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Buried on Three Continents in Three Civilizations: A Jewish Fate

Yishai Shuster

I do not know if the story I am about to tell relates directly to the Holocaust, but I am convinced, however, that a story like this could happen only to someone who is Jewish.¹ I wish to dedicate this paper to my friend, my brother Wlodek (Włodzimierz Przytyk), who died of cancer on March 21, 2006 at the age of 57.

I have no idea if all the history recalled here occurred exactly the way it is narrated. A few of events here were told to me by my parents; other parts come from relatives and friends. This account includes some historically documented facts, but the rest has been handed down to me by others. The second part of the story, however, centers on Kibbutz Yad Hanna. It is based on my personal knowledge and from information gleaned from Sarah Nomberg-Przytyk's published memoirs.

Europe

I will begin with information directly relating to my family and myself. I was born on September 16, 1946 in the town of Walbrzych in Western Poland. I was given the name Seweryn, which means 'a gift'. My parents, Berl Shuster and Rywa Fabrikant, came from Sarny in the Wolyn region, in eastern Poland, one ruled by many different countries at various times, including the Poles and the Russians. After World War I, the district was under Polish control and following the Molotov — Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, it was awarded to the Soviets.

In 1941, however, the entire Wolyn region was captured by the German army during Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Towards the end of the war, and with the German defeat, the district was annexed to the Soviet Union. However, since the dismantling of the Soviet Union, Wolyn has been a part of the Ukraine.

Both of my parent's families were poor and Jewish. In their hometown of Sarny, Jews made up ten percent of the population. It may be no surprise that both of my parents, at a young age, became active in the newly-formed Communist Party. The party was illegal then, and its activities were underground. The ruler of Poland after World War I was Jozef Pilsudski, a man who hated the Communists even more than he hated the Jews.

¹ The following personal account was written originally for a Holocaust study program and has not been published previously.

In her youth, my mother was arrested by the Polish police for the crime of belonging to the Communist Party, and she was imprisoned in notorious sites — Berezie Kartuskiej Prison, where she met my father, and then in Fordon Prison. After serving a total of three years and nine months in these prisons, she returned to Sarny and resumed her political activities in the party. There, she and my father married.

At a very young age, my father Berl had begun working to support his family, first as a tailor's assistant and afterwards as a tailor. He joined the Communist Party after he became aware of their revolutionary activities in the Wolyn Region. When he was a child of nine, the Bolshevik Revolution erupted. He, an assistant tailor who had been consistently abused as a laborer, was immediately attracted to the principles of the Communist Party and he began spending time with its members, much to the objection of his entire family. My father, like my mother, spent time in various prisons of Pilsudski's dictatorial regime.

My parents were married in a civil, rather than religious ceremony, despite objections from their families. Eventually the families came to terms with the youngsters' determination to engage politically. In exchange for this agreement, the two agreed to a compromise, and they were wed in a religious ceremony in a distant city. I very recently discovered the latter information from my cousin, because my parents never spoke of their religious wedding.

My uncle Ya'acov Shuster, of blessed memory, told me that my parents and my paternal grandparents had a terrible fight because of the refusal of my parents to have their first son, my brother Marek, circumcised. When my parents had to travel to another town for some political activities, his family quickly organized a circumcision. They had the local *mohel*, who was also a butcher, come and perform the ceremony. Marek was named after my mother's father, Menachem Mendel, who had died from a terrible illness a few years earlier. Though they decided to name him Menachem, they called him Marek — a proper Polish name. He maintained the use of that name until his death in 1997 and even though he lived in Israel, he never gave himself a Hebrew name.

Contrarily, my parents changed the names they had been given at birth. My father's original name was Berl Dov which he changed to Boleslaw — again, a proper Polish name. My mother, born Rywa, changed her name to Regina, and those are the names that appear on their wedding certificate. When the family immigrated to Israel, they did so using their Polish names.

My parents' underground political activities weighed heavily on the young family, until 1939. Then, they received the happy news that their district, according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, would be annexed to the Soviet Union. The mere fact that my father was arrested by the Soviet authorities — because of Stalin's anti-Semitic policies — briefly after the annexation and sent to Siberia did not deter either him or my mother from being faithful to the party.

At the time, my mother was pregnant with my second brother Franek. He was born in September of 1940, while my father was imprisoned in the Gulag. Like Marek, Franek was named after a family member but he, like Marek, maintained the use of his Polish name until his death in 1993 in Toronto.

With the beginning of Operation Barbarossa and Germany's attempted conquest of the Soviet Union in 1941, my father was released from Siberia; he returned to Sarny and immediately enlisted in the Red Army. My parents were together only briefly, as the Germans were conquering Sarny and the entire district.

My mother, following Stalin's orders, moved to a kolkhoz (a Soviet collective farm, structured somewhat like a kibbutz or communal village in Israel) in Uzbekistan, deep within the Soviet Asiatic region, far from the reach of the Nazis.² My father, on the other hand, under the orders of the Red Army, enlisted in a Soviet Partisan unit which operated in the forests surrounding Sarny. There he witnessed the murder by the Nazis of almost his entire family along with most of Sarny's Jewish population. The victims were then buried in a mass grave.

His mother, father, nine sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins were murdered. The only survivors were a few cousins and his younger brother Yankel (Ya'acov), who like my father had joined the Red Army.

Of the Fabrikants, my mother's family, two older brothers survived — Ya'acov and Yoseph; they had escaped earlier with their families deep into the USSR. In addition, my uncle Hatzkel had been drafted into the Red Army; he survived the war and remained in the USSR. Hatzkel was also an active communist, and he was the only family member who had supported my mother's political affiliations.

From the beginning of 1942, it became increasingly dangerous for my father to remain within Nazi-occupied lands; he was a Communist, an officer in the Red Army, and a Jew. After being ordered to cross the lines back into Soviet territory, he took a detour to Uzbekistan to visit his wife and two young sons. He intended to join his new unit — The Polish Division, under the leadership of Konstantyn Rokossowski. So, after his visit he joined his unit, but unbeknownst to him, during his family visit he had been tried and found guilty of desertion, and he was sentenced to be executed.

²In a kolkhoz, a member, called *kolkhoznik* (колхозник, feminine колхозница), was paid a share of the farm's profits according to the number of workdays, while a sovkhos employed salaried workers. In addition, the kolkhoz was required to sell their crops to the state, which fixed prices for the grain. These were set very low and the difference between what the state paid the farm and what the state charged consumers for the food represented a major source of income for the Soviet government. Thus, in 1948 the Soviet government charged wholesalers 335 rubles for 100 kilograms of rye, but it paid the kolkhoz roughly 8 rubles. Nor did such prices change much to keep up with inflation. Prices paid by the Soviet government hardly changed at all between 1929 and 1953, meaning that the state did not pay one half or even one third of the cost of production. (Wikipedia)

For some reason, the sentence never reached his division and he served with them as had been previously ordered. My father held the rank of captain in the infantry and he fought in the battle of Stalingrad. Together with his soldiers, he reached Berlin at the end of the war in 1945.

Meanwhile, my mother lived in the kolkhoz in Uzbekistan with my two brothers. Their life was very difficult. For a while, she and my father corresponded, but soon after his return to the front, their correspondence ended. She received sporadic news about my father, and then, during the freezing winter of 1942-43, she received the horrible news, with no explanation or details, that my father was dead. (This probably happened because of his being accused of treason.)

My mother worked picking cotton. (Forty years later, when I was picking cotton with a modern mechanized picker in the fields of Kibbutz Yad Hanna, my mother told me how she had become a "Soviet working heroine" as a result of being the fastest cotton picker in her kolkhoz.) In the summer of 1943 my mother and her children left their kolkhoz because of her son Franek's illness and they moved to another one on the outskirts of the city of Bukhara, so that he could receive treatment. There, my mother met a kind medic. Their hard lives bound them together.

As the world war drew to an end, my mother and brothers stayed on in Central Asia because they did not want to move Franek, who was still recovering. (Perhaps, though, this was just an excuse to stay with her new life partner.) In 1945, Regina Shuster was chosen as the representative of her kolkhoz to hail the Soviet soldiers upon their return from their victory over the Nazi oppressors. The victory parade was to take place on November 7th in Red Square. Naturally, my mother's new boyfriend arranged to join her at that event in Moscow.

According to my mother, the parade was very impressive. Then suddenly, and to her amazement and shock, she saw mounted on a horse at the head of his unit her Berl -- alive and well. Their reunion was obviously very moving. However, that very night my parents received word from a close friend that the Soviet secret police were looking for my father. The charges of desertion had never been dropped. My mother and father immediately went into hiding. They hid for a few weeks with different friends. Eventually my father used his Polish citizenship and managed to cross the border into Poland.

My mother, as a result of their reunion, became pregnant. She returned to Uzbekistan, took my brothers, and carrying me in her womb, she reached Poland as well. And so, I came into the world on September 16, 1946, in Walbrzych, Poland, near the Polish border with Germany. My parents first considered calling me Ishaiyahu because they wanted to name me after my paternal grandfather who had been murdered in the killing pits of Wolyn in 1941. However, they quickly abandoned that idea, because it seemed

inappropriate that highly recognized communists would call their son such an obviously Jewish name. Since they felt that they had received me as a gift, they named me Seweryn, an unusual name in Poland at the time. I dearly cherish, appreciate and love my paternal grandfather with all of my soul, whom I knew only through stories and feelings, but I am pleased that I did not inherit his name.

I used to think that my parents chose to settle in Walbrzych, far from the Soviet border, to keep their distance from the Soviets. However, I learned during a Holocaust study program that the Polish government's policy was to repopulate the western area of the country since the Germans had either killed or deported much of the population there throughout their six-year occupation.

In spite of everything that had happened to the Jews of Poland, my parents remained in Walbrzych, Poland, loyal, active and prominent members of the Polish Communist Party. My father managed a clothing factory and my mother was a party employee. Their promotion within the party hierarchy was swift. My mother received an important position in the Central Committee and was one of the personal secretaries of Edward Ochab, a prominent party and government official. Then my father was offered a managerial position in a military clothing factory in Warsaw because of connections he had made during his military service. Thus, towards the end of 1949, we moved to Poland's capital, Warszawa (Warsaw).

We lived first in a town near Warsaw called Anin, occupying a beautiful home in the woods. Our elderly and kind neighbor was the Polish Jewish poet Julian Tuwim. Then, we moved to Warsaw once a new home was built there for us. It was located in one of the first neighborhoods to be constructed on the ruins of Warsaw. These neighborhoods were erected for Polish and Soviet officers. Therefore, our neighbors were either military personnel or government officials, so naturally my friends were their children.

Life was good during those years, and I have no recollection of any anti-Semitic atmosphere or events, although everyone knew that my family was Jewish. We never hid our Jewish identity. My parents spoke Yiddish in public and attended the Yiddish Theater in Warsaw. (Unfortunately, I have never understood Yiddish.)

We celebrated some of the Jewish holidays. I recall that my brothers and I demanded that we have a Christmas tree because they are lovely, and of course because of the gifts. My parents acquiesced but we also lit Hanukah candles that stood in the window. Naturally we were given a secular explanation of the secular spirit of Hanukah. At Passover, my father brought matzo from the Israeli embassy. My Polish friends and I nicknamed the matzo, which we enjoyed, "Jewish bread." We did not observe the kosher dietary laws and until we moved to Israel I didn't know what they were.

However, the first night of Passover we always had a large feast. Bread was not a part of the meal and we were told why it was celebrated. Neither God nor any other religious aspect of the occasion was mentioned. It was purely a celebration of freedom. I have tried ever since to continue the tradition, first within the kibbutz, and now, since kibbutz tradition has dissolved, within my own home. I continue the secular Jewish tradition which I was given in my parents' home.

Although we barely sensed it, it is not true that anti-Semitism didn't exist in Poland in those days. One event I do recall was my oldest brother Marek, who was a member of the Polish Communist Youth organization, coming home after being beaten up by Polish hooligans. I was told that intoxicated hooligans had done it, but years later when I was in Israel I was told that the reason behind the attack was anti-Semitism.

Nonetheless, we led happy lives and I had many Polish friends. Like all Poles, we celebrated Wladyslaw Gomulka's rise to power in 1956. The very same Gomulka had been a friend of my mother's in Pilsudski's prison 30 years earlier. However, as a reaction to the 1956 Sinai Campaign in Israel, and because anti-Semitism overcame him, Gomulka decided to "cleanse" Poland of its Jewish population. The few Jews who remained after the expulsion in 1957 were deported (more like "encouraged to leave") after the Six Day War in 1967. Of course, I was too young at the time to comprehend the on-going political process.

It was shortly after Gomulka's election, while we were still celebrating his rise to power, that I was told by my parents that we were moving to Israel. At first, I didn't know what or where Israel was, until I was told that they were speaking of Palestine, and that there most of the family that had survived the Holocaust was living.

As we were leaving Poland on the train in the spring of 1957 I personally experienced overt anti-Semitic behavior by Poles. On the border between Czechoslovakia and Poland, the Polish Border Patrol checked the passengers and their belongings. Their behavior reminded me of the pictures and movies I had seen at home and in school of the crudeness and brutality manifested during wartime. I remember, as if it were today, that our record player that was in a very special suitcase, was taken from us. It had been given to my mother as a farewell gift from her comrades in the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The image of my mother, the woman who in my mind could do anything, pleading and crying in front of a young, mocking Polish border guard is etched forever in my memory.

Thus, for years, I had no desire to visit Poland. A special reason eventually presented itself in 1999 when my childhood friend and I found each other.³

³ In 1999, a Polish friendship was re-kindled following a long search. We had had great neighbors, the Faust family; they lived across the street from us. The father was a colonel in the Polish Navy and they

Israel

On May 5, 1957, the Greek ship which had transported us from Venice docked in Haifa. Aside from Jewish Agency representatives, family members I had seen only in photographs were waiting for us on the pier. My cousin, Haikah from Kibbutz Lochemei Hagetaot (The Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz), asked my parents in Yiddish “how the little boy is called.” “Seweryn”, my parents answered. “That is not a name that you can call a child in Israel” Haikah replied. “Who is he named after?” My father hesitated, recalling their uncertainty of what to call me when I was born eleven years earlier. “Perhaps he is named after my father. They called him Yishayahu”, my father answered.

My cousin saved me by saying that Yishayahu is too long and awkward a name. “We’ll call him Yishai”, Haikah declared. So it was, and so it remains. I love my name that was given to me by my cousin Haikah, who took me to live in her kibbutz. There I lived for two or three years. Until the day I die I will never forget the Agami family from Lochemei Hagetaot that so warmly “adopted” me. They gave me a strong beginning in my new country, along with my new name.

My parents were placed in a ma'abara (temporary housing set up for new immigrants) in Kiryat Haim, near Haifa. After looking for work, they sought contact with the Israeli Communist Party.

Yes, in spite of the blows and humiliation they had suffered in Europe at the hands of the party, in spite of the arrests and eventual exile, Berl and Regina Shuster arrived in Israel and shortly thereafter joined the Communist Party. At that time, the party was “anti-Zionist,” and its members were disliked by most of the Jewish population in Israel. This was during the McCarthy Era and Israel’s political orientations leaned towards that of the so-called “capitalist” USA. Thus, the communists, or anyone who might be too “red,” were persecuted, discriminated against and even beaten.

After moving in with my parents in Kiryat Bialik and trying to join a few youth movements, such as Noar Oved and Hashomer Hatzair, I, too, joined the Communists, through the youth movement, Bankee (an acronym for The Communist Youth Covenant).

had two sons, Janek and Jurek. Our connections were cut when we were expelled from Poland in 1957. But after communism fell in Poland, Jurek found me. We have been in contact ever since.

Garin Dror (Freedom Group), a part of Nahal⁴, arrived at Kibbutz Yad Hanna in October of 1963 for the first phase of its army service. Kibbutz Yad Hanna was on the “Green Line”, the accepted international border, facing the (West Bank) then Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan city of Tulkarem. Towards the end of 1962, I joined my friends from the Bankee Youth Movement who were serving in Kibbutz Yad Hanna with Garin Achva. I remained there until I was inducted into the army. The army track for the communists was different than the other Nahal groups because of the politically-based discrimination and isolation that communists then endured in Israel. (Naturally, the military authorities explained away the discrimination as being based on “security considerations.”)

In actual fact, there was no true connection between national security and Bankee. Our track began with pre-military unpaid service in Kibbutz Yad Hanna for three months. Afterwards we spent six months in basic training and then we were returned immediately to Kibbutz Yad Hanna to work until the end of our service. The garins from other youth movements that served in other frontier communities went through advanced training in the paratroopers, and they created small outposts that eventually became settlements. These and various other activities and opportunities were denied to us — all based on politics.

A few years later, during my Reserve Service, I completed the training I had been denied and became a part of a select paratroop unit. This occurred at the beginning of the 1970's after the division within Maki, the Israeli Communist Party, and after a tragic incident along the border, at Kibbutz Yad Hanna.

On December 8, 1964, Jordanian Legionnaires opened fire on Avraham Jurie, who was protecting me as a security escort while I tilled the fields next to the border of Tulkarem, then part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Jurie, my best friend, was killed. Ever since then, my life has been bound to Yad Hanna. (The story of our garin and the border incident has been told by me in a movie, “As Wind in the Willows,” which was produced in 1994 by Tikva Sneh and me. The film was shown at the Haifa Film Festival of that year.)

In Kibbutz Yad Hanna in 1965, I met my life partner (and now wife) Mazal Miyuni. She was born in Ioanina in northwest Greece. Mazal, the daughter of Greek Communists, came to Yad Hanna with a garin that was named after my already dead friend, Jurie. Mazal and I met over a bar of chocolate — our paths crossed and melded.

⁴ Nahal- a Hebrew acronym for Noar Halutzi Lohem (literally, Fighting Pioneer Youth), refers to a program for Israeli youth which allows them to combine their compulsory three-year military service with volunteer-type civilian service, such as organizing social welfare projects in neighborhoods and towns suffering from socioeconomic difficulties, acting as counselors for youth organizations, or founding and developing new agricultural settlements. (Wikipedia)

I was released from my mandatory military service in 1966, and Mazal and I married in September of that year in Kibbutz Yad Hanna. There, our four children and three grandchildren were born. There, we all live today. Yad Hanna is no longer a kibbutz and most certainly no longer communist. Regretfully? Perhaps.⁵

One day in the spring of 1969 (if memory serves me well) when I returned home from work, Mazal told me that a Polish man named Wlodek Przytyk, who barely spoke Hebrew but who knew Polish and English, had arrived at the kibbutz. He had come to visit someone from my garin, Oded Yorkovski. Since Oded, to say the least, was not one of my friends, I had little contact with Wlodek at first. However, after meeting by chance we learned to like each other and then became close friends. We had a great deal in common and had very similar tastes in music and books. Wlodek knew a great deal about the type of Western music that was very popular at that time, particularly music from the US and Canada. His desire to know about things from the West came from his life behind the Iron Curtain of Communist Poland; and his knowledge was vast.

Another thing we had in common was our pleasure in eating and drinking. Mazal loved then, and still does now, cooking and no one can match her culinary artistry. We satisfied our appetites with countless parties that lasted through the night and into the morning — and all within the walls of our tiny kibbutz home.

I learned that Wlodek was born on November 7, 1949, an extremely important date for communists throughout the world since on that day in 1917 the Bolshevik Revolution had broken out in Russia. As a good communist family, the gift of a child born on that day was commemorated by naming their tiny infant Wlodzimierz - Joseph after the names of the party's founder, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, and Joseph Stalin. The Przytyk family left Poland in 1968 after their oldest son Jurek went to the United States for a university sabbatical and opted against returning to Poland.

The family went to Vienna first and then to Rome, where they were temporarily housed with the help of the Jewish Agency. They intended to immigrate to the US, where Wlodek's father Andrzej had close relatives. However, his mother, Sarah Nomberg-Przytyk, was denied a visa by the American immigration authorities as she had been a very active member of the Communist Party in Poland.

So, in 1969 Andrzej joined his family that had immigrated to the US in the 1920's while Sarah, together with Wlodek the younger son, immigrated to Israel. In the meantime, their son Jurek had left the US and moved to Canada, where he met his wife Natasha.

⁵ The story of Kibbutz Yad Hanna and its subsequent changes from the time of its establishment in 1950 -- and the massive change in 2007 -- is worthy of another essay. I'm not entirely sure that this place should still be called Yad Hanna.

When Wlodek and his mother arrived in Israel, she was placed in housing for retired academics, located in Ramat Efal. Wlodek was sent to a kibbutz ulpan⁶ which he quickly left. He tried his luck in the Israeli Merchant Marines and went abroad as a cadet. On his first journey, he realized that the lifestyle wasn't suitable for him and when the ship docked at one of the US ports, Wlodek left the ship and joined his father who was living there. After a while, Wlodek crossed the border into Canada and joined his brother for a while until he grew tired of it and returned to Israel.

In the meantime, Sarah being a veteran Communist Party member, joined Maki (the Israeli Communist Party). Maki splintered into two groups — one that became Rakach, headed by Meir Vilner and Arab leaders, while the other group, Maki, was headed by Moshe Sneh and Shmuel Mikonis. Sarah joined the latter of the two.

After Wlodek returned to Israel, his mother advised him to try life on a kibbutz and what could be more natural than to live on a communist kibbutz? And so Wlodek and I met in Kibbutz Yad Hanna.

One morning, in that spring of 1970, Wlodek and I had breakfast in the kibbutz dining room with my parents, who were also living in Yad Hanna. Naturally we spoke in Polish and my mother asked Wlodek where he was from in Poland. "I'm from Lublin", he answered. "I had a very good friend from Lublin", my mother said. "We shared a prison cell in Poland for three years because of our membership in the Communist Party. Her name was Sarah Nomberg." There was a moment of silence at the table and then Wlodek said, "That's my mother."

Obviously that same day we went to Ramat Efal and brought Sarah to the kibbutz. There was great excitement as the two friends who hadn't seen each other for some 40 years finally met. My father, who knew Sarah only from stories, was moved to tears. The old friends sat into the wee hours of the morning, laughing and crying. Each of them recounted their life experiences since they left one another in prison in Poland in 1934.

⁶ The aim of an ulpan is to teach adult immigrants to Israel the basic language skills of conversation, writing and comprehension. Most ulpanim also provide instruction in the fundamentals of Israeli culture, history, and geography. The primary purpose of the ulpan is to help new citizens to be integrated as quickly and as easily as possible into the social, cultural and economic life of their new country.

It turned out that Sarah, like my parents, had remained politically active in the Communist Party until the time Poland was conquered by the Nazis. But unlike my mother, who was saved by escaping into Central Asia, Sarah was captured by the Nazis and sent to Auschwitz. A journalist, she had documented her life during World War II in a book entitled Auschwitz. It was published in English by the University of North Carolina Press in 1985. The original manuscript had been written in 1966 in Sarah's handwriting and is found in the archives of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Obviously after such a meeting, Wlodek and I grew closer and Sarah came to visit often in Yad Hanna. If memory serves me, she came most weekends. Most of the visits were between my parents and Sarah, but the family frequently spent time in my home as well.

During one of these visits, while we were all sitting on the porch, Mazal's parents, Moshe and Lina Miyuni arrived. Immediately after their arrival, Mazal's mother spoke to Mazal in Greek and said, "I know that woman". Mazal replied, "Oh, you know everybody! You're probably imagining it. How could you possibly know her? You're from Greece, she's from Poland -- what's wrong with you?" Lina persisted and said to Mazal, "I know her. Look, the numbers tattooed on our arm are from the same camp: Auschwitz. I know her from there. We were on the same block for a while and I even taught her songs in Greek."

Lina approached Sarah and asked her, "Do you remember the little Greek girl in Auschwitz who taught you a Greek song?" Lina began to sing and Sarah immediately replied, "Of course I remember," and she began to sing as well. Lina then said, "I am that Greek girl from the Block in Auschwitz." Of course, everyone was moved — tears and experiences were shared into the late hours of the night.

The relationship with Wlodek became even stronger. Mazal and I shared a closeness with Wlodek that could be likened to that of a brother, especially because of the incredible connection between our mothers from 40 and 50 years before. The three of us shared a good life in Kibbutz Yad Hanna: parties, many trips, food, drink and a lot of music. Wlodek met a volunteer from Denmark named Karin, who was both beautiful and sweet. They began living together in Kibbutz Yad Hanna. In 1973, Wlodek joined the Israel Defense Forces and served in the Air Force. It seemed that he had found his place in Israel.

At one point, Wlodek's brother Jurek came for a visit from Canada to Kibbutz Yad Hanna with his wife Natasha and their son Sasha. Other friends of Jurek's joined in as well: Sidney and his partner, along with his daughter Maya from Canada, and Daniel and Max with their daughter Chantal from Holland. That visit transformed the group into one large international family.

During the Yom Kippur War, Wlodek was a member of a crew that transported wounded soldiers from the field of battle via helicopter to various hospitals. The horrible experiences during that war and the loss of our good friend, Moshe Uziel from the kibbutz, affected Wlodek deeply. He and Karin decided to leave Israel. They first tried to live in Canada near his brother and his mother Sarah, who had also emigrated to Canada. Shortly afterwards they moved to Denmark, the country of Karin's birth; there, their daughter Sima was born.

My close relationship with Wlodek didn't change despite the geographical distance. In fact, we grew even closer. Wlodek, Karin and Sima visited in Israel frequently. Sarah visited on occasion and remained in touch with my parents.

The first of the people I have written about to depart this world was Wlodek's father, Andrzej Przytyk, who died of cancer in Canada in 1972. He was buried on Jurek's farm in Canada. My father, Berl Shuster, died in 1983 and was buried in Kibbutz Yad Hanna. Sarah Nomberg-Przytyk died in 1990, after becoming ill during a visit in Israel. According to her request she was buried in Taut. My mother, Rywa Fabrikant Shuster died in 1993 and was buried in Kibbutz Yad Hanna.

My brother Franek died two days after my mother was buried. I had spent a month and a half with Franek, who had undergone surgery for a brain tumor. I stood by his side and cared for him throughout his illness. After he died, I took his cremains back to Israel to be buried next to our father, as he had requested. In 1996, my oldest brother died as the result of a lengthy illness and he was buried in Kiryat Bialik.

And finally, my friend-my brother Wlodek Przytyk, died on March 21, 2006 after a brief struggle with cancer. His wife Karin and daughter Sima decided to have Wlodek cremated. His ashes were buried in the three places that were meaningful to Wlodek throughout his life. Some of his ashes are in Denmark, where he spent most of his adult life. Some of them are in Canada, where he visited often and where his father was buried. The rest of his ashes are in Israel, a place where he spent fascinating years and where his mother Sarah is buried. Wlodek is the only person I know who is buried on three continents: Europe, America and Asia.

In my opinion, this story is one that only a Jew could experience.

Translated from Hebrew by Beth Malke.