

**A voyage from
Birthplace to Homeland**





























מהולדת למולדת



Mine is a story of an immigrant coming to Israel in 1948 at the age of six where I grew up with my parents from childhood to adulthood. In 1971 at the age of twenty-six immigrated to Canada, raised a beautiful family, matured, grew older and developed emotionally and intellectually. My life experiences shaped my identity and my life philosophy

My Great grandparents

Four Generations of the Sarfati – Levy Family
!879 - 1951

										
Omama Buka	Saba Avram	Nisim	Lina	No Name	Safta Aliza	Saba Yaacov	Jaco	Lisa		
										
Jana	Liko	Mom	Dad	Vita	Shlomo	Bela	Shlomo	Mazal	Victor	Ruthy
										
Clare	Emil	Aliza	Coby	Naomi	Chaim	Gila	Fanny			



There are so many things about me and my parents that I don't know. What I know for sure is that I was born in Sofia Bulgaria to Marko and Ketty Levy in 1943 during the war. For 16 years of my life I answered to the name Aliza and Elche, at school all my friends and family knew me as Aliza, I figured that the name Elche must be a Bulgarian nick name.

At the age of 16 every Israeli citizen is required to carry an identity card. To my surprise the name on my card was Alis and my birthday, which I always celebrated on March 3, was written as March 4. I was only 16, busy being a teenager, not curious enough to question my parents about these discrepancies. We arrived in Israel in 1948 at the end of the war of independence and the beginning of the mass immigration to the newly created Jewish homeland. The country was not set up and organized to receive the large number of immigrants that arrived from different countries, speaking different languages and mostly with limited means.

Over time I became curious as to why my name and birthday were different. At first, I thought that the clerk who took our information when we first arrived in Israel, made a mistake, most likely because of language barriers, or that he misunderstood my parents and wrote my name and birthday wrong. But at the time, being only sixteen, identity questions were not foremost on my mind. Becoming eligible to carry an identity card is a right-of-passage for every Israeli teenager. I felt grownup and very proud to produce my card everywhere I went and for every official transaction I made. In Israel, at the age of sixteen your name is added to the military roll and at the age of 18 you join the army for a period of two years for females and three for males. It was only years later that I started asking questions about my identity. Unfortunately, by that time, it was too late I waited

too long my parents died and so did practically all family members who knew me and my parents since I was born in Sofia, Bulgaria.

In 2008 I decided to travel to Bulgaria where I still had close relatives in search of some answers. Before my departure, I contacted an agency that I thought could help me find my birth certificate and my parents wedding marriage certificate. It struck me that for all those years I didn't even know my mom's maiden name. For all those years I didn't know basic information about me and my mom. When I arrived in Sofia, the lady from the agency handed me the two documents, my birth certificate and my parents wedding certificate. I discovered for the first time that my Mom's maiden name according to the marriage certificate was Sarfati. To my surprise, I also discovered that my official name on my birth certificate was Lika and my birth date was March 4. I was confused. I now had three names and two birth dates and to this very day I am not certain as to which is the right one. I was skeptical at first and not sure that these were the right documents and if they were, I was truly puzzled. Bulgarians, not only Bulgarians Jews, are warm and very helpful people. The lady saw that I was doubting the information and was determined to put my mind at ease. Before opening her agency, she worked at the Interior Ministry and still had friends who worked there. Without hesitation she offered to take me to the ministry where her friends would let her see the original documents from the archives. We looked together and she read to me the births in Sofia the week that I was born. We looked together and the records of the others did not match at all. My birth certificate had my parents' name and their ages correctly alright. The certificate confirmed that I was born at home, but my birth date was clearly stated at March 4th, when all these years I was certain that it was March 3rd. She did her best to reassure me and offered a simple but most likely true explanation of the discrepancy. We know, she said to me, that mothers always know the day their baby was born. March 3rd was the day my mom celebrated my birthday all these years and I continue to celebrate it to this very day. I told her that I know from my mom's stories that my father was very happy when I was born. I was born at home and the midwife was surprised to see my father so happy for having a girl. Back then, it was unusual for men to be happy having a girl. Boys were far more celebrated. Her explanation was simple. According to her theory, my father, being so happy, went celebrating with his friends and probably did some drinking and more drinking so that by the time he went to register my birth at the

ministry 6 days later he could not remember the exact date. Was it the third? or the fourth? Knowing my mom, it was easy for me to accept her explanation. We went for lunch together and befriended with the help of a couple of Rakias, The Bulgarian national drink, much like the Greek Ouzo. She was so excited to find out that I had my first drink of Rakia with her that she had to immediately call her husband to share it with him. It was such a nice gesture for her to make me feel like home. Before we parted, she gave me her phone number just in case I didn't manage to connect with my family and be left alone in Sofia. The rest of my stay, I travelled to explore the country of my birth. I discovered the amazing beauty of Bulgaria for the first time. I was learning the history of the country and its traditions. Interacting with Bulgarians gave me the understanding of my parents' love and connection to their homeland, which continued long after they left Bulgaria.

So, am I Aliza, Alis, Elche or may be Lika? My best guess is that I was named Aliza the name of my grandmother from my father's side. I also learned that during the war Jews did not give, or were forbidden from giving, Jewish or Hebrew names to their newborn babies. It is possible that the name Lika was close enough to Aliza and or Alis. This is how I reconcile the difference in my birth date and my name.

Today I answer to all three names Aliza, Alis and Elche on official documents my name is Alis. Family and friends call me Aliza, the name Elche is my childhood name. I don't hear it anymore. My parents and Omama my grandmother were the only ones who called me by that name. It is likely a term of endearment in Bulgarian. Amnon, my husband, surprised me a few years ago with a personalized license plate with the name ELCHE 1 for my car.

I will try to write as much as I know and remember of the stories I heard or the stories I overheard when the adults didn't think that we kids were listening. My parents never talked or told us of their family history or their life in Bulgaria. They kept from us, the children, their struggles, both financially, and socially. They were way too busy and tired from the daily pressure of making ends meet and taking care of the family in a new and foreign country. They came to Israel, a country that was just born together with tens of thousands of immigrants, who like my parents, arrived without any means of support. Nowadays, immigrants receive housing, financial assistance, language training and more. In 1948 Israel did not have the financial resources and the ability to support the new immigrants. Without a penny

in their pocket my parents had to take any, and all kinds of work that was available. My parents started working as laborers. My father in road construction and my mom in the field picking fruits. They did not know the language. Hebrew is so completely different and difficult from any European language both for speaking, and writing. Mom told me a few anecdotes of her trying to communicate in Hebrew in the first few years. I remember one story she told me which I thought was so funny at that time. She went to the market to buy a chicken. She wanted to be sure that she will get a chicken and not a rooster. So, with her broken little Hebrew she knew, she asked for a girl chicken not a man chicken. Years later I realized how not funny it was for her and later for me. Now I understand her frustration and difficulties with a new language. I can relate to the difficulties she had expressing herself in Hebrew. Years later I too was an immigrant in a new country. I had minimal knowledge of English. When we arrived in Canada in 1971, the country was mainly populated with White Anglo Saxon people. Most did not have the patience to try and understand immigrants' broken English with a foreign accent. I remember well the embarrassment and frustration shopping at stores trying to ask or explain what I was looking to buy. My parents registered and went to night school which was provided to all immigrants for learning Hebrew. Mom and dad didn't stay long at school they did not have the luxury of having time to spare to go to school. They were able to read a little and know how to sign their names in Hebrew. The Bulgarian diaspora had their own newspaper in Bulgarian for my parents that was their main source of world and community news.

When I grew up, the relationship between parents /adults and kids was very different from what it is today. As children, we were discouraged from asking questions and just follow our parents' instructions and guidance especially when it came to family matters. Today, it is a very different relationship between children and parents. Our parents did not share their personal life stories with us. We were brought up from early childhood to respect our parents and the elderly. It was drilled into us and it became second nature for us. Standing up and giving up your seat on public transportation, to an elderly person, or to a pregnant woman, was natural and instinctive. Today kids don't have the same respect for the elderly. Today, parents think that they need to be friends with their children. Our parents were wonderful parents to us, but friends they were not. We knew our lane and for the most part stayed in it. Our parents did not see the need for us to know their

past. Perhaps they thought that it is not important or of interest to us or just that this was private. Later in life you begin to wonder about some simple things like: where did my parents meet? What was my father occupation? What kind of childhood did they have? and endless other questions. To this day I have so many questions and probably more questions that I don't even know about. As children we didn't know how much was kept away from us and appreciate how huge a hole in our parents' past we are missing. Only as adults we realize how many pieces are missing in our family history. Information that is almost impossible to discover when the main characters have passed away. As a child, I remember hearing bits and pieces of stories from my parents and my adult relatives. This memoir is my attempt to try to piece them together and have as complete a picture of my family as I can. I learned from my own experience how frustrating it is being left in the dark, not having answers to so many questions in my quest to discover who I am without knowing my family's story.

As for myself I tried to be as open and honest with my children and my grandchildren. I love to tell them stories about my childhood, myself and my family. I love sharing stories from my past. It helps keep my family alive. There is a saying that, so long as there is one person that remembers, their memory will remain alive. The best gift I can receive from my children and grandchildren is for them to know the wonderful people in my family and may be through their stories they will remain alive in our memory for a little longer. I understand that now at their age, they have little interest or patience to listen to stories from the past. When you're young you are looking forward not backward. Right now, they may not see the importance of knowing their family ancestry. But this too is changing. Now we better understand the importance of our DNA and better appreciate that our ancestors are part of who we are. Be it resemblance or a trait that without it they had no idea where it came from. My daughter was two years old when my mom passed away. She may not remember her, but she has a striking resemblance to my mom. Now as a mature woman I am certain that she would like to know more about my mom and her family history.

It is for that reason that I am writing to document my life and that of my family so that the next generation(s) when they will become interested, it will be available to them. I am making my best effort to document mine and my family's life so that unlike myself, future generation will have no need for guessing and wondering as

did I. As I am writing this, I came to realize that I have yet another reason, no less important for telling my family story. My brother Coby and I are the last one's who knew and remember our parents and Omama. It is of utmost importance to me to keep their memory alive and for you the readers to know them. Omama was the most loving grandmother a granddaughter can ask for. To this day, some fifty plus years later I miss her warm hugs. Being in her arms made the world feel so safe. I miss her a lot. My mom was a beautiful woman with big black eyes. She gave us unconditional love. She was always in my corner. Mom is my idol the one I look to when I am in trouble or in pain. I miss her love wisdom and council. My Dad had a gift. He was the one we called (in Bulgarian) ELEGANT TCHOVEK an elegant man. Not only with his always impeccable attire but in character and behavior. I miss his generous and quiet spirit. I lost all of them way too early in my life. My father passed away when he was only 61, my mother only 49 and my Omama at 74 all within a span of 15 months.

It is my hope that when you finished reading my story of the Levy family you will have a better understanding of who I am, where I came from and the family and community I grew up in and how it shaped me to become the woman, wife, mother and grandmother that you know.

BABA my great grandmother



My grandparents top right



My mother top right, Baba below her

BABA that's what we called her. She was my mom's grandmother and Omama's mother. Her husband my great grandfather name was Nisim. I never met him. He died in Bulgaria. I only have pictures of him and Baba. My first recollection of her was in Israel. Baba and Omama my grandmother arrived in Israel a few months after my parents and me. We lived in Rehovot where my mom's aunt Lina Leah in

Hebrew, found us a one room apartment across from where she and her husband Moise Moshe in Hebrew where living. Baba moved in with Lina her daughter and uncle Moise Halfon her husband. Lina and Moise did not have children. Omama moved in with us. My memories of Baba are very few, I was six when she came to Israel. She died shortly after, a year or so later. I remember her being very old and skinny. I have only one memory of Baba. A watermelon plant grew between our houses and I always thought that it belonged to us. Moise insisted that it belonged to them and Baba of course sided with him. I was mad and I felt betrayed. In a tantrum, I pulled the plant from its roots to make sure than none of us will be enjoying the watermelon. Baba and my uncle Moise were at odds with each other. They did not get along or for that matter liked each other. I remember the tension between Moise and Baba. Uncle Moise made her feel unwelcomed and considered her a burden on his family. Baba opposed Lina and Moise marriage. Moise was of Turkish heritage. Bulgarians did not like Turks. In fact, there exists outright hatred between Bulgarians and Turks going back to the Ottoman empire ruling over Bulgaria. Lina and Moise eloped. They left their families and moved to then Palestine. I don't think Moise ever forgot or forgave Baba for that. Life for Lina and Moise was not easy. A young couple all alone with no family and friends in a strange and hostile country. They immigrated to Palestine before World War II. Palestine was under the British mandate. The large wave of Bulgarian immigrants immigrated to Israel in 1948/49. This is the time we came to Israel.



Lina & Moise Halfon



Lina & her second husband & Omama

The immigrants before the war were mainly from Eastern Europe fleeing pogroms or Zionists coming with the hope of building a new state for the Jewish people. Lina and Moise had a one room and a kitchen that doubled for washing. The toilet was an outhouse. Baba's bedroom was in the kitchen she had a bed in there. It was a tight space and to be shared by three people, especially when they did not like each other. Moise was sick and so was Baba. He really did not like or care for her. His main fear was that she may survive him. I remember him saying that she will survive him as he will die before her and that thought upset him very much. As it turned out, Baba died first, she said to us she wanted to die when life for her became unbearable. I was eight or nine years old when uncle Moise died shortly thereafter. At that time my grandmother Omama lived in Lod a town that is about an hour drive from Rehovot. I was sent by bus to let Omama know that uncle Moise died. I was the only one available and my mom probably did not have any other choice but to send me alone by bus to deliver the bad news. Maybe the world was simpler, less complicated then than today. Or maybe there were far fewer options then. My parents never owned a car or a phone which today will be unthinkable. Moise and Baba are buried in Rehovot.

I know very little about Baba. She was from a village named Pleven in Bulgaria. She had four children, two sons and two girls. Her first born was my grandmother Omama. She was named Buka a name given to all first born females. The origin of this name comes from the Hebrew word BECHORA meaning first born. First born males were called Buko from the Hebrew word BECHOR. Nisim was born second, he and his family stayed in Bulgaria he had two sons. I met Nisim and his wife in 1966 in Israel when they came for a visit. In 2008 I visited Bulgaria I tried unsuccessfully, to locate Nisim's sons or any one from his family. Baba's second son whose name I do not know died at a young age he had one daughter. The fourth child was my aunt Lina she was the youngest. She married Moise Halfom he was a Turkish Jew. Bulgarians didn't like, in fact they hated Turks. Lina and Moise left for Palestine they were never accepted by both families. After Moise died Lina married a very nice man from Jaffa. He had one son that lived with them. I liked visiting them. I was probably 14 or 15. Their son was in his twenties. He rode a motorcycle and from time to time he will ask me to join him. I loved riding with him. Most times we went to the beach. Those were the only times I ever rode on the back of a motorcycle. I still remember the special feeling sitting behind on a motorcycle being

noticed and treated as equal by him and his friends. Aunt Lina like Omama was large and heavy set. There were many similarities between the two sisters. They both had large personalities, were good and warm hearted, always being helpful and hard working. The two of them were seamstresses. Aunt Lina was a trained professional seamstress. She earned her living as a seamstress working at people houses, sewing for their families. she was loved by her clients and was in great demand. Life with Moise was not easy for her. I remember him being remote and removed while Lina was loud and happy. She tried her best to help us when we arrived in Israel, she was loving and generous. Life with her second husband Haim was happier and easier than her first marriage. Lina was the only family from my mom's side to move to Israel. Lina died in 1970 she is buried in the Holon cemetery.

When we first arrived in Israel, we were housed in a tent city in Pardes Hana. Lina found us a one room apartment across from her place in Rehovot. Rehovot the town I grew up in, got married, had our children, lost both my parents and grandmother Omama. I have mixed memories and feeling about Rehovot and Israel.

OMAMA, Buka Avram Sarfati Bachar my grandmother 1895 – 1969 died at 74



Omama



Me & Omama



Omama & my mom

She was my mom's mom her name was Buka but for me she was Omama . I can feel her warm hugs to this very day. I felt safe and loved to be hugged and squeezed to her heavy and large bosom. Omama was loving, playful and mischievous. I loved to lie on her lap while she pretended to look for lice in my hair. It was a game she

played with me. I loved her playing and stroking my hair. It had such a calming securing effect on me. I became “addicted” to it. My husband, Amnon took over from Omama. To this very day, fifty-seven years after our marriage and ever since he continues stoking my hair at night before we go to sleep. It feels familiar, it feels good. It is the best way for me to relax and fall asleep. I am so lucky to be surrounded by loving people. When my children were young I too played and stroked their hair. We call it NANIKOT, don’t ask me why. They too continue this tradition with their own children. A simple ritual which started with my grandmother was passed on to my grandchildren for them to, like me, to enjoy the expression and pleasure of simple love.

As a child and later as an adult I knew very little about Omama. For many years I didn’t know if she was a widow or a divorcee. I found out later that she was divorced. In 1985 I visited Bulgaria for the first time after leaving the country in 1948. I met Aunt Jana. My aunt Jana is my mom’s younger sister. She was the one who told me a few more details about her father, my grandfather. Jana described her father Avram as a very good man. She remembers visiting him after the divorce. Jana told me that her father could not stay married. Why, she did not say, and I do not know to this very day. I was left guessing, that maybe he was gay or maybe he had some mental or emotional or any other kind of problem. I will never know. My mom never mentioned her father to me. She never spoke of him. I wanted but couldn’t ask more questions of Aunt Jana. My Bulgarian is poor. She didn’t speak English at all, and we communicated mainly by hand and facial gestures. Once again because of language barriers I was left with many questions and incomplete knowledge.

After the death of my parents the two languages Bulgarian and Ladino which I spoke fluently with my parents and Omama were erased from my memory. Today, I understand very little, I am hardly able to put a sentence together. The trauma I experienced with the death of my parents and Omama played havoc with my mind. I completely forgot two languages that I spoke for years. It is as if they were erased from my memory. My grandmother was left a single mother with two young daughters to support. One of the few things my mom told me about her childhood was that at a young age she was sent to the village of her grandmother and grandfather to be raised by them and the extended family of uncles and cousins. My grandmother sent my aunt Jana to an orphanage. Aunt Jana told me how much

she resented being sent to the orphanage. She was mostly upset when she stayed there after my mom came back to Sofia from the village. Jana was upset and felt abandoned by her family as a child and now again as an adult. She felt alone and abandoned by her mom when Omama left for Israel shortly after my parents and I left. The understanding was that Jana and her husband Liko will join the family in Israel shortly thereafter, but for reasons that I will explain later this never materialized. The village where my great grandparents lived was a backward hamlet, way behind the times. It never progressed to the twentieth century. My mom lived there for a few years with her grandparents. That could probably explain my mom's childhood and upbringing, lack in education and manners in this primitive setting. When she spoke to me about these times, she compared herself to Eliza Doolittle in Pygmalion. Being raised in this village explained why both my mom and Omama were so superstitious and practiced dubious alternative medicine. My mom came back home to Sofia probably at the age of 14 or 16. The few times that my mom talked about her past were when she asked me if I know the story of Pygmalion that's how she described how my grandmother saw her when she came back to Sofia. While with her wild behavior, her dress and her unkept looks. My grandmother was poor, self -thought, wise and sophisticated. She knew how to turn my mom from a Pygmalion to the beautiful and smart woman that she was.

I loved and I love Omama so much. She and my mom shaped the woman I have become. I am sorry that my children missed out the experience of growing up with a warm loving grandmother. With all my heart I tried to be to my grandchildren what Omama was to me and I hope that I did not fail them.

For the first years in Israel we all lived together in one room. Imagine, five people sleeping eating and socializing in a single room. Not a one bedroom, a single room. There was a Murphy bed for my parents that will open at night and two single beds one underneath the other and one more. A table for dining and homework, the Ice Box (no, not an electrical refrigerator) on top of which was the radio. We all set around it at night listening to news, music, sports, theater. We did not have a TV or record player. Our prime minister Ben Gurion at the time was against bringing TV to Israel he was concerned it will spoil the spirit of the youth. TV was only introduced in Israel in 1969. We had only one channel, a public channel broadcasting between Six p.m. and Nine p.m. When I think about our one room

apartment, I don't remember being crammed, or that we were one on top of each other. However, Omama knew that it was too crowded for all of us to be in one room. She felt. She needed to give my parents more room and privacy. She was introduced to a man who lived in Lod, she married him and moved away.

Omama was warm, smart, wise, playful, generous with her love and time, mischievous, considerate, hard-working, having a good sense of humor, curious. After the Six Days War of 1967 she was the first one from our family to take a trip to the new territories. But what many of us remember is that she was very superstitious. It probably came from growing up in a small village. Her superstitions were also transferred to my mom. It stopped right there with my mom. I never had superstitions.

One of Omama's remedies was LIVYANOUS. Explained in English it is a ritual that is designed to "lighten the soul", get out all the heaviness in the heart. Get rid of depression and stress which is making us sick. Amnon my husband was one of Omama's "patients". LIVYANOUS is a long ritual that involves lead, fire, bread, water and few other things. The way it is administered is quite intricate. The patient's face is covered with a cloth or towel mainly for safety. In a pot of water Omama puts bread cubes and herbs something like parsley. In a ladle, lead is being melted over an open fire. The pot with the water and bread cubes is placed over the head of the patient. The lead is then poured into the pot. The hot melted lead will seize and adhere to some of the bread cubes and the parsley. Now it is Omama's turn to interpret the significance of this mangled mess of lead bread and parsley. Omama was the best at this. Even if you did not believe in this hocus pocus, you were made to believe every word she told you. Somewhat like a fortune teller she made it so believable. She had an air of sincerity about her and endless wisdom. When She spoke, it was just like when she read my coffee cup. The ritual was repeated three times head, heart and feet removing all the bad spirits from the body. I don't know if it helped Amnon but for sure we always have a good lough every time we talk about and remember that experience. Amnon loved Omama and whether he played along with her or really believed in the remedy remains a mystery to this very day. Omama was the family's nurse, psychiatrist, adviser and a friend. There was something playful and mischievous in her eyes that won you over instantly. For years I was under the impression that LIVYANOUS was a Bulgarian thing until I read a fictional novel where the story is taking place in old

Yugoslavia. The narrator describes the exact same ritual except that it just has a different name. Now I know that it is probably practiced in different places, maybe with some variations. Catholic exorcism has the same purpose and probably the same results. Finding out that others practice the same rituals makes it more understandable and less weird.

As a child, what I really loved was Omama reading me my future and fortune off the bottom of a Turkish coffee cup. Her rousing predictions always alleviated my worries. I used to go to her before an exam in school. She would read the marks that the coffee grinds left and tell me how well I'll do on the exam and how many wonderful things are waiting for me in the future. Only good things were going to happen to me. I loved listening to Omama. As a child I believed every word. Now I also like to pretend that I know how to read coffee cups which of course I don't but I try unsuccessfully to fake it. Omama was clearly a better performer than me and therefore much more believable.

When Omama got married and moved to Lod I loved to come visit with her. She lived in a small house which used to belong to an Arab family who fled the country during the 1948 war. They had a yard where they raised chicken and ducks. For me, a city girl, it was heaven. Feeding the chicken and ducks and collecting eggs was so much fun. I remember vividly that on one of the visits Omama made me a Purim costume. She dressed me as a Geisha. You should have seen it, I looked beautiful



I came back by bus to Rehovot and my father came to pick me up from the bus station. When he saw me, he was surprised and in awe as to how beautifully I transformed to a beautiful geisha. He was so happy to see me in this Purim costume that he decided to join in the festivities. My dad went home to look for a costume and decided to dress as a woman. He was the ugliest woman you have ever seen. We all went dressed in our costumes to visit family. It was happy time. That was one of the few times my father acted happy and silly. Most times he was very serious and reserved but Purim is the one holiday that we should act silly. Seeing my normally austere dad dressed as a woman and looking ridiculous is one of my most cherished memories of him.

Omama had a good life with her new husband. I liked him. we all liked him. Unfortunately, the marriage didn't last long. He died a couple of years later. Omama came back to Rehovot. All she could afford to rent was a room and a kitchen with no electricity. The bathroom was an outhouse. The place had a big yard and two big berry trees, one black and one white. Every summer we gorged on the juicy berries. Our hands and clothes will be stained from the black juicy berries. I can still taste the sweetness and juiciness of the fruit. Omama's place wasn't far from ours. We saw her a lot. She will come to see us every Shabbat to have lunch with us. Twice a year, I used to go to help clean her place before Rosh Hashana and Pesach (Passover). This was something I always looked forward to. Spending time with Omama just the two of us was a wonderful experience. After we finished cleaning, we had lunch together. I waited for and will never forget Omamas' lunches. They were the best lunches ever. Everything tasted better when Omama made it. As a seamstress, Omama was a magician. She was able to copy and duplicate dresses from an American catalogue she had. For me the catalogue was like my bible. I would browse for hours, pick dresses I liked and Omama will have them made for me. We had wonderful moments together and great memories, that I will cherish forever.

When our first son, Eyal was born, Omama came to stay with me and help me physically and emotionally. She was a great help to me. I was young, I needed her help and guidance. Looking back, I probably had but never recognized that I had postpartum depression. I was rude and impatient with her I was mean and unpleasant to her and on reflection regret it so much. Omama understood and in her wisdom recognized what I was going through. She didn't get mad at me. She

continued helping me and ignoring my awful behavior. When I said she was wise and loving that is what I meant. She always knew what to say, when to help and when to stay away. I remember my brother Coby being upset with me for the way I behaved at that time. I didn't see or recognize how abhorrent was my behavior. Omama was there for me all the time, helping me with Eyal. When Alon was born she was already ill. We failed to realize how serious it was. Omama and my mom were my anchors. They were always beside me ready to help. When Alon was nine months old he was in the hospital. Omama was also at the same hospital in a different ward. Her severe illness didn't stop her from visiting Alon. She would wear a coat on top of her gown and come to sit next to him. When Sharon was born Omama was very ill. She was bed ridden and died two months after Sharon was born. Omama saw Sharon only once. She was practically on her death bed, but she asked to see Sharon. I am sorry that my kids have no memory of her love for them.

Omama had two daughters, my mom, Ketty and Jana. Jana was 4 years younger. She was married to Liko Baruch. They had two children Claire and Emil. Their family stayed in Bulgaria. I remember the day they were supposed to arrive in Israel. My grandmother went to meet them in Haifa. They also were coming by boat. They were not on the boat. My grandmother returned home alone. Later we learned that friends of theirs sent them a telegram telling them not to come. They warned them about the conditions in Israel. At that time Israel was in the middle of a severe recession and there were terrorists' attacks. Later, we learned that they sold all their possessions and needed to rebuild their life from scratch. My uncle, Jana's husband, later became a loyal Communist in Bulgaria and refused to leave, so it was out of the question for them to immigrate to Israel.

They came to visit us in Israel. First came my aunt Jana with her son Emil. A year later came Liko with Clare their daughter. The Communist government in Bulgaria would not allow the whole family to leave the country together for fear they may defect. I have no recollections from their visits. When I met Clare in Bulgaria years later, she mentioned her visit in Israel. She remembered that I (I am four years older than her) was busy being a teenager dressing up and going out with friends and didn't pay too much attention to her.

Omama died in April of 1969 and my father died in June 1969. My mom went through a very difficult time losing her mother and husband in the span of two

months. Mom needed her sister, she asked Jana to come and be with her to share together the grief and pain of losing their mom. Mom offered to pay for her ticket and her lost wages. Jana didn't come. Coby and I, where very upset. We knew how important it was for mom to be with her sister. We broke all ties with Jana after our mother died. In 1985 Amnon and I we went to Greece for a vacation. I figured that it was close enough to Bulgaria and it is about time for me to forgive. After all they are the only family left from my mom's side. They were so happy to see us. They received us with open arms and a bouquet of flowers.



Omama, Liko & Jana



Jana, Aliza & Claire



Jana, Emil & Liko

Bulgaria at that time was behind the iron curtain and there was scarcity of every commodity. We took for granted things like toilet paper, batteries, food on stores shelves were empty. Somehow, they managed to get those items for us, items they could not afford for themselves. We were moved by the warm reception. We found each other after many years that we were apart. We were family again. We cried and laughed. I mentioned before that I forgot speaking Bulgarian. Somehow, we managed to connect. When there is a desire and will to understand, it can be done. My aunt wanted to know about my grandmother and my mom's life and their death. I managed to tell her somehow in my broken Bulgarian, hand signs and some English. My cousin Emil has one daughter her name is Aliza I was told that she was named after me. I was surprised and pleased to know they wanted to keep the family connection alive. My cousin Clare has two sons and three grandchildren. It was a wonderful visit. It felt great to reconnect with family.

I called my brother Coby when we came back and told him how wonderful it was to meet them and the warm reception we received. He too visited them a couple of years later. In 1990 I went to Bulgaria and brought back with me my Aunt Jana

and Emil to North America. First, we spent two weeks in New York at Coby's and then we came to Toronto for two more weeks. This was their first time visiting the West. It was an amazing experience for them and for me. We flew from Sofia, changed planes at the Amsterdam airport. It was their first encounter with the West. They were overwhelmed by the abundance of products on display at the shops, the size of the bananas, which they first thought were fake. Coming to New York from Sofia was a complete cultural shock for them. They were in awe of what they saw and experienced. It was a great experience for me too to see the city through their eyes and experience. Things we take for granted were a mystery to them. Simple things that they have never seen in Bulgaria and didn't fathom to exist. Simple things like grapes without seeds or the same for seedless watermelons they questioned how it is possible for fruits to grow without seeds. They had a mild whiplash looking up Manhattan's skyscrapers. They were overwhelmed by the sheer size and the abundance in the department stores. They were proud of their country. Every time they saw something extraordinary, they always mentioned that they have similar in Bulgaria.

The years of Soviet propaganda influenced their perception. In New York they were afraid to board the subway. They were led to believe that crime is rampant on US streets. My third time visiting Bulgaria was in 2008. This time I joined an organized tour from Toronto. It was the first time for me touring Bulgaria. I fell in love with the country and the people. For two weeks we traveled and experienced the beauty of the country. This was the first and only time that I got to see Bulgaria and learn the history of a country that my parents loved so much. Bulgarian Jews who left in 1948 were crying as they left the country they were born in and loved. Bulgaria is one of the poorest countries in Europe. It is mainly an agricultural country. The Bulgarian people are simple, earthly, easy going, good hearted, warm and hospitable. By contrast to many Eastern European countries there is no anti-Semitism in Bulgaria. Bulgarian Jews were a small community, about fifty thousand, most of them were either poor or lower middle class. The Bulgarian Jews during World War II were saved by the Bulgarian king, the Archbishop of Sofia and by all the Bulgarian people. Bulgaria during the war was an ally of Germany, but when Germany asked them to turn in the Jews they refused. The Bulgarian people stood with the Jews insisting that they are one people. Bulgarian Jews were the only ones to escape the Holocaust. We were the lucky ones. Nowhere in Europe did a nation

stand up to Germany and succeed. Bulgaria was not altogether a white knight. They gave Germany the Jews from Tricia and Macedonia, two territories Bulgaria for years wanted and considered to belong to Bulgaria. The Germans agreed to fulfil that wish and gave Bulgaria those two territories in exchange Bulgaria let Germany take the Jews from Tricia and Macedonia. All the Jews from Tricia and Macedonia perished in the concentration camps. But when it came to the Bulgarian Jews, they stood by them in an epic resolve and won. Michael Bar Zohar wrote the book “The Trains Left Empty” in which he covers the events that took place during the war and the exodus of the Jews in 1948 from the Communist Bulgaria.

I miss my parents.



In 2008 I visited my family for a short time. My aunt Jana died a few years earlier. Bulgaria as a state was not in a good place and neither were my cousins. Bulgarians began to understand that the fall of Communism that they first celebrated changed the life of the average Bulgarian and not for the better. The safety net of the communist economical model including job security, education, healthcare and living wages were no longer guaranteed. Law and order in the country was broken when fear from the strong arm of the state security apparatus disappeared. Unemployment soared with the privatization of the economy. Most of my family's members lost their jobs. The same hardship befell them when Bulgaria entered the

European Union. The cost of living sky-rocketed when the Euro became the currency of Bulgaria. Financial and social changes left a large segment of the population behind. I felt uncomfortable there. It was an unspoken tension. As a stranger I felt that the warm reception from prior years was no longer. I felt they resented and envy what I represented in their eyes. They looked at me as “the rich relative from America”. We could not bridge those uncomfortable feelings. This visit was the last time I saw or spoke to them. The ties that connected us before were broken again.

Ketty Sarfati Levy my mom 1921 – 1970 died at the age of 49



My mom, both as a child and an adult did not have easy life. As a child she separated from her mom and sent to live with her grandparents in a small village and as an adult she left her country and came to a new country struggling with language and hard work.

Mom was twenty years old when she married my father. He was 33 years old, a whole thirteen years older than my mother. Aunt Jana told me that mom had a big love before my dad. They were young and he and his family left Bulgaria and immigrated to Israel. I don't know how and when mom met my father. What I do know is that she wasn't well received by my grandmother, my father's mom.

I have little knowledge of their life in Bulgaria. Mom got pregnant immediately probably on the first night. She was not ready to have children and she had an abortion. When Omama found out she warned her that she might have a hard time getting pregnant again. My mom almost immediately got pregnant again and I was born in 1943 in the middle of World War II. Coby was born in 1949 three months

after we arrived in Israel by a cargo boat. Mom was seven months pregnant. Our bunk was the top one. I hated the food and especially the tea that was served on the boat. For many years I did not drink tea and could not stand the smell and taste of tea. When I had cold my dad will chase me with a cup of tea trying to get me to drink. We arrived in Haifa happy to see relatives waiting at the dock. They were throwing food at us. I can remember the loafs of white bread. It tasted heavenly. It is hard to describe how it tasted to us after being on the ship for days and eating awful food.



Photo from our Bulgarian passport when we landed in Israel

We were taken to a MABARA (a transit shelter in Hebrew) a tent city for the new immigrants. It was Winter. It rained. It was cold and muddy. At night we feared from howling wolves. After a couple of months, Aunt Lina helped us get an apartment in Rehovot. What an improvement. We did not have to live in tents anymore. Many of the Bulgarians settled in Jaffa in houses that used to belong to Arab families who fled during the 1948 war.

Coby was born in January 1949. My mom didn't have the of luxury of staying home and taking care of the new-born, my brother Coby. She needed to look for and find work immediately. It was left for Omama to take care of us. Mom and dad took any work that was available. It was all physical hard work. Mom worked picking up grapes and oranges. Later she would sort and package oranges, lighter less physical work. Mom told me that the hardest most physical work was collecting olives. This involved spreading heavy tarps on the ground and shaking the trees. She continued this kind of work for three years until she started working as an assistant to a

kindergarten teacher. Mom worked in this position till the day she died. She loved her work. Mom was a quick study. She learned on the job and from year to year. She got more and more responsibilities. She was very good at her work. The children and their parents loved her and so did the teachers she worked with.

My father had health challenges from the time we arrived in Israel. One of his first jobs in Israel was working in construction. Then, one day, a heavy hammer fell on his head from the building's upper floor and he had to stay home and quit work. Later he contracted tuberculosis a serious and dangerous disease. He was sent to a sanatorium up north where the air was cleaner and cooler. Dad was in insolation until he recovered. Mom was the only bread winner for long periods of time while dad was ill. Mom was the one taking care of us and worrying about my father. Mom was the one who managed the money. She was careful, rational and sensible with money unlike my dad who regarded money as a way of spending more than mom was comfortable spending. Dad was different. He was large with money we used to say that money slips through his fingers. He spoiled us when he could. Our parents made sure that we had all that we needed to have a happy life. Looking back, by today's standards, we were poor, but as children we did not know or feel that we were poor or deprived of things. We as children needed very little to be happy and did not ask for much either. A snack in between meals was a slice of bread with some oil and paprika. Most of our friends came from similar backgrounds of working families and we all felt equal.

During the early 1950s Israel experienced a great recession. There were shortages of food and food rationing was in effect. There were restrictions on what and how much every family could buy, and every family had certain amount of food stamps. The restrictions were not only on food they were on all items from clothing, shoes and many other products. Through the food stamps there were restrictions on what we could buy and how much. Meat, chicken, butter, were, simply not available on the open market. For many years we used only margarine. I only started using butter once I came to Canada. There were also restrictions on eggs. Frozen fish fillets were the only thing available to buy with food stamps. I do not buy or eat frozen fish fillets. I hate fish fillets since that time. The same goes for brown sugar, the only sugar available. Close to our town Rehovot was a Moshav, a collective farm that was founded by Bulgarian. My dad knew some of them. He would go to the moshav to buy chickens and eggs and literally smuggle it to us. Dad

had a black long coat and Omama sewed big pockets inside the coat to hide the chicken or eggs from the police inspectors who rode the busses to catch smugglers like my dad. Our parents and any one we knew tried their best to get through those difficult days.

Mom was not a seamstress, but she learned how to sew from Omama and her aunt Lina who were both seamstresses. In order to generate extra income, mom started sewing men's ties. Dad had a friend Isaac who helped dad with the distribution of the ties. Mom sewed and dad delivered the ties. I admired my parents for their ingenuity, hard work and perseverance in finding ways to earn additional income.

Mom and dad had good friends in Jaffa, a large Bulgarian community. A large part of our family lived in Jaffa. Jaffa was the Bulgarian cultural center full of restaurants with familiar food and drinks. My parents would meet friends and go to eat Bulgarian Kebapche and drink Rakia or Boza. With all their hardships they knew how to have a good time too. Rakia is an alcoholic drink, A spirit I learned to like. You drink Rakia in the morning accompanied by hardboiled eggs with freshly baked Burekas and at dinner with Kebapche. Boza is a thick non-alcoholic drink recommended for nursing women. It is an acquired taste for non-Bulgarian. It is not like any other soft drink in texture or taste. One of my parents' favorite past time was playing Remi Cube with friends and with us children, a game which I also played with my children. One of my most beloved photos of my family is one taken at my engagement to Amnon. It is a picture of all my extended family uncles, aunts, cousins, great aunts and great uncles. In it my mom is dancing with one of dad's cousins. She looks so happy and glowing. The picture was taken just before my dad suffered a stroke.



Mom was slim, beautiful, with black big eyes. She was an extrovert. She wore her emotions on her sleeves. You always knew when she was happy, sad or when she was mad or upset. Mom had a loud and big personality. She was just like a ball of fire, exploding easily laughing and talking loudly and loving big. Mom and Omama were expert in home remedies for cold, earaches, depression and other maladies. For earaches, no need for drops, a warm garlic clove in the ear immediately solved the problem. I had it done every time I had an earache. I tried it on my skeptical son Eyal and grandson Ethan when we were in Costa Rica. Eyal had a bad earache and we did not have medicine for him, but we had garlic. He was in so much pain that he agreed to try my home remedy and reluctantly admitted that he felt better. A remedy mom and Omama used for chest cold was heat cupping. Seeing how it is done is frightening but apparently not painful. A cotton swab is dipped in alcohol, lit and placed inside of a small cupping glass. The heat creates a vacuum in the cupping glass, and it is immediately placed on the bare back for a few minutes. Red spots will be left on the back after the cupping glasses are removed. I was afraid and would not let them do it on me. I have seen it done on my mom and dad and it scared the life out of me. Lately this practice is in again and was used on athletes such as Michael Phelps at the Olympics. As always. every old thing becomes new and trendy again.

My mom's wish was that my life would be easier and better than hers. I don't believe in the afterlife or God, but I believe and feel that somehow mom can see me and see what a good life I have had with my wonderful family. Mom always worried that I married a younger man. She kept telling me "Amnon is younger, we women get older faster than man. Take care of yourself, keep yourself young. It was important to mom for me to stay young and not work too hard. For as long as mom was alive, she was by my side. Mom, Dad and Omama helped me all the time. Mom would send with Coby pots with her delicious Bulgarian cooked food. When the children were born, mom and Omama helped me with the children. Dad helped me with the shopping. After his stroke half of his body was paralyzed but it did not stop my dad from climbing five flights of stairs to see me and the kids.

We Bulgarians, we were not religious, but we kept our Jewish faith by keeping the Jewish holiday customs and traditions. Very few of us attended services in synagogue or kept kosher. Ladino language songs kept us united as a community. Mom sang in Ladino and Bulgarian. Mom had a beautiful voice. I wish I inherited

her beautiful voice, but unfortunately, I did not. I love listening to Ladino songs they remind me of home and the family that I miss every day. Mom used to light Shabbat candles but for some unexplained reason I resist lighting Shabbat candles and leave it to my daughter, my daughters-in-law or my beautiful five granddaughters. In our family, only Mom and Omama were fasting on Yom Kippur. They used to say that they are fasting for all of us and praying for a good year for all of us. My father was an atheist he did not participate in any religious custom. Yom Kippur was the only time Omama attended services at a Sephardic synagogue. Amnon loved Omama as if she were his own grandmother. He would pick her up at the end of the services and drive her to my parents' house for breaking the fast. We Bulgarian break the fast with cake and coffee and I continue the same tradition in our home. Amnon is the only one who fasts in our family. He started fasting after we got married out of respect for my mom and Omama and he continues to this very day. In Bulgaria there was very little assimilation if any within the Jewish community. We remained a cohesive community. The same in Israel. Bulgarians married with the community. I was one of the few exceptions of my generation to marry an Ashkenazi man. Mom liked Amnon. Her only concern was his age. He was younger than me, which was and maybe still is an anomaly. Mom kept worrying that I'll be an old maid by the time Amnon will finish his studies be able to get married and support a family. Little did she know that we will be married much faster than she expected.

In 1956 we moved from the one room apartment to an apartment with two rooms plus a kitchen and a bathroom. For us it was a huge improvement. My parents had their own bedroom, Coby and I shared the second room at night and during the day it was our living room. I shared the room with Coby till I got married and left home.

In 1968 Omama fell ill. She was bed ridden for a year before she died in April 1969. Mom was the only one who took care of Omama. In the morning before going to work mom would stop to clean and to feed Omama. At lunch she would first come to my home, bring Eyal whom she took every morning to her kindergarten. She would ask if I needed any help, then she'll go to Omama to take care of her. Only after she took care of everyone else, she went home to make lunch for herself and dad. For a few months when dad was in the hospital, mom would take the bus to go visit my dad. She maintained this rigorous schedule for a full year. A year later mom had her first stroke. She was only 49. In hindsight this should not have come as surprise. A social worker visited Omama during the year that she was bed ridden.

She was amazed how Omama was free of pressure wounds, always clean and hydrated. The social worker warned mom that she is going to burn out and collapse under the pressure. She suggested to my mom to put Omama in a long-term facility. Mom would not hear of it. Mom told me she owes Omama the care she has given her. We all have our dark corners. When mom was young, she kept Omama from remarrying. For years she felt guilty for allowing Omama to live alone all those years. Mom felt that now was her time to repay her debt to Omama. At the same time Omama was sick, my father got sick and was diagnosed with lung cancer. My brother Coby was in the army, mom was splitting herself between taking care of Omama, visiting my father in a Jerusalem hospital, worrying about Coby who was on the front lines during the war of attrition with Egypt and of course she never forgot about me.

Mom always worried about me. She didn't want to burden me with her worries. She kept bad news from me. The night before my dad died mom came to babysit for us and sent us to see Ari Son a famous Greek singer who performed that night in Rehovot. Mom visited my dad that day. She knew that dad was dying but she kept it from me. It was so typical of her to always try to protect me. I may not have understood it then, but Mom was a martyr, always shielding us kids, protecting us, dealing with harsh realities of her own and as it turned out doing it to her own detriment. We all knew that dad was doing badly. I just didn't know that it was so imminent. The next morning, we received the phone call. Dad died during the night. My father loved Omama. When Omama passed away month earlier, my mom wanted to keep the bad news away from my dad. She did not want to upset him. A friend who visited dad, who did not know that the news was to be kept from my dad, told him that Omama had died. While my mom was sitting Shivah, mourning the death of her mother, every day she would dress up, make herself up and take the bus to visit my dad in Jerusalem. Sitting Shiva is a mourning period for the dead for seven days. We, as Sepharadim, make it a family affair. During each day and for every meal, one family is designated and in charge of bringing and serving food for the mourners. Sitting and eating with the mourners is how we share in their pain and grief.

It took me years to grow up. All my life I was sheltered and protected by my parents. Was I selfish and inconsiderate in taking so much from them without realizing the heavy toll it took, especially on my mom? I don't know! Maybe I was or maybe it

was how I was raised by my parents who did everything they could to help their children. It seems to run in our family. One thing I am sure of, they did it with love. I know that my parents and Omama did what they did out of the goodness of their hearts. Only years later did I understand how difficult a time my mom had after Omama and dad died. Mom expressed herself to me only once when she said to me: "You have no idea how hard it is to come home, close the door behind you and be all alone, no one to talk to or share your day with. I may not have grasped the enormity of this reality at the time and the emotional and physical toll it took on her. How could I not understand? Mom lost her mom and her husband within a three months period. Coby was in the army, I was with three little children ages four, two and three months. I probably didn't see or understand the enormity of her loss and loneliness. I was young and busy with three young children. We all managed with our grief separately.

It was June 1970. Amnon was in Minneapolis on business. Mom came to babysit. Gila, my cousin, and I went to see a movie. When I came back my neighbors were in the apartment with the children. They told me that mom had a headache and she didn't feel well. They called an ambulance and took her to the hospital. I took a taxi to the hospital and was relieved, when the Doctor said to me that there is nothing wrong with my mom, that she just had a headache and I should take her home, so I did.

At home her behavior was strange. She wasn't herself. She kept repeating the same question and asking over-and-over again what's the time? What's the time? I called my brother who was a medic in the army, and he was on leave at home. Coby suggested that I call an ambulance and take her back to the hospital. Coby came and rode in the ambulance with mom. I stayed at home with the children. The next morning Coby left for his army duty. Deep down I felt and knew that mom was in bad shape. I just did not know how bad it was. I decided to wait for Coby and to go to the hospital together. I admit I was afraid to go by myself to see mom. We arrived late afternoon and we were told that mom had another stroke and that she needs to be moved immediately to a hospital in Jerusalem. Coby went with mom and took care of the arrangements. I went home to be with the kids. Amnon was still in Minneapolis. I had no one to stay with the kids. The next morning, we visited mom and a miracle happened. Mom was completely well. The Doctor said to us that she needs to stay a few more days to go through some test. That week was exactly a

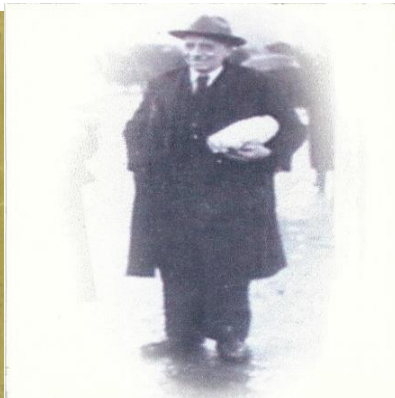
year since father's death. Mom was upset that she could not go to the cemetery. We begged her not to upset herself and that we were going to be there and that we will come to see her the next day. The next day she had a second stroke which was the beginning of the end. At one point the Doctors thought they would be able to operate but before they could schedule the operation mom had another stroke. Mom was in the hospital for a month. There were times that I thought that she would be able to survive. Our emotions and mood were like a seesaw; up and down, from hope to despair. I made a deal with God: I will take her home in any condition, even if she's not perfect, not one hundred percent healthy and functioning, I will take her home just as long as you let her live. That didn't happen. I remember the last time I saw my mom she was unconscious. Her head was shaved, she was not my beautiful and vibrant mom anymore. I was there with my aunt Bella. I said to her that this is the last time I'll see mom and the next day we got the call.

I lost my mom, my anchor, my safety net, my mentor, the one I looked for answers advise and courage. I miss you so much mom. Forty-nine years have passed, and the pain and the longing has been growing sharper as the years pass. There are songs that remind me of you mom. I think of you mom. Mom had a beautiful voice. She had big black eyes. and one of the songs she loved singing was Ochi Chornia, a song about a woman with beautiful black eyes. There are some Hebrew songs that when I hear them, I think of my mom. There is a children Hebrew song. In it the little girl can't find her mother in the crowd. She sings, I lost, I lost my mother. In the song she finds her, but I don't. An old Hebrew love song to a woman with black hair.

Yakov and Buka Aliza Levy My grandparents



My Grandparents



Saba Yaacov



Saba Yaakov's extended family

My grandparents and their families were Zionists and pioneers who immigrated to Israel in the late 1890s. They settled in Kfar Hitim a new settlement in the Northern Galilee. My grandfather and my grandmother immigrated separately with their families. At that time, they were not married.

One day, an Arab boy was murdered near their settlement. Afraid of being blamed for the murder, the whole community packed their belonging and returned back to Bulgaria. My grandparents were married later in Bulgaria. They had three children Marko my dad, next was Vita and the youngest was Bela. Unfortunately, I do not have any memories of my grandparents and little to no emotional connection to them. All I remember is my grandmother's looks. She was small, short, red head. My understanding is that by contrast, my grandfather was tall. That's all I know or remember. I was young when he died. My grandmother had two brothers: Jaco Yakov Levy and Daniel. Jaco, who was of the same age as my dad was his uncle. So, they were more like friends. Jaco married Liza. Jaco, like my aunt Lina, immigrated to Israel before World War II. He and Liza got married in Israel and had two daughters: Mazal, meaning luck or lucky, (her twin brother died at birth) and a younger sister Ruth. Both our families lived in Rehovot and always celebrated the Passover holiday at Jaco and Liza's place. Their house was big enough for all of us. I remember with fondness those gatherings. Money was tight. Every family brought food. Jaco was the only one who read Hebrew, so he conducted the Seder. My fondest memory of these Seders was the singing in Ladino of UNO AS EL CREADOR the Hebrew song EHAD ME YODEAH. Whenever I hear or when we sing this song during our own family's Seders, it brings back vivid, fond memories.



Mazal's wedding from right: Omama , Amnon, me, Coby ,Mazal, Vicor, Lisa, Marko, Ketty, Jaco, Ruthy

Ruthie married and moved to Colombia. She had two sons. Unfortunately, Ruthie and her husband both died just a few years ago, at a relatively young age, in Colombia.

Mazal is red headed just like her aunt, my grandmother. Mazal calls herself Miki and is married to Victor a very nice man. They have two sons. I knew Victor prior to him marrying Mazal. We both worked at the Atomic Energy Reactor near Rehovot. At some point we worked at the same department. As children Mazal and I we weren't close. We attended different schools and different youth organizations. It changed after we both married. We became close friends. We keep in touch after almost fifty years of us living in Canada, every time I go back to Israel, we visit with them and enjoy their company.

My grandfather had a few brothers and sisters. Two of them settled in Jaffa in abandoned Arab houses. They lived at the catacombs. Getting to their places we had to walk through narrow and winding streets. The catacombs area was close to the Mediterranean Sea. There was dampness and wetness everywhere.

Bulgarians are warm and hospitable people. We love getting together with the extended family a few times a year. When I was dating Amnon he could not understand why I liked visiting my extended family like my father's uncles and aunts and cousins in Jaffa. At the time, visiting family was not as simple as today. None of us had cars or phones. We had to take busses wherever we needed to go, then, walk quite a distance to their homes.

In 1949 my grandparents with their daughters Vita and Bela came to Israel.

Vita – Levy – Bezalel



Vita married to Shlomo Betzalel

Vita and Shlomo had two children. Bela was single. They all settled in Akear an Arab village that was vacated when the Arabs fled during the 1948 war. My grandfather died not long after arriving in Israel, Aunt Bela married a widower with a young daughter, Gila, about my age. She moved in with him to Rehovot. Grandmother moved in with Vita and her family. She lived with them till the day she died. I have little to no memories of my grandmother. She was connected emotionally and physically to Vita and her family. I don't remember my father being close to his mother either. I couldn't tell. My dad was an old fashion man showing very little emotions.

Vita and her family moved from the Arab village to a new development in the same village. It was a semi-detached house with a large back yard. They grew all kinds of vegetables. I was nine or ten years old, coming from the city to their place was a lot of playful fun. I loved visiting them in the summer. It felt like going to a summer camp. We the children loved playing outdoors. We played for hours on end. One of the games we played was Hide and Seek, hiding between the corn stalks. Vita and Shlomo had two children: Chaim and Mimi Naomi. Chaim was my age and Naomi five years younger. Vita had two children before Chaim but they both died as infants. Our family was very superstitious; it is likely a Bulgarian trait. We believed in good and evil and that we can trick the devil. When Vita was pregnant with CHaim, Aunt Bella "bought" the baby from Vita's womb. I am not certain as to what exactly was involved. Believing they are tricking the devil, evading the faith of the two previous babies now that the baby is Bela's and does not belong to Vita. Chaim was born a healthy baby. Bela and Chaim had a very special relationship. Their love for each other was very special. They treated one another as son and second mother. In the Jewish tradition there is a custom that is performed before the high holidays known as CAPAROT. It is a ritual that is performed for the first-born male. A rooster is sacrificed for the life and health of the child. It is designed to spare the boy from bad things. This goes back to the time in Egypt. Bella used to perform this ritual on Chaim every year. She loved, cared and was interested and involved in every aspect of his life. After Bela's husband Shlomo died, Chaim a good person as he was, helped, cared and frequently visited Bela. For her he was the son she never had. The strong love that existed between them continued till the day Chaim died. Haim died of a heart attack at a relatively young age. Bela was devastated. For her it was as if she lost her own son. Bela was never the same after Chaim's death.



Left: Shlomo, Ketty, Chaim & Vita



Chaim, me, Vita, Shlomo, Alon, Mimi, Eli, Bela

Vita and Shlomo, much like my parents and many other new immigrants, worked very hard. Vita worked as housekeeper and Shlomo worked at the citrus groves. Rehovot was known for the many citrus groves, especially oranges which surrounded the town. Once a year we had a festival celebrating the harvest time of oranges, grapefruits and lemons. In the fifties Rehovot was a small agriculture town, the main industry was working at the citrus groves in all the aspects of the industry.

Rehovot had two classes of people: The one's with the money and the influence, the PARDESANIM meaning the owners of the groves. Most if not all of them came to Israel in the 1920,1930 or were born in Israel. They were known as the VATIKIM the old timers, the veterans. The rest of us were new immigrants, the workers who picked the oranges, cleaned the VATIKIM's homes, worked in construction and built roads. There were also a few small business owners. Rehovot was divided to two sections. The south part of the town was called Shaaraim. Mainly Yemenite Jews lived there. They too were part of the working class. In fact, for many years we referred to a cleaning lady by the generic term "Yemenite" because many of them worked as cleaning ladies. Nowadays it would have been totally politically incorrect, if not racist. Jews are just as prejudice, suspicious of the "other" just like any other group. We Bulgarians are part of the SEFARADIM community, even though, unlike Sepharadim, who came from Arab and North Africa regions, we came from the Balkan countries. We speak an old Spanish dialect with some Hebrew words sprinkled in, known as Ladino. Our culture, traditions and rituals are the same as in the Balkan countries we came from. Sepharadim is a reference to the ancestors of the Jewish community that were exiled from Spain (Sepharad in Hebrew) during the Spanish inquisition of 1492. In the early years of the country

each group stayed and socialized within its own community. Cultural differences and opportunities available to the Ashkenazim that were not available to most of the Sepharadim created resentment and suspicion between the groups. Compulsory Army service in Israel is credited with minimizing if not eliminating mutual prejudice between the two communities. It is a melting pot. A levelling environment. For two years we live together, day and night, depend on one another, form life-long friendships and become color and class blind. In the last thirty years or so the social makeup of the country has been changing. There are many more so called inter-ethnic marriages between the groups. For me, coming back to Israel after our parents died was emotionally difficult. However, visiting Vita and Shlomo's home brought back some of the warm feelings of home, of belonging, of being connected to the family I miss so much.

Chaim married Rivka and they had three sons. One of the sons was born ill with an immune deficiency syndrome. He was seriously ill for long time. Aunt Vita was very concerned that he would not survive much like her two sons. However, thanks to advanced modern medicine he recovered. Rivka, Chaim's wife, asked Vita of what her two children died from curious to know if it was genetic. Did they have the same illness? It was important to know for the future if this disease is hereditary. Vita didn't know. In the 1940s medicine was not as advanced as it was in the 1990s. She never found out what they died from. Naomi, Vita's daughter married Eli and they had two sons. Eli was killed in an accident during army exercises. Naomi is now married to Alex.

Bela Levy Aharon



Bela with Coby



Bela and my mom



Bela in Bulgaria

There is a shroud of secrecy around Bela. It is going back to Bulgaria and involves her boyfriend or fiancé being in jail. There must have been more to the story. In our family it was a taboo to ask or talk about it. There were only whispers. I have picked up very little. My father was protective of Bela, his younger sister. He had a special feeling for her. You might say that she was his favorite sister. My dad would not let people talk about her and in our family what my dad said was it. No one did. Bela was twenty-seven and single living with her parents. She was later introduced to and married Shlomo Aahron a widower with a young child Greta or in Hebrew Gila. Her mother died at childbirth. This was clearly a marriage of convenience, a loveless marriage. Shlomo worked in construction. Bela worked as a housekeeper. They too lived in one room with a shared bathroom. Bela and Shlomo had one child together Fanny.

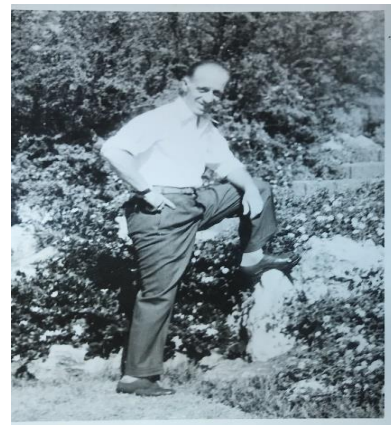
We all loved Bela. Mom and Bela were good friends they were of the same age. Their friendship started in Bulgaria and continued through the rest of their lives. Dad loved and protected Bela like a big brother will do for his younger sister. Bela respected dad and in a strange way he had an unspoken authority over her as her older brother. She never challenged dad. Dad for example objected to her smoking and as a result Bela never smoked in front of my dad. She respected him until the day he died. Today it may seem unusual or may be strange for such a relationship to exist, but not in my parents' generation. This was how families were structured. The oldest brother took care of his younger sisters and commanded their respect.

As a stepmother, Bela's treatment of Greta was out of character. Bela was what you may call the wicked stepmother as we know from fairy tales except that this was not a fairy tale. For Greta it was real life. At the age of 16, the age when Greta was no longer considered a minor for ID registration purposes, Greta changed her name to Gila (Hebrew for happiness). This was the generation of native born (Sabras) in Israel. The generation of the "New Jew" as distinct from the meek "Diaspora Jew". Many immigrant families "Hebraicized" their names to fit in the Israeli scene. My husband Amnon's family came from Poland and while he was born in Israel with a given biblical Hebrew name his family name was Zilberboim. When we got married, we Hebraicized our family name to Zohar.

Bella did not show any love or affection toward Gila. In fact, she was mean and harsh toward Gila. Gila from a young age had to take care of all her needs by herself,

washing her own clothes by hand (they did not have a washing machine) and much more. Her dad did not spare his belt in disciplining her. Vita, her sister, and my mom tried intervening on behalf of Gila, but Bela would not listen or change her attitude or behavior. Gila was and is very resourceful resilient and hard working. Gila started working as a clerk in the courthouse in Rehovot. She was liked by her co-workers, she was successful. Gila continued living at home until she was able to save enough money to buy her own apartment. Gila married a widower with two children. Life is so strange. You can clearly see the irony. Gila and her husband Avram had one child together. Gila's life continued to be hard. She worked at their store while taking care of their three children without any help. They later moved to New York. Life for her in New York was not much easier. She was working at their Lighting store seven days a week, from morning to night. After her husband died, Gila decided to retire and moved to Florida. Gila lives in Florida. Her son Guy and her granddaughters live close by. The move finally changed her life. She now has time to enjoy her family and spend time with friends. Gila and I became closer friends only after I got married. Gila has a big heart, she loves to help, she was the only one relative who was by my side during my mom's illness when Amnon was away on business she has been there for me after my mom's death. We continue our friendship to this very day. We don't see each other often but we are on the phone or on Skype a few times a month. We have a shared past. Gila is one of the few that is left who knows me from childhood. It is easy for us to talk and share memories. Fanny is eight years younger than me we were never close. She is married with kids. I have not seen her or been in touch with her for many years.

My dad Marko Mordechai Levy 1908 – 1969 died at the age of 61



The young boy is my father.

Dad, like his mom, was a red head. Fortunately for him, he was not short as his mom. He took after his dad. Red hair runs in my family we shall see where else it is going to show.

In his youth in Bulgaria, my dad attended a French school run by nuns. The reason he attended this school is that it was the best education available. Dad was lefthanded. At that time being lefthanded was considered deviant. The nuns tied down his left hand and forced him to learn to write with his right hand. He continued doing other tasks with his left hand. Today we think of this act as cruel and unusual punishment, but we can't judge by today's values. My son Alon, his daughter Erin, are also left-handed. Nowadays, no one pays attention, thinks it is weird or considers "conversion" to right-handedness. While going to a French catholic school run by nuns, my dad had to pray every morning. He had a cross hanging over his bed. I could never figure out how his parents allowed this to happen in a Jewish home albeit secular. It is interesting how differently mom's family and dad's family dealt with prayer at school. Mom told me she left class during the morning prayer. We are not religious. Religion was not an important part of our life. My grandparents they may have overlooked the religious aspect of the school for the benefits of good education. Thinking of dad praying is strange, as dad for the rest of his life was an atheist. Looking at my parents' marriage license certificate from 1942 I learned that he worked as a civil servant in the Bulgarian bureaucracy. Knowledge of French in Bulgaria the years before the war was an asset. French was the international diplomatic language. French was the preferred second language used in government and at by the diplomatic corps. From another document a year later in 1943 it lists his profession as a tradesman. 1943 was in the middle of the war. All Jews were removed from public institutions such as banks, government and in the civil service. To understand why my dad's profession changed I needed to do some detective work. My dad married my mom in 1942. He was 33 years old. Dad and all the Jewish men in Bulgaria who were physically capable were sent force working camps run by Bulgarians under Nazi supervision.



During WWII in a Work Camp

The men were assigned to build new roads. In one of the books I read on the war and the treatment by the Germans of the Bulgarian Jews, there was a description of the work camps. Bulgarian guards were in-charge of the working men. They, the guards, did not enforce harsh work discipline. The work discipline was relatively lax, lenient. They had it relatively easy. The Germans realizing that work was not progressing to their satisfaction, sent German supervisors to oversee the work. Conditions did not change much as the Bulgarian guards were still in charge. The Bulgarian guards protected the Jews in any way they could. Bulgarian Jews were spared from being exterminated during the Holocaust. They were the only Jews who were spared owing to the resistance of the country in refusing to let the German take the Jews. Other measures were taken against them. All Jews had to wear the Jewish infamous Yellow Star the same as all the Jews in Europe. Mom for all the years kept her Yellow Star in her sewing box with all the needles and buttons. As a child I used to play with the buttons. I remember seeing the Yellow Star. After

mom's death I cleared my parent' house. Unfortunately, I probably threw it out with many other items that I regret and wish I had not. This is one of the many mistakes I made while going through my parents' belongings. It was too soon after their death. I was not ready emotionally to deal with this act of finality. I felt angry. I remember the feeling of wanting to finish this task as soon as possible and leave the apartment. I gave away most of their belongings. I kept very little for myself. It took me years to understand the emotions and to recognize the turmoil I was going through at that time. I know now that it takes a long time to deal with traumas. Losing my parents was a trauma that changed me and my life forever.

My dad did not exhibit his emotion out in the open. Some who didn't know him well may say that my dad was cold, removed, remote and unapproachable. He loved me from the minute I was born. He spoiled me as much as he could all his life. For my Bat Mitzva I had the most beautiful dress. It was a blue organza with a puffy skirt. A good friend of my dad asked him why he spent so much money on my dress. It reminds me of when the nurse asked my father why he was so happy when I was born. He was a loving and generous father he may have not shown this side to others, but he always showed it to me. I am very much like him. I see myself in him with all the good and the faults. Only once in my life I got a spanking from my dad. I was six or seven years old. I climbed a tree in our back yard. I don't know how or why it was such a terrible offence. I was a young child having fun. Our landlady complained about me to my parents. My dad felt so embarrassed to be put in this position. When we misbehaved and mom was mad at Coby or me, she used to say: "just wait for when your dad comes home". But nothing ever happened. Usually, mom did not say a word to him, the threat was enough for us to behave. We had tremendous respect for him. I don't remember ever talking back to dad or challenging him in any way. When dad was in a bad mood or tired, Coby and I would be very quiet and stay out of his way. On Saturday's dad loved to play Poker. He had a group of Bulgarian friends he played with. As kids we waited to see in what kind of a mood he would be when he came home. If he won money playing Poker, he would come home in a good mood and we would have a lovely lunch. When he lost, he would come back in a terrible mood and go straight to bed. He was upset and felt guilty when he lost money at Poker. Money in our house was always tight. Dad and mom worked physically very hard for it. When the group of friends stopped meeting Saturday's dad stopped gambling and playing cards.

When I think of dad or try to see him, the picture that comes to me is of dad always dressing impeccably. His shoes were always shiny, his shirts and suits pressed and clean. I see a picture of a proud and elegant man. His appearance was an important part of who he was.

I described dad's love as a quiet love. He was not demonstrative with big hugs or kisses. The way he showed his love was by being present, by knowing what and when we needed him. Dad did things for me that either made me happy, like getting me the dress for my Bat Mitzva or bringing groceries to help me out when I lived on the fifth floor (with no elevator) with two young children. Dad would carry the groceries up the many stairs even though he did not quite recover from his stroke. His right side was partially paralyzed but that did not stop him from climbing all those stairs up to the fifth floor. Dad was generous with money he loved to spend it on us. Mom and dad had arguments about money. Money all their life was in short supply. They always had to cut corners and improvise. We as kids didn't feel, know or understand how tight money was. They managed somehow to provide us all that was needed. We didn't miss or envy things that other kids had whose parents were better off. We always felt that we had everything we needed.

Dad always suffered health problems from as soon as we arrived in Israel. He had work accidents and tuberculosis. In 1963, two weeks before my wedding, he had a major stroke. Half of his body was paralyzed, and he had slurred speech. I was devastated. I said that I am not getting married without my dad present. In the Jewish tradition we do not postpone weddings. Sometimes miracles do happen. My dad partially recovered in time and was able to attend the wedding. It is customary for the two dads to carry the groom to the chuppah. In my wedding it was more like Amnon was carrying my dad. He never recovered completely. His right hand was weak and hanging. He shuffled his right foot. His speech improved. Those handicaps did not stop him from climbing five flight of stairs to come visit carrying bags of groceries for me. That's the kind of dad he was.



After dad recovered from tuberculosis a good friend who worked as a guard at the Weitzman Presidential Palace told him that a space for another guard opened. This period was a happy time in our family. For dad it was a relatively easy work after working in construction and paving asphalt on roads. Dad worked many nights. He loved socializing with the other guards as they were also Bulgarians. Most of the time the Palace was empty. Chaim Weitzman, the first President of the State of Israel, was dead by now. His widow was away most of the time and spent very little time in the palace. For the first time, Dad had a steady job and a reasonable salary. The gardens surrounding the palace had fruit trees, some of the most exotic fruits. Fruits that were not available or seen in any Israeli market at that time. We were the lucky ones to taste and enjoy fruits such as mangos, Papaya etc., that were not available until after many years in Israeli markets. After the stroke dad could not continue working as a guard. He started working at the Weitzman Institute in the mail department.

In between all the ups and downs of work, money and health, my parents had calm periods. They enjoyed with us the company of family and friends. When our first son Eyal was born, my dad was the happiest person alive. Not surprisingly, Eyal was his favorite, his first grandson. Dad spent lots of time with Eyal, playing, taking him for walks. Eyal was the apple in dad's eye. Dad was always available for him. Dad loved him so much. In my last visit at the hospital before dad died one of his final questions was wanting to know how Eyal was doing.



Unfortunately, my dad did not have enough time to spend and bond with Alon and he only got a glimpse of Sharon before he died. He could have been a great grandfather.

The good times didn't last long. Dad was feeling sick, coughing, had chest pains which the doctors dismissed for a long time as nothing but a lingering cold. Bit by bit his health was deteriorating. He kept going to see doctors. Until one day he decided to check himself into the hospital. By that time, it was too late. He was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. Dad was transferred to the Hadassah hospital, in Jerusalem for treatments. Tests showed the cancer had spread and was terminal and that they could not operate or treat the cancer. At that time patients were not told what was wrong with them especially when it came to the C word – Cancer. The information was kept from them. Mom told dad that he had a Cyst and that he would be fine. Before going to the hospital dad saw a program on TV dealing with cancer and radiation, in the program they show technicians marking the body before radiation. When his chest was marked, dad realized and understood the truth. After the radiation treatment we did not recognize dad, he was in shock and mentally, he did not recover. He lost his will to fight, he gave up.

That day was the beginning of the end. He received radiation only once. The attending doctor who was a surgeon said to mom she had to take dad home. There was nothing he could do for him. He needed my dad's bed for other patients. Mom was in a panic. How could she take him home with all the tubes connected to him. Mom found a hospice in Jerusalem managed and cared by nuns. It was a French hospital. Isn't life ironic? Dad as a child was taught by French nuns and at the end of his life he was cared for by French nuns. Our charade, trying to convince him that

everything is going to be fine continued even then. One of my painful memories is my last visit with my dad. The two of us were fully aware and knew that it was the end. Dad knew, I knew, and I knew that he knew that I knew. Dad was asking about the kids, my kids. He wanted to see them. I can still hear it in his voice as to how much he missed them. I kept saying to him that he will come home and see them. It hurts me till today that the last time I saw my father I was not open and honest with him. Both of us were deprived of the opportunity to express our love and to talk freely about how much I'll miss him. Dad was 61 when he died.

Yaakov Coby Levy 1949 son of Marko and Ketty my brother



Coby is the first Sabra in our family. He was born January 1949, three months after we arrived in Israel. Coby is six years younger than me. For the first few years I considered my brother as a nuisance at best. He was a child when I was a teenager, he was only fourteen when I got married and left home. We shared few experiences together. There are two that I do remember. The first one was when I was nine or ten years old. Our parents were out with friends for the evening. I was the babysitter. On the ceiling I notice a gecko. I can still remember how frightened I felt. I needed protection, I needed company. Coby was the only one available. He was a baby tired and falling asleep. But I wouldn't let him. To keep him awake till our parents came, I kept washing his face with a cold towel. I cannot explain why this memory is so vividly etched in my mind. I can see the room, the gecko, I see Coby and me. Other memories from when we lived in our one-room apartment on Benjamin street were that Coby used to lie down in front of the front door with his hand stretched out and touching the bottom of the door. Every time someone

opened the door, Coby would lose one or more fingernails. Another place he loved to play was the front gate. He would swing on it back and forth and again he lost a few fingernails. I wonder if any of his fingernails are the original ones. As a child he was mischievous. He used to be called little Ketty after my mom. Not only does he have my mom's complexion, they have the same traits, they think alike, and they talk alike, loud and fast. As children, we did not have toys. I don't remember ever playing with dolls. Coby for his birthday once received a tank toy. Coby loved his toy and played with it constantly. The tank had rubber chains and from the heat they would expand. Every night, Coby would put the chain in the ice box hoping they would shrink again. I continue to marvel how such trivial episodes remained so vivid in my memory for so many years. By the time I was fifteen we already lived in our new apartment on Achad Haam street. I shared a room with Coby, the same room was also our living room. A friend of mine from school came to work with me on a school project. My parents were away, they went to the movies. Coby was nine years old and stayed at home with me. Me and my friend, were working on the project and having a good time. She was one of my best friends. As we were working, Coby kept interfering, making mischief and looking for attention. I got so mad at him that I threw him out of the room. He ran back trying to barge in. The entrance to the room was a glass door. He broke the glass with his elbow and cut his hand all the way to the fingers. I called my neighbors for help. An ambulance came and took Coby to a first aid clinic. Coby refused to go without mom. So, the ambulance had to drive to the movie theater. They stopped the screening of the movie and called my mom by name. I can't imagine what went through her mind when she heard her name called out. I was at home. I was in panic worrying if they'll save his hand. The cut was deep. The neighbors kept saying how bad the cut was and how dangerous it is. Coby had quite a few stitches and has a scar to this day. When my parents and Coby came back home my mom saw how I was worried and terrified. Mom reassured me that Coby is fine. I was spared being yelled at what happened. I wonder why we always imagine and think of the worst.

As adults the age difference between us disappeared. We became best friends.



Mom used to say to us: “You are only two. Love and take care of each other” I feel confident that we fulfilled her request. After our parents died at a relatively young age it was just the two of us. After mom died, I was married and busy with young children, at that time I believed that it was harder on Coby being left all alone. He just completed his army service and was ready to start studying at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. This was a special wish mom had for him. Coby applied to the university when mom was still alive. She was very happy and proud that Coby would be the first from our family to attend university. Coby said he came to the army with two parents and left with none. He left the army an orphan, he was only twenty years old. Less than a year after mom’s death I left with my family to Canada. Shortly thereafter Coby dropped out of school to join us in Canada. Unfortunately, Coby was denied a landed immigrant status or a permanent work visa to stay in Canada. We couldn’t sponsor him as Amnon had only a working visa himself. After a while it was clear that Coby had to leave and go back to Israel. We encouraged him to go back home as we too planned to go home as soon as Amnon’s 2 years project was completed. Our plan was to stay in Canada for only two years, go back home and be together. Coby told us bits and pieces of the things he had done from the time he left Canada to the time he met his now late wife Yael. Only years later he told us some of the things, but probably not all, of his misdeeds and we had preferred not to know about it either. I remember receiving letters from family complaining and warning me that Coby lost it. He was wild and irresponsible. This period lasted for a year or so until he met Yael. There was little I could do from afar. I was disappointed by my family, how they did not see or understand the pain, the loneliness, emptiness and Coby’s state of mind during all this time. I dare not think where he would have ended if he did not meet Yael. Yael

was his love, his wife and his savior. Yael was his anchor and hope for the future. I could never thank her enough for saving him and for creating a loving and warm family.



Coby and Yael moved to New York. They have two sons Don and Ron. Being on the same continent made it easier for us to see each other a couple of times a year. Coby and his family come every Rosh Hashanah and Passover to celebrate the holidays together. The whole essence of a holiday for me is the family gathering. We go once a year to New York for a visit. This is the most important thing I am proud that we have accomplished as far as the second generation is connected. My kids love Coby and his family. They love that they have real ties to their uncle and cousins. Now that Yael is not with us anymore, Coby continues the tradition of joining us every holiday. Don and Ron are now married. Don and Rachel have three kids. They too come from time to time to join us during the holidays. The connection with the third generation continues. I am so proud of this achievement. In my value system, there is nothing more important than family. I feel that I am honoring my parents by keeping our small family together and mom's request to take care of each other.

Yael died of leukemia in 2010. It was a shock and a loss to all of us. She was only 64. We all loved her. She was an easy going, fun loving person. Seder night is not the same without Yael. She had a beautiful voice and she led us with the songs. I appreciated very much the effort they made every holiday to join us. I think it was important for her as much as it was important to me for our families to spend time together. Yael loved to be and was an excellent host. Guests were always welcome. Appearance were an important part of who she was. Her hair and nails were always

impeccably done. Getting ready to go out took her forever. I remember when Don's brit was at friends in Manhattan. We drove from Staten Island which is about a one-hour drive. I helped dress the baby. Yael needed just to take care of herself. Coby was getting restless and impatient he felt embarrassed to be the last to come to his son's brit. The guest and the Mohel were waiting for us. At the hospital when she was sick her appearance was just as important to her. She wanted to present herself at her best. Before visitors arrived, she asked for a hairdresser to come.

It was a devastating loss for Coby, Don and Ron. I am not going to put myself in Coby's shoes, his world crumbled. Unfortunately, I know what Don and Ron have been going through. I do know what it is to lose a mother when you are young. The loss and pain do not go away. It hits you hard when good things happen, and she is not there to share them with you. She is not there when you are in trouble and need advice or help. I tried my best to be a good sister, a friend that Coby can lean on when he needs someone to listen to and share the events of the day. Don makes fun of us he describes us as two "girlfriends" that talk and talk for hours. Two years after Yael's death, Coby met a wonderful woman Nurit. He was in love again. Coby said to me that he sees in Nurit resemblance to Yael. Maybe there was, but I did not see it. What I saw is my brother being happy again. Coby loved cooking for the two of them, they travelled, went to plays, explored the city. They had five wonderful years together. Nurit died in 2017 at a relatively early age. The second time was harder. After you pick yourself up once and start living again it is twice as hard to expect that it is happening to you again.

Coby tries to squeeze every drop from life he can. He and I learned from our history that we don't know what life will bring us next, what expects us behind the corner. The life lesson we both learned is not to delay and make the most out of life – Today. Coby has a very young spirit. He has a lot of life left in him and a lot to give. I am hoping that around the corner there is yet another woman who can be a life companion to him, share his passion for life and travel.

Coby and I are more than a brother and older sister, we are genuine friends. We are alike and dissimilar at the same time. We have a lot in common. We like traveling to exotic places, cooking and discussing politics. Coby has a subtle and undeclared competition with me to continue and accumulate exciting life experiences. I am happy that he has all those interests. After Yael passed away, he

accelerated his travels, increased his interest in art and cooking. Coby is an extrovert, he is loud, loves to talk on any subject, he is a carbon copy of mom. By contrast I am quiet and Introvert very much like my dad.

Me, Born March 3 (4) ,1943 – Mother to 3 Grandmother to 7



Elche is my favorite name. It represents who I am and who I feel I am. It brings forward past and pleasant memories. When I think of who I am as a person, what shaped me, and what made me the woman I am today, the answer is very clear. Being an immigrant twice in my life and losing my dear parents and my precious Omama at the age of twenty-seven. These are events that I still deal with. Events that impact my outlook on life, my marriage, parenting and over all my relations with friends and family.

I was almost six when we arrived in Israel. It was in the middle of the school year my parents registered me to kindergarten. I have no memories of those first few months. Sometimes I wonder what it was like to be the new girl in the class where all the other kids were Israeli born Sabras. Would I easily make friends? I wish I could remember how I felt. Was I frightened going to a new environment with kids that spoke a language I did not know or understand? The only memory from Kindergarten is a photo that was taken at the end of the year with all the children and the teacher. There are only one or two people in this photo that I recognize,

some that continued to be classmates in grammar school. As I am writing this memoir old memories are flooding through my mind. This has been a cathartic experience. Questions, memories and experiences are flashing back. Ones that for all these years I didn't confront or that never crossed my mind. I am even questioning if some of my flashback memories are mine actually or maybe stories that I was told and incorporated them as mine. I will never know.

My first day of school, going to grade one is a big day for everyone. Every kindergarten teacher walked with her kindergarten children that are going to grade one. I can see us walking in twos. Our parents looking proudly. We were received and welcomed by our grade one teachers and the school principal. It was a happy and festive day. All the other children had brand new school bags. I had a briefcase. What were my parents thinking sending me to school with a briefcase? This was all we had at home. My parents could not afford to buy me a regular school bag. My briefcase was not a hit, it stood out. Kids made fun of me for carrying it. One of our classmates Shalom, we called him Shulem, grabbed my briefcase and threw it away. I can still feel the sting of embarrassment and anger today. Eventually my parents bought me a regular school bag. Being a newcomer from Europe stood out. Israel was building a new generation of Jews: Sabras. Sabras in Hebrew means cactus fruit and like cactus fruit they are prickly on the outside and sweet on the inside. When I grew up in Israel, There was a concentrated effort by the Israeli leaders and teachers to change the image of the new Israeli Jew from the image of the diaspora Jew who was seen as weak and meek, to the strong pioneer working the land and the soldier keeping the country safe. Sabras were always depicted as a picture of a proud virile man.

Hebrew is one of the few if not the only language that was resurrected from the dead to become a living language. Hebrew and Arabic are the official languages of Israel. All reminders of the "old country" were not welcome such as teaching or speaking Yiddish, a language associated with the diaspora. So were other customs or behaviors associated with the diaspora ridiculed. In Bulgaria it is customary for every girl to wear earrings. My ears were pierced when I was one month old. I arrived in Israel wearing earrings. The kids made fun of me. It was strange it did not fit the image of the Israeli girl. Girls at that time did not wear earrings, no one else at school wore earrings. I quickly removed them and never wore earrings again.

Years later I only wore clip on earrings. Different times, different country. My granddaughters all have many pierced earrings; today it is a desirable look.

My generation was the first one to grow in the new state of Israel. Patriotism, Love of country was strongly emphasized. Being strong and courageous and having a healthy body was part of our consciousness. Knowing that we are building a new country, a new society was exciting and our duty. Practically all kids belonged to youth organizations. There were two ideological streams: the left leaning and right leaning. The left youth organizations had three different youth movements connected to political labor parties. Most children of the working class joined these organizations. Their mission was to prepare the young members at the end of high school to settle with their friends in an existing kibbutz, or to establishing a new kibbutz. It was the highest ideal of achievement. Every member looked forward to this day. They were admired for all their pioneering spirit. I joined with my friends the Maccabi youth organization that was considered a sports organization with a Zionist spirit. My parents were working people, at that time. Ideology was not on their mind. They were busy making ends meet and did not worry which organization I joined. I loved and looked forward for the weekly meetings we had. For us kids it was a place to meet friends after school and have fun for a few hours. The motto of the Maccabi was: "A Healthy Soul in a Healthy Body". The club had a gym and a pool. Maccabi as a movement instilled in us patriotism, love of country through songs stories and trips to see explore learn and get to know our country. Healthy body was as important to the future of the new society that Israel was building. Once a week we had exercises at the gym as part of our weekly meetings.

Every four years the Maccabia was held in Israel. The Maccabia or as it is fondly being referred to as the "Jewish Olympics" is an Olympic style sport competition between Jewish athletes who came from all over the world and was held in Tel Aviv. I can say with pride that I participated at the opening number in one of the Macabia games. Maccabi like every youth organization required us to wear uniforms which included a hat, kerchief, khaki shirt and pants that you could buy in a store or at the club. My parents could not afford to buy me the uniforms, so my Omama sewed and made them for me. They looked close enough to the originals. Interestingly and unlike my first experience with the briefcase and the earrings, my friends did not ridicule my home-made uniform. When I am thinking about it now it is because my uniform was an Israeli symbol and not a throwback to the diaspora. To be poor was

fine, many of us were. To be different and look like I just stepped out from the boat was unacceptable to the kids. We were brain washed to be a Sabra and behave and look like a Sabra. School, youth organizations like Maccabi shaped our character. They were not only teaching and educating, the goal was to create a homogeneous and patriotic society ready to build and serve the country. It was one of the most important parts of the success of Israel.



On a Maccabi trip

Israel was at the beginning of her existence under constant threat from her Arab neighbors in need to build and develop the country. We came from different parts of the world with different languages and customs and to become one nation. Together we had to blend. A big part of our childhood were the seasonal parades that we got to participate in as part of our youth organization.

In Rehovot, we had the annual Citrus Parade. Rehovot was the center of the citrus groves and the whole orange industry. The town turned Orange on this day and school children, celebrated, participated and marched and sang during the parade.

The Lag Ba Omer parade was organized by the youth organizations. We marched with torches, celebrating the holiday which symbolized courage and victory. At the end of the parade we built a large bonfire, roasted potatoes, sang and danced till late at night.

Shavuot was another memorable holiday that celebrated receiving the Torah from Mount Sinai and the harvest. Israel in the fifties was an agricultural country and we were celebrating the harvest. Every school child brought in a basket of fruits and vegetables. We were dressed in white, a white cloth and wreaths on our heads. We

marched to the Maccabi stadium for assembly at the end of which the baskets of food were distributed to the needy.

Yom Haatzmaut, Israel's day of independence parade was designed to show the strength and power of the Israeli Defense Forces.

Purim is a carnival where we, the young children and some adults dressed in costumes and paraded on the main street. All my costumes were made by Omama I was a Gypsy, a Dutch girl, a Geisha and a Marquis. At that time the notion of cultural appropriation was not a thing. To the contrary it was considered a sign of respect and admiration of foreign cultures. The last time I dressed up for Purim in Israel was with my friend Naomi. We dressed as a couple of baggers.



On Hanukah, my favorite holiday, we celebrated at school and at the Maccabi and at home. Every Hanukah, Maccabi prepared a huge production of music, dancing, storytelling and lighting of the Hanukia. Kids from all ages participated in the show. I can recall the excitement and anticipation before the performance as we were performing on a professional stage in front of our families. The show was staged in Bet Haam, the largest cinema theatre in Rehovot. On Hanuka we would visit our family, our uncles will give the kids Hanuka money, eat Tishpishti a sweet Bulgarian desert made especially for Hanuka.

Tu Bishvat is a celebration of trees. Children plant new trees every year. Dad was in charge on this holiday. He bought and arranged a large platter with every kind of nuts, dried and fresh fruits that grow on trees. It is a minor holiday here in Canada. I tried for a couple of years to introduce Tu Bishvat to my kids and grandkids, but it did not take. It is a pity, as it is one of the few non-religious holidays where we eat sweet fruits and nuts. Celebrating holidays was an important part of our families.

We kept the customs and traditions that we brought with us from Bulgaria. It is as important to me now as it was then when I grew up at home.

The mission to create and build a cohesive Israeli society was successful. We grew up as a cohesive unit at our schools and at the youth organizations. We, the kids, were prejudice free. We saw ourselves as one and the same. We did not see or care for the differences between the established wealthy agricultural families somewhere first-generation Sabras and some were the New-Comers, who were struggling to get established in the country. Friendships were made across economical class lines. Regardless of who your parents were, Vatikim or new immigrants.

Thanks to the Maccabi I went on trips, visited and learned about the ancient historical sites like Masada and places of more recent Israeli history. The first time I was old enough to go on an overnight trip to Masada my dad did not let me go. He told me that "I was a girl too young to leave for an over-night trip". Coby had no problems getting permission when his turn came for overnight trips because he was a boy. A year later dad gave me permission. It was one of the trips I remember vividly. It was so much fun. I have a picture from this trip. I am lying on the ground exhausted. Amnon is beside me. My mom didn't like the look of it. She thought that the photo was too intimate. I was only 14 at that time.



We visited Masada a few times as a family with my kids and grandkids. it is a part of our history as a people and I hope that they will feel the same. I left Israel almost fifty years ago. My love of the country and the beauty of the land and its history and its very existence has never diminished.

I am hoping that I am passing on the love and connection to the land to my kids and grandkids. I encourage them to go and explore and fall in love with this beautiful and complicated land. It is a special place for us Jews. We are connected to the land through our ancient history, new history of sweat and blood. Where else can you see the beauty of mountains desert the lush valleys, the Mediterranean and the dead sea, the country from north to south in a couple of ours. It is a small country that offers food for the eyes and the soul.

The summer of 1957 was one of my most memorable summers. Every summer for one month we used to go with our Maccabi leaders to work in a kibbutz. Think of it as summer camp on steroids. We had an early morning wake up we were assigned in groups to pick fruit till lunch time. After lunch we had free time to do whatever we liked. We had our meals at the communal lunchroom with the members of the kibbutz. American Jews and gentiles loved to come work and stay at the Kibbutzim. It was just after the Sinai war. Young American Jews felt a pull to come help and experience life in Israel. We were in kibbutz Dafna in the beautiful north part of Israel. The kibbutz is close to Tel EL CADI at the mouth of the Jordan river. The water there is very cold coming down from mount Hermon in a rushing force. We still went swimming disregarding the danger. Today the area is fenced off. You can't swim there anymore.

In 2014 we took our grandchildren Zach and Emily to Israel for their Bar Mitzva trip. We wanted to show them some of the places that we used to hang out and that we love. One of them was Tel EL CADI. There were volunteers from the USA and France in kibbutz Dafna. An American and a Frenchman befriended me. I was flattered that they liked me. Imagine how I felt as a fourteen years old girl, who never left Israel, was noticed by American and French men much older and sophisticated than me. After I left the kibbutz and came back home to Rehovot, Danny the American and the Frenchman came to visit me in Rehovot. I did not speak English or French and they did not speak any Hebrew but somehow, we figured out how to understand each other. Danny went back to the US, we corresponded with the help of the dictionary for a couple of years. Two years later he came back to Israel. He planned to attend The Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He wrote that he wanted to see me. At that time, I was dating Amnon. We were only sixteen. When Amnon heard that I was planning to see Danny he gave me an ultimatum: "It's Either Him or Me" and you know what I chose. Now I think what

Chutzpah Amnon had giving me an ultimatum. We were only sixteen. I ask myself where was my independent spirit? Then, I did not have it. I was too young to know my wants. I took Amnon's ultimatum seriously. It took me years to gain my confidence and develop an independent spirit. I lost touch with Danny. Amnon travelled for business to Dallas where Danny used to live. Every time I asked him to see if he can find Danny's phone number in the phonebook. He could not. One day, many years ago, Amnon was telling me about the internet. These were the early days of the Internet. He told me that you could now find anything you would like to know on the web. He challenged me to ask for anything I wanted to know and how he can find anything I wanted within minutes. I said, Ok. Find me Danny. Guess what? Within a few minutes he received an e-mail from Danny saying it was him. To verify that it was indeed the right Danny, Amnon scanned a photograph I kept since 1957 and asked him to identify himself, me and the Frenchman in the photo. He did within minutes.



Danny Feldman, Aliza, Ruthy, Gila, the Frenchman, and?

We found out that Danny now lives in Palo Alto. He is an acclaimed medical researcher and a venture capitalist. All I could think of was that I made a big mistake!?! Sometime in the mid-Ninety's my daughter Sharon had to go to San Francisco on business. I asked her to contact Danny and see if he would meet with her. I wanted my kids to know that he was not a ghost or just a good story. Danny agreed to meet Sharon. They met for lunch. She liked him a lot. She was impressed

with him and brought back a recent photo of him. She told me that I may have missed a pot of gold. No. I didn't. Amnon and I created and have our own pot of gold it is our wonderful family. I never met Danny again. We corresponded by e-mail for a while. Amnon and I were travelling to San Francisco and I tried to see if we could meet with him. He gave me all kinds of excuses why he can't meet me when I was in San Francisco. It is too bad. I was curious to see him almost 40 years later.

I have a confused and complicated relationship with Israel and the city of Jerusalem were both my mom and dad died. I am sure that my mixed emotions of love and anger for the country are totally irrational. But I need someone to blame for the hard life my parents lived that caused their death and taken them away from me at such a young age.

Rehovot in the 1950s was a small town. We had only two schools, one in center of town, the second in the south part of the town. There was always a rivalry between the schools. Children from one school did not mix with the others. Each school was a small community. We knew everyone and all their family members that attended the same school. Rehovot was a small town. We knew most of the residents and it gave us a feeling of familiarity and security. There were very few Bulgarian families in Rehovot. We had only two more Bulgarian kids in my class, one boy and one girl. They lived in the outskirts of Rehovot. All the rest of my friends were Sabras.

Ella was my best friend from grade one until we joined the army. We were together in boot camp and after that we went our separate ways and lost track of each other. Forty years later we met again. This time we felt like two strangers introducing our life and families to each other. As children, we lived on same street and as all kids we played outside on the street. In the winter we played indoors. I would go to her house to play. She had a bigger house. One of the memories I have of those days, are the cakes her mom baked. They looked and tasted great. I asked my mom why is it that Ella's mother's cakes are so high, and her cakes were so flat. My mom took it as a challenge. Since then mom became a great baker. She was always a great cook. Ella lived in a private home with her parents and older sister. They had two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a bathroom. What a difference. My parents, my brother, Omama and I we were all living in one room and a bathroom that doubled as a kitchen. In the early fifties Germany paid reparations to European

Ashkenazi Jews victims of the Holocaust. That money was one of the causes of the large wealth gap between Ashkenazi Jews and the Sefaradim Jews who came mainly from poor Arab countries.



Ella and me at the Army's boot camp

This gap between Ashkenazim and Sepharadim exist and may have gotten even wider today. One of the first things Ella's parents bought with the money was a refrigerator. At the time, this was a luxury item. I was very jealous. We had an Ice Box. During the week the ice truck would come to deliver ice but not on Saturdays. Saturday was the only rest day for my parents. It fell on me to go and get a block of ice from the factory. In Israel, because of the weather, ice is needed every day. The factory was at the outskirts of the town a long way from our apartment. I hated this chore so much. It was a long walk. The block of ice was heavy. Recently Gila my cousin and I we were reminiscing, remembering memories from our childhood. We had similar experiences growing up in the same town at the same time and in the same family. Gila also mentioned her going to get ice and how much she too hated it. We were the older children in the household.

When Coby was at an age that he could go it was too late. By that time, we had a refrigerator – lucky him. On top of the ice box we had the radio. We treated the radio with extra care. Mom sewed a cover for the radio. It was one of our most precious possessions. When Eyal moved out of the house it was the only thing he asked to take with him. I hope he will cherish it and know how much joy this radio gave us. The radio was one of the few things I had that belonged to my parents. I kept my mom's wristwatch. I wore it every day. When Sharon got married, I decided to give it to her. Whenever I look at Sharon, I see my mom. I think it is befitting that Sharon should have the watch.

I was recently listened to a professor from Colombia who wrote a book on how parents' wealth effects children's outcomes in school. He was studying the proposition that by providing children more resources from early childhood it would have a positive effect on the children's schooling and eventually a factor in their income later in life. I was not included in this study. I didn't have those advantages. My parents didn't speak the language or had time to help me with schoolwork. I had to figure it out on my own. I liked school. I was an ok student until high school. High school was a disaster for me. I had a hard time with many subjects and to add to that I was dating Amnon and that didn't help at all. After grade ten I enrolled in secretarial school. Israel was quite advanced in having vocational schools to allow students to complete the education. My parents had different expectation of Coby than of me. Their thinking was that I am a girl and doing well in school was not too important. I'll get married, have a family and my husband will take care of me. This was my parents' generation's way of thinking. Girls were raised with different expectations than boys. Now we know better how important it is to give the same opportunities, encouragement and tools to girls as to boys.

The army for me was a blast. It did not start this way. After boot camp I was assigned to the Military Police. I thought that it was the end of the world. At home, I cried all weekend. I thought that is the worst thing that ever happened to me. I was so wrong! The next two years were wonderful. I served with a bunch of great people. I was assigned to the Military Police training base. I worked in the office. My greatest fear was that I may have been assigned to traffic control or patrolling. Instead, I spend the next two years in an office. I had so much fun. It was the first time I was free away from home being on my own experiencing freedom. There was one incident that challenged me. The base was empty. I was alone in the office with the base commander. He thought it was an opportune time for him to go after me. He chased me around the office and finally managed to corner me. As he got closer, I kicked him in the you know where and he came back to his senses. The next morning, I reported the incident to the women's officer in charge. Her advice was not to say or do anything. She said that he was the officer, he had the power to write a good discharge or not, so don't jeopardize it. I was due to end my army service in few months and depended on a good discharge report for work in civil life. I listened to her advice and didn't file a complaint. I did what many women do

when they find themselves in the same dilemma: to go after an offender, be questioned or be quiet. Sexual harassment continues to affect women in the workplace especially when it is between a boss and subordinate.



Amnon and I knew each other from a young age we were neighbors. We attended the same school, were in the same grade and we were together in the same youth organization Maccabi. I didn't pay attention to him till the age of sixteen. I started dating Amos, Amnon's best friend. One day Amnon walked me home. He said that he wanted to make sure that I am serious about Amos. He said he wanted to protect his good friend. I do not know or remember how and why the switch happened. I started dating Amnon. Amnon is both romantic and possessive. We spent together every minute. In our small town everyone knew us as a couple. We were the famous couple in the town. We spent all our time together and alone neglecting all our friends and slowly we lost all of them. Amnon and I enjoyed each other's company. We were in love. We thought that we did not need other people's company. The same thing happened to us years later in Canada. We had many

friends, all Israelis for many years. We met every Saturday night at some one's house for a get together or a party. We went on picnics together. We had a large group of friends. When the grandchildren were born, we turned our full attention to them. We had no time or interest in others. Now they are grown up some of them away in University. Now that we have time for socializing with friends, we still don't feel the need. Amnon and I, we are lovers, friends, companions, and partners. We developed a lifelong friendship. We have similar interests, we love spending time together, we travel just the two of us not in a group, we like each other's company. Knowing each other and being married for so many years (this year is our fifty-seven's wedding anniversary) one may think that we said and did everything, already. Amnon is very good at surprising me time and time again. We grew up together, literally. We were married at a young age, our personality, our outlook on life developed together. We are aligned in our politics our inspirations and a strong emphasis on the family. We have the same points of reference growing in the same small town when Israel was an Idealistic country. Being together for so long and being of the same generation, we laugh at the same jokes, we love the same songs, experienced the same history together. All this is an advantage we have that keeps us together even during challenging times. We learn to love and enjoy each other's passions and interests. Amnon learned to love the opera and art that I love very much.

Amnon is a soccer fanatic. I learned to understand the game and enjoy watching it with him. I accompanied him to watch games in almost every city we visited together. We will see an opera and a soccer match every opportunity we have. Amnon surprised me few times, the best and most memorable was when he bought us tickets to the gala opening of La Scala De Milano after years of being closed for renovations. It was an evening to remember. Us from a small town in Israel rubbing shoulders with dignitaries such as the Prime Minister of Italy and most importantly Amnon's favorite women Sophia Loren which he keeps reminding me how much she resembles me. This was one of the greatest nights. The other time was after I had surgery for lung cancer. Norma is my favorite opera. Amnon bought us box tickets at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. I am a lucky woman having a loving husband who always thinks how to make me happy and keep our marriage fresh.

Amnon is a good writer when I was in the army. He sent me many letters. He should have been a romantic and poetic writer. He is great at expressing himself in writing. I kept all his letters. We misplaced them when we moved to Canada. We wonder some time who has them and if they read them and if he or she did, what do they think of the love letters. It's a pity that I do not have the letters. I would have loved to have read them again. Don't get me wrong. During our long marriage Amnon still wrote me love letters and wrote some romantic poems that he dedicated to me. All of those I keep.

As much as Amnon is romantic his marriage proposal was more like a business proposal. I just started working at the Atomic Energy reactor in the secretarial pool. Amnon was still serving in the army, earning enough money for a pack of cigarettes. Amnon's dad came to him with a proposition, asking him if he is serious about marrying me and if so, he had an apartment for us to rent if we could decide quickly. My mom who worried that I would be an old maid by the time I get married was surprised of the speed and the rush to marry. I just started working, I had no savings, my parents did not have the means to help us. We were young and in love. Money, financing was not on our mind. We the young couple, we were only twenty, too young to pay attention and realize the difficulties of bringing the two families from different backgrounds together.

Planning a wedding are times when family friction happens, and hard feelings and resentment set in. Amnon's family is originally from Poland. They are Ashkenazim. They lived in Israel many more years than us and were financially and socially much more established than my parents. Ashkenazi Jews spoke Yiddish, had a different life experience than Sephardim. We spoke Ladino, we practiced and prayed differently. That is the background to the wedding and going forward to the interaction between the two families and between me and Amnon's family. In planning a wedding there are three main decisions to be made: who pays, where it takes place, and who officiates. Right off the bat we had disagreements on all three. A few months before we married a good friend of mine Mimi, a friend I met when we were serving in the army. She was Bulgarian like me. She invited me to her wedding. I brought Amnon to see a Bulgarian wedding. The wedding was at a Sephardic synagogue officiated by Rabi Avramico. He was the beloved Rabi of the Bulgarian community. He was known as the Rabi of Maccabi Jaffa's soccer team, were many of the players were Bulgarian. After the ceremony, Marzipan packed in

cellophane paper was given to the guests and we left for home. At that time that's how Bulgarian weddings were celebrated. Now we all copy and mimic and try to outdo each other. The bigger the wedding the more food, the better. Amnon could not believe that a few candies (that's what he called the Marzipan) is all that was served. What happened to the rest of the meal?

For us, marzipan is more than a sweet treat. It is a tradition it is an integral part of all our celebrations. I did not have marzipan at my wedding. I celebrated this custom and tradition at Alon's and Sharon's wedding. My in-laws are Ashkenazi Canadians I wonder what they thought of the marzipan given to the guests after the ceremony. For me it was a continuation of our traditions passed on to me by my parents. In continuing their traditions, I keep them with me and their spirit alive.

My parents could only pay for a wedding in the synagogue. Amnon's parents did not accept their offer. They were concerned how it would look to their friends and what would they think. We were married in a hall. I refused to have the Rabi from Rehovot. When I could not have Avramico, I compromised by having a military Rabi (Amnon was still in the army in his compulsory service. His friends in the army asked Amnon if I was pregnant, which was the only reasonable explanation, they could think of as to why we would get married at such a young age (19.5 and 20 respectively). I could not have Avramico at my wedding, but I had him as the Mohel for Eyal and Alon brits. In Israel toddlers on the beach used to run naked. Eyal received a unique compliment from one of the people on the beach that his "brit" was the most perfect he has ever seen. My parents by not paying for the wedding were restricted to the number of guests they could invite. That is how bad feelings happen and continue. The first impression, and encounter, remains throughout the rest of the relations.

Two weeks before the wedding my dad had a stroke and half of his body was paralyzed. I was devastated I did not want to get married without dad. A few days before the wedding dad left the hospital and came home. We managed to bring dad to the wedding. I am thankful for that. My thoughts during the whole evening were on dad checking to see how he was doing. I have very few memories of the wedding: the one of dad being helped to the chuppah and the other vivid memory I have is Amnon's father pouring from a bottle of whisky drinks only to guests he

considered to be important, and of course none for my parents' or their guests. Just thinking of it now makes me angry and disgusted with his behavior, as I was at my wedding. Amnon is cognizant of this flaw of his father. Amnon is always concerned to make sure that he does not behave like his father. He checks his behavior all the time. I can say with great relief that he is not. Amnon is a hybrid of the good qualities of both his parents.

A few months after the wedding, I became pregnant. It was an ectopic pregnancy. I had an emergency operation and one of my fallopian tubes was removed. The only good thing that came out of this experience was that the doctor at the hospital who took care of me was Bulgarian. There is a special kinship between Bulgarians. He took me under his wing, helped during the period of difficulties getting pregnant again, reassuring me that one fallopian tube is enough. We have three beautiful children Eyal, Alon, and Sharon. I had them in a span of four and a half years. Our married life for the first two years felt like a continuation of our dating. It was as if we were playing house. Amnon continued his job in the army as a civilian. I continued working at the same place. After work we would meet at my parents, eat there or take food home. On Friday's I would come home early in the afternoon. That time was dedicated for cleaning. Many a time we left the pail and cleaning supplies in the middle of the floor and went to sleep. On Saturday's we slept till three in the afternoon. We would go to my parents to eat and after we would go out with friends or to a show. We had no responsibilities, felt no pressure and had no debt. The money we earned covered the rent and our expenses. We were free as birds for two years just the two of us. We enjoyed this time. We took short romantic vacations exploring each other. Our honeymoon which we celebrated in Naharia, the honeymoon capital of Israel, was short and uneventful. I was sick and throwing up but not for the reasons you think. During the wedding I did not eat at all. Bat Sheva brought us steaks she bought from a street vendor as we were driving home from the wedding. The steaks were probably the cause of my sickness. The official honeymoon was short, but our honeymoon continued for two years until we had kids.

A smart man once coined the phrase: "Life is not a bed of roses" he was right absolutely. Life is sprinkled with thorns. I can look at my life and see that I lived a good life, a privileged one. I have a loving husband, one who adores me, and I adore him. We have three wonderful kids married with amazing grandchildren. My family

is everything to me. I love them more than I can express. We are lucky to have all of them close by in the same city. We created a wonderful tradition to have them all for Friday night Shabbat dinner together as well as all the main Jewish holidays.

So where are the thorns? It is the hole that would never heal that effected the entire trajectory of my life. All my childhood and adulthood I was protected and spoiled. I feel as if I was wrapped in cotton, protected from the outside world. The world crashed on me when I was only twenty-seven years old: my mom, dad and Omama died at a relatively young age and within a span of just 11 months. I was not ready or prepared to lose them, to lose their safety net. There are so many clichés written in books and articles about dealing with grief. I did not find any of them helpful or true for me. What does it mean time heals? It doesn't. You don't forget and you don't want to forget. To the contrary, I want to remember them, I talk to them, look for their advice, trying to think what they would have done and get courage and reassurance in times of need. When I was diagnosed with lung cancer, I was thinking how my mom would have dealt with it. I reassured myself every time by thinking that if my mom could go through it, so can I. I have my parents with me in happy times on holidays or celebrations. I light candles not as a religious act but as a symbol that they are here with me and part of my life.

I had two toddlers and I was pregnant. Amnon moved to work at Control Data an American company. He travelled to Europe and to the United States for long periods of time, sometimes six or seven weeks at a time. Omama was sick, my dad was sick, mom was overwhelmed and exhausted but with all that she dealt with it. For the first time, the pressure affected me and our marriage. Mom sensed that I am unhappy she said to me "in our family there is no divorce". Not then and not at any other time did I consider divorce. Mom in her way was saying to me life has its ups and downs, we need to get through the hard times to get to the good times. We crossed this hump. We crossed a few more humps in our marriage. Life is always full of challenges. We matured together, we figured out how to deal and accept our differences. Recently I said to Amnon that our marriage is divided in to three segments: the beginning was burning love and lust, the middle section flat, busy, mundane, kids, work, career, money. The third section just the two of us rediscovering us as a couple. Most of the pressures from the middle sections have been resolved or gone. It is our time to enjoy, explore life and take chances.

We arrived in Canada in 1971 with three young children and two suitcases. Amnon had an opportunity to work for two years in Canada, learn the ins and out of the new super-computer that was being developed in Toronto and go back to Israel with the knowledge he acquired. The timing for me was perfect in the last year I spent too much time at the cemetery. I buried my parents, Omama, Aunt Lina and Aunt Liza. A change of place was the right thing for me, to be far away from cemeteries.



April 21, 1971

In life there are always “ifs”. I know that if my parents were alive, I would not be living in Canada regardless how tempting the offer Amnon received, or we would be back after the two years as we were supposed to. Our kids would have grown in Israel. They would have had to serve in the army. Their lives and ours would be completely different from the life we lived and experience today. I do not at all regret moving to Canada. It took me two years to feel good here and now I love Canada and know that this was for sure the best move for the future of our children.

Starting a new life in a new country is exhausting, terrifying frustrating and exciting all at the same time. 1971! Almost fifty years since we arrived in Canada. More years than I lived in Bulgaria and Israel combined. I should feel and be a Canadian. It is more complicated than just being Bulgarian, Israeli or Canadian. Each country has a piece of me. I have a struggle as to where is my heart and where my loyalties lie. Bulgaria represents my parents, Israel my youth and Canada my family. I love

Canada. I thank our lucky stars for bringing us to Canada (Control Data). I will say it simply: Canada was and is good to us. Raising the kids in Canada was the best thing we did for our kids and their future. Growing up in a peaceful prosperous country with lots of opportunities is a privilege.

I had a cultural shock immediately as we landed in Toronto. During our ride from the airport to the hotel driving on the 401. I have never seen such an intricate road system, ramps and off ramps (it was the first time I left Israel) At the hotel riding the elevator I had a feeling that we came to Gulliver's land. All the men looked to us like giants. Everything looked big to me, in the market the cucumbers, watermelons. In restaurants, the food portions that could feed two. There was an abundance of food products, so many choices I was overwhelmed and excited to try them all.

We rented a townhouse. Amnon started work. Eyal and Alon started kindergarten and school. I was left at home with Sharon. She was two years old. I did not drive, my command of the English language was minimal, I felt completely isolated stuck in the house with no one to talk to or see. I asked Amnon to make it a habit every day at least once to call me so that I will have a human connection with the outside world and hear the voice of an adult. The first two years were hell for me. I wanted to go back home to Israel every day. Slowly things changed. we were introduced to Israelis. They introduced us to more Israelis. Our circle of friends grew, all of them were relatively new immigrants with young families. I started driving and was mobile to meet friends. Watching TV playing Yahtzee, using a dictionary, helped improved my English although I continue to struggle. and my accent stayed the same. Frustration is a mild way to convey how I felt every time in stores and in restaurants. Canadian's were deaf or dismissive of the difficulties of the new immigrants with the English language they did not make the minimal effort to understand me. Coming from Israel a country that most of her citizens are immigrants from different countries who speak different languages we all try to understand each other. Even if the pronunciation was off, we tried to figure it out in context. One thing for sure, we did not make them feel embarrassed.

The two years were extended. Life in Canada is easier and offers many new experiences. I slowly began to enjoy what Canada has to offer. I had no one, no family pulling me back to Israel. Amnon suggested that we should go back to Israel.

By that time the kids were in high school they grew up here, I had friends. I loved the life we had in Canada. I could not see us going back. I was absolutely against it. We had a mini family crisis each one pulling and trying to convince the other. We stayed in Canada and the crisis was resolved. Today Amnon will agree that it was the right decision. Canada is our home now for forty-nine years. We raised a wonderful family here, the children grew up, married and had children and became part of the community.

Family is the center of my being. For me the highest compliment is if I am regarded as a good mother and a good grandmother, then, I know that I did my job, I left my mark. Being young and immigrants all on our own without a village to support us, give us advise, helpful suggestion were strikes against us. Of course, we made mistakes sometimes not realizing they were mistakes. We are all wiser now. Looking back, like my parents, navigating life as an immigrant is hard. We were not like my parents without jobs looking for work. Amnon had a good and respectable job, money was never a problem. We, like my parents, had cultural and language difficulties to navigate. The worst part was being young with three young children in a strange country without a close family for support. We too needed to grow and mature be confident with the decisions we made having our own life sorted and established in Canada. I hope that I made up for my early inadequacies, by being a good friend, helpful adviser, a good listener, and most of all always loving my family, being a good partner to my husband. Amnon, I am lucky to have your love. You express your love to me in so many ways. I am the richest person alive-thank you. It warms my heart to know our children and grandchildren love us and love and enjoy our company. My moto is: "come to see us only if you want and enjoy being in our company, never feel an obligation to visit the "old folks"". The way my mom told me and Coby to remember that we are only two and to take care of each other. We are not just a sister and a brother, we are good friends. I am happy to see that I nurtured and had a hand in helping my kids establish and create long lasting friendships among themselves and their families. With Eyal, Alon, and Sharon from childhood I nurtured the feeling of brotherhood love and care for each other. They love spending time together, advising one another and when needed helping each other in any way. For me as a mother, I take comfort in the knowledge that when I am no longer here the bond will remain as strong.

A voyage from birthplace to homeland – מהולדת למולדת



Eyal's family



Alon's family



Sharon's family

Our Grandchildren, they are our precious dividends we cherish. Each one is a gem that shines a bright light in their own special way. We are fortunate to be living in the same city with our kids and grandchildren. We were present in their lives from the beginning. We were present at every birth and being part of their life. As babies we spent hours with them, loving every minute. Now that they are all grownups. We are delighted that they not only come to visit us, or ask to spend time with us, but also share their lives with us. For us it is the sweetest feeling of all.



From left: Ethan, Emily, Alexandra, Safta, Zachary, Jaime, Jacklyn, Erin

One of the traditions I established and that I am proud of is our Friday night dinners. Every Friday we light the Shabbat candles, bless the wine and bread. It is important for me that the young generation who grew up in Canada with very little knowledge of Jewish history, to have the knowledge of the holidays and some Jewish customs and to be proud of being a Jew. They need to know and understand where they came from and the shoulders they stand on. When they were younger and listen to me, I gave each one of them homework before each holiday to write and tell us at the table the story of the holiday we were celebrating. Every girl at her Bath Mitzvah received from us Shabbat candle sticks, all the girls learned and know the blessing of the candles on Friday one of the girls will bless the candles. The boys for their bar mitzvah received from us a Kiddush cup and a prayer shawl. On Passover night I insist that we read the Hagada in Hebrew and explain in English. We as a family spend a lot of time together in town and when travelling. We are fortunate to have the means for the fifteen of us to travel to many exotic places like Hawaii where we celebrated our fiftieth anniversary and renewed our vows. Amnon orchestrated and was the force behind the wedding celebration. When each of our

children turned 50 years old, we, the entire family, celebrated together. For Eyal, in Costa Rica, for Alon in Corfu, Greece, for Sharon in Belize. Mom, I hope you can see me and be happy to see your daughter having a fulfilling and happy life surrounded by her loving family.



Through my life I had good girl friends, I did not have many girlfriends I am personally of the opinion that you can have one or two good girlfriends the rest are friends or acquaintances. Ella was my best friend in grade school she was my childhood friend. In high school I had two good of friends. My best friend in high school was Amnon, we spend all our time together. The army was a special and exciting time for me. On the first day of boot camp I met three wonderful girls two of them Dahlia and Daniela were assigned like me to the Military Police we served together for two years and we developed a tight relationship. The third girl was Mimi she was Bulgarian like me and we immediately gravitated toward each other.

Dvora is a girl I knew from school. We were reunited after the two of us got married. Amnon and Rachamim liked each other too. We became very good friends. We had a lot in common. We were pregnant together. Vered, Dvora's daughter is three weeks older than Eyal. Alon is a few months older than Ronny. We raised our kids together, spent mornings with the kids, on weekends our two families spent time together. Our tight friendship continued through the years in Canada we kept the friendship alive. We kept in touch by writing letters. My generation, like generations before the advent of the computer, wrote letters.

Overseas phone calls were very expensive they were used only for emergencies. The texting generation has no idea of the feeling of anticipation for the mailman to see if I got mail and news from home. We visited them a few times in Israel. They came a couple of times to Canada, once for Sharon's wedding. In almost fifty years in Canada we kept our friendship, every time we see each other it is like we never separated. Now phone calls are cheaper and affordable. We call from time to time to chat.

Nitza

In Canada I had two good friends. Nitza was the most giving, genuine loving, a friend for life. A girl friend that every woman should have, a confidant, a one to go to. She was always available to me generous with her time and always ready to help. Nitza was a walking encyclopedia of useful information: where to shop to find bargains or find a handyman or a craftsman. Nitza always knew the best. I knew her for forty years. We were very close, we liked each from the minute we first met. Nitza used to introduced me as her sister, good or best friend does not begin to describe the bond and love we had for each other. Nitza was part of our family. She felt at home with us. She would pop in any time particularly when she went through rough times at home. She loved coming and spending time with us. We were always there for each other when we went through difficult times or good times. Nitza had breast cancer twice, and I had lung cancer. We instinctively knew the best way to help is to listen and be there for each other. I remember when I told her that I was diagnosed with lung cancer she said to me the worst part is over now that you know. Nitza projected her resilience and optimism when she fought and won two battles with cancer, now you can do it too that was her message to me. In 2011 Amnon and I spend a year in Israel. Nitza and I we were constantly emailing keeping each other informed. We came to Canada for a short visit to celebrate Passover with the family. I saw Nitza she was fine that was April 2012. A month later she wrote that she had headaches and she was dizzy. I did not take it seriously. We came back to Canada in June of 2012. The first call I made was to Nitza. Israel her husband answered: "Nitza is in the hospital, you can come and visit" I was in shock to learn the gravity of her illness. I did not know she was in the hospital and that the headaches were a serious matter. I learned that the cancer invaded her spine. Nitza did not write to let me know. She waited for me to come home to tell me. Nitza died in less than two months from the time she fell ill. She was only sixty-five

when she died. I miss her terribly. She was the sister I did not have, the closest person outside my family. I miss her friendship, her kindness, her optimism. I miss the most being with her.

Ellena

Ellena and I we had common interests one of our interest was art. We took art classes for ten years visited art galleries. We had a couple good art instructors each one of them had a different way and angle to presenting art. I learned a lot and widened my understanding and appreciation of art. We also took Philosophy classes, Ancient Greek history and a few other subjects. Once a week we would go to class and afterwards have lunch. Lunch was the best part. We talked for hours. I looked forward to our lunches. At lunch we caught up with last week's events, we covered family, politics, day to day happenings and exchanged opinions and ideas. My friendship and interactions with Ellena are different. Not as intimate and personal as it was with Nitza. Nitza was my soul mate. Ellena and I share similar life experiences and interests. In 2013 Ellena moved to London England to be with her daughter. My two girlfriends left me in one way or another. We do keep in touch. We email each other frequently and Skype from time to time. It is not the same. I miss our lunches being with a friend sharing time together. Losing my two friends had a devastating effect on me. I had bouts of depression questing the meaning and the purpose of life. I felt alone. My husband and family do not replace close and good girl friends. Girl friends have a different place they are the one who we can talk to, complain about our husbands a subject we can relate to and understand, get mad and laugh about, generally speaking it is different getting women's perspective on any topic.



Nitza and I in Paris



Dvorah and I in Israel



Gila & I in Toronto

My love of books started in my childhood. I read for enjoyment and learning. Reading is my best past time. When I grew up in Rehovot we had only one library it didn't look or function as today's libraries. It was not open to the public to go inside, browse through books and take the one we want. This library had a window, a wicket, the librarian stood behind and handed us the books that we asked for by title. As young children we could not reach the window but there was a stool for us to stand on. I remember the excitement of waiting in line (the library was open only once a week) to exchange my book and hoping the book I want is available. My love of reading continues till today in the first years in Canada I read only in Hebrew. Friends and family will send me books. Slowly I started reading in English with the help of the dictionary. Now I have the same enjoyment reading in Hebrew or English.

I can easily pinpoint the exact time when I changed. I developed my confidence and opened myself up to new experiences. It was when I registered to a class reading and analyzing classical English novels. For me, it was a huge step to take and it took a lot of courage. I was terrified that I would be embarrassed, feel stupid in a class where all the participants were English or that English was their first language. It was the first time that I put myself out and did something that was totally out of my comfort zone. This move opened the door for growth and change in me. I keep telling my grandchildren to not be afraid or reluctant to try new experiences, and for them to keep pushing the envelope. This is the only way we grow emotionally and intellectually.

This first step, of joining this class gave me the reassurance I needed. The confidence that I am capable to be part of this group. Until then I felt intimidated and did not think that I belonged in this company. Through the years I joined many more classes in subjects that I was always interested. From the time in grade school learning about ancient Greece and Rome, I developed a keen interest in that period. I read and studied the Iliad and the Odyssey, studied the Peloponnese war, and of course classical Greek and Roman plays. I always had an interest in ancient Egyptian history and how the three empires had an enormous impact on the ancient history of Israel.

In my youth I did not have a post-secondary formal education. Through the years I broadened my interests and I kept learning and studying throughout my life. I

developed a real interest in Philosophy and nurtured my love for arts which I studied for many years. Learning and studying gave me more than just knowledge it gave me confidence and a sense of worth. Thinking of myself as an under achiever for years due to the lack of formal education has been a heavy burden and a source of embarrassment for me.

Confidence breeds courage and courage feeds innovation. As the new me I was able to architect, design and manage a massive renovation project of our home without any prior formal or informal experience. Amnon, still today, is amazed at how I was able to do it. I have no background in design, architecture or managing tradesmen. If there is a secret it was that I was not a professional. I had no self-pride thinking that I know better. I was open to learn, not shy to ask questions and learn from everyone. As a result, we now have a home that I designed from top to bottom. I am proud of the result and my ability to achieve it. Amnon says that I have a way of detecting oncoming trends and see things before they become trendy. If it was my Yellow Mercedes Benz Roadster, or the open concept in home design and many others. He calls me a trendsetter. Design and aesthetics for me are instinctive and come through intuition and visualization. The design of our home is as modern and contemporary as if it was designed just recently.

Fifteen years ago, we became empty nesters. Usually the term “empty nester” conjures up images of loneliness, depression, old age. This was not the case for us. We welcomed our togetherness. Being responsible only for ourselves is a great feeling. We did not have to rush home, no one was waiting to be fed or taken care of. Spontaneity is something that Amnon and I have in common and because of our lifelong partnership, instant decision making has never been a challenge. We made many spontaneous decisions. We traveled extensively. We fell in love with Africa, and South Africa in particular. Our first visit was during the apartheid regime. We drove from Johannesburg to Durban through the Northern Transvaal. I knew very little about the country and its beauty took me by surprise. We spent two weeks seeing the richness of the country and on the other side of the road the shanty towns. We encountered things and behavior that we have never seen before and that we could not understand. We saw Black people walking down the road at night where there was not a town for miles. We kept wondering: where are they coming from and where are they going too? Later we learned that Blacks were not allowed to ride on busses with Whites. Busses for Blacks were not available from their

villages to town. We had a clear sense way before it became a reality that the country was sitting on tinder box. In our second visit to Africa we spent 13 days on the Rovos Rail (Think the Orient Express) train from Tanzania's Dar El Salaam to Cape Town. Africa is blessed by the beauty of the land, the exotic wildlife, the gorgeous parks, the spectacular Victoria) falls. It is so sad and disheartening to see so much beauty and yet such extreme poverty.

We went on wildlife safaris, we tracked Silver Back gorillas in Rwanda and Uganda. By last count we visited over 70 countries on all 7 continents. From all of them the ones that left a special impression where Tibet and Bhutan. One country is oppressed by the Chinese. We observed how China is systematically working to erase Tibet's language and identity and how quietly Tibetan's are resisting. Bhutan is a probably the most interesting place in the world. It is the only country where the GDP is measured by the Happiness index of their citizens. I can write on more and more countries we visited. I had the distinct pleasure of going with my daughter Sharon to the Artic and Antarctica. These were unique experiences. Standing hours on the deck of the ship, looking at the vast glaciers and quiet surroundings.



There are at least three places, the Grand Canyon the Arctic circle and Antarctica., where the only words to describe these places is awe inspiring. I thought if there is a God his spirit is in those places. When you are there it is easy to believe that God exists. Memorable moments In Antarctica where having a barbeque lunch out on the deck. The sun was shining brightly, surrounded by glaciers I needed to pinch myself how lucky I am being in this incredible place. Travelling for me is more than bringing photos. My political views are shaped and changed by visiting developing and underdeveloped countries. We develop a greater understanding and empathy

through the larger perspective of the world. We enrich ourselves by visiting and seeing different wonders of the world. My interest in ancient history took us to Egypt, Turkey and Greece. My love of opera took us to the Opera houses of Sydney Australia Vienna, Milan Paris and New York



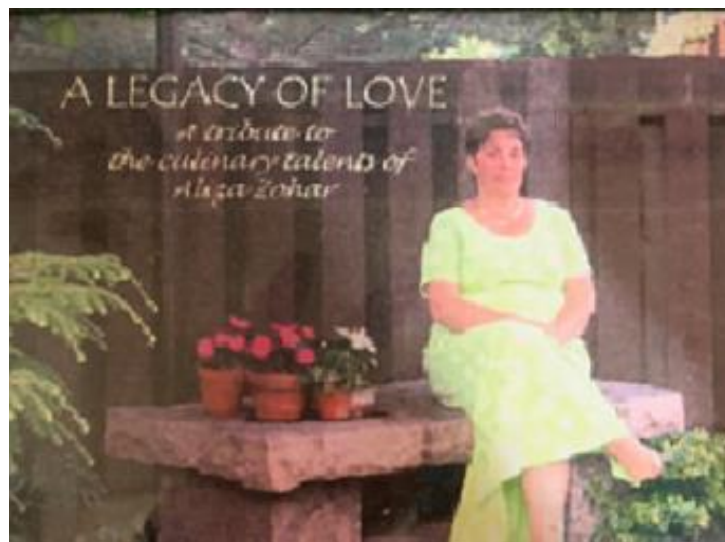
December 4, 2007 Opening Gala of the La Scala de Milano

Israel is a special country for us. Visiting it is like going home but I feel like a stranger in my own home. ALL that was familiar is now different. When going home the expectations are to find things as we left them fifty years ago. Of course, it is not so. The political cultural landscape completely changed. Even the Hebrew language we speak and know well has changed. There is so much slang that we need translation. In 2012 we came to Israel for one year to study, see family and friends, tour the country, go back to all the places we visited and have memories of from our childhood. get reacquainted with our roots. Amnon studied at the Tel Aviv University and I also took courses at the university in Jewish studies, the war of independence, the first year of the country. I was looking forward to study subjects that I was interested. In Canada I did not want to take Jewish studies in English. Now I had the opportunity to study in Hebrew my preferred language to study those subjects.

It was one of our most joyous time. We attended classes four days a week. We felt like we were young students, a powerful feeling. I enjoyed the courses I took. I was always curious to know and learn more on different aspects of Judaism. We were not tourists in a strange country and not residents in our own country. We enjoyed the best of those two worlds. We knew the language, familiar with the places and

customs. We toured the country extensively, enjoyed cultural experiences like theater (in Hebrew) lectures and the company of friends and family. The best part was that we did not have the worries and the stress of every Israeli about work, money, politics and much more. We were spectators enjoying only the good parts. There is a lot of good and beauty in Israel.

My interest in cooking came to me slowly. At home my mom did not teach me. I was not in the kitchen cooking or watching. Mom's way of thinking was that I have plenty of time to be in the kitchen after I get married. I knew nothing, zilch. My experiments with cooking for the first few years were poor including some disastrous outcomes. Amnon was a good sport. He ate without complaining. Unfortunately for me, I had a short time with my mom, dad and Omama to learn home cooking. Today, I feel stupid and regret being so impulsive when I threw away my mom's recipe book written in Bulgarian. I did not recognize at the time the value to me of my mom's recipes. I did not think rationally, I should have asked my aunts to translate it for me. I learned all my cooking on my own. Slowly I perfected my technique, and now I can say with great pride that my cooking taste as good as my mom's. So much so that for my birthday, my daughter-in-law Tracey compiled and presented to me my own recipe book. What an honor.



*A Legacy of Love – A tribute to the Culinary talents of
Aliza Zohar*

When cooking, I tried to duplicate the texture, smell and taste of the Bulgarian kitchen I grew up with, by cooking dishes that reminded me of home. Through the

years I became a good cook and a good baker. I introduced to our family the Bulgarian kitchen's taste and smell and it is a large part of my cuisine.

I read an article in the local newspaper of a journalist attending Le Corden Bleu the famous cooking school in Paris France. She described her time and experience and it sounded like something I would love to do. I applied to study Cuisine and Patisserie and was accepted to Le Corden Bleu starting in September. On August 2007 I arrived in Paris. We rented an apartment a walking distance from the school. Amnon stayed with me on and off during that period. Amnon was still working and had to go back to attend to the business in Toronto. It was strange and exhilarating experience to study with young students who can be my grandchildren. I was sixty-four and they were in their early twenties. A school day was nine hours. It was mentally and physically challenging. I was not used to the fast pace of cooking the chefs in charge demanded. They kept shouting ale' ale' to get us to work faster. Nitza visited and stayed with me in Paris. She said she saw me coming home exhausted but that she has never seen me be so happy. I loved and enjoyed school. I perfected my cooking. learned new techniques and became a much better cook. My goals of going to Le Corden Bleu were to learn for my personal use not to become a professional chef. I was too old to start on this path that probably was my calling. I should have done it when I was younger. It took me many years to discover my passions and interests too late for a professional career. I used my talents for my own enjoyment and to the benefit of my family.



Paris is a dream city. Living there for six months is a dream come true. For six months I experienced being a Parisian, enjoying the cafes, the weekly markets and neighborhood bistros. It was heaven. I had plenty of time on weekends to visit and explore all the main attractions, walk in different neighborhoods, have a feel for

the real Paris not only the touristy Paris. One of my passions is the love of opera. Omama took me to my first opera when I was in my teens. It is a love that stays with me and continues to grow. Amnon and I we made special trips to different cities just for an opera we wanted to see. During my stay in Paris I went to see quite a few operas and ballets.

Mine is a story of an immigrant coming to Israel in 1948 at the age of six where I grew up with my parents from childhood to adulthood. In 1971 at the age of twenty-six immigrated to Canada, raised a beautiful family, matured, grew older and developed emotionally and intellectually. My life experiences shaped my identity and my life philosophy.

Like most, I grew, matured and changed during the years. I look back and I see a very different woman. The changes that happened to me and how they influenced my way of life and my life philosophy. All that I am and who I am is influenced by my parents and the family I grew up with. I grew up in a working- class family. I know first-hand the struggles of looking and finding work, paying bills and trying to get through to the end of the month. I never forgot where I came from. I was lucky that I did not have to struggle like my parents. I know the importance of workers' rights for equal opportunities for all. I am a social liberal a feminist and proud of it. Today the term liberal and feminist are used in a derogatory manner by the opposing forces. I wish there was more of a pushback. I hope that I influenced and inspired my kids with the ideal of equality, justice and fairness. I struggle to understand how some who themselves or their parents are immigrants could advocate against new immigrants. Unfortunately, people have short memories and self-interest. I have a hard time especially understanding how Jews could be prejudice against others. Again, how can our memory be so short? how can it be?

The death of my parents at such an early stage had a profound effect on me. My dad could not wait for his retirement. His wish and dream were to go visit France. He was proud of his knowledge of French, but he died before he fulfilled his dream. For my mom, like all Bulgarian women, cleanliness was next to godliness. Their early death, and unfulfilled hopes and dreams of my parents, changed my and Coby's attitudes toward life. We live for today. We know from our experience that tomorrow may never come. I developed a fatalistic view of the world. Sometimes, it causes friction between me and Amnon. I view money as means to have and

enjoy life now! Not later. This attitude made me fiercely unafraid of taking chances, exploring new places.

Amnon and I were planning a six weeks trip to Argentina and Brazil. A week before the trip Amnon informed me that because of work related problems he must cancel the trip. My reaction was that there was no way that I was going forego this trip. With lots of trepidations and fear, I told Amnon that I am going alone. I am not going to give up this dream of a trip. We had tickets to the carnival in Rio, seeing the Iguazu falls and many more places. Amnon realized that I was dead serious. He joined me for the first week in Brazil for the carnival in Rio and the Amazon river cruise. I continued the rest of the trip by myself for another five weeks. I had a few mishaps on the way like airline strikes, my hotel burnt to the ground, but I got through it all. It was my first time traveling in a foreign country by myself. It was wonderful and very different than traveling with a partner. For my sixty fourth birthday Amnon gave me a voucher for a sky diving school. Imagine me jumping out a plane. I did. I jumped. I was surprised that I had no hesitation when it came to the actual jumping. Less than a year later I was diagnosed with lung cancer. it only reinforced my thinking that life is so unpredictable, so we need to enjoy life as much as possible. I was luckier than my dad, the cancer was detected early, now I am cancer free for more than 10 years. My mom worked herself to an early death. Our house was sparkling clean all the time. A clean house for Bulgarian women is as serious and important as it is for religious men, to pray and study the Torah. I saw my mom die so young and I wonder what good is a clean house when you are not around to enjoy it? I changed my ways I stopped cleaning religiously. Hard work, honesty, family and a clean house are the whole mark of Bulgarians. Deep down I am still Bulgarian.

A voyage from birthplace to homeland – מהולדת למולדת

**Now, that I reflect on my life, I begin to understand the meaning of the blessing
LE'CHAIM!**

