

## **Difficult to Remember but Harder to Forget**

### **Experiences Remembered – Addendum**

#### **Pepka**

We were on the promenade, my wife and me taking our usual walk. We were almost alone. The strong winds were not very inviting. The sea looked stormy, and the warning flag was black. It was about 17 degrees (about 62 degrees F) and the wind gusts made it more difficult to proceed. The winds painfully stabbed the exposed parts of our faces. However, we did not give-up and continued our walk as planned – one hour.

On the way back in the car, we reminisced about those long ago times. It was January 1944. There was a new girl with us as we took our regular route to a forest in Smilna. Her name was Pepka. She could have never imagined the brutal winter weather on the mountain tops and the guys did not instruct her about the needed clothing.

At the beginning of our climbing in the Opaka forest, nothing could predict what we would be faced with. As we started gaining altitude we realized that we were in the middle of a wild storm, with wet snow hitting our faces and such strong winds we could barely stand. We ducked to protect our bodies against the wind. At some point Mordechai decided to find shelter by the trees and wait there for the weather to improve. We sat with our backs to the woods, took off our backpacks and rested. Someone wanted to drink and Mordechai said: “Wait a minute, there is a small spring around here, which does not freeze all year around”.

He got up and started to walk around with a flashlight, and after a while we heard his voice: “Let's drink the spring water. It is warmer than the air”. Only Mordechai was able to find the spring - he found it by the sound of running water. The spring was covered with a thin layer of frozen snow and we could not see the water.

Mordechai brought water for Pepka. It was then that we all saw how terrible it was: Pepka's knees were a pulp of bleeding flesh mixed with strips of socks that were cut by the unforgiving winds. Pepka was silent though. I will never forget the sight of her frozen knees and her beautiful eyes wide open. Pepka was unconscious. Using snow, Mordechai started massaging the frozen areas of her legs. Slowly she started coming to, looked around her in amazement and smiled. We were all very happy. We found some rags to wrap around her legs. When we got “home”, Edda treated Pepka and soon she got better.

After the war Pepka reunited with her aunt Hela Wagman in Boryslaw and I often visited her, was always welcomed warmly and treated with good food. She also patiently inquired about my fate - a rarity during that time of my life.

### **Epilogue:**

We immigrated to Israel in 1960 and visited Pepka in her home on Shlush street in Tel-Aviv. She was married to Mr. Baharav, who eventually helped us acquire a residence in a desired location. We were always in good relationship in Israel. We visited them and they came to visit us, and Pepka brought us a nice plant.

After our return from a mission abroad, we renewed the relationship, but soon after Pepka's husband passed away. He was a smart and kind person, the type of religious person you don't encounter any longer today.

We came to the "Shiva" and met his two sons. One of them – Asher was there wearing the intelligence corps uniforms. When he heard our last name, he asked if we had a son by the name of Yehoshua. He then told all present that our son Yehoshua serves with him in the same unit and that he was doing the job of a major while wearing sergeant uniform.

We were surprised and delighted by this turn of events: Our and Pepka's sons serve in the same unit of the IDF. Thanks to fate.

Then Pepka lives in a senior housing around Dizengoff street in Tel-Aviv. We met again at the funeral of Mordechai's wife in Yahud. That's life.

*January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012.*