveling all the way to our hotel. We sit together for a simple dinner at our hotel. And it's amazing: although we've only known them for a year and are only connected online most of the time, it's like meeting very good old friends. There's a sense of connection, warmth and great joy at seeing each other again. We talk a lot about all sorts of things - it's wonderful to communicate so openly.

Rony tells us what criteria are used to classify someone as a friend in Israel. She says: after a loss, during the shiva (7 days of mourning), all kinds of people come and express their condolences. 30 days later, a milestone in the mourning period, there are usually fewer. When a full year has passed, there is another milestone - and whoever is still at the side of the affected family is a true friend. She looks at us, smiles and says: you've come back even after a year.

When we ask how they are, Rony sincerely says that she is tired. Tired of this life in an undefined intermediate stage, without the possibility of being able to start again, tired of waiting for the war to end, tired of improvisation. And the desert dust is getting to her. Her sentences are interrupted again and again by coughing. She longs for fresh, clean air. They are currently living in a no man's land with no time horizon. Do they have to be prepared to live in a temporary home for a long time to come? Does it make sense to try to settle down where they are now? And would becoming at home there, if it were to happen, be tantamount to resignation? Would they be giving up their dream of returning to Kerem Shalom?

And then we learn that the government's agreement with the landlords, in whose property they currently have a small 50 square meter apartment, expires in June 2025. It is a shock to hear this, because the war is still going on and their kibbutz Kerem Shalom has not been restored. As they say, this deadline applies to all evacuees within Israel and means that more than 100,000 people will not know where and how to live from June onwards. When the agreements were signed 18 months ago, no one expected that they would need a replacement home for so long. Never since the founding of the Jewish state has Israel had to wage war for so long.



They will probably have to move to other temporary accommodation and there is currently little they can do for or against this. It may be in another place, another community. They have become homeless and long for nothing more than to finally have a place to call home again. A place they can build and make their own. Where they have a right to stay. For those of us who have never experienced anything like this, it is hard to imagine how much patience and perseverance is demanded of the evacuated families in Israel.

And yet they say: everything will be fine in the end and we will become stronger through this experience. They just don't know how much longer it will take....

Unwavering commitment

It is amazing what Rony and Ofer have achieved and continue to achieve. How they were always and repeatedly selflessly willing to be there for others and protect them. How they have used their experience and their talents - for the welfare of the people around them. Their foresight and the measures they initiated have made a big difference. We are full of respect for what they do.

Between 2011 and 2015, Ofer was also the head of security at the extremely exposed Kibbutz Kerem Shalom. The great responsibility, the constant tension, the traumatic experiences demanded a lot from him. Rockets, mortar attacks, burning car tyres, incendiary kites that crossed the border; terror tunnels through which people from Kerem Shalom were abducted, like Gilad Shalit years ago, shaped his everyday life. In 2014, a grenade blew his friend to pieces. A year later, he handed over responsibility.



Rony & Ofer initiated a paramedic course for the entire Eshkol region. Private photo

At that time, he and Rony also initiated a paramedic course for members of the kibbutzim in the border region next to Gaza. Since then, and also on October 7, these trained specialists have been able to help many people on the ground and saved lives. Here, again, the two have left a long-term trail of blessings.

Even now they are serving their country. Quietly and without making a fuss, but with incredible loyalty and resiliency. They are driven by the conviction that they themselves must take responsibility and make a contribution. As long as Israel has people with such a great attitude, hope will endure – and the future will find its light.

See you next year, dear Rony, dear Ofer. Thank you for persevering.



See you next year. Privat photo



The story of Rony & Ofer is part of the cycle: [Facets of Restoration](#). Brigitte Nussbächer and her husband Harald Bottesch regularly visit Israel. Their current focus is on supporting families who were directly affected by the Hamas massacre on 7 October 2023: Widows and orphans, traumatized people and evacuees. During their last mission to Israel in April 2025, they visited those affected again and established links with specialist organizations on the ground in order to provide specific, long-term and sustainable help.

More articles from Brigitte B. Nussbächer under: www.arc-to-israel.org/en/artikel

