



HADAS - GRIEF WAITING FOR AN END

Part 1 from the cycle: [Facets of Restoration](#) (Widows & Orphans)

By Brigitte B. Nussbächer



When Tamir was abducted and murdered by Hamas while defending Kibbutz Nir Oz on October 7, 2023, Hadas and her children lost the love of her life – and their beloved father. To this day, they still await the return of his body, holding on to his memory and the will to build a new home.

Finally!



The time has finally come - we can finally embrace Hadas and show her how much we care about her fate. Through the [project with which we support Israeli orphans](#), we got to know her (via the Forum for Hostages and Missing Persons) and have been in contact for months. But without getting to know each other personally, there was a certain abstractness about everything. Today, on April 8, 2025, we meet in the morning in a café in Kiryat Gat, the place where she was evacuated to. It is oppressively hot, the air is full of desert dust.

At Cafe Lyon with Hadas (left) and Sigal (center). Photo private

Hadas has come without her children and has chosen this neutral location for a first face-to-face meeting. She did not come alone, but together with Sigal, who shares a similar fate (which I will also write about later). Both lost their homes in Nir Oz, their neighborhood, their community and their loved ones in the Hamas massacre. Everything they had built up, all the pillars of their lives and all their plans for the future were destroyed in a single day.

And now we are sitting together with these two young women. The conversation quickly gets going. As we already know a lot about [what happened in Nir Oz](#), we are able to put the pieces of the puzzle together. But despite all this knowledge, it is not comprehensible how brutally and definitively life can change in a single day. They and their children find themselves in a completely different reality, in which there is only one thing to do: get through every single day, just get on with life.



The 7th of October 2023 in Nir Oz

The kibbutz, which was founded in 1958 and is 2 kilometers from Gaza, is one of the worst affected places. Half of the houses have been burnt or destroyed, only five houses in the entire village were not damaged. One in four of the approximately 400 inhabitants were murdered or kidnapped in agonizing fashion.



Traces of destruction. Private photo



Burnt-out ruins/ Private photo

There are harrowing [recordings of that day](#), the last communication of desperate people who do not understand what is happening, who witness terrorists invading their homes, whose houses are set on fire and thus become death traps. They plead for help that does not come.

The Hamas terrorists knew the place very well. Some had been employed here as guest workers; others had received help from the inhabitants of the kibbutz. Peace activists from Nir Oz had picked up sick people from Gaza to have them treated in Israeli hospitals. But whatever the kibbutzniks did for peace and friendship - it made no difference.

The terrorists first stormed the house of the commander of the security team and took him out. This meant that not only the coordination of defense within the kibbutz, but also communication with the IDF had broken down.

The local security team consisted of seven people and - according to the theory - they were supposed to defend the residents in the event of an attack until the army arrived after 45 minutes (according to the instructions). But that morning everything was different. In addition to the hail of rockets from Gaza, several hundred terrorists entered the kibbutz. Faced with this hopeless situation, some of the members of the security team tried to find refuge in their shelter after a brief struggle.



Tamir: Courage to the Last



But Tamir, Hadas' husband, was different. He was one of the first to confront the terrorists with his weapon. Tamir regarded the whole of Nir Oz as family. He wanted to protect everyone. And so, it was out of the question for him to retreat to his family in the shelter. Together with a few others, he fought for 2.5 hours and was able to save lives. It is a scenario that is unimaginable: how a few individuals stood their ground against all odds, against such a majority. How they made a difference in the places where they were and

prevented the terrorists from killing without restraint. How they held out much longer than the allotted 45 minutes. And it's heartbreaking to imagine what Tamir must have thought and felt when the army didn't come. When the friend at his side was killed and he himself was wounded. When he was thrown bleeding onto a Hamas pickup truck and kidnapped.

[When the army finally arrived in Nir Oz](#), the terrorists had already moved on to the next town. The soldiers found only death, ashes and unbearable pain. Of the approximately 400 inhabitants, 47 had been killed and 79 kidnapped.

Hadas Tells her Story

Tamir and I met in 2010. He belonged to the third generation of Kibbutz Nir Oz and had been born and raised in the Kibbutz. His ancestors were among the founders. I myself came from Beer Sheva and my maiden name is Shwartz. My grandparents came from Germany and Austria. They survived the Holocaust and emigrated to Israel. When we got married, we moved to Nir Oz with the intention of settling there and raising our children.



Tamir worked as a Social Manager at the Ramon Foundation, a program to promote the personal development of young people. He was held in high esteem by his colleagues and was seen as a role model for the children supported by the foundation. He taught them to follow their dreams and, in recent years, he fulfilled his own dream of becoming a farmer.

Our son Asaf (8) and our daughter Neta (4) were both born on the kibbutz, and we all felt at home there and appreciated this place very much: the peace and quiet, the wonderful people, the beautiful flowers, the freedom.

A happy family in 2023. Photo by Hadas with her permission

On October 7, we were woken up by the sound of sirens. Tamir and I took our children to the shelter. Shortly afterwards, Tamir went outside to protect us and our friends, family and all the kibbutzniks from the Hamas. He had no idea that hundreds of terrorists had infiltrated the kibbutz. I stayed in the shelter with Asaf and Neta for hours, enduring the horror of hearing the terrorists enter our house -



screaming, shooting, trying to break into the shelter and wreaking havoc. I feared we would be killed, burnt alive or kidnapped, all while I worried about Tamir's fate.

Miraculously, the children and I survived. Our shelter was one of the few that had a bolt. That saved us, because Hamas didn't manage to break down the door. We spent the night in the kibbutz because it was too dangerous to leave. We received no news about Tamir. The next evening, we were evacuated by the Israeli army to Eilat, where we stayed in a hotel for almost three months, together with the majority of those, who had survived the massacre and had not been taken hostage. There we learnt that Tamir had been kidnapped to Gaza, but we had little information about his condition. We tried to remain optimistic and hoped for his safe return.

In January 2024, we were resettled to Kiryat Gat. A few days after we left Eilat, we learnt that Tamir, who had been injured and kidnapped while fighting the terrorists in the kibbutz, had died the same day as a result of the lack of medical care. His body is still being held in Gaza, which prevents us from giving him a proper burial and finding closure. We still live in a tower block in Kiryat Gat. It's very different from the kibbutz, but I endeavor to make the best of what we have for the children.

Nir Oz in April 2025

We can well understand Hadas longing for Nir Oz. Four days ago, we were [there with our friends Shlomo and Smadar](#).



What was once a Garden of Eden is now a lost, abandoned paradise, where only the cats of the families who used to live here roam. Nevertheless, thanks to the tireless efforts of volunteers, it blooms and greens between the burnt houses as it once did. The flowers are fragrant and the birds sing of what happened here. A painful contrast. Nir Oz was probably the most beautiful kibbutz on this border; laid out like a park, a place of beauty and joy of life.

[Once a paradise: Nir Oz - a green idyll. Private photo](#)

Today, it's like standing here with one foot in the Garden of Eden and with the other one in hell. The blood may have dried and seeped into the ground, but it still screams to heaven, even if you can no longer see or smell it. The clouds of smoke have cleared, but the ash crunches under our feet. The description of the commander of the ZAKA unit (who identify the victims after terrorist attacks and collect body parts and blood for burial), of how they found the site echoes in our minds. Even today you stand here and your brain refuses to believe that what you see is real. It is absolutely unimaginable what it must have been like immediately after the attack, when the flames were still flickering, the corpses were still glowing and the ground was soaked in blood!



Tamir's house/ memorial stone for Tamir/ memorial bench for Tamir. Private photos

We also stand in front of the former house of Hadas and Tamir. And we see the memorial stone for Tamir. A friend of his has written: 'Your smile will continue to light our way. Thank you for fighting until you could fight no more, in a battle that was lost from the start. You protected the kibbutz, your family and the homeland that you loved so much.' Today it is clear that if he had stayed in the locked shelter with his family, he would have survived. But many others probably wouldn't have. This small stone attempts to capture and honor the immense sacrifice that he and his family made!

At the end of our tour, we looked over nearby Gaza. There is a direct road. It takes less than 5 minutes to get there. On this road, hundreds of terrorists came and stormed the kibbutz. Here Tamir and another 78 people were kidnapped dead or alive. Later, countless Gazan civilians came and looted the place after it had been devastated. It is the same road on which the kibbutz residents who on October 7 had been murdered and kidnapped used to take sick Gazans to Israeli hospitals in the past!



Road to Gaza. Private photo

Ruins of Life



In November 2024, Hadas travels back to the destroyed kibbutz with her two children for the first time. Her house consists only of charred walls and shreds hanging from the roof. They came to say goodbye. After all that has happened, she cannot imagine moving back to Nir Oz.

Too many horrific memories - and too much fear of a repeat. The border is too close. The horror of the pogroms has been reawakened. Even in the center of Israel. She and her children also have German citizenship. They don't want to emigrate (yet). But, like most people in Israel, they are now also thinking about alternative ways of life, about escape options, places of exile where they can save themselves in the worst-case scenario. Hadas is faced with the ruins of the lifelong dream that she and Tamir were working towards.

The children, Asaf and Neta, desperately long for their father. They are not comforted by the explanation that he died a hero. Asaf, in tears, says: 'I want my father, I don't want a hero in Gaza'.



The two of them keep asking if there will be someone there to protect them in the future. The feeling of being alone and at the mercy of others has burrowed deep into their consciousness. They have nightmares and panic if Hadas is away for any length of time and fear that they could suddenly lose their mother too. After their entire living environment has collapsed, Hadas is their last anchor, their only one.

Searching for the Future

Hadas herself describes her life this morning as being “on hold”. She is waiting to at least say goodbye. She cannot find peace, because it is extremely important for her to bring Tamir home to bury him in his kibbutz. As long as Tamir's body is not given a proper burial, the wounds will not close and an open rift will remain in her life.

She worked as a nurse before the massacre. Today, she still does not feel strong enough to return to her job. Her strength is just sufficient for her and her children. When she works, she wants to be totally there for others.

In the meantime, everyday life continues somehow. They still live rent-free as evacuees in a residential complex in the Carmei Gat district of [Kiryat Gat](#), around 50 kilometers north-east of Nir Oz. Additional space for certain kibbutz facilities such as a communal dining hall, a kindergarten, the youth clubs, the senior citizens' club and a clinic has been provided for the former residents of Nir Oz. But it remains a temporary place, not a home. Within the busy and densely populated city, they miss the greenery and idyll of the park-like kibbutz, their own gardens, the peace and quiet



Hadas and her children. Private photo

Hadas talks about the better and the darker days. Her expression also speaks of these ups and downs. There are moments when the tears are very close, but sometimes it is as if a ray of sunshine lights up her features and for a fraction of a second you see a smile that lights up her eyes. And you can imagine how she used to be: full of confidence and joy of life.

A majority of the residents of Nir Oz voted in favor of rebuilding and returning to the kibbutz at the end of 2024. But Hadas wants a fresh start in a new environment. And there is a prospect for her: the Beit Nir kibbutz, further away from the border. The inhabitants there have agreed to take in the 40-50 families who do not want to return to Nir Oz. The kibbutz is to be expanded and in around two years they hope to find a new home there.

She is happy about this prospect and will put all her energy into building a new home for herself and her children. But at the same time, she will continue to wait for Tamir, whose body is still being held in Gaza after more than 1.5 years, and fight for his return.

We will accompany her and carry her burden - as best we can.



We will stand by Hadas. Private photo



The story of Hadas 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

