



## Sigal - the Spark of Will to Live

Part 6 of the cycle: [Facets of restoration](#) (perspective for widows & orphans)

By [Brigitte B. Nussbächer](#)



Sigal und ihre Kinder. Foto Sigal privat

*Their love began like a story whispered by the stars: Sigal and Dolev, two souls dreaming under the open sky until on one shattering day, everything was crushed. Yet the cycle of life continues and since October 7, 2023, Sigal has been fighting to create a future and a new home for her children, in whom Dolev's legacy is preserved.*

### Like a Fairy Tale

Sigal and Dolev grew up in the beautiful [kibbutz Nir Oz](#) on the edge of the Gaza Strip, which was founded in 1955. It was a small, close-knit community, in which the boundaries between relatives and friends were blurred - everyone knew everyone else. Dolev's ancestors had also lived here. His great-grandfather had fled Germany two years after the Nazis came to power and had built a new life for himself in Israel. Most recently in the kibbutz Nir Oz.

It was a place where dreams had been preserved and lived: the idea of a better life, far away from stress and hecticness, surrounded by beauty, flowers and birdsong; the ideal of shared joy and suffering within a community and the vision of peace.



Sigal and Dolev knew from an early age that they were meant for each other and have been together since they were 12. They discovered life together and their friendship grew into love.

Dolev became a successful civil engineer working in quality control and Sigal found fulfillment in teaching. They soon started a family. They loved to laugh. Confidence and joy of life were the pillars of their life together.

A picture from previous times. Private photo Sigal

A small paradise, whose happiness was only marginally spoilt by the frequent rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip, just 2 km away. People had learnt to live with the threat. There were shelters to escape to and Dolev underwent additional training to become a medical first aider. He then served as a volunteer with both the Magen David Adom and United Hatzalah and was known for his ability to rush to the scene of any incident or call. Even though he was often confronted with suffering as a result, he maintained his cheerfulness. The fact that he was able to help gave him drive and fulfillment.

## October 7, 2023

Even on [October 7](#), it was natural for him not to prioritise his own safety.

When the sirens began to wail and would not stop, he took Sigal and their three children Raz, Yotam and Ron (aged 7, 6 and 3) to the shelter. But he himself went out to save lives, as he had done previously during countless rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip.

It was the beginning of the end of the lifelong dream that Dolev and Sigal had lived.

Sigal, who was nine months pregnant, stayed in the shelter with her children for nine hours. Contact with Dolev had been cut off. Despite her burning concern, Sigal succeeded in keeping the children calm, even though they had to manage without food and water and she also feared that she would go into labour. They survived because their shelter, unlike most other shelters in the area, was lockable.



When the IDF brought the survivors to the kibbutz kindergarten at around 4 pm to evacuate them from there, there was no sign of Dolev. With every hour that passed, the fear for him grew, a fear that Sigal tried to hide from the children. As there was no sign of him in the days that followed and no identifiable remains found, it was assumed that he had been abducted by the Hamas terrorists. And the horror grew when it became clear that Dolev's sister Arbel was also missing. One in four people from Nir Oz had either been abducted or murdered.



The siblings Arbel and Dolev. Private photo Sigal

There was no family within the kibbutz that was not affected, only 6 houses in total that were not damaged and destroyed in the brutal Hamas massacre! The paradise of the past was now ashes and rubble and the earth was soaked with the blood of the victims.

The survivors found themselves in a reality that was a nightmare. Sigal had lost their home, their possessions. During the evacuation, in haste and danger, they had only been able to take the bare essentials with them. The massive attacks by Hamas continued unabated. It took around two weeks for the IDF to regain full control of the Israeli territory taken by Hamas.

Sigal fought against her breathless fear, rising hopelessness and despair. Nine days after the massacre, she went into labour and gave birth to her daughter on October 16. Alone, in an unfamiliar place. It was a difficult birth in every respect. Black hours of suffocating agony and loneliness that no one can comprehend.

But this small new life in the midst of all the loss and destruction was also a ray of light, a strong sign of hope for the future. Sigal called the little girl 'Dor'. This name is derived from the Hebrew word for 'generation' and is inextricably linked to the legacy that is passed on from one generation to the next. It symbolises the cycle of life, continuity, and thus bridges space and time. It also contains the same initial letters as Dolev, signaling that Dolev lives on in Dor.

After regaining some strength, Sigal participated in Dolev's parents efforts to tell influential politicians about her family's fate and ask for their support in freeing Dolev and Arbel, although she did not know if anything she did made a difference in the end. But by being active, she kept her hope alive. The November 2023 hostage deal came, but neither of them was released. She dreaded waking up, and every hour seemed interminable, but she fought on - every day.

## When Hope Was Shattered

Because the IDF had not been able to obtain any evidence about Dolev's whereabouts in the Gaza Strip, they decided at the end of May 2024 to reassess the previously unidentified remains found in Nir Oz. In many cases, identifying the victims was almost impossible, as the bodies had been badly burned or mutilated by the terrorists. However, with the help of forensic and anthropological experts, it was finally confirmed that Dolev had been murdered on October 7.

For Dolev's parents and Sigal the world collapsed. Suffocating darkness settled on their souls. For Sigal, a future without him was unthinkable:





*'I'm standing here and you're not by my side. Not here to hold my hand. Not here for me to lean on you, for you to catch me so that I don't fall. I always had the feeling that you and I belonged together forever, like in a fairy tale, that nothing could happen to us. You live so much inside me, but I miss you so much... You are my whole life, my whole world. A world that has been shattered. A world that was destroyed. There will always be a void in my heart, a void with your profile'*

Dolev was buried in Nir Oz on June 4, 2024. His grave is a declaration of love carved in stone by Sigal and their children: original, unique, beautiful!

Dolev's grave in Nir Oz. Private photo

## The Spark of Will to Live

Everything that once made up life has been lost for months, the colors have faded, the laughter stifled.

But: there are the children who need Sigal so badly, to whom she has to be mother and father. They still carry the trauma of October 7 within them and have to come to terms with a terrible loss and will never see their father (again). There is Arbel, Dolev's little sister, who is suffering the unthinkable in the terror tunnels for months and who hopes to be freed.

Under these circumstances, Sigal has little time to grieve. But where and how can she begin to put the pieces of her life back together again?



Sigal, widow of Dolev, with her children: Raz, Yotam, Ron and Dor. Private photo Sigal



Sigal does not want to go back to Nir Oz. The children have too clear memories of the terrible hours of October 7 and she herself also no longer wants to live so close to the border. The powerlessness of that day, the feeling of being at the mercy of others, the helplessness, the fact that she no longer had any control over her own life are deeply engraved in her soul. She has lost trust, both in her own state, which failed to protect her, and in the Gazans, whose Hamas terrorists carried out the most horrific pogrom since the Holocaust - in the center of Israel!

But it should be a kibbutz again. She longs for the green grass, the lawns and the flowers - and for a community that becomes a family. And so, in autumn 2024, she travels to the United States to campaign for support and funding to build a new community.

We get to know Sigal in autumn 2024. Due to our [project to support the orphans of October 7](#), we made contact with official Israeli authorities who put us in touch with Sigal.

In April 2025, we had our first personal meeting with her and Hadas, whose story I have already told: '[Hadas - Grief Waiting for an End](#)'.



Meeting with Sigal and Hadas in April 2025 in Kiryat Gat. Private photo

In Kiryat Gat, the place where she has been living with her children for months in a tower block - still provisional, still evacuated - a tall, slim, attractive woman with bright eyes stands in front of us. Her ancestors were also Holocaust survivors - from Czernowitz (Ukraine), who initially fled to Brazil and Argentina. Her parents then came to Israel. To find a safe home here – a thought that sounds like an illusion after October 7.

We are pleased to see that more life has returned to her facial expressions and eyes. When I saw her virtually for the first time, I could hardly hold back the tears. Her face seemed so hopeless and petrified, so full of pain. When she talks now, you can feel the strength that lives in her. And sometimes there's a sparkle and smile in her eyes that gives us a glimpse of what she used to be like.

## A New Home

Life goes on - even if many days it is just a matter of survival. But Sigal has a clear goal: that her children will have a future worth living and full of light despite everything - and a new home. Around 40 families from Nir Oz want to move to Beit Nir, including Sigal and Hadas. They have received the approval of the local residents. And so the expansion of the community is to be tackled. In 2027, they hope to find a new home in this kibbutz, which is much further away from the border.

There was a nice turn of events at the end of January 2025: [Dolev's sister Arbel](#) was released in exchange for a large number of convicted Palestinian criminals as part of the hostage deal at the time. The circumstances were dramatic right up to the last minute: she was paraded by her captors and pushed through a raging, threatening crowd. But finally she was free. After 572 days! Sigal believes that her sister-in-law came back from captivity stronger and more determined. Despite or perhaps because of the ordeal she suffered!



And little Dor is the sunshine of the family. She is the only one who has no terrible memories - and she has her father's sunny disposition and eyes that shine just like his. Her cheerfulness brightens the days of others - seeing her grow up healthy and lively is a triumph of life over death and terror. She embodies the meaning of her name: Dolev lives on in her and in the other children. Sigal says that the little girl is the strongest of them all and an encouragement, a blessing for them.

Dor, the sunshine of the family. Private Foto Sigal

## A Long Road Ahead

When will Israel have peace again? There are still 58 hostages held by Hamas and the terrorist organization would rather have the entire Gaza Strip destroyed than release the Israeli civilians they forcibly abducted more than 1.5 years ago. Israel is still under attack. As recently as the beginning of May 2025, a missile from Yemen that could not be intercepted struck near Ben Gurion Airport. It is hard to imagine what would have happened if it had hit the arrivals or departures hall. Israel is fighting back with all its might, but both its internal power and the support from other countries is waning.

Sigal still has a long and difficult road ahead of her. Rebuilding her life, rebuilding it alone, will take a lot of strength. Will the emptiness in her heart caused by Dolev's death hurt less at some point? Will the terrible dreams and memories fade? Will she learn to trust again?

Despite all the suffering, there are sparks of light that point the way through the darkness. Because we sense the determination in Sigal not to give up. For her children! When we ask her how we can support her, the answer comes promptly: help me build a beautiful future for these children. And we will. With all our hearts and with everything we have at our disposal. Stay strong, Sigal! You are not alone!



Farwell, Sigal. See you soon again. Private photo

The story of Sigal is part 6 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 October 7, 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.



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