

## [Transcript] The Daily / Golan's Story

From the New York Times, I'm Sabrina Tavernisi, and this is The Daily.

In the weeks since Israel suffered the deadliest day in its history, fresh accounts have emerged in village after village of just how extreme and how widespread the violence actually was.

Today, the story of one man at the epicenter of that violence.

It's Friday, October 13th.

Hi, Gola. This is Sabrina Tavernisi from The Daily, from the New York Times Daily podcast.

Hi. Hi. Thank you for talking to us.

Yeah, of course. I'm on my way to the, I think it's the most quiet place I can find.

Great. Perfect. Golan, thank you so much. I know you must be absolutely exhausted.

Yeah, it's not easy.

Where are you right now?

We are, all the community were evacuated to an hotel in the Dead Sea. All the refugees were evacuated to this place. Practically, I think 90% of the hotel is people from my kibbutz.

Golan, can you identify yourself for me, please? Tell me your name, your age, and where you live.

My name is Golan Abitbol. My age is 44. I live in Kibbutz Berry, and I was born in the Kibbutz.

The Kibbutz was established in 46. It's older than the state of Israel, and it's a quiet place surrounded by nature. And I've been living there all my life with my family.

How many people in the Kibbutz?

We have like a thousand people in the Kibbutz. And we know each one of them by name because we lived with them since I was born. And we know the name of the kids. We know everybody.

We all vouch for each other. We all take care of each other, and it's an amazing place to raise

your kids in. Do you have children? I have four kids. The older one is 15, his sister is 14, and my twin girls are nine. Oh, twin girls. Yeah. And the kids are going freely. They don't have any traffic inside the Kibbutz. Just go send the kids to the grandparents on the other side of the Kibbutz, and they can go and you don't worry because nothing bad can happen.

Golan, I'm going to turn us now to the attack. But first, I want you to tell me about Friday.

How did you spend the day before the attack began? What was Friday like for you?

On Friday morning, in the morning, I got up in Reykjavik, Iceland. Oh my goodness.

I woke up in Reykjavik, Iceland, coming back from work and landed in Israel in about

six in the evening. And two hours later, I was at home. So this was my Friday,

and I saw my kids after a week. I didn't see them. I spent time with them. We ate dinner together.

I saw my friends. We had some drinks and went to sleep like a normal Friday.

And then we woke up in about 6.20 in the morning to the sound of launching missiles.

It was a huge, huge launch. And I remember telling my wife what is going on, what is,

it's out of the blue. We are on the border of Gaza. We know what it's like to have

a missile attack. We are used to it. But this time, it was weird. It was suddenly,

and it was so intensive. And a few minutes later, we got a text message. We have an app

of the community. So we got a text that there is an invasion to the kibbutz,

and that we should lock ourselves in the shelter.

In the second I got this message, I went to my safe and took my gun. It's a pistol.

It's a small 9mm pistol and it's what I have for personal defense. So the first thing that felt

right to do for me is to take the gun out and lock my family in the shelter and then took

front position in the kitchen where I can have a better view of the neighborhood. And if someone

comes, I can respond and engage before they come to my house.

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And next we started to shooting and we started to hear talks in Arabic.

And I was looking outside of the kitchen windows. And then I saw in the outside perimeter of my neighborhood, I saw some terrorists standing outside with RPGs and heavy machine guns.

What did you think at that moment?

I knew it was bad. And then I saw them exiting an apartment of one of my friends.

I saw three guys with a fighting vest, with all the equipment, the gear and the helmets and behind them three guys wearing civilian uniforms. And they were exiting my neighbor apartment and it was horrible. I didn't know what to do. If he's alive, if he's dead, I didn't know. I just saw them exiting the apartment.

And then there was units starting entering the neighborhood.

I saw them going near one of the families and started shouting, like IDF, IDF, to make my neighbors think that they are from the IDF and they would give up and get out.

To make your neighbors think they were actually from the Israeli military, that's the IDF.

Yeah. And this group were dressed like an Israeli police officers. But something about the way they were dressed, they were, I don't know how to describe it, a bit sloppy, you know, it's not, it didn't felt right for me. And I text my friend, I don't think it's the IDF, don't open the door.

And then I heard Arabic from real, real close and I heard shooting from real close and I saw from around the corner, tourists, I saw them going towards my balcony. I was standing at my post of the kitchen and I just saw them coming from around the corner. I saw their face and you could see murder in their eyes. I saw in their eyes, they are going to kill my family.

I need to shoot now or else it's going to be my family. It's now or never.

So I started shooting. I gave a burst of 506 bullets towards them and they shot back at my home. They shot with automatic weapons. So then I'm shooting now from here and I'm going to a different position to shoot from a different position because you don't fire twice from the same position. So it will seems like there are more than one armed persons inside the house.

In Israel you join the army in the age of 18 and then you do a reserve duty until you are about the age of 40. So you don't think you act like a warrior. You switched to a different mood and it's like a muscle memory and it's like a slow motion movie.

Everything is slow. Everything is you see every move like flow and then you hear them shooting back and then it's like a fast forward. You jump to the floor and hide from the bullets.

So the time moves slowly and is suspended and then the time moves very quickly and speeds up. It's like a weird dream or something.

Yeah like a weird dream.

Do you remember feeling fear?

Yeah of course. Of course. If you don't feel fear you're an idiot.

I felt fear and I felt fear from my family and my neighbors but the fear is set aside and now it's time to engage the enemy.

So then after several bursts of fire toward the balcony and toward the rest of the house they shot the house from many positions but my family were in the safe room and the safe room can stand the heat of a missile so I wasn't worried about them. It's okay shoot the house as much as you like. I'm on the floor. It's okay now and then I don't know why they left.

They decided to go. They went to a different house. Then it got quiet. It got quiet. When I say quiet I mean I didn't see any any attackers any terrorists outside. You could always always hear all the time the noise of the weapons shooting outside. I can hear them throwing grenades but I didn't see for like an hour anyone else and then I heard one of my neighbors texting in the group of the neighborhood that they're in his house and they're trying to break into the safe room but he was holding on to the lever and so they want to be able to open the door and then I guess they got tired of trying to and they just set the house on fire and at first I didn't saw the fire then I heard a weird noise a weird unfamiliar noise of cracking stuff. It seems like stuff is cracking cracking wood and I looked outside and I saw all the top floor and fire and there they started texting that the fire the smoke is getting inside inside the safe room and in the kibbutz text group they said you need to put wet fabric on your mouse to shield you from the smoke but the house is on fire and in certain time it was it wasn't safe for them anymore and I told them I don't see anyone outside from my position so they jumped the ground level the family with the two kids and ran straight to the neighbor's house and got inside to his safe room together with him so the whole village was giving them instruction by text no no no the whole village was giving each other instruction we were all under attack not only our neighborhood there were some neighborhoods closer to the eastern side the side of Gaza that were heavily attacked much heavier attacks than we got they got RPGs on their house on the safe rooms and then in the text group a daughter of one of my best friends just sent a recording of her she wasn't shouting she was whispering help us my mother and brother are dying my father is hurt and is dying they're trying to enter the house and is on fire and she just kept on sending this kind of message and and I know this girl and I know she's a good friend of my girls and she'd been to our house several times and I used to work with her father and we are one family we're like one family and I hear her recording just help us help us my father is dying my mother is already dead my my older brother is lying dead and you feel helpless how old is she I think about 10 years old she had to see her parents critically injured in front of her eyes and just she couldn't do anything and I couldn't do anything and no one could do anything later on I heard they managed to rescue both of them after shooting with a tank because there were terrorists inside their home and they they survived the girl is okay and their father is just got out of surgery he lost his leg but he's alive it's with us not like a lot of my friends but the rest of her family was killed the rest of her family was killed Golan when did you finally leave the house and when did the police finally respond we heard the a big noise really weird one and I opened the window to get a different view and I saw tanks tanks on the neighborhood it's not something it's not something you're supposed to see so I knew things are going to change but I don't know how long it's gonna take and then a unit of the army came and took us out it was nighttime but we could see a lot to see the kibbutz burned to the ground it's it was horrible we could see the house of my neighbors normally when you have a fire in the house the firefighters are coming and they put out the fire but here I could see the fire dies out after burning everything we were encircled by the soldiers who kept us safe and took us and they told us to close the eyes of the young kids so they won't see the dead bodies of the terrorists lying outside so they

want to have this kind of memories in their mind they won't be scarred more than they are already scarred and we went to the entrance of the kibbutz and they took us to the evacuation area and we were just about to go on a truck an army truck to evacuate us and then from the bushes one of the terrorists just started shooting at us with no cover and we had had to lie on my kids and protect them my twins I had to shelter them with my body and shout to my kids I lost my two grown-up kids I shouted them where are you where are you and it seems like forever but they killed the terrorists very quickly the soldiers and no one was injured what time was that approximately do you have any sense of that that was 10 o'clock at night 10 30 when we left the perimeter and it began in six in the morning that is so many hours that's eternity it's I just can't describe the feeling it just felt like an eternity and later on we were evacuated to the hotel in the Dead Sea where we are now did anybody in your neighborhood die we don't know we don't know we have we get drips by drips of names and today all the grown-ups in the community got inside the conference room of the hotel and they were sitting there some members of the community with the list and they were starting to read the names of the people we know are dead and each one of the members got the page and start reading like 10 names and then collapse back and then the other one next to him stand and start reading some more names and sit back and like I don't I don't know how many I couldn't count and then I know each one of them I know each one of them and they read the names and then they paused and said now we are gonna read the names of the people we don't know where they are and it was just as long a good friend of mine she was they broke into her safe room they pulled her out she and their kids and they told them to sit outside and they took all the men and the boys from this group put them on a truck and just went together and they took her son is the best friend of my son he's 16 years old and he's the most adorable gentle kid and they just ripped him away from the hands of his mother and my son is devastated and we are all devastated and we don't know what happened to our family we don't know what happened to our friends we know that they kill one out of 10 of our community one out of 10 is dead but a lot more were taken they took babies they took kids they took elderly people 18 years old woman she was like my grandmother I I know her from the day I was born she was like my grandmother and we were laughing together like two weeks ago and now they took her why what kind of they are not human beings they are not human being a human being couldn't do this kind of they are vicious killers they are not freedom fighters are not fighting to to liberate their country and our community donated every year money to some people who used to work in the kibbutz these are people from Gaza people from Gaza they were our friend and we donated money to them the mother of a friend of mine was kidnapped she used to go once a week to one of the border crossing with Gaza Strip and pick up with her car children and take them to get dialysis in Israeli hospitals and now she's in Gaza we are liberal person we don't believe that all of the people in Gaza are evil we don't believe we didn't believe I'm sorry we didn't believe I don't know what I'm thinking now I don't know what to think now because we always thought that peace and negotiation is the solution and I don't think anyone think now we lost our faith we don't think there could be any kind of reason to talk with these animals that destroyed my kibbutz kidnapped my family and we we want them back we can't be a community without them they are part of us it's like a jigsaw puzzle you you can't take one piece and it will

be okay the ones that dead are gone okay but we need them we need the ones that survive get my neighbors back I want them back they are my friends they are my family I want them back and I go in the hotel and it's like a roller coaster of emotions because I hear someone just died and it broke my heart and I collapsed and second later I see someone arriving that I was sure that he was dead and I was afraid to ask and then another one is dead and another one alive and it's a roller coaster of emotions

what are the children like in the hotel how are your nine-year-old daughters my twins are playing they they talked to a psychiatrist and they didn't saw anything they heard the noise of the shooting but they didn't saw the terrorists they didn't saw the bodies my older kids saw the bodies they know about their friends that were kidnapped and their knows about their friends that were slaughtered they know and there will never be kids again their childhood is over and I know my son will never be the same again his childhood is over his friends are dead or gone in Gaza and and now we need to start to rebuild our life from scratch and from the moment we arrived here we rebuild infrastructure of the community this person who in charge of finding people place to sleep in someone who is in charge of activities for the kids and we have a person who is in charge of the elderly persons and the nurse of the kibbutz is in charge of getting people their medicines that they left back at home we rebuild our community here in the hotel so we could survive the day to come because we don't know how long we are going to be here we don't know if we have a place to go back

to I don't know if my home is still standing I don't know and it's still under army quarantine so we can't go back home we are here like refugees so for now I'm still in the hotel and trying to hold on trying to go on one day at a time

do you feel that it changed you

I'm sure it did I always say I was scratched already before with all the military service I've been through but this is a different kind of scratch so many friends of mine died so many when half of your friend died there is no coming back I'm not going to be the same person as before

I'm trying to keep my humor as much as I can but none of us are going to be the same again my kids are not going to be the same again I'm not going to be the same again none of us Israel is not going to be the same again we went to a second holocaust and unfortunately I did opportunity to be in the front line we're not going to be the same

so the death toll from the weekend's attack in Israel stands at 1200 people among them were at least 25 Americans in Gaza at least 1,537 people including 500 children have been killed in airstrikes that Israel has conducted in retaliation for the attack and late thursday night Israel's military told the united nations that the entire population of northern Gaza about 1 million people should relocate to the southern half of the territory in 24 hours the UN said it had strongly appealed for the order to be rescinded to avoid making quote what is already a tragedy into a calamitous situation we'll be right back

hi i'm tracy mumford i'm an audio producer at the new york times

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the new york times has reporters all over the world covering all the big stories and we are always trying to figure out new ways to bring those stories to you that's where our show the headlines comes in the headlines brings you three top stories every weekday morning all in 10 minutes or less in each story you will hear firsthand from times reporters who are on the ground they'll tell us what they're seeing and why it matters we might start with what's happening on capitol hill and then we're hearing from a reporter in india and then maybe we wind up in texas wherever the news is unfolding that day and again we get this to you in 10 minutes you won't find the headlines in your podcast feed but you will find it in the new york times audio app along with other exclusive shows narrated articles and more and new york times news subscribers can download this app right now and listen to the headlines at [nytimes.com slash audio app](https://www.nytimes.com/audio)

here's what else you should know today the house of representatives was once again left without any prospect for a leader when representative steve scolese of louisiana withdrew his name for consideration for the speakership late on thursday scolese was nominated for the role on wednesday but he failed to muster enough votes to be elected because hardline republicans balked at supporting him instead they threw their weight behind his challenger representative jim jordan of ohio the right wing republican endorsed by former president donald trump the surprise move left the house republican caucus in chaos with no clear end in sight scolese said he would step aside in hopes that someone else could unite the fractious party

today's episode was produced by lindsey garrison ricky nevetsky and diana win with help from summer

to mod it was edited by mj davis lin with help from page kowat and michael benoit contains original music by dan powell maryan lazano and alicia bit youtube and was engineered by alissa moxley our theme music is by jim brunberg and ben landsfolk of wonderly special thanks to alan de la carriere

that's it for the daily i'm sabrina tavernisi see you on monday