

## Eulogy from Irit

I have chosen to write about Aba in the spirit of the novel, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, a book I have used in my high school curriculum. I will use the title of this novel and part of its internal structure to tell you a little bit about Aba's life.

The first people Aba will meet when he arrives will be his parents, Safta Miriam and Saba Itzhak. I never met Saba Itzak because he passed away a few months before I was born but I knew Savta Miriam well. Savta raised seven children in Zichron Tuvia, one of the 32 neighbourhoods that make up Nachlaot in Jerusalem. Safta, who was of Moroccan descent, spoke Ladino to her children while she spoke Hebrew to her grandchildren. Safta was an important figure in Aba's life. I remember talks about her famous Hamin, her Borekas and especially her Ma'amuol which she would wrap up and place in an old shoebox to send to New York with anyone who travelled to New York. It was important to Aba that we meet his mother and consequently after second grade, he sent me for summer vacation to stay with Safta in Jerusalem, alone- I was seven and a half. The distance from his family and especially his mother was difficult for him and he often sent money and gifts. He called whenever possible despite the expense of overseas calls at that time and visited as much as he could.

I'm certain that he is very excited to reunite with his mother.

The second person I imagine that Aba will meet upon arriving in Heaven is Rina Nikova, a pioneer of classical and biblical ballet in Palestine who had a nationalist style and was influenced by ethnic folklore. Aba, danced with Rina's company and travelled with them to an International folk festival in South Africa to perform. The trip was cut short when one of the dancers was killed in a road accident. When returning from the trip Aba went to Paris for a year to study ballet and then, with 50 dollars in his pocket, decided to move to New York to study Jazz. In New York, he worked at a restaurant to support himself and slowly started to build his career. He opened a studio for Israeli dancing on The Upper West Side, founded a dance troupe named Sadot, appeared on TV shows and eventually began running International and Israeli dance camps including IFC, Hora Shalom, Hora Keff and Sababa. Rina Nikova was his inspiration as a dancer and choreographer and a profound influence on the course of his life. I'm sure they have a lot of catching up to do.

I have a feeling that the third person Aba will encounter might be Chaim Gazuli. Many of you know him because of Aba's dance, Debka Chaim, was named for him. Chaim was a talented Debka dancer and friend, who was tragically killed in an accident in South Africa. His death caught Aba in utter shock. Despite the physical distance Aba kept in touch with his friends from Israel, called on holidays and special occasions and visited on frequent trips to Israel. Aba choreographed over 80 diverse dances and even though he was known as "King of the Debkas" he created Horas, couple dances and line dances. Dedicating a dance was just one way he expressed his love for people he cared about and quite a few people are blessed with a true work of art that bears their name. Among them are Chanita- for Mom, Debka Irit, T'filat Michal-for my sister as well as Debka Liel and Liya- two of his grandchildren.

I would like to believe that the fourth person Aba will meet is Yossi Banai. For most of us Yossi was an Israeli performer, singer, actor, and dramatist. However, for Aba he was a childhood friend who grew up in the same neighbourhood, a neighbourhood which gave rise to numerous Israeli entertainers and served as a melting pot of languages and cultures. This ethnic heterogeneity was in turn the basis for Aba's dances which often have Balkan or Middle Eastern rhythms.

Aba and Yossi kept in touch and visited one another whenever the opportunity arose. Yossi's untimely death saddened Ana greatly and he often spoke of their childhood memories. In an era when the word "friend" is used for every virtual acquaintance on the net, Aba's idea of friendship was much different. He never missed an occasion to pick up the phone to say hello. Despite the great physical distance he always knew what was going on in the lives of his friends and family. I'm sure Yossi and Aba are reminiscing up there already.

The fifth and final person is my beloved Mom. They met in the early 60s, folk dancing at the 92nd street Y. As Aba always said, "One Ez Vakeves and that was it". Mom was prominent partner in Aba's career, she designed and sewed costumes for the dance troupe, worked behind the scenes at the studio and camps and was proud of all his dances which in her eyes were always the best. Even after their separation, they continued to stay in touch and never missed a chance to take a trip with Liel and Ayla. When Mom was ill, Aba tended to her until her final days.

Aba, to many you were the talented dancer, the revered creator, the eternal entertainer. For me you were the father who drove me everywhere, helped me with all the schoolwork that required handiwork. You built, cut, pasted, and stayed awake till the wee hours so that my homework came out perfect. You were the cook of Mediterranean cuisine that we loved so much and that was so different in the New York landscape. You supported me during difficult times and made sure to attend all the special occasions. You even made it to Liel and Dana's wedding last July. You instilled in me my love for dance, as a dancer and as an instructor. Even as an English teacher I drew from you skills for discipline, diversity in teaching methods and personal attention to students. You knew how to enjoy life, laugh with everyone, take care of everyone, especially me and my family. For all these I will be eternally grateful.

Ever since I was a little girl, you have been talking about returning to Israel. Unfortunately, when you came back two years ago you came along with Covid-19. You were not able to enjoy folk dancing and family gatherings as planned. The world stopped and closed and with it you too were forced to stay away from family and friends who were so happy about your return to Israel. Your physical, mental and emotional state deteriorated quickly and you could not enjoy life as you used to. Even when your body completely betrayed you in the last month you tried to show love when you held our hands or tried to kiss us. We have done our best to be by your side as much as possible and alleviate your suffering. I hope you felt our presence and our love even though you could no longer speak.

Rest in peace my dear father, your memory will always be always with me.

### **Eulogy from Michal:**

I wrote this on the fly and of course wanted and could say much more.

I started by thanking them for waiting for me and then I just referred to something that my father's brother-in-law Meir said before we started. He just said that my father cared so much for others and always put them first before himself.

My father was caring, generous and believe it or not, not judgemental. Sure he was stubborn, extremely, but I truly believe that he thought people, family, dancers were doing their best. He met people where they were. This at least was my experience.

When I try to explain my childhood to people they just give me funny look sometimes. It's really hard to translate and explain what it was like to grow up at dance camp. Sometimes it felt like we had a really big family. And it actually was. At these camps, I met the most amazing people. Many call themselves my older sisters and they were. Marion, Stephanie, Edy, Amy and more. Many more.

Aside from all the dancing at camp, I learned how to play shesh besh and would bet away his falafel from the canteen.

The camps brought people together from around the world. They were a lot of work, but he was so dedicated to them and to everyone who came to dance.

Those experiences shaped my life. They taught me to appreciate culture, languages and different lands.

One of things I have in common with my father is love of languages. I know I got that from him.

He was such a giving and supportive father.

I'll just pick out a few funny moments to share. Because for him, life was really about having fun and bringing people together.

Some examples of his generosity.

On 2 occasions when he decided he no longer wanted to drive his old Hondas that had close to 100,000 miles, he decided to drive them to Chicago to give me.

They were "gifts". Each gift spent months in repair shops.

I remember when I finally could afford my 1st car I thought I don't have to have his gifts anymore.

More gifts were his cooking.

When I went to college just a few hours north of the city, he would pack my car with huge amounts of falafel, tachina, babaganouch and humus.

For my college friends, his legacy lives in his cooking. Today they still reminisce about the amazing food that we had upstate.

When he came to visit me in Chicago he would cook up huge meals for family and friends. They only remotely knew the dancing side of him but they definitely knew the chef in him.

For many many years when I would go to New York for the weekend, each Friday night he would say I'm just making a couple of things and he would invite Jocelyn and Susie and Ellie, Loren and others.

He would start with borekas and then he had mushroom barley soup and and salmon or salmon as he said, chicken and rice and salad...and more.

He was a gifted cook, and I know that I learned to cook without recipes from him. My mother stuck to recipes.

About 5- 7 years ago, he definitely started declining and we started talking about coming back to Israel. He would say things like... I don't like New York any more. it's so different than when I moved here ...60 years ago. Then he would come back from Israel and say,... I don't like Israel .it's different from what it used to be...60 years ago.

I wondered if he could ever be happy anywhere, but I definitely knew he was declining and not his old self when he let me pack up his apartment. That was probably one of the hardest things he had to go through.

We went through hundreds, thousands of cds and videos and pictures and equipment.

For every decade he had walkman, mini disk player, cd copier , speakers, phonographs speaker stands and more.

Every closet revealed more and more equipment

He watched me go through everything and only had a few comments. It was clear to me he wasn't ok.

The pandemic has taken so many lives and I think there are pros and cons to how his move here coincided with the start of the pandemic. If he had stayed in New York, I am pretty certain he would have gotten sick early on, or I would have given it to him flying back-and-forth.

But moving here in the middle of the pandemic was isolating. One of the reasons to get him back to Israel was that he would be less isolated. Things didn't work out as we planned.

Traveling here during this pandemic was not like going to see him in NYC 4 times a year.

The distance has been tough.

Even though I know he was getting great care in Bnei Brak, it was hard for him and for me/us to see him there.

He was a fighter though.

No one really expected for him to leave that hospital a few weeks ago, but he lived up to his name, Nissim- miracles. He was an incredible human who made miracles for many. He was a very supportive father and I will miss him dearly.

## **Eulogy from Shlomo Maman**

Moshe Eskayo was my friend and dear brother.

I refuse to believe that we reached the moment that we are mourning one of the founders of Israeli dance, one of its greatest creators.

Moshe was the biggest of cynics, but also took his own dances and dancing in general very seriously and professionally. But that said, he did not refer to himself gravely.

He was a socialite, **efull of** humor, and one could laugh with him about anything.

He was a pioneer in establishing and leading the big dance camps around the world: Hora Shalom, Hora Keff, Sababa, and other high quality camps and workshops. In his unique way he spread Israeli folk dancing all over the USA. Dancers and dance leaders from around the world attended his dance camps to learn the new folk dances and teach them to their groups.

I recall that my first meeting with him was not too successful. I arrived with Shlomo Bachar, one of the dance leaders who collaborated with him at Hora Shalom for the dance session preceding the camp. When Eskayo saw me jumping and stomping on the dance floor, he asked Shlomo Bachar to send me back to Israel. I remember that he asked him, who is this crazy guy? And Shlomo answered him: this is the dance leader that you paid his flight ticket to come here. But when the camp started and he got to realize my abilities, a connection formed between us, and we became good friends until this day.

I did not know Eskayo prior to that meeting at Hora Shalom. I knew only a small portion of his dances, which were danced in Israel at that time. My major surprise was when I went on a performance tour in South America with the Inbal

dance troupe, and I joined dance sessions at Jewish communities, I first encountered his dances and was surprised and marveled at his unique style.

From all the dances I knew up to then, I immediately perceived them to have been created by a gifted person, and at the same time powerful. A creator who is attached to his homeland and has a wide knowledge of dance.

Moshe inspired his generation and all young creators at that time. When they first encountered his beautiful and unique dances like HaShir Sheli, Ha'Ir Be'Afor, Shir HaChatuna, Debka Keff, Debka Ramot, Debka Gid, Ilu Tziporim, Livavtini, Pney Malach (Yaldati), Bakramim, and many more goodies.

It is hard to bid farewell from a master artist who left his mark on the folk dance movement and has created many generations of dancers, dance leaders and creators.

I am sure that the classic dances that he left us will become a monument for his memory and great legacy!

Moshe my good friend, we are saddened by losing one of the giants of generations of Israeli dance.

We all warmly embrace your family members, who were at your side in your difficult moments and tried to ease your suffering as much as possible. We will remember and cherish your memory forever.

Rest in peace. I love you very much and already miss you.

Your brother,  
Shlomo Maman