

# George Magazine Article About Yitzhak Rabin's Murder

## **Background**

In March 1997, President Kennedy's son, John, Jr., ran a controversial article in his magazine, *George*. The article was written by Guela Amir, mother of Yigal Amir, the man who assassinated Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. In the article, Ms. Amir made it quite clear that her son did not act alone. She provided compelling evidence that Rabin's assassination was sponsored by the Israeli government, and that her son had been goaded into shooting the prime minister by an agent provocateur working for Shin Bet, Israel's equivalent of the FBI and Secret Service combined into one agency. The motive for the killing was because Rabin was going to give land back to the Palestinians as specified in the Oslo Accords. The following is Ms. Amir's article in its entirety:

## ***A Mother's Defense*, by Guela Amir**

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Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin looked exhilarated as he made his way down the podium stairs that chilly autumn night. The pro-peace rally that Rabin had just addressed was an unqualified success. Some 100,000 supporters attended, and public attention was briefly deflected from the mounting criticism of his administration.

Rabin's carefree, buoyant demeanor that night seemed to put his bodyguards at ease, and the half dozen or so agents who accompanied him to his limousine in the parking lot behind the stage encircled him only loosely. None of the Shin Bet (General Security Service) agents in the entourage seemed to notice the slight young man leaning casually against one of the government cars.

As Rabin walked past, the young man drew a pistol, slipped into the crowd of towering security agents, and fired three rounds at the prime minister. Two of them hit Rabin's exposed back, and one shot wounded his bodyguard. As the shots rang out, someone at the scene shouted, "Blanks! Blanks!" as if to reassure the others that the bullets were not real. But the shots were not blanks. Rabin, mortally wounded, was rushed to nearby Ichilov Hospital. Curiously, as Leah Rabin was whisked away by car to Shin Bet headquarters, one of the agents assured the prime minister's wife that the gunman had actually used "a toy gun" and that her husband was fine. The reality was that Rabin lay dying in an emergency room.

The gunman was my son Yigal. The shooting seemed to be an open-and-shut case of assassination. An amateur videotape of the event clearly showed Yigal walking up to the prime minister and shooting him. So how could anyone at the scene have thought that Yigal was shooting blanks? Why was another guard so certain that the gun wasn't real?

And how is it that minutes after the shooting, even before the details of the incident were broadcast, Israeli TV received a phone call from a man who claimed to represent a right-wing Jewish organization. He confidently declared, "This time we missed. Next time we won't." Other journalists simultaneously received messages on their pagers with the same statement.

Throughout the tense and painful period since the assassination, the answers to these troubling questions have begun to emerge, and they depict what I believe is an unsavory intrigue at the highest levels of government. This is the story of my search for the truth about the Rabin assassination.

I was visiting a friend's home when the first news bulletin about the assassination was broadcast. The report said that a law student "of Yemenite origin" from Bar-Ilan University had shot the prime minister during a peace rally in Tel Aviv. I had heard about the rally but had no reason to think that my son Yigal would be there. Nervously, I ran to my car and drove the short distance home to Herzliyya, a northern suburb of Tel Aviv, my hands shaking with fear all the way. When I pulled up in front of our house I could hear my husband, Shlomo, shouting. He is a religious scribe with a particularly gentle personality. In our more than 30 years of marriage, I have almost never heard him raise his voice. If he was shouting, something was terribly wrong.

My husband grabbed my hand and we stood together, eyes fixed stonily on the television. Within minutes, our other seven children joined us. Relatives and neighbors streamed into our home. Somebody insisted that it couldn't be Yigal, that "Gali" (his nickname) was visiting a friend. But then a broadcast showed a clear image of my son in the custody of the police. There was no mistake: That was my Yigal. As we sat, dazed, in front of the television, a swarm of Shin Bet agents burst into the living room, charged upstairs to Yigal's room, and took it apart from floor to ceiling.

In the streets outside, hundreds of neighbors gathered at the edge of our yard. Reporters and television crews soon joined them. My youngest children were crying uncontrollably. The phone rang off the hook that night, and it has not stopped since.

Daybreak brought the peculiar combination of unreality and routine that is painfully familiar to anyone who has experienced a family tragedy. For years I have managed a nursery school in our home for neighborhood children. Forty preschoolers had enrolled that autumn. At 8 A.M. parents began to arrive with their toddlers; all but a few came that day.

Later, the Shin Bet returned to raid the house. Concealed in the rafters, in a backyard shed, and in an underground cache they found weapons and ammunition. The agents seemed to revel in our shock at each new discovery. At one point I asked one of them why he was spending so much time examining several bars of soap found in the house. He showed me the explosives that were hidden inside. And then they arrested my firstborn son, Hagai, on suspicion of being an accomplice in the assassination of Rabin.

Several of Yigal's and Hagai's friends and schoolmates were also hauled in for questioning.

I had lived through four wars and the terrifying Iraqi Scud missiles that struck Israel—just miles from our home—during the Persian Gulf War. But the fear I now felt was something entirely different. In wartime we had been part of a brave and unified community; now I felt that it was my family's own battle—that our family stood alone. Politicians and newspaper columnists branded us a family of "religious fanatics" and "extremists," never pausing to distinguish between us and Yigal. Leading the attacks against us was Rabin's former chief of staff Eitan Haber, who showed up at one of the early court hearings for Yigal and announced that he wouldn't leave the "Amir family in peace until the end of [his] days." Haber's pledge helped inspire a new round of telephone harassment against us, and our home was attacked by vandals.

When the news leaked out that my oldest daughter, Vardit, would soon be married, Haber was on her trail. Needless to say, we were in no mood for celebrations, but according to Jewish religious tradition, once a wedding date has been set it cannot be postponed; Vardit's wedding date had been decided on six months earlier. Haber called for protesters to show up by the thousands.

To our amazement, Haber's plan backfired. There was a spontaneous outpouring of sympathy for our family. Gifts began to arrive from anonymous well-wishers. People we did not know called to offer us help. A stranger lent the young couple a new car for their honeymoon. Nearly every one of our invited guests showed up.

In Jewish tradition the righteous are rewarded with a place in the world to come, and those who are sinful are punished until their souls have been cleansed. When I was a little girl, my grandfather, a revered rabbinical sage, would tell me stories about rare individuals whose sins were so grievous that they could not even enter purgatory. Such a soul, termed a dybbuk in Hebrew, is sent back to the earthly realm to repair the spiritual damage it has wreaked. The dybbuk's only hope is to infiltrate and possess the body of a living person and cling tightly to this purer soul in the hope of securing enough credit, through that person's meritorious deeds, to be forgiven for his own misdeeds. In the spring of 1992, a baneful dybbuk took possession of Israel's radical right-wing political movements and almost succeeded in driving them to ruin. This dybbuk's name was Avishai Raviv.

Raviv was a part of Yigal's other world—his world away from home—and I didn't realize what a central role he played in my son's life until his name began cropping up again and again as the Israeli press probed deeper into the Rabin assassination.

Avishai Raviv was born in 1967 in Holon, a backwater development town just south of Tel Aviv. He is remembered in Holon as a youngster who made up for his shyness and stuttering by playing practical jokes on his classmates. Raviv's family was not religious and tended to vote Labor. His life changed suddenly and dramatically when, at the age

of 16, he attended a lecture by Rabbi Meir Kahane, the fiery leader of the Israeli nationalist Kach movement. Raviv became active in the movement and, under Rabbi Kahane's influence, seemed to undergo a religious awakening that resulted in his embracing traditional Judaism. While on leave from service in the Israeli army's elite Givati Brigade, Raviv began attending demonstrations and other Kach activities.

Subsequent Israeli and foreign media reports alleged that at some time during or immediately following his military service, Raviv was recruited as an informer for the Shin Bet. Raviv, however, was no ordinary snitch. It was reported that for five years he initiated, organized, and led dozens of extremist right-wing activities.

After the November 1990 assassination of Rabbi Kahane, the Kach movement split into two factions. Raviv managed to remain active in both. He consistently appeared at each group's events and soon became an infamous fixture on the nightly news. When scuffles broke out with the police or hostile passersby, Raviv was often in the center of the trouble and was arrested dozens of times (although he was rarely charged and never imprisoned).

While he was active in the various Kach splinters, Raviv joined the Temple Mount Faithful, a group that protests for Jewish rights on the Temple Mount, the Jewish holy site in Jerusalem upon which Muslims built the Al Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock shrine. Israelis must get permission from the police before they can pray on the mount for fear of violence between Arabs and Jews, and the Temple Mount Faithful has responded with protests. Raviv's attempt to wrest control from the founder of the group would lead to his expulsion.

Raviv's agitation led to a particularly ugly episode in August 1991 during a protest outside the Tel Aviv office of Israel's Communist party. As Tamar Gozansky, a Communist member of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), left the building, Raviv charged at her with a large metal flagpole. Gozansky's aide blocked the assault, and a brawl ensued. Photos of a bloodied Raviv limping away from the rally enhanced his stature among the Kahane activists. Raviv was arrested, but it took nearly four years for the case to go to court. He was let off with a mere nine months' probation and a small fine. The decision by Israeli prosecutors to request probation rather than imprisonment seemed curious.

In the meantime, Raviv had enrolled at Tel Aviv University and was busy making trouble on campus. When a Druse student was elected head of the student union (the largely Jewish student body had chosen a Muslim), Raviv publicly accused him of being disloyal to Israel. The university administration brought disciplinary charges against Raviv for racism. Eventually Raviv was expelled from the university-but not before he asked the Office of the Prime Minister to intervene on his behalf Tel Aviv University officials, however, had had enough of his provocations and his appeal was rejected.

Raviv then founded an organization with settlement activist David Hazan, called Eyal (the Jewish Fighting Organization). It was a religious-nationalist youth movement with barely two dozen members at the start. But Raviv devoted all of his energy to recruiting new members. He soon built himself a small but loyal following, made up primarily of religious teenagers. Raviv lured these youngsters with the enticement of violence and rebellion. According to one girl's later testimony, the charismatic Raviv would arrange Sabbath weekend retreats for Eyal members in various Jewish settlements. I believe the cost of these weekends was usually footed by Raviv.

Before long, Raviv was quarreling with Hazan over the group's direction. Hazan thought Raviv went too far at times, and, reportedly, when Raviv started to openly discuss assassinating a prominent Israeli, Hazan resigned. Raviv took over and shaped Eyal into his vision of the militant vanguard of the Israeli Right. His former roommate, Eran Ojalbo, claimed that Raviv was obsessed with obtaining publicity for himself and his small band of followers and developed a real flair for media stunts. On one occasion, Raviv invited a television crew to watch Eyal members training with weapons. On another, he launched a well-publicized leafleting campaign against mixed Jewish-Arab classes in public schools. He and several Eyal teenagers were brought in for police questioning. Leaflets of this sort are illegal in Israel because they're considered racist, and those who are responsible for creating them are often prosecuted. With Raviv, no charges were pressed.

In September 1993, the Rabin government signed the Oslo accords with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The accords, and the series of terror bombings that followed their implementation, brought thousands of previously apolitical Israelis into the streets and onto the barricades in embittered protest. These neophyte activists poured into the pre-existing right-wing groups and placed themselves at the disposal of experienced organizers such as Avishai Raviv. One of these new activists was my son Yigal.

The election of Labor party leader Yitzhak Rabin as prime minister in 1992 was the climax of an extraordinary political comeback. After four straight national election losses and more than 15 years in the political wilderness, Rabin led the center-left Labor party to triumph.

Like many Israelis, my husband and I were saddened by Rabin's election, but we sought consolation in the platform upon which he ran: no negotiations with the PLO, no establishment of a PLO state, and no surrender of the strategically vital Golan Heights. If Rabin adhered to his party's declared principles, Israel's basic security needs would be protected.

In utter disregard of Rabin's platform and in defiance of the Israeli law prohibiting contact with the PLO, Labor party emissaries initiated negotiations with the terrorist group. In September 1993, Rabin announced to a stunned nation that he was going to sign an agreement with PLO chairman Yasir Arafat, giving the PLO partial control over

Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. He also planned to release jailed terrorists in exchange for a PLO peace pledge.

In Israel, we hoped desperately that peace would emerge. As a wife and a mother, I know the pain and fear of having watched my sons go off to serve the mandatory three years in the Israeli army. I yearn for the day when we can beat our swords into plowshares.

Sadly, the Oslo process did not produce the peace we expected. Within weeks of the White House handshake, the horror began. A Palestinian terrorist drove a car filled with explosives into a bus near the community of Beit-El, wounding 30 people. Next, a Palestinian driving a car filled with explosives pulled up alongside a bus in the northern Israeli city of Afula. The explosion killed eight people and wounded dozens more. On Remembrance Day, a Palestinian suicide bomber boarded a bus in nearby Hadera and blew himself up, killing five and wounding 25. Public support for Rabin and the Oslo process plummeted. Labor had insisted that the agreement would bring Israel untold benefits. But such dreams were shattered by the rude reality of the old Middle East.

At the same time, a dangerous schism was emerging in Israeli society between those who continued to support the peace process and those who opposed it. Faced with widespread public rejection of the Oslo process, an increasingly defensive Rabin and his cabinet ministers responded by forging ahead with policies that did not have the support of the public majority.

The terror continued. On October 19, 1994, in the heart of Tel Aviv, a Hamas bomber blew up a bus, killing 22 passengers and wounding 48. Three weeks later a terrorist riding a bicycle and carrying a knapsack filled with explosives pedaled up to an army checkpoint in Gaza and killed three soldiers. Each week brought more death, violence, and disillusionment. Around our Sabbath dinner table, the one time each week when all of our children were together, there was a growing sense of despair. Yigal once said, almost in tears, "Who cares if you can now take a vacation trip to Jordan if the street outside is running with Jewish blood?" We didn't know how to answer him. But we did not quite understand just how deeply he felt the pain of the massacred victims. We could not imagine that these terrible events were pushing him past the point of no return.

In the summer of 1995, as Rabin entered the fourth and final year of his term, his popularity was rapidly declining and his coalition government had to count on the support of five Arab members in the Knesset for its survival, though he could not be assured of these crucial votes indefinitely. And there was turmoil inside the Labor party itself. Rabin had indicated his willingness to surrender most or all of the Golan Heights region to the Syrians, and a handful of Labor members of the Knesset, led by the 1973 war hero Avigdor Kahalani, balked. Recalling how the Syrians had used the Golan from 1949 to 1967 to shell northern Israel, the Kahalani faction announced that it would vote against the government if it sought to surrender the Golan.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1995, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu began to rise in the polls. By late summer of 1995, the polls showed that if elections were held at that time, Netanyahu would be elected prime minister. The polls found that a majority of the nation no longer supported new territorial surrender.

With elections less than a year away, Rabin's career appeared to be on the verge of ruin, and it's my belief that the Labor leadership quietly turned to the security services to help stave off a defeat at the polls.

The dybbuk in our story will now be joined by an authentic spook. Karmi Gillon came from one of Israel's prominent families. His grandfather, Gad Frumkin, had served as a Supreme Court justice during the pre-state years under the British Mandate. Gillon's father, Colin, was Israel's state attorney during the 1950s, and his mother, Saada, was a deputy attorney general. Gillon's brother, Alon, is a judge who serves as the registrar of Israel's Supreme Court. Karmi Gillon forsook the family profession for a career in the Shin Bet. Created shortly after Israel's birth, the Shin Bet is, in effect, the Israeli FBI and Secret Service combined; it is charged with the tasks of gathering domestic intelligence, counterespionage, and protecting diplomats and VIPs. Control of the Shin Bet is in the hands of the office of the prime minister.

The Shin Bet like the FBI, has had no small share of controversy over the years. During the time that Gillon was rising in its ranks, the Shin Bet was implicated in a series of scandals. The Landau Commission, established in 1987 to investigate the methods of the Shin Bet, found a pattern of perjury spanning almost two decades. It released an 88 page report sharply censured the Shin Bet leadership for having "failed by not understanding that no security operation, however vital, can put its operatives above the law." The commission characterized the Shin Bet's lawlessness as a danger to democratic society.

Karmi Gillon had a unique field of expertise. While most of his fellow agents spent their time combating the threat of Arab terrorism, Gillon was the Shin Bet's resident expert on Jewish extremist groups; he even wrote his master's thesis at Haifa University on the topic in 1990. He was an advocate of cracking down on Jewish nationalist movements and made no secret of his antipathy to the right-wing outlook.

A few months prior to Gillon's appointment as chief of the Shin Bet in February 1995, Avishai Raviv pulled off an extraordinary stunt. Raviv, accompanied by a band of former Kach activists, attempted to stage a demonstration outside Gillon's Jerusalem home to demand his resignation from the Shin Bet. Raviv and two other people were briefly detained as they approached Gillon's house. Raviv told reporters at the scene—I believe he tipped off the press—that the planned-demonstration was "to protest that the head of the Shin Bet is being used as a political tool against the right wing."

To some, Raviv's threatening behavior was just further "evidence" that the Jewish Right was a menace that had to be combatted. In fact, Raviv, as it was later alleged, was already serving as an informer for the Shin Bet, and I find it hard to believe that his stunt

hadn't been cleared by Gillon himself. Even before Gillon assumed control of the service, Raviv's provocations had become completely unrestrained. According to the Jerusalem Post, a few days after the machine-gunning of 29 Palestinians by Dr. Baruch Goldstein in March 1994 at Hebron's Cave of the Patriarchs, Raviv rented an apartment—directly above the one where Goldstein had lived—in Kiryat Arba. While Kiryat Arba's leaders were denouncing Goldstein, Raviv was boasting about his admiration for him. According to the Post, one of Raviv's splinter groups, DOV [Suppression of Traitors], vandalized a car belonging to the Kiryat Arba council head, Zvi Katzover, and the next day, Eyal took credit for assaulting Katzover's son so seriously that the boy had to be hospitalized. Again, Raviv was not prosecuted.

Raviv was then accepted by Bar-Ilan University, an Orthodox Jewish institution located in Ramat Gan, not far from Tel Aviv. Raviv registered for several history and philosophy courses and also enrolled in the school's Institute for Advanced Torah Studies. It was there, in the spring of 1994, that he met my son Yigal.

By the time summer rolled around, Raviv was sponsoring a paramilitary Eyal summer camp for militant youngsters. Reporters were invited to watch as Raviv ordered his young recruits, armed with automatic weapons, pistols, and knives, to engage in paramilitary drills and martial-arts training.

Throughout 1994, my husband and I were aware that Yigal was becoming increasingly involved in political activities. But as long as his actions were within the law (and to my knowledge, they were) and he kept up his grades (and he did), we saw no reason to object. If Yigal felt that the Oslo process was endangering Israel—and many, many Israelis felt that way—it was his right, even his obligation, to protest.

What we did not know was that Yigal was being drawn into Raviv's netherworld. Raviv was blanketing the campus with extremist posters. He clashed with campus security when some of the more militant notices were taken down by guards. This resulted in a hearing before an academic disciplinary committee that issued a warning: He would be expelled if he caused any more trouble.

In the summer of 1995, Raviv was once more summoned to a disciplinary committee for his activities. Raviv was again let off with a mere warning by the university administration. Acquaintances from that period later told me that he had behaved as if he had protectzia, the Hebrew slang for pull, or influence in high places. The rabbis at the Institute for Advanced Torah Studies, however, had seen enough of Raviv's antics. He was expelled from the institute.

In Hebrew, Yigal means "he will redeem." My second son was born during those first heady years after the Six Day War, when Israel, on the brink of annihilation by the Arab armies, miraculously beat back the enemy and liberated sacred territories that are so central to Judaism and Jewish history: Judea, Samaria, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and, of course, Jerusalem. God had redeemed his nation, and we named our second child Yigal



as an affirmation of that miracle. Even as a young child, Yigal displayed an energy and drive that set him apart from other children. Whatever Yigal wanted, he found a way to get.

Yigal had never given us a day of trouble in his life. After graduating at the top of his high school class, he began his military service. His fierce patriotism compelled him to volunteer for an elite combat unit. As a mother, I dreaded his decision to serve in the unit that is called into battle first when war breaks out. But how could we stand in the way of our son's desire to defend his country?

When Yigal finished his three mandatory years of service, I detected a new seriousness in him. He was hired as a government emissary to Latvia, where he taught Hebrew to potential Jewish immigrants to Israel. He subsequently told me that this is where he was trained by the Shin Bet.

Upon his return, Yigal gained admission to law school at Bar-Ilan. For a young man of Yemenite background, this was quite an accomplishment: Jews from Yemen and other Arab countries start out at the bottom of Israel's socioeconomic ladder, and it has taken decades to break into professions dominated by those of European origin. Yigal enrolled not only in the Bar-Ilan University law school but simultaneously in its computer classes and the university's religious-studies program.

Like many of his fellow students, Yigal was drawn to political activism by the Oslo accords. He attended a number of mass demonstrations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and helped organize a number of campus rallies, but he soon despaired of their impact because there was no chance of changing Rabin's mind.

Yigal found himself overwhelmed by a sense of frustration, and this helped to pave the way for his association with Raviv. He was now spending a good deal of his time organizing Sabbath weekend retreats for student activists in various Israeli towns and in the settlements. As Yigal's friends told me subsequently, he and Raviv worked together, publicizing the retreats, preparing literature for the discussion groups and seminars, and arranging for guest lecturers.

We hardly saw Yigal during the summer and early autumn of 1995. I couldn't imagine how he mustered the energy for such outings after his grueling schedule of classes. But if he was using his day and a half off from school (Israel's weekends last only from Friday afternoon until Saturday night) for educational purposes, we considered it worthwhile.

According to Yigal's friends and others who have since testified in court, Raviv seemed to be obsessed with one topic: killing Rabin. He and Yigal frequently engaged in discussions about the feasibility of assassination.

On September 16, Israeli television broadcast what was purported to be a secret late-night swearing-in ceremony organized by Eyal. At the ceremony, which was later revealed to have been staged for the television cameras, Raviv assembled what he

claimed were a group of new Eyal recruits at the graves of pre-state Jewish underground fighters, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Raviv scored his biggest media triumph on October 5, 1995, when the opposition political parties organized a mass rally in downtown Jerusalem to protest the mounting Arab terror and the government's weak response. Although I rarely attended demonstrations, Yigal and I went to, this one together. The main speaker that Saturday night was Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu. Circulating among the huge crowd was Avishai Raviv and his band of Eyal hotheads. According to the Jerusalem Post, Raviv had given them handouts depicting Prime Minister Rabin dressed up in an SS uniform. When demonstrators urged the Eyal sign holders to remove the offensive placards, they refused. Eyal's founder, David Hazan, passed by and tore up one of the posters. A gang of Eyal toughs promptly pummeled him.

The Post reported that an Israeli television reporter, Nitzan Chen, later revealed that Raviv had approached him and urged him to broadcast the sign on the nightly news report, and that he had even called later to be sure that it had been included.

In the Knesset the next morning, the Labor party made good use of the poster. Netanyahu was accused of having failed to condemn them. It helped reinforce the notion that the Likud was extremist and irresponsible. In a radio interview shortly afterward, Rabin told the public that "the Likud provides extremists with inspiration. It cannot wash its hands of this and claim it has nothing to do with it."

Netanyahu's request to meet with Rabin to attempt to ease the mounting political tensions was ignored. Rabin's refusal to even meet with the Likud leader again strengthened the idea that Netanyahu was beyond the pale. It also helped deflect public attention away from Arab terrorism. Finally, so it seemed, Rabin had found an effective campaign strategy.

On November 4, 1995, Yigal exited a bus and made his way toward Malchei Yisrael Square, where thousands of supporters had already assembled. The large floodlights placed outside the Tel Aviv city hall illuminated the area for many blocks, and security was stepped up around the demonstration. On hand were more than 700 police and border-patrol officers, dozens of undercover police, and agents of the Shin Bet who had been assigned the job of guarding the featured political leaders.

The gathering, whose theme was "Yes to peace, no to violence," had been heavily advertised for weeks. Labor party-dominated municipalities and unions pulled out all stops in their drive to generate a large turnout for the rally. Some of the biggest names in Israeli entertainment were recruited to perform. In addition to Prime Minister Rabin and Foreign Minister Peres, other top Labor leaders were present. It was meant to be an impressive show of strength for the party and proof positive that large segments of the country still supported the peace process.

Yigal strode quickly through the crowd. The police had erected special metal railings to keep the crowd away from the rostrum, but people were simply walking around the barriers. When Yigal arrived near the stage he circled around the police line and descended the stairway that led to the cordoned parking area, where the limousines of the prime minister and other government officials were parked.

After a while, a Shin Bet agent approached and asked Yigal who he was. He reportedly replied that he was one of the drivers. The agent apparently accepted the answer and walked away. At no point did anyone ask Yigal to produce identification or seriously challenge his presence near the cars. Much criticism was later leveled against the police and the Shin Bet for failing to create a "sterile" area near the stage, a standard security precaution.

Yigal struck up a conversation with some of the drivers and police officers who were mingling in the parking lot. Later they would admit that they had assumed he was either an undercover policeman or one of the entertainers' drivers. From his position in the parking lot, Yigal could clearly hear the singing of the performers.

As the speeches and performances continued on the stage above him, Yigal bided his time. He did not check his watch, nor did he display any anxiety, he told me. He said that if the police had stopped him or seriously questioned him at this stage, he would have taken it as a sign from above and abandoned the plan to kill Rabin. But on this evening there were no such actions by the police or Shin Bet agents. And so Yigal was content to peacefully wait for the rally to end and the prime minister to be escorted to his car.

In the chaotic aftermath of the assassination, rival Israeli law-enforcement officials engaged in a frenzy of finger-pointing and recriminations. In the newspapers and on the airwaves, the Police Ministry and the Shin Bet hurled accusations at one another, each attempting to blame the other for the lax security. Shin Bet head Karmi Gillon, whose name was then a state secret, announced that the security services would conduct an internal investigation. The police announced their own internal probe. Astonishingly, within 48 hours—on November 7—the Shin Bet report was concluded and leaked to the press. The document, which was authored by three former branch heads of the Shin Bet, found that the entire protection system assigned to the prime minister had collapsed. The report lambasted the inability of the Shin Bet to gather intelligence on extreme right-wing groups. After the report's release, the head of the protection department, identified as "D," was forced to resign. The Shin Bet insisted that D's negligence was the sole reason for the procedural breaches on the night of the killing.

On Tuesday, November 7, Raviv was arrested by the police, on charges that he was involved in the assassination. The Jerusalem Post asserted that his group, Eyal, was being investigated in connection with a conspiracy to kill the prime minister. As the handcuffed Raviv was brought to court under heavy police guard, he yelled to reporters, "This is a political investigation and a false arrest! This is a dictatorship!"

The next day, the government announced the formation of a commission of inquiry into the assassination, to be headed by former Supreme Court justice Meir Shamgar. And from the outset, the Shamgar Commission was plagued by conflicts of interest and questions of impartiality. Shamgar himself had served for many years as Judge Advocate General of the Israeli army and maintained ties to the military establishment. He was also a close personal friend of the Rabin family. Shamgar was joined on the panel by a former head of the Mossad, Zvi Zamir, and Professor Ariel Rosen-Zvi, dean of Tel Aviv University law school. Professor Rosen-Zvi was in the advanced stages of cancer at the time and would be dead within weeks of the commission's final report.

In a strange twist, Judge Alon Gillon, the older brother of Shin Bet head Karmi Gillon, was named secretary of the commission. Sitting in on the commission's proceedings was the brother of the government official who was most likely to be blamed if the commission concluded that the Shin Bet had failed to safeguard Rabin. The possible conflict of interest apparently escaped the notice of the commissioners—Karmi Gillon would testify before the commission at length. Unfortunately, neither the public nor the news media were allowed to attend many of the commission's hearings.

Equally troubling was the presence of Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair. Since the commission was investigating, among other issues, whether the attorney general's office was granting some Shin Bet informants—one of which was later alleged to be Raviv—immunity from prosecution, the presence of the attorney general at the hearings was surprising indeed. If the government's intent was to definitively ascertain what led to Rabin's assassination, then even the perception of impropriety should not have been tolerated.

During the days following the assassination, Attorney General Ben-Yair had ordered a crackdown on individuals who were suspected of engaging in "inflammatory speech." Curiously, the crackdown continued for several weeks, then stopped suddenly. Ben-Yair announced—in a stunning reversal—that mere words could not cause an individual to engage in criminal acts, and they had not caused Yigal's act. "The person who killed the prime minister did not do so under the influence of incitement.... He acted due to a complete worldview, which he had developed.... It wasn't because of a poster here or there." Ben-Yair was not the only one to engage in a sudden, unexplained about-face. Police Minister Moshe Shahal, who had previously declared, "We believe that a group of people carefully prepared the ground to conspire to murder carefully chosen targets," now asserted that Yigal was a lone gunman who had organized the assassination on his own.

But the "inciting rhetoric" and "organized conspiracy" theories had served their purpose they had inflamed public opinion against the Israeli Right. Now, I believe they needed to be discarded lest they open an even bigger can of worms about incitement and conspiracy.

On the weekend before the Shamgar Commission was to hear its first witness, Karmi Gillon, there was a stunning revelation: Israeli television and radio both reported that Raviv was, indeed, an undercover agent for the Shin Bet. According to the reports, Raviv, codenamed "Champagne" by his Shin Bet handlers, had been on the government's payroll for at least two years as a top infiltrator of the far Right. But according to an investigation by the Jerusalem Post, Raviv's task involved much more than infiltration: His orders were to attract individuals to Eyal, incite them to illegal activities, and then inform on them to the Shin Bet.

One of the sources of this information was Rabbi Benny Elon, the dean of Yeshivat Beit Orot, a religious college, and son of a retired Supreme Court justice. Elon would later become a Knesset member in 1996. This prominent Jewish-settlement activist and leader of the right-wing group Moledet held a press conference and charged that Raviv had effectively manufactured the wild far Right. He was, in Elon's words, an "agent provocateur," carrying out a mission by the government to discredit the right-wing opposition, including, by association, the Likud. "I would venture to say," Elon added, "that the whole organization [Eyal] and its activities, including the poster depicting Rabin in an SS uniform, were all paid for by the Shin Bet." (The Shin Bet later denied the charge.) Elon went on to say, "There is a reasonable suspicion that [Raviv's activity] was okayed by the legal authority."

Elon, who had met Raviv and other Eyal activists on a number of occasions at demonstrations and elsewhere, said that Raviv had been Yigal's constant companion in the months prior to the killing. How could Raviv have been so close to Yigal and not known, as Raviv later claimed in court, of the assassination plan? And how could a Shin Bet informer have been so closely involved in all of these activities without the knowledge of the Shin Bet, which is supervised by the Office of the Prime Minister?

The two weeks after the assassination were the most horrible period of my life. Now, suddenly, came the revelation of a Shin Bet connection to Yigal's "pal" Raviv.

The Likud, which had been on the defensive since the assassination, came to life in the wake of the Raviv-Shin Bet accusations. At a meeting of the Likud executive bureau, Netanyahu called for "a full, thorough, and exhaustive investigation into the Raviv affair. There must be no coverup. Even if only a fraction of the provocative activities attributed to Raviv are true, they constitute a grave danger to democracy. There must be an investigation, and it must come now, with no delays and no excuses."

And then there were more revelations. Israel's leading daily, Yediot Ahronot, reported that in testimony before a closed session of the Shamgar Commission, several young women at a religious seminary said that they had recognized Yigal and Raviv from a Sabbath retreat at Ma'aleh Yisrael the previous summer. The girls told their teacher, Sarah Eliash, that Raviv had denounced several Rabin government officials as "traitors." During several marathon ideological discussions that weekend, Raviv had attempted to goad Yigal into killing Rabin, ridiculing his "cowardice" for not being willing to

assassinate a "traitor." In court, Raviv said he had heard Yigal talk about the "need to kill Rabin" but claimed he hadn't taken him seriously.

The girls testified: "We used to see Raviv and Amir on Saturdays during last summer. These gatherings were arranged by Yigal. We would sit out on a hilltop there. There were no demonstrations or any violence. They were basically study groups. We met, like, several times.... Raviv was real macho. He kept saying to Yigal, 'You keep talking about killing Rabin. Why don't you do it? Are you frightened? You say you want to do it. Show us that you're a man! Show us what you are made of'" The girls testified that Yigal didn't react at all to Raviv's pressure and just changed the subject of discussion.

Suddenly, information about Raviv was spilling forth. Raviv's former roommate in Kiryat Arba, and former member of Eyal, Eran Ojalbo, testified as a witness for the defense at Yigal's trial. He revealed that Raviv had said that Rabin was a rodef—the Hebrew term for someone who endangers others and therefore should be killed. At a weekend retreat organized by Yigal in the settlement of Ma'alch Yisrael, press reports say, Raviv had marked several different government leaders for death.

Ojalbo also testified that ten minutes after news of the assassination had been announced, Raviv called him and asked how he was and if he knew who had shot Rabin. Ojalbo responded that in television reports he had seen that it was "a short Yemenite guy." Raviv asked if it was Yigal. "I looked again," Ojalbo testified, "and said that it was Yigal."

Ojalbo also maintained that Raviv had verbally pressured Yigal to attempt an assassination of Rabin. "Raviv told Yigal and others, time and time again, that there was a din-rodef [judgment] on Yitzhak Rabin. He said, 'Rabin should die,' and whoever killed him was a righteous person.... Raviv had a powerful influence on Yigal. He continuously emphasized to him and other students that whoever implemented the din-rodef against Rabin was carrying out a holy mission."

Israel television's Chen appeared before the Shamgar Commission and related the details of Raviv's involvement with the SS handouts. Raviv's job was to discredit the Right, Chen said, and what could be more effective than giving the public the idea that the entire opposition considered Rabin to be a Nazi?

The next Raviv revelation came from the Jerusalem Post investigative reporter Steve Rodan. He reported that "Israel Broadcasting Authority spokesman [Ayala Cohen] said the first report of the Rabin shooting was broadcast at 9:48 P.M. Channel 1 began broadcasting live at 10:15, and 15 minutes later, the alleged assassin was identified as a 25-year-old student from Herzliyya."

But Rodan also wrote that Raviv had arrived at the Tel Aviv rally 15 minutes before Rabin's murder. When the first rumors of the shooting swept through the crowd, at 9:50 P.M., Rodan reported, "Immediately Raviv pulled out his mobile telephone and spoke to an unidentified person. 'He called somebody,' one of the witnesses said. 'He asked

whether they shot Rabin.' Then Raviv asked, 'Was he hurt?'.... When he finished [the conversation] he shouted, 'It was Yigal. Don't you know Yigal? He was at the Orient House demonstrations [Eyal's protests at PLO headquarters in Jerusalem].' Raviv then made his way toward nearby Ichilov Hospital and then disappeared."

"Those around him could not understand how Raviv knew the identity of the assassin before anyone else," Rodan reported.

As the accusations about Raviv mounted, the opposition Tsomet party petitioned the High Court of Justice to prevent Attorney General Ben-Yair from attending further Shamgar Commission hearings. The petition asked that, at a minimum, Ben-Yair be prohibited from questioning witnesses, including Shin Bet agents and confidential informants, whose activities he might have authorized. The petition also argued that since Ben-Yair might himself be called to testify, it was improper for him to become familiar with others' testimony.

Instead of ruling on the merits of the petition, the High Court offered a compromise proposal under which Tsomet would withdraw its petition in exchange for a promise that Ben-Yair would absent himself if a conflict of interest arose. But it was a disappointing action by the Court, and it did little to restore the image of the commission. The growing public perception was that Ben-Yair was sitting in on the commission hearings to conduct damage control for the government in the wake of the Raviv-Shin Bet revelations.

On December 14, Raviv himself appeared before the Shamgar Commission. After completing his secret testimony, he was whisked away in a government car and vanished from public view.

Following Raviv's testimony, the commission issued warning letters to six Shin Bet officials, including Karmi Gillon. The letters cautioned the officials that they might face criminal liability as a result of their involvement with the events surrounding Raviv and the Rabin murder. Gillon and several other Shin Bet agents were called back for additional testimony, in light of Raviv's statements to the commission.

On January 8, 1996, Karmi Gillon resigned. The Israeli media concluded that had he not stepped down voluntarily, the Shamgar Commission would have insisted on his removal. The man who had been championed as an expert on Jewish extremism had failed to examine and follow up on information that he had received regarding a possible attack on the prime minister by Jewish extremists. But what was widely perceived as Gillon's negligence explained only a fraction of the events that led to the assassination. Why hadn't the Shin Bet ordered Raviv to cease his provocations? Why had it not detained or at least questioned Yigal before he acted? Why the strange restraint in the face of a threat to the prime minister?

The Jerusalem Post reported: "Yigal told investigators that he acted alone, did not belong to an extremist organization, and had 'received instructions from God to kill

Prime Minister Rabin." Yigal also reiterated in court that he acted alone. I believe he did so in order not to implicate others.

On March 28, 1996, the Shamgar Commission released its report. Of the 332 pages, 118 were declared classified. The unclassified parts blamed Gillon for the failures of the Shin Bet on the night of the murder but did not find him or any other agents criminally negligent. According to the Jerusalem Post, the unclassified sections contained only a few scattered references to the relationship between the running of agents and the Shin Bet. The report depicted the assassination as a failure by the agents protecting Rabin to organize themselves effectively. In one of its least believable conclusions, the Shamgar report claimed that Gillon—the expert on right-wing Jewish extremism—"did not conduct even one substantive, relevant, thorough, and comprehensive discussion with all the security and intelligence-gathering bodies to review methods." This was after two senior Shin Bet officers told the commission that they had gathered intelligence reports that right-wing groups could be a threat to both Jews and Arabs.

Equally bizarre was the commission's assertion that in order to "safeguard" the Shin Bet's operational methods, testimony by or about Raviv and his role had to be placed in a classified appendix to the report. In Chapter 5 of the commission's report is a section entitled "The Avishai Raviv Episode." The page is blank except for the cryptic note that "the details of this subject will be discussed in the secret appendix."

A section entitled "The Operation of Agents" states: "The body that operates an informer must keep tight control of him and not allow him to initiate actions at his will ... and to prevent the carrying out of provocations that in the end might have a boomerang effect." Could they have been referring to Raviv?

The official investigation of Raviv's relationship with Yigal remains shrouded in secrecy. Labor, of course, wanted no further probing into a potentially explosive scandal. Ironically, Likud, having forced national elections in two months, preferred to put the issue to rest.

The idea of using an agent provocateur was not originated by the Shin Bet. The secret police in czarist Russia created fake anarchist cells in order to attract genuine anarchist militants whom they would arrest and execute. When the Soviets came to power, they employed the same tactic against their political enemies. In the United States, the FBI created COINTELPRO (the counterintelligence program) to recruit potential lawbreakers, help incite them to break the law, then arrest them. By the late 1970s, the use of such unscrupulous tactics had been exposed and widely condemned as improper interference with citizens' rights. In Israel, unfortunately, dirty tricks are still commonly used.

Neither the Shin Bet nor the political echelon that controls it, the Office of the Prime Minister, seems to have appreciated the difference between a legitimate informant and an agent provocateur.



I believe Raviv enjoyed the full backing and protection of the Shin Bet. He assaulted a member of the Knesset and did not serve a day in jail. The Office of the Prime Minister was contacted to help intervene in an attempt to prevent his expulsion from Tel Aviv University. He emerged scot-free from distributing racist literature, publicly praising Baruch Goldstein, holding illegal summer militia camps, and allegedly distributing the Rabin-SS poster. On many occasions, he allegedly urged the assassination of Rabin and other Labor government officials and was never prosecuted. Raviv's lawlessness had to have sent the message to potential extremists that violence could be employed with impunity.

As I see it, Karmi Gillon and Avishai Raviv were the perfect match: Gillon, the Shin Bet chief obsessed with the belief that right-wing Jewish terrorist groups were on the loose; and Raviv, the alleged Shin Bet informer actively ensuring that Gillon's dark prophecies came true. If Raviv was an informer, did he alert Shin Bet agents that Yigal was now a potential assassin? I find it inconceivable that he would have kept such information to himself. Yet Yigal was never arrested. Never questioned. Never had his gun license revoked. Never had his gun confiscated. Did Gillon know from Raviv about Yigal's activities? If so, why didn't he order his agents to undertake any action against Yigal? What were they waiting for?

Just minutes after Yigal had shot the prime minister, somebody called reporters, identified himself as a spokesman for a right-wing organization, and claimed, "This time we missed. Next time we won't." It seems astonishing to me that the caller could have known that the shots were fired by a right-wing Jew rather than an Arab. Why did he think that the attack had failed?

Could the caller have been Raviv? I think he spent months inciting Yigal to make the attempt. He may have suspected that it would take place that night. I also think that he positioned himself at the rally, close enough to the scene of the crime to know that the shots had been fired, enabling him to make the immediate calls to the reporters. (One wonders what might emerge from an investigation of the itemized bill of Raviv's cellular phone.)

Yet, for some reason, Raviv was sure that the attempt would fail. Why? Perhaps somebody—either Raviv or someone else—was surreptitiously supposed to have disabled Yigal's gun, either by removing the firing pin or by replacing the bullets with blanks, before the shooting. It has been claimed in court that it was Yigal who shouted, "Blanks! Blanks!" But Shin Bet agents are trained to shout out "Blanks! Blanks!" in security drills. And I believe that that cry, combined with the fact that an agent assured Mrs. Rabin that the gun was not real, might mean that the Shin Bet were expecting an unsuccessful assassination attempt.

The Shin Bet could have arrested Yigal at any time in the weeks before the rally and charged him with plotting to kill Rabin. But the impact on the public would be so much more dramatic if Shin Bet agents heroically foiled an attempt on the prime minister's

life. But something went terribly wrong. The bullets were not blanks; the gun was not a toy.

My belief has some basis in past events. Foiling attempted crimes at the last second is a well-established Shin Bet method. In April 1984, in a Shin Bet operation, agents were tracking a group of settlement leaders who were engaged in retaliatory attacks against Arab terrorists. They followed the suspects as they planted explosives on several Arab buses in East Jerusalem. After this, the suspects were allowed to travel back to their residences. Only then did the Shin Bet raid their houses and conduct arrests. At the time, it was reported that the Shin Bet delayed taking suspects into custody until after the bombs were planted in order to sensationalize their own heroic efforts. Faced with the shocking news story, then prime minister Yitzhak Shamir had no choice but to let the security services arrest dozens of other suspects and crack down on the settlement organizations.

More recently, there is the disturbing case of the Kahalani brothers, Eitan and Yehoyada, from Kiryat Arba. The two men were convicted of plotting to shoot an Arab in retaliation for the murder of a Jewish settler. The pair had taken their loaded rifles to a road near the village of Kafr Batir, where they spotted an Arab man on a bicycle. As the Arab approached their truck, Eitan raised his rifle to fire, but the gun malfunctioned and Shin Bet agents waiting in ambush rushed to arrest the two brothers. The charge sheet is revealing. It contends that the murder was dramatically foiled "as a result of the removal of the firing pin by GSS [Shin Bet] without prior knowledge of the accused, [hence] no shot was fired."

The Kahalanis' attorney argued that a third individual involved in planning the attack was a Shin Bet plant who had disabled the guns. The alleged informant was arrested and then quickly released despite the charge that he was involved in the conspiracy. Why did the Shin Bet wait until after Eitan Kahalani had pulled the trigger to move in and make the arrest?

What Israel needs now is to heal the terrible wounds that the nation has suffered as a result of the assassination and its aftermath. To ease the malaise that is eating away at our society. To restore the public's confidence in our government. And, above all, to preserve the principles that are the basis of our democratic way of life.

My concern for the lives and the freedom of my two sons ensures that I will not rest until the truth—about Avishai Raviv, the Shin Bet and my son Yigal—is fully revealed.

(Guela Amir, *A Mother's Defense*, published in *George Magazine*, March 1997, p. 138)