**Title:** Telling Nonie

**Genre:** Documetary

**Release date:** 2024-04-06

**Completion date:** 2023-08-01

**Production country:** Israel

**Hebrew title (in Hebrew and in English letters):** נוני עיוני Nonie Ayuni

**First screening date:** 2023-10-02

**First screening place (where has the film premiered?):** Haifa IFF 2023

**Shooting format:** 4K

**Spoken languages:** English, Hebrew

**Subtitles available:** English, Hebrew

**Frame Aspect Ratio:** 1920\*1080

**Sound specs:** Stereo

**Logline (max 30 words):**   
A former Israeli secret service agent seeks redemption by meeting the peace-activist daughter of a man he helped assassinate in the 1950s.

**Short synopsis (max 50 words):**

At the age of 88, Mossad member Geizi Tzafrir can't forget an affair from his past, the first targeted assassination that Israel initiated in the 1950s. His unrelenting memories lead him to the daughter of the man he killed.

**Synopsis (max 100 words):**

Tormented by his role in a 1950s Gaza assassination, Geizi Tsafrir, an elderly Israeli agent, seeks redemption. Reflecting on his time with Shin Bet (The Israeli Security Services) and the killing of an Egyptian lieutenant colonel, he decides to confront his past. He contacts the colonel's daughter, Nonie Darwish, once intent on avenging her father's death but now a prominent voice against radical Islam and a supporter of Israel. The mysterious email from Tsafrir sets Darwish on an emotional journey into her past, culminating in a meeting with him in Los Angeles. This winner of the Haifa International Film Festival’s Best Israeli Documentary explores intricate emotions, history’s complexities, and the bumpy path toward mutual understanding and forgiveness.

**Full synopsis:** “Always forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much.”  
- Oscar Wilde   
  
The movie follows NONIE DARWISH, 71, a kindly grandmother who lives in a sleepy suburb outside Los Angeles. Nothing about her hints at her past as the daughter of a murderous terrorist who reshaped the Middle East. Her father, general Mustafa Hafez, was a powerful figure in the Gaza Strip in the 1950s, responsible for the killing of more than 1000 Israelis, until the Israeli SHABAK (Internal Security Service) marked him as a target and assassinated him in a sophisticated sting operation.   
His daughter Nonie, who grew up in the Gaza Strip, was raised on her father’s heritage and dreamed of the day when she could avenge his death. She never imagined how far from that place her life’s path would take her.   
63 years after her father was killed by the Israeli SHABAK, Nonie Darwish is now a Christian woman and one of the most prominent voices speaking out against radical Islam. She is embraced by rightwing organizations and has become an enthusiastic supporter of the State of Israel.   
A mysterious email that appears in her inbox one night sends her off on an emotional family journey into her past and the trauma that marked her exceptional path.   
This email leads to a friendship with a man named Eliezer “Geizi” Tsafrir, a former high-ranking agent in the Israeli Mossad and SHABAK, an elderly Israeli man of Libyan descent who speaks fluent Arabic and has a lively sense of humor. What Nonie doesn’t know is that Tsafrir is hiding a big secret, which he plans on telling her when they meet face to face.   
Darwish’s life story, and her encounter with Geizi, are symbolic of a broader, painful story. In a world of dichotomies, of war or peace, friend or enemy, Judaism or Islam, Nonie Darwish manages to be many things at once. In a sense, she contains within her all the gaping wounds of the entire Middle East.   
Gaza, Los Angeles, Cairo and Tel Aviv. Four cities, and one woman. A documentary journey rich with secrets and passions, centered around a renouncement—of terrorism, of violence. And the encounter between two strangers that leads to an unexpected friendship.   
  
EXPANDED SYNOPSIS  
At one AM, Nonie Darwish receives an email. Perhaps it’s a sign of her age, or the constant fear that someone out there is lying in ambush waiting for her, that keeps her up at this hour. With a cup of tea in her hand, she sits down at her computer to read it.   
“Nonie, my dear,” the email says, in Arabic. “We have never met, but I have known you well, ever since you were a little girl. I would like meet you, to tell you the story face to face. I invite you to be my guest in Israel. If you are interested, I’d love to talk.   
Signed,  
Geizi Tsafrir  
Israel”  
  
San Fernando, Los Angeles, 2021  
Nothing about Nonie Darwish gives away her exceptional life journey. At first glance, she appears to be a kindly grandmother who lives in a wealthy American suburb and divides her time between baking cookies and babysitting the grandchildren, surrounded by friends and embraced by the local Jewish community. Every aspect of her former identity has been completely erased.   
However, gradually, clues are revealed, exposing another layer of her life—she refuses to reveal her address , her home is equipped with CCTV security cameras, she sleeps with a gun under her pillow, and she shows us countless letters with death threats she has received over the years.   
Gradually, the curtain is drawn back to reveal the unique and intriguing story of Nonie Darwish. “It is obvious there are those who wish to kill me, but this story is much bigger than my own personal life.”   
Nonie spends her mornings babysitting her granddaughters, who live nearby. She watches them play in the back yard. Nothing about their childhood is reminiscent of her own. Hers is a childhood that seems taken from another world, far from the upper-middle-class Los Angeles suburb, deep in the bustling heart of the Gaza Strip in the 1950s.   
She grew up as the daughter of one of the most dangerous and brutal enemies of the State of Israel in its early years, an arch terrorist who reshaped the Middle East.   
Gaza, 1950-1956   
Mustafa Hafez, Nonie’s father, is the head of Egyptian intelligence in Gaza, and the man who founded the Fedayeen units, terrorists who infiltrated Israel from Gaza and killed 1000 Israeli civilians in numerous terrorist attacks between 1950 and 1956.   
The State of Israel considers Hafez the most dangerous man in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli Prime Minister at the time, David Ben Gurion, orders Israeli intelligence to come up with a plan to take him out. The Israeli SHABAK constructs a sting operation. They use an Arab agent within Gaza, a double agent who is close to Hafez. The plan is to give the double agent a booby-trapped package, hoping he will take it to Mustafa Hafez.   
On July 11, 1956, a package is delivered to the double agent at the Gaza border crossing, containing a booby-trapped book. The agent crosses the border and brings the package directly to Mustafa Hafez’s office in Gaza, just as the SHABAK anticipated. The package explodes, killing Mustafa Hafez.   
That day, Nonie Darwish is on her way with her mother to watch a movie in Gaza. They hear a fierce explosion and see a crowd running toward their house. Nonie is only 8 years old when she is orphaned, losing the father she admired. Her grief quickly changes into rage and a desire to get vengeance on the Jews who killed her father. At his grave, as a little girl, she swears she will avenge his death.   
No one could have known how far from that her life’s path would lead her.   
  
  
May, 2021—Gaza and Israel, at War  
More than 60 years have passed, and Gaza is once again bursting back into Nonie Darwish’s life. The city she grew up in, where she lost her father, is in the grips of another round of warfare, in the never-ending cycle of blood with Israel.   
Thousands of rockets are fired from Gaza onto Israeli towns and cities, with concentrated attacks on Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. In response, Israel launches a widescale attack on Gaza, code-named Operation Guardian of the Walls, resulting in hundreds of deaths and injuries on both sides.   
Los Angeles, May 2021  
The waves of war in the Middle East reach the streets of Los Angeles. In recent years, in light of the wars in Gaza, dozens of pro-Palestinian organizations have protested against Israel’s policy in Gaza. Each of these protests is met with a counterprotest by rightwing organizations, the Jewish community and pro-Israel activists.   
Nonie Darwish is recruited to this struggle. On the floor of her study at home are signs from protests she has taken part in, which read “ISRAEL WE STAND WITH YOU”.   
The study serves as her war room from which, she writes, tweets and gives interviews on the situation in the Middle East. For many years, she has been sought-after for interviews. Rightwing and anti-Islamist activists consider her a symbol of the “awakening,” someone who was there and chose to cross over. They embrace her and use her as a spokesperson.  
She goes on the air for an interview on the Al Arabiya channel.   
The interview starts with the most common question she gets: How did the daughter of the martyr Mustafa Hafez, killed by Israel in Gaza, become a supporter of Israel?   
Nonie has her regular answer to this question: “It was a long path, but by the end of it, I learned how to forgive.”  
The Road from Gaza to Los Angeles—Nonie’s Journey, 1956-2021  
After Nonie’s father is murdered, her mother leaves Gaza back to Egypt with Nonie and her four brothers.   
Though her father is considered a famous “shahid” (martyr), her mother suffers from low status due to being a single parent. She uses the stipend she receives to give her daughter the best education she can afford and sends Nonie to a Christian school. The spirit of hatred and incitement against the Zionist enemy is replaced by other values. Nonie goes on to study at the university in Cairo, where she falls in love with a Christian man. Since they are forbidden from marrying in Egypt, they decide to leave together for the United States. In the US, Nonie is exposed to the values of the West. She begins to write about women’s rights in Islam and becomes an activist for the cause.   
25 years after coming to the United States, she decides to go back to Egypt with her children for a visit. She is shocked to discover an Egypt that is more radicalized, more poverty-stricken, and more hateful toward Israel. When she returns to America, on September 10, 2001, she kisses the ground and feels like she has returned to sanity. The day after that, the whole world changes, with the attack on the World Trade Center.   
Nonie feels she must take action and decides to publish an essay in a local paper. Its headline is: “Why am I, a Former Muslim, now a Supporter of Israel?” She could not have imagined what would happen to her life from the moment the article is published.   
In the anti-Islamist atmosphere following the attack on the Twin Towers, her essay goes viral and is shared on hundreds of outlets worldwide. Overnight, she becomes a popular interview subject. Rightwing organizations looking to reinforce their anti-Islamist agenda make her a symbol of the struggle against radical Islam, a former Muslim who grew up in the shadow of terrorism and had an awakening.   
In 2004, Nonie publishes her first book: Now They Call Me Infidel: Why I Renounced Jihad for America, Israel, and the War on Terror. It becomes a best-seller. Her transformation is complete; she has become a pro-Israel activist and founds the “Arabs for Israel” organization. Even Benjamin Netanyahu, the former Prime Minister of Israel, mentions her on his Twitter account.   
Over these past few years, Nonie has become a lecturer on campuses around the United States, spreading her agenda against radical Islam. The more she is embraced by the conversative right, the more hawkish she becomes in her worldview. In recent years, she has often been accused of Islamophobia and fascism, and chased off several campuses in the United States.   
After wishing to escape the militant and incitement-ridden atmosphere of her childhood, she has become the spokeswoman for rightwing organizations and is considered by many to be an inciter in her own right. For this, she receives death threats and is forced to live under an alias, and a constant sense of dread.   
Los Angele - Tel Aviv 2019   
  
The person who sent Nonie the email at one AM is Geizi Tsafrir, an 84-year-old Jewish man of Libyan descent, with a sharp mind and a rich sense of humor. Tsafrir is considered one of the top operational agents in the history of the Israeli Mossad and SHABAK. Born in Tripoli, he speaks fluent Arabic, and he begins corresponding with Nonie in Arabic, under the subject line (in Arabic) “Nonie ayoni (my dear)”.  
   
They establish a virtual friendship. Geizi tells her about his life as an agent working under aliases in Arab countries, and the personal price he was forced to pay due to his career. Nonie tells him about the personal costs of her own life decisions; about missing her family, who stayed in Egypt and have renounced her.   
Geizi invites Nonie to Israel to speak to a group of his friends, who all served in Israel’s national security, and tell them her life story. He has still not told her the secret he is hiding from her.   
  
Israel, August 2021  
Over the past year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Nonie’s visit to Israel has been postponed repeatedly. Now, it is finally happening. Nonie Darwish will soon l land in Israel and meet Geizi Tsafrir face to face, for the first time.   
Only when she is right in front of him will Geizi muster up the courage to reveal the secret he has kept hidden up until now. For years, he has been following her from afar, but only now has he worked up the courage to speak to her.   
62 years ago, when Geizi was a young operative with the SHABAK, he was the one who sent in the double agent who killed Nonie’s father.   
Can Geizi bring himself to tell her the truth? And will this revelation provide Nonie some closure for herself?   
Visual Language  
Telling Nonie moves between the past and the present.   
The Present follows Nonie’s current life as an activist and popular lecturer in Jewish communities, who receives verbal attacks and death threats, and is accused of Islamophobia.   
In addition, we follow the surprising friendship formed between Nonie Darwish and the former Israeli Mossad agent Geizi Tsafrir. The film follows her journey as she visits him in Israel, and the moment when he reveals to her and the cameras, for the first time, that he is responsible for her father’s death.   
The Past explores the story of Nonie’s life, through her correspondence with Geizi Tsafrir. The encounter with the Israeli Mossad operative, who knows all about her childhood story, floods her with memories and a yearning for her family who cut her off.   
Her life story is translated into meticulous cinematic recreations, taking us on a journey to another place, another time, between Gaza, Los Angeles, Egypt and Israel.   
The cinematography is warm and intimate, with long shots of Darwish, the sweet grandmother, sitting in her study and diving into her past. Narrated by her own words, we go back to her childhood in the Gaza Strip, while her voice gives the sense of a personal diary. The use of reenactments and cinematic illustrations give the feeling of a dramatic feature.   
  
Authentic Archival and News Media Footage  
The past storyline makes use of archival footage, still photography and home videos, 8mm footage that gives the feeling of a nostalgic review through a soft, intimate prism. In places where the personal story is subsumed by the national conflict, archival and news media footage from Israel and Egypt will be interspersed. The visual packaging creates a distinction between the two sides of the conflict, and their analysis of the incidents and the figure of Mustafa Hafez—a war hero and admired martyr on the Egyptian side, a terrorist and mass murderer on the Israeli side. Between these two interpretations, there is an 8-year-old girl who lost her father.   
The interweaving of past and present comes together to tell one story, deep and complex, taking on questions of identity, and the attempt at reinventing oneself while erasing a previous identity.

**Director's Statement (Important!):**

I found Geizi Tsafrir through family research into a different topic:   
My grandmother passed away, and we found, in her home, love letters she got when she was in the Palmach (the underground Jewish army during the British Mandate for Palestine) from a man named Yehuda Cohen, who served in the Mossad. I was intrigued and eager to find Yehuda Cohen, but the only thing I knew about him was that he had been in the Mossad. In my research, I found an article that mentioned Cohen alongside a Mossad operative named Geizi Tsafrir, and this led me to Geizi, who exposed me to an entirely different story. Without a shred of cynicism, I felt through it all that I had been sent by my beloved grandmother on a journey among members of her generation, to learn another chapter in the country’s history.

I paid a visit to Geizi Tsafrir at his home and met a man with an impressive career who was lonely and isolated, in pain over current events in our country. I asked him if he missed his days with the Mossad and the SHABAK, and he responded that he refuses to live in the past, but there is one mission he took part in that came back to his life, and he cannot stop thinking about it. Tsafrir showed me an email correspondence under the heading “Nonie my Dear,” and told me about the connection he made with Nonie Darwish, and his dream of one day meeting her.

When I asked why he was doing all this, he responded that it was a reckoning of sorts. The ability to reexamine history at his age is very important to him, as is the unique opportunity to find emotional closure. He told me about himself and said, “To succeed in the world of Intelligence you need many skills, and I’m not sure I have them all, but I do have one, which is the desire and ability to bond with the enemy.” As the head of the Anti-Terrorism Unit, he was forced to pick candidates for assassination by the Mossad, and he never gave any thought to their families. Meeting Nonie would mean acknowledging the decisions he has made over the course of his life. He understands today that he has lingering questions on the human level, questions that may have been repressed for many years, but were always there.

The deeper I delved into the story and its various characters, the more I felt I had been given a rare opportunity as a filmmaker to learn a chapter in history I had been unfamiliar with, and to examine it from today’s perspective, to hear a complete story on both sides of the border. The characters in the film were combatants in the 1950s, years when moral and personal boundaries were crossed, and the dynamic that is in effect to this day was defined along the Gazan border (terrorist attack and retaliation), and the decision to use targeted assassinations was put into effect.

I hope that the viewer’s journey, much like mine, allows them to reexamine the narrative told to us, offering a different read on local history—more complex, less dichotomist. The realization that we can never know the full story, certainly not in real time, and perhaps never. For me, the film is about the possibility of getting closer to your enemy and understanding them. It features discourse on regret and forgiveness, the mistakes of an individual and the mistakes of a society as a whole.

**Director:** Paz Schwartz

**Producer:** Ananey Studios

**Produced with the help of:** Kadar Foundation, Makor Foundation

**Broadcaster:** Kan 11

**Script:** Paz Schwartz, Sagi Bornstein

**Cinematographer:** Uriel Sinai

**Editor:** Sagi Bornstein, Tamara Mamon

**Sound Designer:** Rotem Dror

**Key cast:**

**Additional credits:**

**Brief background and relevant education:**

Paz Schwartz  
A director, journalist, and media professional. Schwartz worked as a director on the investigative journalism program Real Time, considered the flagship program of the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation. A reporter for Channel 13 prime time News, she covered a wide array of topics, including southern Israel and the Gaza border. Meanwhile, she created and directed documentary features for YES Documentary Channel, Channel 13, and the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, about the Israeli army, the national security apparatus, and the Arab-Jewish conflict from a personal story perspective.

**Filmography (including production years & festival premieres):**

PAZ SCHWARTZ  
A director, journalist, and media professional. Schwartz worked as a director on the investigative journalism program Real Time, considered the flagship program of the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation. Formerly a reporter for Channel 13 Prime Time News, she also created and directed documentary features for YES Documentary Channel, Channel 13, and Kan 11, focusing on the Israeli army, the national security apparatus, and the Arab-Jewish conflict from a personal story perspective.

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**שם הסרט** : נוני עיוני

לוגליין**:**

גייזי צפריר חוזר לפרשת החיסול הממוקד הראשון שיצא לפועל בישראל בשנות ה-50. הזכרונות שלא מרפים מוציאים אותו למסע שמתחיל בחבריו למבצע ומסתיים בוידוי מול ביתו של האדם שאותו הם חיסלו.

**תקציר מקס' 100 מילים:**

כמה חודשים לפני תחילת המלחמה, מתקיים מפגש נדיר ולא צפוי על הגבול עם עזה, מפגש שעולה על כל דמיון. בגיל 88, גייזי צפריר נזכר במבצע חיסול שבו לקח חלק בראשית דרכו בשב"כ. הוא מגלה שביתו של מושא החיסול, נוני דרוויש, חיה בלוס אנג'לס ומחליט לכתוב לה מבלי לספר לה על חלקו בפרשה. כך מתחיל מסע הנבירה של גייזי בפרשת החיסול הממוקד הראשון שהנהיגה ישראל ברצועת עזה בשנות ה-50 . הוא נפגש עם חבריו למבצע החיסול ומגלה מידע חדש ומערער. רגע לפני שיהיה מאוחר מדי הוא מחליט לעשות עוד מהלך אחרון, לספר לנוני כל מה שהוא יודע על המוות של אביה, אולי כך יצליח להשתיק את מצפונו.