

## To My Father Alex Rafaeli on His 70th Birthday

A Poem by Lonny Rafaeli

July 1, 1980

As a glass of water cannot sum up an ocean, so I am not summing-up a life,  
merely expressing some memories, some nostalgia.

Some seventy years ago, in the month of Sivan (July 1, 1910)  
In a little town close to the renowned Riga,  
My father was born, in a good hour, under a lucky star.

I had searched for him for many years...  
So he could play Cops and Robbers, or Indians in Latvian...  
And read Pushkin and Tolstoy in the original Russian...  
And interrogate Nazis in Germany in German...  
And curse roundly in English as an American GI...  
Order in French in fancy restaurants...  
And tell spicy jokes in Yiddish...  
And in Hebrew, to work and build factories in Israel.

I had dreamt of a father with an adventurous spirit —  
But not so many and of such variety;  
As a child he was brought during the Revolution to Riga, the capital;  
Hence the school years during war and revolution.  
His mother a socialist and father a capitalist,  
They compromised on the Hebrew High School.

Filled with boundless energy, he sought outlets after school,  
Always in training and developing his form —  
For his legs are not long, and he's not very tall —  
He ran the 400 and 800 with might and main,  
As if the pride of the nation depended on it.  
Days and nights he spent with his friends in the Movement, for don't forget that Betar  
was founded in Riga.  
So in sport and Betar he went from strength to strength —  
And fell asleep on his books almost every night;  
Even so, in his twentieth year he was already far from home in Heidelberg,  
Where he studied and ran and lived the good life with spirited friends.  
But the rise of the Nazis was already in progress,  
And at the age of twenty-four, Ph.D. in hand,  
He sought his fortunes in a new land.

By ship, to Palestine, the Motherland.  
With Prof. Ruppin on Mt. Scopus, and against the attackers.

In the Shapiro Quarter,  
As a night watchman, research assistant, journalist or insurance agent,  
He becomes deeply involved with the beloved land.  
Then he joined the Underground, and served many arduous years, with faith and  
enthusiasm.  
By the end of the Thirties, filled with ominous forebodings,  
He is crisscrossing Europe buying arms and sounding the warning  
Of the approaching cataclysm.  
Soon the forewarnings turned into terrifying facts,  
And body and soul rose up in protest.

Undeterred by his age, by now thirty-two,  
My father joined the American army;  
In spite of diplomas, experience and years,  
He enrolled as a private,  
Obstinate as a mule he succeeded in adjusting,  
And landing on the shores of Europe,  
He knew he would fulfill his pledge.  
From town to town he progressed and took note  
Till the cup of hatred runneth over.

He fought his battles and took his revenge  
For the fate of his brother, his parents and friends.  
The war finally ended, and the embers still smoldered,  
Yet the gallant band renewed the battle to establish the Jewish State.  
The dream comes true. So passed the years...  
And the overcoming of grief and relentless work become  
A sign and symbol, which will stand for generations

Now nearing forty, and having left a trail  
Of broken hearts in various lands, during  
Exciting days and mysterious nights —  
Finally, the war fox realized he must resume responsibilities, this time to his self.  
With typical thoroughness, he undertook to learn about business.  
Two whole years he worked tirelessly,  
Constantly raising his sights further and further.  
The land of milk and honey, for which they had fought,  
Waited far away for promoters, for newcomers, for fresh blood.  
The first steps did not put him off, on the contrary,  
Industry was brought to the land and began to flourish.

But ladies and gentleman, time off for a pause

For finally we find father in the society for broken hearts.  
One day he saw my mother in the office of WIZO;  
He lost his heart — and so ended his hesitations and deliberations.  
He was trapped in a net, which hadn't even been spread.

And the rabbi blessed them and since  
Thirty years have passed in bliss.  
Then we began to appear, the new generation —  
Four of us, one after the other.  
Thus, my story comes to an end, with the hope  
That tomorrow or the day after, on the heels of this celebration,  
The impulse will come and with pencil in hand  
Abba will unburden his heart and his memory,  
And many wonderful tales will come forth which will  
Remain forever inscribed in history.  
Although this is a story two thousand years old,  
Which begins in the Diaspora and ends in Jerusalem,  
He is the one and only, he is my dad.  
As my friends say, we wish we had one like him.