

Voices of Israel – 12<sup>th</sup> of October - Elinor Bariakh, Survivor from Kfar Azza

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Hello and Thank you for attending this meeting. It means a lot to me that you are all here to listen.

On Friday evening, we were in Tel Aviv for Simhat Torah and came back home late at night.

It all started at 06:30 on Saturday morning. We woke up to the sounds of the sirens, in Kfar Azza, we have only 15 seconds to reach the shelter. There were so many missiles.. It was awful. My husband Sharon went outside for a minute and told me there is something weird going on. He heard "Allah Akbar" and we understood later that it is exactly the time when they landed in our kibbutz and the first families that lived next to that field were killed. There was a short lull between missiles and we ran to the toilets. We don't have a gun, so my husband collected some knives from the kitchen. We closed all the doors of the house, took in a bottle of water and we returned to the shelter, the five of us: our 19 years old daughter and our 14- and 17-years old sons, and our dog.

We have many WhatsApp groups in the Kibbutz (women, mothers to young children) but very fast all of us were in the "second hand sales" group and people started to write horrible things about terrorists in their home and then they stopped writing. And then there was this 9 years-old boy that wrote to his aunt that his parents were killed in the shelter and he is hiding in the closet with his 6 years-old sister. He also wrote that his younger 4 years old sister was taken outside and later, we were told that she was hanged and burned with other very young children. **For nine hours, that boy kept his sister busy and silent in the closet.**

Also, not all the groups of terrorists behaved on the same way. There is a single mother of two that talked to the terrorist that entered her house. He decided to leave the house. He did not kill her.

The terrorists were advancing from one neighborhood to the other. We knew where they were progressing according to the messages on the WhatsApp group. We were lucky because our house is located at the opposite side of where the terrorists entered the kibbutz.

On the WhatsApp group we received some advice about how to lock the shelter from the inside; someone said we need to break the door handle. My husband had the strength to do it but many women did not succeed and the result was death.

But then, there were strange messages on the WhatsApp group. We later understood they were using the phones of persons they had killed to urge others to open to them.

After three or four hours, we heard some shouting nearby. I never felt so totally helpless in my whole life. I started to write messages of farewell. I wrote to my sister not to tell my mother yet. My mother was a hidden child in a monastery during World War Two. And my girlfriends were asking me to send emojis. And I did, and they sent back other emojis.

Suddenly we heard their voices in our yard, and saw their shadows through a thin slot of light coming into the shelter metallic window. We heard a terrible noise while they were trying to open the house door. My husband that was a combat soldier, was standing next to the shelter door with a big kitchen knife. My sons were also holding the knives. I thought I cannot stand to see my young one, 14 years old holding a knife. It didn't make sense. Nothing made sense..

Then there was silence and we thought they were inside the house. But we also hoped they had left. I told my husband, maybe we got "lazy" terrorists... He smiled. We did not know for sure so we decided to wait inside the shelter. We waited some more eight hours. There were more messages of people trying to hold on the shelter handle to prevent the terrorists to get in. I could not read anymore in the WhatsApp group about our fellow kibbutz members being killed and burned alive.

At 10 pm the soldiers arrived to our door. We heard them but we did not believe they were IDF soldiers. I shouted through the shelter door, what is your name? He said Alon Suissa. Where are you from, I asked? Tel Aviv, he answered. I still was not sure. So I asked him to which scouts group he belonged. I grew up in Tel Aviv and I knew everybody goes to the Scouts youth movement. He shouted back the name of his branch. I told my husband, it was OK.

You know what is strange? Our dog was with us in the shelter for more than 15 hours and she did not bark. No food, no water. She just lied there, understanding with her instinct that it was the only thing she could do.

The soldiers told us we have ten minutes to organize a bag. First thing I put our passports in the bag. But then the sirens started again and the soldiers asked us to go back into the shelter. We were so tired. Only at 2:30 am, did they tell us to start walking on the kibbutz circular trail. After so many hours alone, we met some other Kibbutz

members. We hugged each other and started to cry because we realized people were missing.

It was dark. The soldiers said we should not look around. I was curious of course but I asked my children not to look and I did not look either. There was an old lady that could not walk and I grabbed a wheel chair from when my daughter broke her leg. That march was awful. We were exhausted and suddenly that trail we all knew so well looked completely different. It felt like the death marches in Auschwitz. We finally arrived to the entrance of the Kibbutz next to the gas station. I saw two buses, someone shouted my name. I had only two minutes to say goodbye to my two best girlfriends that were taken to Eilat.

There were no buses so they took us to Netivot with trucks. You can imagine old people trying to climb on those trucks? But we soon had to stop since there were combats on the road. We waited for more than two hours there and reached Netivot only at 6 am. Three hours to complete those 11 kms. At this moment, entering Netivot was our moment of redemption. Good people were waiting for us. They had prepared food and drinks for us. I went out and started to walk my dog back and forth. It was odd, I could not stop walking. And then some dogs started to fight. At 7:00 am the buses of Shaar Hanegev Council arrived. The driver was the regular driver that is taking my children to school every day. It was great meeting him there. Something from our previous life. They took us to Kibbutz Shefaym. We could finally sleep.

The last thing I want to share is that our next door neighbor, that woke up early that day felt something and decided to take his family away at 6:30 am. I met him here and he was devastated. "Why didn't I tell you to leave also? He felt so guilty." But I asked him to let go. He had to save his family. I have nothing in my heart against him.

It is good for us to stay here together to share with each other what we experienced. It is helping us. Every day, we hear of people who were killed or are missing, or badly injured. No-one can come inside here. We are here together.