

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / Bring Back My Children: An Israeli Mother's Plea

Hi there, I'm Dr. John White, WebMD's Chief Medical Officer and host of the Health Discovered podcast where we bring you fascinating stories and unique perspectives like our recent episode on how heart failure can particularly affect women in Black and Hispanic communities.

We've documented it time and time again. She was young, she was Black, she was a woman.

No one expected her to look like the face of heart failure. When you don't look like what

someone expects, that's going to lead to delays in diagnosis. We all have to take

this consolation of symptoms, treat it the same each and every time, whether it's a young person,

a Black person, a woman. If someone presents to me with my heart racing and feeling when did,

I need to get an echocardiogram 100% of the time, regardless.

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I'm Barry Weiss and this is Honestly. Given the shocking news out of Israel, we're going to do

something different on this podcast for the next little while. Over the next few days and maybe the

next few weeks, depending on how this war develops, we're going to be bringing you first-hand stories

from the ground, as well as interviews with experts like we did yesterday with Michael Oren.

If you haven't heard that conversation, please listen. And we're going to do this so you can

understand what is happening in Israel and what the ramifications are for the region and for the

entire world. For today, we want to share the story of one mother who is desperate for help.

She is desperate for help because her two children, ages 12 and 16,

were taken from their home by Hamas terrorists and are now being held hostage in Gaza,

in God knows what conditions. As you are listening, please bear in mind that this is

the story of just one mother. There are untold numbers of other mothers and fathers like her

right now in Israel. Hundreds of people are missing, including from her kibbutz where, as you'll hear,

the terrorists came and took women, children, elders, the mentally disabled, and disappeared

them into the Gaza Strip. Please share this story for the sake of this mother. All she wants,

all any Israelis want, is to bring their loved ones home. Stay with us.

Yes. Hi, it's Barry. It's Barry Weiss.

Yeah. First of all, I'm so, so sorry and like every Jew all over the world, praying for your family

and thinking of you and the devastation of what's just happened. And I really appreciate

you taking the time. We want to expose the evil of what has just happened to everyone in the world.

So let's start on the morning, Shabbat morning, Saturday morning. Where do you live? Where were

you? Well, I live on a kibbutz near the Gaza border. I'd prefer not to say any names. I think it's

another way to keep my boys safe. I wasn't home. They were at my house staying the night on their own

at 12 and 16 on a normal, normative day. It's a good solution. I'm divorced and

every couple of weeks I go to see my spouse and they're staying at their deaths, but they're

sleeping at my place. That is also a member of a kibbutz I live in. At 6.30 we all woke up all

across the Gaza border. They were better lads. We all went to security rooms. Unfortunately,

it's a routine we're very much used to. And about probably half seven, they started hearing gunshots

outside their house and I was on the phone to them all the time, you know, on and off, but every

couple of minutes and they were very scared. And I said, you know, everything's fine. The army's on

the way. It's going to be okay. Don't worry about it. And about eight o'clock in the morning,

we started getting texts from other members of a kibbutz that terrorists are walking around

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really trying to break into houses and take people. And at about half a state, that was the last time, the last call I had from them, they said they hear someone breaking the door and breaking into the house. And I heard a few minutes later, I heard Arabic speaking on the phone. The phone was on. I asked them to be quiet and they were whispering to me and I was whispering to them. And I could hear Arabic speaking behind the door and the door broke. And the last thing I heard was my youngest was 12, telling them, don't take me, I'm too young. And that was it. The phone went off. And I didn't hear from them since.

Yesterday was, well, since then, we're having a complete nightmare. You can't even begin to describe

what it feels like. I don't even know how I feel, to be honest. Just feeling a bad dream. And I'm just waiting to wake up. Like, tens of members and babies and children and elderly and disabled people were taken from their beds, from their houses, into the Gaza border.

Just innocent civilians who did nothing wrong but living on in Israel.

That was it. That's it ever since I'm trying to get them released, to be honest. I can't believe it hasn't been done yet. I think how on earth can hundreds of civilians can be held hostages when they did nothing wrong? War has rules. And this is against the rules. This is, this is a terror attack. This is a terror act. This is an unhuman act. I always tell my kids when we get shot at by missiles from the Gaza border, I always tell them when they're scared that the children of Gaza are in a much worse situation than they are. And I'm starting to believe that maybe my morals are not equal to the enemies. I'm not, you know, basically all I'm asking for is to have my babies back home and to have everyone who was, who were taken, released freely and alive.

And I'm just waiting for their return.

For people that have never been to Israel and have never been to the south of Israel and have never been near the Gaza border, I just want you to explain how the, the regularity of using that safe room for your family is. Like that's something that would typically be done in the case of a missile getting sent over by Hamas from Gaza. Is that right? Right. Yes. This is the first time we, we had to use it as a safe place from a terrorist attack because I don't think anyone could even imagine that hundreds of Palestinians would cross the border and get into houses in the settlements of Israel. It's where people live. It's our houses. And it's not, it's, it's not like we're soldiers. It's not army that's living there. It's just plain innocent citizens.

When your boys got taken from that safe room or other people from the key boots where you live also taken? Yes, many. Like I can't even, I don't know the exact numbers yet.

Can you describe, can you describe some of the people that you know were taken hostages?

They took mothers. They took babies. They took children under five. They took teenagers. They took people over 80. They took elderly. They took mentally disabled. They took, they just took everyone. They, you know, I don't think even, I don't think, I'm not even sure that was the main plan, but they just went so easily that they just took half of, half of the key boots. Well, again, I don't want to say any numbers because I'm not sure the numbers are correct, but they took many, many people in and not only from my key boots, but also from other settlements and other key booties. I believe there are hundreds of people held hostages at the moment. People think of Israel as one of the most militarily sophisticated countries in the world, and it's had to be that out of necessity, given that the neighbors it's surrounded by. And I think just the utter shock of what happened yesterday is hard to comprehend.

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How do you make sense of how Israel allowed this to happen? Or is your mind not even going there yet?

I'm not sure I'm the person you should be referring this question to. There's no doubt that there's a lot to learn from. Well, a very, very big lesson to learn. And probably there will be consequences in the future regarding the way we perceive the way we need to act, the way we need to think about that. I think even the army couldn't imagine such a horror attack and such a such horror dream. And I don't, you know, I'm not here to defend the army. There's definitely mistakes that both the army and the state did and should be

thought about and should be learned from. But right now, as you said, I'm only focusing on getting my boys back. And the fact that this very, very strong country couldn't do what I've been promised they will do for me, which is to defend me and my family is something that will have consequences both on the country and on my family. I'm not looking for anyone to blame in Israel. As you said, this barbarian act was also held against the main base, the army base, that was supposed to be giving

the solution to such situations. And as they took over that base, they basically took away the chance that the army would be there on time. Obviously, it was well planned. Obviously, they had info and we didn't have it. But as I said, it's not for me to answer this question. The only thing I'm worried about now is to get my boys back and as a mother to a mother and to other mothers in the world, I don't think any mother in the world could be worried about the country, the army or the government when their boys are held hostage by barbarians.

When you look at the coverage of what has happened in Israel, a day in which more Jews have been slaughtered since the Holocaust, and we don't know what they're doing to all of these innocent people that they have captured, and you look at the way that it is being discussed in the press, does it surprise you? I think everyone's in shock. I said to someone earlier that it's not something you can compare. You can't compare one disaster to another. But if you compare it to press releases on 9-11, then everyone was in such a shock that it took a while

to get the straight picture and to get the full picture. I think this is probably what's happening now. I would have liked the press to have more focus on the fact that there's civilians, hundreds of them, waiting to be released from being hostage by terrorists. That's something I would have liked to have more focus on. But I am wishing or I want to believe that the fact that it doesn't have that much focus on is deliberate, is that behind the scenes there's actions done or negotiations taken place. I'm just hoping. I'm just hoping because hope's the last thing I have.

Have you heard from anyone in the government, in the military, what does trying to get your son's back look like? I didn't hear from anyone. That's why I'm going to the press.

And that's why I speak out. And that's why I'm asking other families to speak out.

I think the size of this catastrophe is way beyond what's told by now or exposed by until now.

But again, I don't have the numbers to prove it. I'm just saying what I think

and what I know of from the place I live in because so many people were taken just from one kibbutz. Are you with other families or in touch with other families on WhatsApp, on Signal or even in real life who are in the same situation as you? Can you describe that a little bit to me?

Well, we've been trying to find one another basically both sympathy and just because no one knows how we feel better than other people who are in a situation.

But also in order to get together because the more we are, the more power we have, the more our voices will be heard, the more interviews will be taken place.

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The world will hear more voices. And yes, I've been putting quite a bit of effort into getting to other families. So yes, I've been in touch. Obviously, I have families where I live that are in a situation, but also other families.

Do you think the fact that you haven't heard from the Israeli government or the IDF is a signal of anything other than how surprised and overrun and overwhelmed they are right now?

Yes, I do. I do believe that that's the case. And I also believe that they probably can't speak to each and every one of the families because there's so many of them. I'm putting my faith into the fact that there's so many civilians there that there's no chance that the world will let it happen and will let it keep going. This is my hope. It might be naive, but this is where I put my hope into. A few years ago, Israel exchanged more than a thousand prisoners for the release of a single Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit. Tell me how you're thinking about that in regards to what's happening right now in which there are untold numbers, maybe hundreds of hostages

like Gilad Shalit, but children, women, older people, your two sons, 12 and 16. What do you expect your government to do to get them back? As far as I'm concerned, they can give them back, all of them. They're getting very good conditions in our prisons, very good conditions.

They get education, they get visits, they get rest, to be honest, and they're terrorists. As soon as they'll be released, they'll be there doing terror anyway. I do want to make sure that we all understand that the prisoners Israel is holding are prisoners who are doing terror.

They're not young innocent people, they're not little children, they're many men, and they are terrorists. But if all of them should be given back, that's fine by me because it's another thousand or 2,000 or 6,000 people who do terror. And as far as I'm concerned, there's potentially 2 million people there that are doing terror. The answer is not by keeping prisoners, the answer is lying somewhere else. And I don't care what the cost is, to be honest, it's my children, and I want them back home. I understand that the country or the government has other considerations

to take. But as far as I'm concerned, they can give them all their prisoners and Israel will only have less to worry about in terms of holding them. Obviously, we will have more to deal with as well concerning terror attacks. But while we're holding them now and look what terror attack happened, obviously, you know, it's like, well, I've got the wrong word to say, you know, I was going to say it's like snakes, but no, it's not. It's just a case of education.

If they're educating the next generation and the one after it, and the one after it, to be terrorists, and it doesn't matter how many prisoners we're going to hold, because we consider life as worth so much and they consider death as worth it.

That's the main difference between perceptions. And that's why we're willing to give thousands for the sake of one, and they're willing to kill thousands from their own for the sake of one.

It's an honor to die as far as they're concerned. And for us, it's an honor to live. We honor life, they honor death. I don't think holding them prisoners will help us in any way.

The entire reason for being for the state of Israel, since its establishment in 1948, was to be a safe haven for the Jewish people after their near annihilation.

I saw that one of the women that was taken by Hamas was a Holocaust survivor. What does it mean to be in the place that is meant to protect Jewish life and to have it be, to have Jewish life be so vulnerable there? What does it mean to have any life so vulnerable anywhere? I mean, you know, people just want to live their lives. Why do we have to feel

so scared? Why do we have to live under continuous threats? I can tell you honestly, I don't know what personal consequences it's going to have on my family and the place we live in. It's very hard to live in a place that you don't believe you're going to be feeling secured and your family won't be feeling safe. It's very hard to live in a place like that. We never feel completely safe, but are you safe anywhere in the world?

I think most people would say, you know, you've been willing, if you're living in Israel and if you're living especially in the region of Israel that you're living in, you put up with a lot of risk. Please explain what makes this so different because I think a lot of people flip on CNN or the BBC or Sky News and see the news and say, Israel, another day, another conflict. I really want people to understand what makes this so cataclysmic and so catastrophic and so different from all of the other wars that you've seen in your lifetime.

As I said, war has rules. Some of them are written, some aren't, but war has rules between human beings. You know, if I was to choose, there would be no war, but as long as we have wars, they have rules. The rules are that there are borders and that there are armies and when we fight over a border or we fight over a territory, then it's done by armies, between armies.

Now, we're once exposed to risk, as you said, living where we live, but the risk is a risk that we can defend from. We can defend ourselves from. We can decide to leave the place for a while, we can go and stay in a safe room. But we do know at the end of the day that we're relatively safe. At this time, children were taken from their beds,

taken hostage from their beds. Just imagine terrorists would walk around in Paris or New York, take people out of their beds and take them hostage to the nearby country over the border.

This is, it's unthinkable. It's unthinkable. In any human terms, it's unthinkable.

And that's what makes it so different. Taking children and babies from their house, from their beds and taking them over the border. I don't think it's a day-to-day routine anywhere,

not in Israel nor anywhere else. Is there anything else that you want people

to know about your sons without revealing anything that would make them even more vulnerable?

Oh, I want you to know they're just normal teenagers.

You know, they just love what normal teenagers love do. They fight constantly between them.

They can drive me mad and I love them to bits. And I miss them. And I want them home, where they should be in their beds.

This is where children should be in their home, in their beds,

living their lives. And I'm asking every mother in the world to think of her children

and help me make the effort to release those people and my children.

I'm so sorry. I'm sorry. I'm the one who's sorry.

I just want to explain to people why we're not sharing your name or the names of your children.

Can you just give us the answer to that question and then I'll let you go to sleep?

Well, as you said, the people who took them are so cruel and have no moral,

no values, well, no values that I share with anyway. And I'm scared if I expose their names or my name or the place that they were taken from.

Well, obviously, the other side sees and hears the interviews and the pictures and it can be used against them and it can be used as a manipulation against them. And I don't want to make things worse. I want to make things better. I want them back. I want them home. And I don't want to do, but want them to hurt them. So I'm trying to do the best I can

and put all my efforts into it without exposing them to further risks.

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I am so grateful to you for taking the time to talk to us and for your incredible composure. Given the circumstances and we're thinking of you and your children and every other innocent Israeli who has been taken away from their families.

Thank you. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to bring it to you and to your audience.

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