



EPISODE 3.4

## TRUST BUT VERIFY

**OREN SEGAL:** Welcome to extremely, a podcast from the ADL Center on Extremism. I'm Oren Segal.

**JESSICA REAVES:** And I'm Jessica Reaves.

**OREN:** Today, we're going to talk about a range of issues, including the very timely demise of Omegle. We're going to talk about hate symbols and the importance of context and understanding those hate symbols in the real world and online.

**JESSICA:** And we are going to talk to one of our colleagues who is a disinformation analyst at the Center on Extremism. She will be discussing specifically generative AI in spaces where disinformation is spreading.

**OREN:** Finally, and critically, we'll be speaking with two people who are advocating for the release of their family members who were kidnapped by Hamas. Very important stories to hear from them and what they're trying to achieve.

**JESSICA:** Okay, so let's talk about Omegle. Oren, I don't know how much you know about Omegle. Well, actually, I do know how much you know about Omegle and it's too much. No one should know as much as you know about Omegle.

**OREN:** Well, just to be clear, though, it's not that I was spending time on Omegle. I was seeing what the team was seeing on Omegle because of all the hate and extremism. [So] I just want to clarify.

**JESSICA:** Okay, sorry. Yes, that's an important clarification. Oren, what do you know about Omegle?

**OREN:** It was a place where people would go onto this platform and get sort of randomly connected to other people. You don't know who you might meet, but it's an opportunity to meet people from around the world. There would be people who were preying upon this system in order to meet people and make them feel terrible and scare them or try to recruit them. It was just an opportunity for extremists to meet people and it was used by a lot of young folks.

Did I get that even close to right?

**JESSICA:** You did. That is absolutely right. And in fact, ADL issued...our Education colleagues in partnership with some of the COE researchers issued a statement to parents and educators back in 2021 warning people about the dangers of Omegle.

[They were] using it, I think, initially for homework help. So, it was like people would go on there and, you know, need help with their homework and they would get matched up with whoever. It was a very weird setup, but it was relatively successful for quite some time.

Earlier this month, the founder of the popular online chat site announced that he was shutting down the site after 14 years. And among the reasons he cited was psychological stress.

**OREN:** For him or his users?

**JESSICA:** Well, that's what I was going to say. It was sort of funny that something that has been abused so consistently by extremists actually caused the founder psychological stress. So yeah, he wrote, basically, I wish things were different, but the stress and the expense of this site combined with the expense of operating Omegle and fighting its misuse are simply too much.

He also said he didn't want to have a heart attack in his 30s. We were seeing LGBTQ+ teenagers and teenage girls being sexually harassed. It was really bad – there were white supremacists, there were people who were targeting kids who would show up with some identifiably religious symbol, you know, either wearing something that made them identifiably religious. It was a real disaster.

**OREN:** I know that one of the main ways that it was abused was a particular antisemitic and white supremacist group would basically do like programming around their exploitation of the platform, meeting people, yelling racial slurs at them, or trying to sort of lure them into this extremist world.

And they would show others how to do that.

**JESSICA:** Well, and, they would monetize that. As we've talked about before, several white supremacists, several virulent antisemites, they would record this harassment and then share it with their followers and monetize it and make it part of the show.

[So] this just kept happening over and over again. And it just became too much for the founder to try to push back against that constantly. I don't know what went on enforcement-wise, policy-wise at the site, but it sounds like it just got to be too much.

**OREN:** Right. So hopefully anyone who was listening to this, who was not aware of this before, realizes that we're talking about it because it's kind of a good thing when extremists have one less avenue to exploit for their hatred, even though we know they'll find other places. I mean, it was a pretty major place for some extremists that we monitored closely, who also ended up doing terrible things in the real world. And there were consequences for it. So...

**JESSICA:** Notable departure from the extremist landscape, definitely. But as you pointed out, it's this sort of continuing whack-a-mole scenario we find ourselves in all the time. One goes away, another one pops up. But in any event, we will celebrate this small victory.

**OREN:** So, Jessica, I was thinking about hate symbols and hate phrases and just memes and...

**JESSICA:** As one does.

**OREN:** Well, I mean, I was less thinking about the actual symbols and more about the importance of context. You know, a lot of times we say the context is key to understanding whether something is right or wrong. Whether something is intended to be hateful or intimidating or whether it's not. I think hate symbols in particular or chants, etc., are very key part of that.

An example, I think famously, a lot of people think of the OK symbol and how it's been co-opted by *some* extremists over the past couple of years. And a lot of the work that we've done at ADL is actually tell people that sometimes OK is just OK. Don't assume that anybody who's doing the OK symbol is an extremist or somebody who really loves Pepe the Frog doesn't mean that *they* are extremists.

There are people who like the pre-coopted version of that cartoon or what have you. Which I know has been particularly difficult for the creator of that cartoon, by the way, that how it was co-opted. But with so much imagery being part of people's regular diet of information, I just hear from people both professionally and personally really concerned about stuff that they're seeing and needing to have an explanation of what that is.

I wanted to just sort of throw this out there and get a sense from you about that approach of the importance of context and understanding the world around us.

**JESSICA:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think context is key. We know that. And our hate symbols database is one of our most important, most visited tools. Something I keep coming up against is that we can go into spaces and say, "actually, this hate symbol means X, Y, and Z." And there will always be people who will say, "oh, no, that's not true. This is the real meaning of the hate symbol." And then you end up in this sort of circle.

It's the sort of post-truth era that we find ourselves in where we have to struggle a little bit harder to make people understand what we are saying and understand the context and understand kind of the history and the expertise that goes into building something like the hate symbol database.

This is years of research. It's, you know, all of these examples turned into a neat entry. But you will always have people who say, "I don't trust this. I don't believe it."

**OREN:** It's not the 'always and every case, no matter what' hate symbols database. It's the 'this has been used for hate symbols' database. I mean, frankly, even the swastika, right? We know that in many of the cases that we're seeing or people that are concerned, it's clearly the context around that is hateful. But as something that has been used as a symbol in Buddhism, as an example, that's an important context to know before somebody either jumps to a conclusion or even helps them sort of maybe not be intimidated, if again, that context is not there.

It's really hard, though, right? I mean, I think people are going to default to what they hear and see. So, this is why I just think, A) our database is super important. But B) it's just always a good reminder that especially in this day and age where we're being hit over the head with images and being told what to believe, we take very seriously the context around issues before we make those decisions.

**JESSICA:** I'm sure it's not particularly satisfying for journalists who come to us for what they hope might be a really sort of money quote on these things. But we're often the ones who are saying, you know, "let's take a step back and see what this really means. And we don't know what their intention was." Certainly, with the OK symbol, we were frequently the voice of reason in an increasingly unreasonable space.

**OREN:** It's as important to be able to provide perspective on when something is not clearly being used for hate as it is to speak out against that when it is. We highly recommend visiting the Hate Symbols Database. We're going to put a link to that database in the show notes, and we hope it helps people understand the hateful and non-hateful world around.

**JESSICA:** So a piece published by the COE's disinformation analyst, Sara Aniano, laid out some of the disturbing trends that we're seeing around generative AI or GAI, as Sara refers to it, because she knows what she's talking about.

In short, and this is a very, very brief summary, and Sara will get into the specifics, but we're seeing promoters of conspiracy theories and hate using generative AI to create misleading content or awful content or both.

And, you know, we've seen this really amplify polarization and the disagreements and the fighting online. And Sara is going to talk to us today a little bit about her research on that front.

And, Sara, welcome to extremely.

**SARA ANIANO:** Thank you so much for having me. It's been a long time coming. I'm happy to be here.

**JESSICA:** We are very happy to have you. So, talk to me a little bit about the basics of GAI and what people need to know in order to understand this conversation.

**SARA:** Let's clarify that traditional AI is not necessarily the same as GAI. So traditional AI, that's more about problem solving and efficiency. So, think like search algorithms or voice assistance, like Alexa or Siri or other strategies involving things like automation.

Now GAI, on the other hand, creates content. So, it's not just about understanding a human-led prompter query, which a lot of AI models do. It's actually taking those prompts and queries and expanding them to create something new as text. That includes audio, video, images. And we've seen these getting increasingly popular. It includes things like deepfakes, which is also something that we've been seeing get increasingly popular. So again, the generative part is kind of the operative word when it comes to how we think about AI in this context.

So, for example, if we take something called synthetic speech, that is a key component in what we see when people make deepfakes, that uses AI to mimic real voices whose audio has been cloned from authentic speech. So, you can say, "read this book" but as this celebrity or this politician. The sky's the limit really, and I don't think that we've seen that limit just yet.

**OREN:** So can I just kind of ask in caveman terms...So, if AI is me asking Alexa to like "play my favorite song" or "give me a recipe for something I want to make." Would generative AI be Alexa lecturing me about my decisions?

**SARA:** Maybe. I mean, if we think of something like chat GPT, for example, that is kind of creating more knowledge than what you have given it, I guess you could say. So, you can ask Alexa to pull up for you a great recipe for pumpkin pie.

**OREN:** Or key lime pie.

**SARA:** Sorry, I should really stay on the Oren brand here and say key lime pie, but it is Thanksgiving. So cut me some slack here.

You can ask it for a recipe for key lime pie, but you can use generative AI to create a picture of key lime pie on a mountain, or you can ask chat GPT to make a fantasy novel about key lime pie. So, it's not about pulling data.

**OREN:** So generative AI is a good thing.

**SARA:** Well, if we think of it in the non-extremist, non-hate way, then, yes, in that context, it's a good thing.

**OREN:** So, let's move from maybe the nice to the not so nice, Jessica.

**SARA:** Yeah, away from the key lime pie.

**JESSICA:** For God's sakes. Do you have tips for people to help them figure out, okay, is what I'm looking at real? Is what I'm hearing real? Do you have tips for people on that and do you have tips for people on how not to spread this stuff?

**SARA:** Yeah, and I would say that's one of the most common questions I get when I talk to classes or when I do webinars about this topic is we feel powerless to help. What can we do? And I would say it's not necessarily about what action you can take, but about what preventative measures you can take for yourself.

So it's not about action, but maybe inaction. And one example of that is this fantasy that you have to be unbiased. There is no such thing as an unbiased person – that doesn't exist. But if you look at content and you're not sure if it's true or real, you have to acknowledge, okay, this is what my bias wants me to believe. And maybe I'm right, but what if I'm not?

And if you follow through from there and accept that maybe your bias is going to be challenged, I think that really prevents a lot of this reactionary reposting and reactionary sharing and fear mongering that happens often unintentionally in the mis- or disinformation landscape.

**JESSICA:** I love that suggestion so much. If it happened, I feel like we could dig ourselves out of a hole really quickly. We are an era where everybody wants to be first. Everybody wants to share the information faster. In that context, what do you tell people who are chomping at the bit to get to the next thing?

**SARA:** What's making it hard and what's made it hard for a long time now? Social media. And I can speak from experience, you know, being on Twitter a lot in the past. The more salacious and reactive a claim, the more engagement you get. If I wanted to work the machine, I could totally do that. Anybody could post a bunch of false information. It'll go viral. Maybe it'll get deleted later. But it'll go viral.

I would hope that people understand that there is a price to that clout and that is your credibility. And so, if you want to be treated as a serious person, you have to vet any and all information as best you can. Go to journalists, go to experts. Those are people who have systems of checks and balances in place that prevent them from being reactionary.

**OREN:** My concern is not the people who actually want to, like, inherently do well, be reasonable or people, right? I mean, what we're dealing with is people who want to game the system. And so, the fact that everybody has access to these tools means that people without nefarious purposes or ambitions have access, and then people with really nefarious purposes who want to create whole new genres of hate and ways to communicate that have access to those tools too. How are you seeing extremists start to explicitly engaging in these tools to create this content?

**SARA:** What GAI has done is it's made it way easier to create more classic propaganda. And a lot of that is imagery. So, for example, extremists have used GAI to show Jews blowing up the World Trade Center. So, they're promoting and pushing this classic antisemitic and anti-Israel conspiracy theory about 9-11, but they're doing it through imagery, which is really easy and quick to communicate.

What is unique, I think, about how extremists are using it now, and we have also written about this recently, is that there are tools that allow you to put a hidden image in an AI-generated 'whatever'.

So, for example, there's one of what appears to be a beautiful mountain-side scene. Right? It doesn't really look like anything up close, but if you shrink that image down or you move it far away from you, it's Hitler.

**OREN:** So it's like subliminal Hitlers are being inserted into imagery, which, I mean, eventually may have an impact on what someone's feeling, at least.

**SARA:** Yeah, and that could move offline. You could easily trick somebody into printing your secret Hitler image or your secret Swastika image.

**JESSICA:** Also, subliminal Hitler is a great / terrible band name.

**OREN:** No, but I mean, for all those people that think they see Hitler everywhere, now they may be.

**SARA:** Maybe you do.

**OREN:** Well, we really appreciate you joining us, Sara. We started talking about Omegle, which was the demise of a certain tool.

**SARA:** RIP.

**OREN:** Yeah, we have a feeling that much of what you're talking about is something that is obviously going to be animating the extremist landscape [and] is going to be part of our work. And it's just so critical to have people are thinking through not only sort of the policy elements, but how we make sure we're addressing this at the same time that we're addressing hate and extremism.

**JESSICA:** And now that you've laid the groundwork, Sara, we're going to have you back again to discuss specifics and talk a little bit more about sort of the public response and what people can do.

**SARA:** Thank you. I unfortunately look forward to it. We have our work cut out for us. Thank you so much.

**JESSICA:** We do. Thank you, Sara.

**OREN:** We think it's important for people to hear from Abbey Onn and Alana Zeitchik, both of whom have families that have been murdered and kidnapped by Hamas terrorists.

**JESSICA:** An important update. In the two weeks since we recorded our initial interview with Abbey Onn and Alana Zeitchik, several members of their families have been released to Israel.

**OREN:** In Abbey's case, Sahar and Erez have been freed, and in Alana's case, Danielle, Amelia, Sharon, Emma, and Julie are home. Both families continue to advocate for the release of others who are still captive.

**JESSICA:** So, Alana. Welcome to extremely and thank you so much for being here. Before we get started, I want to share a little bit of background. On October 7th, six members of your family were kidnapped from their homes in Israel by Hamas terrorists. Your cousin Sharon, her husband David, their three-year-old twins, your cousin Danielle, and her five-year-old daughter.

And, like so many others, we read your incredibly powerful November 5th [2023] op-Ed in the *New York Times*. And you really describe viscerally the horror of not knowing the fate of your family. And you also touch on something that's so important, which is this incredible emotional pain that you've experienced since October 7<sup>th</sup>, kind of at the hands and words of fellow Americans who don't seem to be capable of or willing to grasp the enormity and the brutality of Hamas's attacks.

So, I encourage everyone to please read the op-Ed. But first I just want to ask, I mean, how are you doing in the midst of all of this? How are you coping? Are you coping?

**ALANA ZEITCHIK:** Hmm. It's not always an easy question to answer, I say. Like, it can depend on the minute of the day that you ask me. I'm surviving. You know, I move through the day with what I call this sort of like overcast of like an emptiness that is ever present. You know, like those cartoons of like the person walking through the street with like the cloud above their head.

**JESSICA:** A little storm cloud, yeah.



**ALANA:** That's kind of what it feels like a lot of the time. In a way, because it's just always with you, you know, the uncertainty and the need to know what is going on with them, when will they return, will they return.

And in terms of coping, the way I've been coping is by putting myself into action. By being vocal. By leading this for my family here in the West. And I feel it's a responsibility, a duty, but also in the strangest of ways, a bit of a destiny that I was meant to be a voice for them here.

I have a very big family in Israel, and I don't have family in America besides my immediate family and my aunt and uncle that live here. I don't have cousins in the U.S. So, I've always played this strange role of both American and Israeli and had to make sense of my own identity of being that.

And now more than ever, I realize that I'm able to use the American-side of myself powerfully in this moment. And that...so that's what I'm doing. I'm focusing on that. Really, it's a full-time job now. Until they're back.

**JESSICA:** On that note, can you tell us a bit about the Bring Our Family Home campaign that you just mentioned? And, also, what would you want people to understand and to really hear about the hostage crisis, about what you all are going through?

**ALANA:** Right. So, the Bring Our Family Home campaign is a campaign that we created specifically for my family. We're of course in contact and work with the Hostage Family Forum in Israel – my family is involved in that forum. Obviously, our family is included in all of the media that comes out of social media and things like that. But this was something we created very quickly to focus on my family. We have six, like you said, six family members missing – or hostage, not missing.

And I just wanted to humanize them more. Humanize them, like allow us to have a platform to share about them, to let people know more about them, really to also feature a lot of the media that I've been doing, my UN speech, the speech I gave at the rally on Tuesday. So, it's a place to rally around my family specifically.

My hope is especially that people in the West can just connect with us and perhaps it will resonate. And I've said from the beginning, I want people to love my family the way I love my family.

And so that's why we created it. And that's meant to also be a representation of all of the hostages. And, what I would say, in terms of the hostage crisis, we have 240 hostages from 30, I believe, countries. And it's becoming a number, not names and faces. And people in the West, in particular, seem to be ignoring that and focusing a lot on numbers. So, they're focusing on the numbers that are coming out of the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry.

And focusing on the number of hostages but not the people. Especially when it comes to the Israeli people. And I want people just to start to open up their minds and their hearts a little bit more to start to get to know the people that have been taken hostage, the babies, the children that are being held hostage, which is a crisis against humanity.

And to perhaps empathize with them a little bit more *and* to have a bit more urgency around the cause. Because it seems like, and I said this in my speech on Tuesday, it's become a footnote in the way people in the West are talking about this, right?

I will never try and diminish the suffering of Palestinian civilians, of women and children in Gaza. And the crisis there is unimaginable. However, the hostages are not a footnote. They are actually the center of this.

**JESSICA:** Right.

**ALANA:** The country is reeling from the massacre and still recovering from all of the death and destruction and horrific, horrific acts of terrorism. But the hostages are actually at the center of all of this.

And I can't say what will happen once we get the hostages back. How do I know what will happen thereafter? But I do know that this is not going to de-escalate until we have them home.

**JESSICA:** Yeah.

**OREN:** So, it has been over 40 days. And I know you are speaking out, meeting with authorities, elected officials, and so many others. Do you feel like you are getting people to do enough to get your family home?

**ALANA:** Well, in Israel, I think there's a little bit more communication because there's more of an organized forum. But my family members are not Americans. So, my struggle as an American...and I'm not personally a dual citizen because my mom didn't want to deal with the bureaucracy of that when I was little. But my brother Liam is a dual citizen. My mom is a dual citizen. And so, in our family here, we have dual American and Israeli citizens.

And, I also don't think it should matter, to be honest. I'm American. My family is...we are...American here. We want the government here in America to start speaking to us a bit more and start prioritizing our family a bit more. We did, like, Kristen Gillibrand spoke about our family on the Senate floor. But the offices we've spoke to here in the U.S. have...kind of...we hit a ceiling since my family that is taken is not American citizens.

So. I'm finding that to be incredibly frustrating. You know, I know there was the other group that was with me on Tuesday, right, they went to the White House, my family

wasn't invited to that. And I'm very frustrated with that distinction that's being made here in the U.S.

And at the same time, I don't have any...it's hard to have opinions when you have so little information about what they're actually doing to negotiate these hostage deals. I hear in the news the same things that you do. What I know about these potential hostage negotiations is gonna be the same that you know. And while I can recognize that sharing that information would probably be problematic in case it leaked out – I can understand that.

I do think it would be great if the State Department was in contact with my family here and giving us updates even if there are no updates. I wanna know that something is happening currently. That there are negotiations being had or discussions being had and who they're being had with. That would be helpful.

But I do feel confident that the hostages remain a priority for our American government, for sure. So, I do feel confident in that at the very least. But it doesn't really alleviate the suffering that we experience from not knowing.

**JESSICA:** Yeah, of course.

**OREN:** You're in a position that people just frankly can't imagine themselves in. And in fact, you're helping people understand and imagine what it is like by speaking out the way that you are. Is there anything that you've learned about yourself throughout this that stands out something that you didn't know about yourself because you obviously haven't had to be in this position before?

**ALANA:** Yeah, I would say something I've learned is that I'm a very emotional person in general. And in my life, I certainly have, and I've done a lot of therapy around this, but, especially around Israel in the past, I have reacted very emotionally to the hatefulness, the ignorance and I've taken things very personally in that way.

But I've found that this this changed for me. I felt that I could no longer be that way. I no longer have the strength to fight back and react emotionally. And I felt...something I learned about myself is I actually can be a person who just speaks my truth, speaks with great compassion and empathy that I know that I have, and that it may be slower, but that people are finding me that way.

People are starting to listen to me that way because I'm *not* trying to be inflammatory. I'm trying to be a voice of reason and show people that even in all of my pain and suffering, I'm not focusing on hate. I'm focusing on love and I'm focusing on empathy and compassion and trying to show people what it's like to be us. But I never knew that I would react in that way.

And I think this is an unimaginable circumstance.

So, I would say on that end, I've seen a lot of growth in that sense that I never would have expected in this type of trauma.

**JESSICA:** I think all of that came through so beautifully in The [New York] Times op-Ed. That is what stuck with me sort of the most was how compelling, you know, your writing was, but also the nuance with which you delivered the message.

So, you know, it's interesting to hear that that is not necessarily...sort of that. That that's not necessarily what comes naturally to you in terms of like such a perfect balance.

**ALANA:** Yeah, I would say it didn't before this moment. Right. I would say that I've always understood...perhaps...the suffering that exists across both Palestinian and Israeli people. But, you know, I grew up in a world, too, where, you know, my family has always been under attack in some way my whole life. So I've always been thinking about their security and whatnot. But I think this is just a breaking point. That I really had to step back and think, we cannot do this any longer. We cannot go on in this 'status quo' any longer.

And it just became so clear to me right away. And I just felt like the op-Ed especially, it was important for me to express that understanding that I had and express it in a way that was still very much supportive and in support of my family and in support of the Israeli people.

And that was personal, right? Like a lot of what I spoke about in there was, like I said, I'm not taking things personally, however, it is personally painful to see people I know disregard my suffering more so than it is to see people I don't know ripping down posters. That I think is awful and hateful and whatnot. But it's really those, what I thought were sensible people, that have turned their backs on me or just, not necessarily all turned their backs, but just chosen a different path or a different way because... whatever reason I really don't know. It's just disheartening and eye-opening in many ways.

But I think the divide – it doesn't serve anyone. It doesn't serve the Israelis and it doesn't serve the Palestinians and it's also a problem we have in our American politics. Like obviously it has not served us for the last, however many years since 2016. I think we all woke up then to that and it's only gotten worse. And I feel like this is perhaps, I don't know, a chasm that is opened for us to try a new approach.

**JESSICA:** Yeah, that's...I think that's the very best that we can hope for. Maybe this will shock people out of their complacency. I don't know. Or not complacency but there's the sort of, as you said, the status quo.

So, if you could speak, and you are speaking directly to our listeners, but also to the people who read your read and really responded to your op-Ed, what would you...what do you need right now? What can we all do to help?

**ALANA:** Well, first, I do want to say that I did receive quite an outpouring of support on the op-ed directly to me personally. A lot of people messaging me on all different platforms, telling me that my words made them feel less alone. And I'm so grateful for that. And I appreciate it ... and words of encouragement are incredibly helpful. So, I'm open to it. And that makes me really happy that I was able to connect with people in that way.

I think continuing to raise awareness about the hostages, continuing to create sense of urgency around the hostages. Without being inflammatory. With compassion and love and just trying to ask people to understand that these are human beings who are being held by terrorists.

And to focus on what matters *more* than focusing on the suffering wars or the battles in the comments on social media. I don't think that those are effective. I don't think it's an effective use of anyone's time.

So, I think focusing on what matters would help us. Help me and not just my family focus, you know, share from Hersh's page. And share individual stories you find about the human beings who are being held hostage. And let's put humans and humanity at the forefront of this discourse as much as we can. I would say that would be great.

And then there's also I think there's a website called One Second A Day, which helps you, they say, if you have just one second a day to call your Congress people. It's really simple. They give you a script. I think that's another really actionable way people can continue to make this a top priority amongst our government is to, you know, take a few seconds a day to call their Congress people, to write an email requesting, or demanding the release of the hostages.

**OREN:** I have to say, I just continue to be struck, right....I know that you've now been speaking to a lot of folks, publicly, very public stages, writing op-Eds, doing so much...that you didn't ask to be in this position.

And yet, of course not. And yet there's a clarity that I think that you are expressing, but I think a lot of people would be shocked to hear. I mean, the idea of going through this and not being hateful it seems difficult for a lot of folks. The way that I see people ripping down posters and denying Jewish suffering...

You know, Jessica and I spend a lot of time in dark spaces in the Center on Extremism. And I tell you, I can understand some of the terrible things that we see more than I can understand why somebody would rip down a poster.

**ALANA:** Right.

**OREN:** And yet you've been thrust in this position to explain this to the world. And again, I just sort of want to ask again, you know, how do you, outside of the hostages coming

home, what happens to you after? Like, I mean, you can never kind of go back to the way it was.

**ALANA:** I can't personally. So, a little background on me is I worked in media for 15 years, like in advertising. And I was actually quite unfulfilled in my career. I left my job three days before October 7th because I wanted to find a greater purpose. And I said that vocally to my family and friends. I was like, I think I should be a life coach. Like I just need to like be more in service of others.

And my connection to, kind of in parallel, my connection to Israel, my family in Israel has been a creative project I've done for a long time. I went to be with my *safta* in 2016 to film her making her Yemenite food and she passed away like a year after I did that. And I started a food pop-up and I was constantly trying to figure out.

I knew that my purpose and my life's path had an alignment with me being an American and Israeli and the connection to my family specifically in Israel and those roots. So, when this happened, it was so natural to me to just immediately step up and speak on behalf of my family because I've already been doing that.

And also, I'm 38 now. The last few years, I would say my connection to my Jewishness has evolved, has deepened in a way that is not religious by any means, but culturally. And the way I identify its importance in my life has deepened. And it just felt like all of these things converged in the moment of this tragedy. And it was just so clear that this is what I had to do.

So, well, my focus now is absolutely on my family. I do see that this will continue to be my future. I don't know how. So, if anyone has any ideas, I'm open to them, but I'm starting to think about what does an advocacy group look like for me, where I am at the helm of that? What could that look like? Are there groups I can work with? How can I continue using my voice to get my family home? But further to humanize the Israeli people and to also bridge the space in between the suffering of both people and move us closer to peace. Because I would say anything I am pro-peace, more than anything.

**JESSICA:** I think that's a good note for us to end on. Alana, thank you so much for joining us. It's been a real pleasure to hear from you. And again, thank you for everything that you're doing to shed light on the hostages on the families, on your speaking, the unspeakable. And we're very grateful. So thank you very much.

**ALANA:** Well, thank you so much for having me.

**JESSICA:** Thank you so much for listening and following and liking and doing all the things that one does *podcast* to show appreciation.

But if you really want to show us that you're enjoying the content, or not enjoying, either way, if you're listening, please do send us emails. We enjoy hearing from you. And

that email address is **extremely@ADL.org**. We are checking that inbox, anxiously awaiting your communications. So, please do reach out

And, let's go to our life raft for the week. Oren, what is keeping you going these days?

**OREN:** OK, I get to go first this time.

You know, Sara earlier in the podcast mentioned something about key lime pie on a mountain.

**JESSICA:** Yes.

**OREN:** And I have to tell you, I have this like generative AI image of just this beautiful day on top of a mountain, me alone, eating a key lime pie, not sharing. And I think I'm going to take that with me into the weekend and see how that is.

**JESSICA:** That's great. Love it. I really am enjoying the creative ways in which you are manifesting the key lime pie every week. It's just a slightly different version. And, you know, I think it's important to reinforce your love for the key lime pie.

**OREN:** What's yours this week?

**JESSICA:** I have a pretty profound sweet tooth. And so, I really like sour gummy candies. Unfortunately, a lot of sour gummy candies in the U.S. are made with gelatin, which I don't eat. And so, I have to go to the foreign branches of the sour gummy candies. The people who are the best at this are the Swedes.

So if you remember a few years ago, I went to a conference in Sweden.

**OREN:** I do.

**JESSICA:** They would have these amazing like....at every like bodega, the Swedish bodegas, which, of course, had like the best chocolate you've ever had in your life, they would just have these bins filled with these sour candies.

I think they were slightly alarmed by the volume of candy that I acquired. But there's this thing in Sweden, I believe, and Swedish listeners please correct me if I'm wrong, but my understanding is that every Saturday, and this may be throughout Scandinavia, on Saturdays, kids are basically given like you can eat as much sour candy as you want.

So there's a Swedish candy company called Saturday Sweets, and I have recently discovered that they will ship. So yeah.

**OREN:** I'm so happy for you that you found a way to get that joy.

**JESSICA:** I know! So, I'm now up to my eyeballs in gelatin-free Swedish candy. Also, IKEAs frequently have the gelatin-free Swedish candy. In the checkout area, you know, you're so exhausted and you just want lie down on the floor and rest...you can get some sugar, some gelatin-free sugar. Highly recommend.

**OREN:** Yeah. Some people may be thinking with just the heaviness of a lot of this podcast that gelatin-free candy, in retrospect, sounds like nothing, but it really can be everything.