

# Memories of Yom Kippur War

## On return to Canada, life changes

VICTOR NEUMAN

*In this eight-part series, the author recounts his life in Israel around the time of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The events and people described are real but, for reasons of privacy, the names are fictitious.*

### Part 8: Epilogue

In a backhanded, minor way, I was a casualty of the war, too. The lack of help during the conflict meant I had to work alone trying to preserve the banana crop. One day, on my tractor, I was in a hurry, carrying several sacks of fertilizer to the fields. They had to go into the distribution tank before the irrigation timers flipped a switch and began irrigating another field. Someone at the kibbutz had helped me load them onto the hood of the tractor, with the idea that, at that height, I could drop them easily into the tank at the other end.

It didn't work out that way. I hit a rut in the road and all the sacks slid to the ground. As fast as I could, I reloaded all the bags – which were 50 kilos each – lifting them from the ground to the tractor hood, and carried on. I felt OK at the time but I had herniated a disc in my back. The pain started later that day and got worse over the next few days. I saw a doctor in Hedera and got a daunting prognosis. My back might need surgery but no surgery would be possible in the near future. Wounded soldiers had priority, so only life-saving procedures were available to civilians. Had I been lucky enough to have been shot as well, they could have done something for my back.

I had to return to Canada to get the operation and, although I didn't realize it at the time, my time in Israel was coming to an end. My plan was clear in my head. I would go home, get the surgery, return to Israel cured, become a kibbutz member, marry Tamar and live happily ever after. As the saying goes: "Man plans and God laughs."

Away from Tamar in Canada, I had the growing realization that I wasn't going back to Israel. The best explanation I can give is to repeat what a friend once told me.

He was a rude bugger but he had the right of it when he said, "Millions of years of evolution have turned men into slobbering idiots around women. Our problem is that we're always thinking with the wrong head."

Whatever Tamar and I had going on, it wasn't happening between my ears. As beautiful as she was, I couldn't imagine spending my life with her and I had to end things. And, if I ended things, I could never return to the kibbutz after jilting their darling firstborn-on-kibbutz child. And that particular kibbutz was the only place in Israel where I could imagine a life for myself.

It was over in every sense and way. I wrote a painful letter to Tamar. She wrote an even more painful letter back to me, using English expressions I didn't know she had. She hated me. That made two of us. Lost another woman. Lost a country. Lost my purpose in life. How careless can you get?

Ironically, my back injury, which had started the whole process of turning my life on its head, simply healed itself. No surgery and no pain after just a few months. My life had completely changed direction because a few sacks of fertilizer fell off a tractor. Once again, life turning on a dime.

As much as I loved English literature, I still had no notion of how to use my master's degree. Teaching wasn't my thing and, with that degree, there wasn't much else. I had to change gears – drastically. Then I recalled something from my time doing archeology.

While we tourist-volunteers struggled in the heat and dust, digging endlessly to uncover the ruins of Tel Beersheva, a surveyor stood over us and used his instrument to map out the location of walls as they were discovered. To do it, he spent most of his time staring through his instrument at his survey assistant – a woman in a two-piece bathing suit who was holding the survey rod. I started thinking an archeological surveyor was the job for me. You may think of me as a shallow person. In my defence, I am.

To make a long story short, I began studying survey technology at the British Columbia Institute of Technology. That morphed into surveying fish hatcheries, which morphed into surveying logging roads, which morphed into designing logging roads, which morphed into a lifelong career

designing highways for the Province of British Columbia and an engineering firm called Binnie Engineering Consultants. Nowhere along the line did I ever do archeological surveying, and the only survey assistants I ever had wore flannel shirts, jeans and hiking boots.

In time, my road design work left me feeling a little parched, culturally. I decided to join the Vancouver Jewish Folk Choir. There, I met the gal who has been the love of my life for the past 31 years and counting. After meandering through life for what seemed like an eternity, what I wanted was crystal clear to me. I wanted her. And I learned something about finding my purpose in life. The main deal is to find the right person. The rest is just commentary.

We had our first date on New Year's Eve. We were engaged by February and planning to be married by May. Her family was apoplectic about the timeline so we pushed the marriage date to September. I've stuck by her and she is stuck with me. And so, more than 30 years after puberty, I was finally all grown up. And you know what? By all I hold dear, she is the most beautiful creature I've ever laid eyes on.

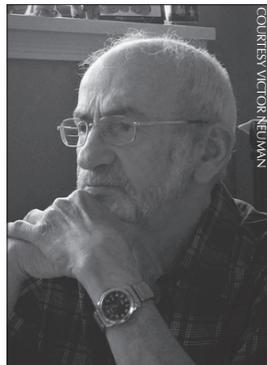
Time is a river, they say, and this river may have almost run its course to the sea. But I remember the stream that became that river. I can never get Israel out of my mind, after all this time. And my leaving that country to lead the easy, secure life in Canada will always haunt me. It was 1974 and I still remember, clear as a bell, the sign I passed in Lod airport on the way to my plane home. In Hebrew and English, it said: "Will the last one to leave the country please turn off the lights." Even believing I was soon coming back, I felt like a traitor.

A long time ago, when I was courting the dear lady I married, I did something very old-fashioned. I wrote her love poems. She may have married me because of them or in spite of them, I'm not sure which. I reread one of them recently and something dawned on me. It wasn't a poem just for my beloved. It was also a poem for everybody in that land; everybody trying to hold onto their place in the sun or everybody trying to find it. It's called "Magic":

*On this shattered summit / Over plains fooded red by sunfall / Where insect armies sullen, bloodied / Crawl craters in search of victim's missed / We perch uneasily / And wonder at a lethal world*

*But then, conjured by you / I felt for one bedazzled, high moment / We were magicians such as none before / And with our silk top hats / And our crimson capes, love-woven / We could pluck rabbits out of a hat / Launch birds out of a box / Or trick the world into decency. ♫*

**Victor Neuman** was born in the former Soviet Union, where his family sought refuge after fleeing Poland during the Second World War. The family immigrated to Canada in 1948 and Neuman grew up in the Greater Vancouver area. He attended the University of British Columbia and obtained a BA and MA with majors in English literature and creative writing. Between 1968 and 1974, he made two trips to Israel, one of which landed him on a kibbutz at the time of the 1973 Yom Kippur war. Upon his return to Canada, he studied Survey Technology at BCIT and went on to a career of designing highways for the Province of British Columbia and the firm of Binnie Civil Engineering Consultants. When he retired, he reconnected with his roots in creative writing and began writing scripts for Vancouver Jewish Folk Choir concerts and articles for the Jewish Independent. Neuman and his wife, Tammy, live in southeast Vancouver and enjoy the company of friends, their extensive extended family and their four sons.



Victor Neuman

COURTESY VICTOR NEUMAN

# Obituary

GABRIEL PELED

Born in Israel, the only child of Margarete and Kurt, Gaby died in Vancouver Oct. 12, 2019. He is survived by his wife, Barbara; son, Yair (in California); daughters, Anat (in Israel), Anna and Zoe; grandchildren, Maya and Owen; and cousins in Chile.

So many roles in his lifetime and so many changes. Gaby was a Sabra, a kibbutznik, a farmer and a student. He served as a soldier, officer, commando and reservist – but remained a dove. At an age when most are comfortably settled, he became an immigrant, a new Canadian, taking on the challenges of a new country, new work and a new family. He loved music – especially Israeli music – and all sports – especially soccer (as a player and as a fan). Mostly, he loved his friends and family. He lived bravely for many years in the face of difficult circumstances, never complained or burdened others, and never gave up. Mensch.

The family would like to acknowledge the love and loyalty of Mira Samet and Geoffrey Druker and all of Gaby's friends, here and abroad, who did not abandon him. Also, thank you to Ran Ben Nissim, who made Gaby smile.

"Goodnight, sweet prince / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!" ♫



### DEATH ANNOUNCEMENTS

**SYBIL FAIGIN**  
OCT. 29

**DOROTHY CHECHIK**  
OCT. 30

**LUCILLE HYMAN**  
NOV. 5

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