

A TRUE LOVE STORY

A SHORT STORY BY IRITH BROWDY

They met. He was her brother's childhood friend. She saw him first.

He dropped by the house to see if her brother was around. She happened to be home at the time. While her mother told him that his friend was not home, she stood behind the stairs and stared at him.

He was handsome. He had a dark complexion and dark hair. Not too tall, but that did not faze her one way or another. All she saw was this handsome young man standing there. You could say that this was love at first sight.

She was a teenager when she met her prince. Hers was a wealthy family. She was the young beautiful daughter of a successful merchant who owned his own business. She was dressed in furs in winter, played tennis during springs and went on vacations to resorts during the summers. He was the son of a "Rabbi," who was also a grocery store owner. His father passed away when he was young and his mother continued to run the small grocery store. His family lived above the store in this town, the same town that she was born and raised in. Two different classes, but there was no difference when it came to friends and love.

I guess I am getting a little bit ahead of my story.

The date is the 1920's, and the place is Bialystok, Poland. .

The 1920's were certainly a different era in Europe. Life, then, for the Jewish community was thriving. The majority of Bialystok, where Ola was born, was occupied by Jewish families. As a matter of fact, 98% of the city's residents were Jews.

Ola grew up in a warm, loving home with her older brother, Manny, and her younger brother, Itka. Her father, Yaakov, and her mother, Rosa, adored their only daughter. For Yaakov, nothing was too much or too expensive for her. One might say that she was a little spoiled.

"Dad, I want to learn to play tennis," she whispered quietly one evening while he was reading. "Are you sure that this is what you really want?" he asked. "You are still young, and maybe we should wait another year or two," he suggested. She would not have any of this, and Ola in her own little way and charm, managed to convince her Dad that it was the right time to start her lessons.

You see, Ola had a way of convincing anyone that she was right. So, at an early age, full of energy and ability, Ola started her lessons.

She went at it with full energy; she knew that she could be the best, or at least she would be able to impress the boys.

The boys. There was one boy in particular she wanted to impress.

Her older brother, Manny, had lots of friends. Manny was a very popular guy among his peers. One of his good buddies was Aharon.

Aharon hung around Manny's home whenever he just could; it was a center for the young lads. Open house, with welcome warm family, and good food. Oh, what good food did Rosa cook. Not only did she cook for her own family, but for the whole town. More on that later. Meanwhile let's get back to Ola and her crush on Aharon.

A knock on the door made Ola shiver. Could that be Aharon coming to see her brother Manny? Will he be impressed that she is now taking tennis lessons? Will he notice her at all? Ola could not wait for the maid to open the door. She peaked from her ajar door, while her heart was racing. "Who could that be?" she wondered. As the door opened, she saw him. The big smile on Ola's face gave up her little secret. She came out of her room and walked quickly downstairs, pretending not to notice who was standing by the front door.

"Is Manny home?" Aharon asked the maid. "I am afraid he is out at the moment," she answered. "Oh, don't let him leave," prayed Ola.

"I guess I will wait for him," said Aharon. Ola approached him and asked him if he would like some refreshments. "Thank you, but I am fine," he answered. Ola was so disappointed. "How could he refuse her offer?" she thought. "He probably does not like me," she thought to herself. "I am not sure if I could stand it," she murmured to herself. Having a strong character and pride, Ola just turned around and marched out of the living room, leaving Aharon by himself.

"What a cute sister Manny has," he thought to himself. "I wish she liked me," he thought. "After all, I am coming from a poorer home. My mother is running the family grocery store, my Dad is dead, and we live in a small apartment over the store. What could Ola possibly see in me?"

Life for Aharon was not easy. His father, Yoel, whom everyone called Rabbi, basically spent every day at the synagogue studying the Torah. He died when Aharon was young, leaving his wife, Golda, to support the family and run the little grocery store they owned. Aharon came

from a family of nine children. At that time only seven were still living, and Golda was the sole bread-winner of the family. Though times were hard for the family, Aharon was still able to have fun. He constantly hung around with his group of friends, including Manny, and started noticing what a cute, popular, energetic, funny sister Manny had.

Ola used all her charm and wit whenever she was around Aharon. And charm and wit she had. Life was wonderful for the young Ola. She kept herself busy playing tennis, running around with her girlfriends, and still managing always to be around when Aharon came over for a visit with Manny. The hardest time for her was when the family went on vacations. The thought of not seeing Aharon for a while was too much for her to bear. She missed him so much, his smile, and his presence around her. These two people did not even know how much in love they were.

"I want to go back home," pleaded Ola after only one day on one such vacation. "Why?" asked her mother. "I am bored and don't feel good," she proceeded to say. Knowing that there was absolutely no truth to her complaints, her parents ignored her request. She sulked the whole trip. Her insides were aching to see this young handsome friend of her brother. She knew that she would have to do something more than just pretend to ignore him when she was around him, in order to get his full attention.

Upon the family's return from vacation, Ola changed her game plan.

As soon as she saw Aharon from the corner of her eye, she ran to greet him. Aharon was stunned, and could not open his mouth to even say hello to Ola.

Amazing how complicated love can be. It took Aharon a good few minutes to compose himself and acknowledge Ola's existence. That was the deciding moment in their young lives. From there on it was hard to separate these two love birds.

They did everything together, not so much to the delight of Ola's parents.

"Tell me, what do you see in this boy," asked her father. "He is so nice and sweet and he likes the same things I do," answered Ola. To his amazement, her father noticed a change in Ola's face every time she talked about Aharon. Her eyes sparkled, and cheeks got red, and her breathing changed from excitement.

"I think something is brewing," Yaakov exclaimed to Rosa, "and I am not sure I approve of it." Rosa, knowing her daughter very well, tried to smooth the situation. "Don't worry," she said,

After all, Ola's was a well-to-do family, and Aharon came from a working class family. Nevertheless, this did not stop those two from being together and having their little secret love flourish.

As times started to change in Poland in the very late 1920's, life did not seem as wonderful anymore for most Jews. Pogroms happened; people were killed; and, with the Russian occupation, Jews were sent to Siberia. Both Aharon's family and Ola's family managed to escape these horrible fates.

Ola's family was well known in Bialystok as a very charitable family. Rosa would cook every Friday a huge meal. For how many people you ask? Even she did not know how many people will show up for dinner.

Yaakov, on Fridays, would walk around the town asking strangers, "Do you have a place to go and eat a Friday Night meal?" If the answer was no, he would invite him, her or the whole family to his house for dinner. It really did not matter to the family whether they were Jewish or not, everyone was welcomed at their home. So when the Russians came to Bialystok and rounded up the Jews in order to send them to Siberia, the non-Jewish residents pleaded with the Russians to leave Neidorf family alone and spare them. "These people are so good to the whole town," they said. "They are always there for us, feeding us, helping us. Please leave them alone and we will make sure that they are staying within the boundaries you set up for them." To everyone's delight, the Russians agreed. The family was spared and was not sent to Siberia.

Aharon's family, having sensed that times were getting tough, made a decision to sell the grocery store and move to Palestine.

When Ola heard the news she was heartbroken, to say the least.

"Come with me," pleaded Aharon. "I will take care of you, and we can be together." Ola was torn between her loyalty to her family and the desire to be with Aharon. "Let me talk to my parents and see what they say," said Ola, knowing very well that the answer would be negative. She did make an attempt to talk to her parent's one Friday night while they were all were sitting to dinner. Well, it was not received very well. Her father was furious, her mother cried and her brothers just looked at her, puzzled.

"There is no way you are leaving us and going to this no man's land, Palestine," yelled Yaakov. "There is nothing there for you. The only thing we hear they have there are diseases, heat and

heartaches. No daughter of mine is going there and leaving behind her family." His words were harsh and final, or so he thought. It took Ola almost two years to convince her family that she needs to follow her heart. Reluctantly they gave in, and in 1934 they sent her to Palestine.

A young single woman could not enter Palestine, according to the British mandate. So, what was Ola to do? Using her intuition and knowing that this was the only way to follow her love, she approached an acquaintance. "Would you be willing to help me," she pleaded with him. "What can I do for you, and how can I resist those blue eyes," he said. "Would you agree that you and I will have a fictitious marriage so that I will be able to get on the boat to Palestine?" Ola suggested. "You have to understand that the love of my life is there, and I plan on reaching him no matter what," she continued. Feeling her urgency, liking her and adoring her determination, he agreed. And so, Ola boarded the boat with all the proper papers and headed to an unknown venture.

They say that love conquers everything. In this case, they were right.

Life in Palestine of the mid 30's was hard, but uncomplicated.

Ola landed in Palestine and was welcomed with love and open arms by Aharon. Not much was there for the two love birds. "Ola, I found a place for you and me to share after we get married," Aharon said to her. "Any place with you will be fine," answered Ola. Little did she know that their first apartment will be a rented room at Aharon's sister's small apartment in Tel Aviv. They were soon married and moved into that small apartment. It is hard to imagine Ola, the spoiled well-to-do young woman, living in one tiny room. But, she never complained about anything and just learned to make the best of her new life with Aharon. And their love flourished with the years.

Aharon worked as a clerk in different places and managed to bring in enough money to sustain them. While life was tough, Ola and Aharon still managed to have fun. They met other couples and befriended them. Their group of friends grew as time went by. Everyone around them started having kids, and so did they.

"Aharon, I have good news," said Ola. "What is it?" questioned her Aharon. "We are going to have a baby," exclaimed Ola. "Aharon, speak to me, are you excited?" she asked. Aharon was so stunned he could not talk. After all, they had been trying to conceive for a while, without success. Excited, he surely was.

"I am so excited, I have no breath left in me," he said. And so, in 1936, their first daughter, Yoelith, was born. She was named after Aharon's father. The excitement was beyond description. Ola dressed her little doll with clothes she made herself. Judging from the way

their daughter was dressed, no one would ever suspect that money was tight. Ola was an excellent cook and very creative when it came to managing the family income.

"Ola, it is time for us to move on," said Aharon to her one day. "It is time for us to find our own apartment to raise our daughter." Ola was beside herself. "I have waited so long for this day to come," she told him. They moved out of the one room they had to a bigger rented apartment, and this time it was their apartment. Two rooms and a kitchen was more than enough for the small family.

Ola did not work. Aharon would not have it. She spent her days cooking meals, sewing beautiful clothing and waiting for her Aharon to come home. On Friday evening, Ola and Aharon would gather with their group of friends for some card playing. It was a very happy group that knew how to enjoy life and have fun. They would meet every Friday night at a different home, and the hostess would provide the refreshments for the group. Even when times were rough, Ola still managed to come up with food for her friends. And Aharon was so proud of her. "You are an amazing wife, and I love you so much Olinka," he would tell her. "You never complain and you manage to feed all of us every day with good food." "I am one lucky man," he would say, to her delight. "Aharon, I am the lucky one. I got you and we have a beautiful girl. Life is so complete for me," she would answer him.

One day she approached Aharon and said, "I know that it is really hard, but can we have another child?" Aharon, who could not resist her and could not see her sad or unhappy, told her that it is OK and they should have another child.

After trying for few years to conceive, in 1944 Ola gave birth to their second daughter, Irith. The excitement in the household was very noticeable. After all, in those years most people could not afford more than one child, and here they are a perfect and complete family now. Two healthy daughters and a happy Ola and Aharon.

Soon the Independence war broke out in Palestine.

"Do you hear the airplanes coming?" Aharon asked Ola as they were sitting around the dinner table. He sounded a little worried, but did not want his family to notice. "I hear something in the distance," replied Ola. Knowing her husband well, she sensed that something was wrong. "I think that these are enemy planes coming at us," declared Aharon. "If we are lucky, we can run to the shelter before they bomb around us." Ola and Aharon and their two daughters ran downstairs. A neighbor's first floor apartment was their shelter. This went on for a long time, but Aharon and Ola sheltered their daughters from the fear of the bombs.

Times were hard for the family. Ration coupons were still needed for food, fighting was going on, work slowed, and running for shelter became a daily routine.

Ola, being a proud woman, would not let anyone know how tough times were. "What are you cooking?" asked the neighbor as she walked into the apartment. "Oh, I am making some soup, cooking some meat and some potato dishes," replied Ola. But nothing was cooking on the stove. Ola would fill the pots with water, so that the neighbors would not realize that there was not much food around. Ola also continued to design and make clothing for her youngest daughter. The clothing was magnificent. So beautiful they were, that a children's clothing store asked her to design clothing for them. "What do you think, Aharon," she asked him one day. "I was asked to design some clothing for children by a well known store. I think that this will help us financially, and it will give me something to do." Aharon looked at her in amazement. He could not understand how his wonderful wife and friend could not see how talented she was. "Go for it," he shouted with excitement. "You are so artistic and talented, and at last someone discovered you," he told her. Ola went on to just do that. With pride she designed clothing and indeed helped the family with its finances.

Ola lost all contact with her family in Bialystok. World War II and Hitler caused that. Ola's father, mother, brother Manny, his wife and their daughter, and her brother Itka stopped responding to letters from Ola. Concerned, she would approach anyone that happened to escape from Poland and Bialystok asking, "Have you heard anything about my family. Do you have any information about them." She did not give up, but to her sorrow not much information came through.

One day an acquaintance from Bialystok approached Ola. "Listen, Ola," he told her, "I just got news from Bialystok, and I have to give you this bad news. Your entire family, together with 1,000 other people, were burned to death at the Great Synagogue in Bialystok." Ola was devastated and for a long time she could not respond to him. In a quiet voice she asked him, "Are you sure that the information you got is correct?" "Unfortunately, yes," he replied. At that point Ola realized that she was the only survivor of her family and the only reason was because she followed the love of her life to Palestine.

Ola ran back home, tears running from her eyes. She could barely make it home. Aharon was home at the time, and when she saw him, she fell into his arms. "Aharon, my love," she called, "They are all gone." Understanding what she was going through, Aharon consoled her, wiping the tears from her face, kissing her eyes, and face, trying to let her know that he was there for

her, without any words. Ola knew that she and Aharon were now even more bound together by the atrocities of the war.

After 1948, when the State of Israel was born, life in Israel started to improve for the family.

Aharon opened his own little hardware store, the girls were growing up, and Ola continued to be the master of her house. She kept an immaculately clean house, cooked gourmet meals and baked fantastic cakes. Soon, Aharon moved from his hardware store to a partnership with a friend. They opened together a larger hardware store. It was also time for Aharon and Ola to move to their own apartment, not a rental. "Aharon, I would love to have an apartment with a very big balcony, so that we can sit outside and enjoy the weather here in Israel," she said to him. Aharon, responding with a little smile, said "I found just the right place for us." He took Ola to show her their dream home. "How wonderful this place is," called Ola, and so they settled on a three room apartment in, what was then, the far north of Tel Aviv. It was a palace compared to what they were used to. The year was 1953.

Ola and Aharon loved their new place. They worked hard decorating it. "I think we might need some new furniture," said Ola one day. "You are so right," agreed Aharon, and they went on to get a house full of new furniture. All Aharon wanted was to make his Olinka happy. Meanwhile, the girls were at school all day long and Ola continued to manage the house. Aharon and Ola gave everything they could to their daughters. They sent them to dance classes, provided piano lessons, anything to expand their education. Unfortunately, their older daughter dropped out of dance classes after injuring her leg, but the younger daughter continued with classes. As the younger daughter was growing up, she realized what a commitment she had to make to continue her dance, and she rebelled. "I do not want to continue taking dance classes every day," she came one day and announced with determination. "What do you mean you don't want to do it anymore?" asked Ola angrily. "All my friends are having fun, going out to parties and dances, and all I am doing is going to classes and performing," exclaimed the daughter. Ola would not have it any other way. "You will continue with classes and the performances," Ola said. "You will thank me for it one day," she told her daughter. The daughter did not have much of a choice. Ola knew what was best for her daughter and what Ola wanted. Perhaps she was living her own childhood dreams through her daughter. And so, Irith continued dancing and performing and Ola continued helping to sew costumes for her daughter's performances, using her talent in all ways. And just so you know, yes, Irith was grateful as she got older, and appreciative of the push her mother gave her.

A few years after moving to their new apartment, Ola was invited by her cousins in the United States to come for a visit. "Aharon," she said one day, "my family in the States wants to send me a ticket to come and visit them. I am not sure if I want to go. I am going to miss you and the girls, and the household is going to be a mess. What are your thoughts?" Aharon encouraged Ola to accept the generous invitation and go. Aharon knew that this was the biggest opportunity his Ola could have, and he convinced her to travel to the States. "Look, Olinka," he said lovingly, "everything will work out. Please do not worry. I promise that I will take care of our daughters and you should not worry." He told her softly, "This is your chance to see your cousins, uncles and aunts, the only family that you have left." So, off she went. She stayed in the States for what seemed like a very long time. It was a good trip for her.

Seeing her family, reminiscing with them about their lives in Poland, was a good healing process for her. She came back to Israel, after a stay of close to six months in the States, aboard a ship, with trunks full of clothes, household goods and everything you can think of, that the family poured on her. Lively Ola had a ball aboard the ship. She befriended almost anyone who crossed her path.

Aharon kept his promise and took care of the household and the family while Ola was abroad. Her return was to him as if sunshine had entered his life again. Ola came bouncing into the apartment, filling it with joy, warmth and laughter. "Oh, how much I missed you," he told her lovingly. "I missed your smile, your laughter, your cooking and most of all your good soul," he said. Ola felt like his princess. "Throughout the whole trip, all I thought was how much I miss you, Aharon. How much you are part of my life, and how much I could not live without you," she told him.

Time marched on and life, for them, continued to improve. Suddenly, money was more plentiful.

"Ola," cried Aharon, "I want to get you something special. What would you like?" Aharon wanted and planned on getting his Olinka some nice jewelry, but Ola was not a spender. She always remembered how tough their lives were just a few years before. So to be safe, she kept putting aside money in hiding places, for rainy days, she told herself. Aharon provided her with anything she desired. He wanted her not to feel poverty any more. Both Ola and Aharon knew how to adapt themselves to the situation they were in, and try and make the best out of any situation. Having a positive attitude was a must. That was the only way one could survive, but you needed something else. Love and understanding between the two of them. And that is something that they had, and lots of it.

While Aharon and Ola continued settling into their new found lives, their oldest daughter left for the United States, after serving in the Army and a lengthy visit to Australia. She traveled to the United States to work for the Israeli Embassy in Washington DC.

"Aharon, when will we get to see Yoelith again?" Ola asked, worried. "It has been a while since she left and I miss her so much."

"Olinka," said Aharon, "do not worry, she is fine, having a good time and I am sure that she will come home soon." And she came home, with her new husband. Ola and Aharon were devastated that they missed their daughter's wedding, but they could not afford to travel to the States at the time.

"How excited and happy I am," exclaimed Ola when she heard that Yoelith was coming for a visit. With open arms and a big heart they welcomed their new son into the family. Meanwhile, their younger daughter joined the army, and, soon, she too flew the coop to the United States.

Ola and Aharon were left in Israel without their daughters. "Aharon," cooed Ola, "when can we go and visit our daughters. I miss them so much." "Olinka," he said, "give me some time and I promise you that we will visit them as much as you want." "I know how much you miss them, and having them around us, but this is their lives and they need to do what makes them happy," he said sadly. Ola agreed with him while tears dropped from her eyes.

Aharon kept his promise and their first trip together to the States happened. They flew to New York and the younger daughter came to greet them at the airport. To Aharon's surprise, as he walked with his Ola out of the airport, he saw his sister and brother-in-law waiting to greet them. He was ecstatic. He had not seen his sister in nearly thirty years. "Aharon," whispered Ola, "do you see who came to greet us?" "I think it is my sister," he said choking from excitement.

Aharon's oldest sister and brother lived in New York. His sister adored him. She kept in touch with him frequently. He ran to grab her and hug her, when, from the corner of his eye, he noticed a tall gentleman. He turned to Ola with a question in his look, and she nodded. "Yes, Artchik," she said, "It is your brother." Aharon could not believe his eyes. He was overcome with emotion because, after years and years of his brother's distancing himself from the family due to a feud among the siblings, at last the two brothers were reunited.

Ola and Aharon traveled with Irith to Washington DC to visit with her and Yoelith, who meanwhile had given them grandchildren. Nothing delighted Ola and Aharon more than seeing their daughters happy.

"I know how hard it is on you, Aharon, to know that we have to go back and leave behind our family, our grandkids, and our daughters," said Ola as they packed their bags to go back home. "Life is not always fair for everyone," she continued. "This is what was in the cards for us, and we need to accept that." Aharon knew that she was right. "Olinka, at least we have each other to lean on," he said to her with a smile. They never made their daughters feel guilty that they chose to live abroad.

Aharon and Ola came back to Israel, to an empty home, and it was hard. It was especially hard on them during holidays, when families would gather to celebrate, and they did not have their family next to them. What they had was one another.

One day they received a telephone call with some news. Their youngest daughter was getting married in the States. Off they went again on a long trip to give their blessing.

From then on, they knew for sure that their daughters will never return to live in Israel. Ola always reminded herself that she, too, left home to follow her love.

Through the years of being on their own, with no children or grandchildren living near them, Ola and Aharon managed to stay happy and content. Being near each other was the most important thing for them. Healthwise, though, their lives started changing, slowing them down as they got older; but they still had each other to lean on.

"Olinka, you will get better soon, you will see. Don't give up, I am there for you and will be there for you forever," he said to her while she went through rough times with various health issues. "Artchik, please, I need you," she whispered to him, while he was lying in the hospital being treated for pneumonia. He looked at her with loving eyes, and breathlessly told her that he will be fine, just for her.

Their health was a big issue for them, and it occupied their lives. Every time one of them was seriously sick, their daughters would appear to help them and be with them. And this went on for years.

In between these episodes, Aharon and Ola would travel to the States to see their daughters and grandchildren. They already had seven grandchildren, all living in the United States. With every trip, their stay was longer and longer.

"Aharon, you know, we are getting older, and it is hard for us to take care of ourselves anymore. We have lots of steps to climb to get to our apartment and it is difficult on me and especially on you," said Ola one day. "Maybe we should think about moving to the States to be with our daughters," she suggested. Aharon was surprised. "I never expected you to feel that way," he told her. "I know that this might be the best situation for us, but I would miss my

routine at home, my freedom, the ability to just walk out of the apartment and be in the big city." It was understandable how he felt. Coming to the States would definitely strip them of their independence. "Let us think about it," Ola suggested. They did.

The crucial time was approaching. Ola's health was deteriorating, and it was very hard on Aharon to see it and handle it on his own.

"Olinka," he pleaded with her, "please get up. I made you your breakfast and it is waiting for you on the kitchen table. It is already noon, and you need to get up." "If you do not like what I made for you, I will make you anything else, just come to the kitchen to sit with me and eat," Aharon said softly. Ola got up and came to the kitchen to have her meal with him. Every morning, Aharon would make breakfast for the two of them and call on Ola to come and join him. Ola could not thank him enough for spoiling her and taking care of her.

"You know, Aharon, I cannot remember the telephone number," she told him one day. Immediately, Aharon, worried, took her to see a doctor. The prognosis was a little grim for him. "The beginning of dementia," the doctor said. Aharon was beside himself. "Olinka, don't you worry, we will find something that will help you." "Thank you, Aharon," she answered with hope in her voice. Aharon did everything in his power to find any medication that was available at the time to help his love.

Aharon called his daughters. "I think the time has come, and I feel that it is very difficult for me to take care of Ema on my own. Maybe the decision has to be made to move to a retirement home, were Ema could get constant professional help and I will be there for her." This situation was hard to digest for all of them.

The daughters approached their parents with three options. One, bring someone to help Aharon cope with the situation. Two, move to a retirement home. Three, move to the States to live with the youngest daughter and her family.

"Ola, we need to make a decision about our future," Aharon said one evening. Ola gazed at him; her sad blue eyes said it all. "Aharon, I do not want anyone coming to the house to help. This is unacceptable." She continued, "I am not sure that we or our daughters can afford the retirement home that is most suitable for us." Aharon was waiting breathlessly for the next sentence. "I think that the only solution is for us to move to the States to live with our daughter and son-in-law," she concluded.

"Oh, Olinka," Aharon said. "This is the answer I was hoping for. You will see that our lives there will be so beautiful. Being near our family is the most important thing." Aharon deep inside knew what he was giving up, but for the sake of Ola he was willing to give anything and

everything. He wanted her to be happy, content, and hoped that in the States, her attitude, her liveliness would return.

So, with only six suitcases filled with their most cherished possessions, at a late age in their lives, Ola and Aharon again moved to the unknown.

"Safta," cried one of their grandsons, "come see what I built." Ola was delighted and happily come to his room to check. "Saba, you too," called the boy, and Aharon marched proudly to see what his grandson had done.

At night, when they laid in the bed in their room, Aharon would whisper to Ola, "You know, I think we made the right decision." She nodded in agreement.

"Olinka, come down, your breakfast is ready," Aharon would call every morning. He would come down to the kitchen, make himself breakfast, sit and read the morning paper in English, so that he could teach himself the language. After he finished his ritual, he would make Ola's breakfast, put a napkin over it, and call her to come and eat. Ola would come downstairs like a lady. Always with her fingernails painted red and her hair done. She would take her time eating and then would go back upstairs to get dressed.

From the wife that was so unhappy and unresponsive, Ola became a happy woman.

"Ola, you need to be ready by 9am," Aharon told her. "They are going to pick us up and take us to a senior center soon," he said. "Ola, remember it is winter and it is cold outside, so please, please dress warm. I do not want you to catch a cold," he told her. "I know it," she thought to herself, "Why does he have to remind me this every time we are ready to go." But she never let him hear her thoughts. She loved his attention and his attentiveness toward her. Three times a week, this conversation took place every morning. Ola and Aharon made new friends at the senior center and they came to life again.

It was very obvious to the grandkids how much their grandparents cared for each other, how much they cared for them, and how much love they had.

You would think that Ola and Aharon came to the States loaded with money. That was not the case. They came with little money, but knew how to manage the little they had.

Together, Ola and Aharon made the decision that every Sunday night they would take the family to dinner, on them. That was their biggest joy. They felt like they were in control on those evenings. The grandkids loved it, and so did their daughter and son-in-law. On occasion,

when the boys were around and no one saw, Ola and Aharon would sneak some bills into the boys hands. "Get yourselves something special from Saba and Safta," they would tell them.

While Ola flourished in her new home, Aharon's health deteriorated. He had emphysema and it was getting worse and worse. All the medication did not help anymore and he needed oxygen already. Aharon never complained about his situation. He still continued making Ola breakfast every morning, and made sure that they still went to the senior center to see all their friends.

"Ola, I think something is wrong," one night Aharon said quietly to Ola while she was asleep.

"Aharon, what happened," she asked him, frightened. "I think I broke my leg," he said in pain. "Let's not wake up the kids," they decided. "We should wait until morning," Aharon told Ola.

She agreed. Though Aharon was in great pain, neither of them wanted to disturb their kids or grandkids. That was not right, in their eyes. In the morning, Ola came to her daughter's bedroom, knocked softly on the door.

"Abba is not well," she said. "What is wrong," jumped the daughter and her husband from bed. "He is lying in bed in pain," she said choking her tears. Running to their bedroom, a horrible sight awaited them. Aharon was lying in bed, not even a moan coming from his throat, yet it was very obvious that he had a broken leg.

"We need to take him immediately to the hospital," the kids announced. "Can I go with you," asked Ola. Knowing how much she hated hospitals, her kids told her that it would only make it harder on them to watch her and take care of Aharon. Ola did not fight them. She stayed home while their kids took Aharon to the emergency room. Ola never forgave herself for not going with them, because that was the last time she saw her Aharon.

Indeed, Aharon had a broken leg and needed surgery immediately. It was a dangerous move because having emphysema meant that any medication for pain will slow the breathing even more and the need for oxygen will grow. Nevertheless, they did perform an operation, which was successful. Aharon's breathing was so bad after the operation that they needed to intubate him.

"How is Abba," asked Ola every day. "Abba will be fine," assured her daughters. "When will I be able to see him," she asked over and over. "When he gets a little better," was the answer.

The daughters did not want Ola to see her Aharon lying in bed with tubes coming out of his mouth, and wires hooked to his entire body. Aharon was in intensive care. Unable to talk, because of the tubes, and just lying there waiting to go home. His daughters were at his side

every day from morning until evening. And the conversation with Ola would be repeated every night.

"Is Abba getting better, when will he come home," she would ask over and over. Always waiting to see her daughters' faces and afraid for the outcome. "He is fine and should be back home soon," again and again they assured her. Ola was not herself anymore.

"Oh, how I miss my Aharon," she said to herself. "Please, God, give him back to me," she prayed secretly. She would lie in bed smelling his pillow and hugging it. She lost her will to even get dressed in the morning, and would stay in bed for hours, depressed, worried, and alone.

Meanwhile, the daughters would go in the morning to the Intensive Care unit and sit by Aharon's side. He could not talk, but he would nod his head in response to questions. He loved it when Irith would read to him the news from Israel, in Hebrew. That became a daily ritual. Twice there was an attempt by the doctors to free Aharon from the breathing tube, and twice they needed to place it back in him. He could no longer breathe on his own.

The family never gave hope that maybe there will be a miracle and Aharon will be able to leave the hospital a well person, or at least breathing without the necessity of tubes. Aharon always said, "I never want to live with tubes hooked to me, and I do not want ever to be a burden on my family." And he kept that promise.

On his seventh day in the Intensive Care unit, when his daughters came, as usual, in the morning, something was different in Aharon's behavior. He asked for a piece of paper, and, unable to talk, he started writing. He asked how Ema (Ola) was, and the daughter who was sitting by his side told him that Ema was fine and waiting for him. He then proceeded to ask individually about every one of his grandchildren and sons-in-law. Not understanding the magnitude of this event, she continued telling him how everyone was. He then asked her to read to him only the headlines of the Hebrew paper, which she complied with.

Could you take off my glasses, he wrote her. "Of course, Abba," she said to him.

Aharon turned around, took a look at all the monitors that he was hooked too, looked at his daughters who were sitting with him, and took a deep breath.

The line on the heart monitor suddenly was straight, and an alarm buzz sounded. Shocked, his daughter screamed to her sister, who was sitting on the other side of the room, that something had happened. They rushed out of the room to the nurse, who at that moment made the infamous and horrible call, "Code Blue." A troop of doctors, nurses, and whoever were around came rushing in, with all sorts of machines. They were going to try to revive him, Irith thought

to herself. And, summoning all of her strength, she screamed, "Let him die in peace and dignity. He has a living will, and he does not want to be revived."

They stopped!

Abba, Aharon, Artchik, Saba was gone! He left for good at close to 92 years old. No, to his family he was not 92; to his family he was Abba, Dad, Daddy, and Saba!!!!

Now came the horrible chore for the daughters to go home and tell Ola, their mother, the bad news." "How do you do that?" they thought to themselves. "No one ever trained us how to do a thing like that."

The two daughters drove home, devastated from what just happened and knowing that the outcome of bringing the news to Ola will be even more devastating.

"Is Abba OK," asked Ola, when she saw the three of them marching in with red eyes and tears.

She knew the answer, but refused to accept it. "Ema," said the daughters, "please sit down."

"He is gone," she shrieked. "My Aharon, my love, has died, didn't he," she screamed. At that moment, her hair stood up on her head, her eyes bulged out of their sockets and she looked as if she will pass out any moment.

"Ema, please, there was nothing they could do for him anymore. And you know that he did not want to live depending on tubes. He chose to shut himself down to save all of us the agony of seeing him become a vegetable rather than the vibrant caring father and husband that he was," they told her. Nothing could bring Ola back from her state of sorrow.

All the grandkids and children gathered at the house for the funeral. Even some of their senior center friends came to pay their last respects for this sweet person they so adored and loved.

"I am not coming out of the car," said Ola to her daughter at the cemetery. "For me, Abba is not dead and I will not go to see him being buried." "Ola, this is important and will help your closure," the Rabbi told her in perfect Hebrew. But Ola would not have it. She stayed in the car while the family buried their father, their mentor, their rock and their love.

The following day it was very noticeable that changes were happening in Ola. Her whole looks, not to mention her attitude, had changed. She was very depressed and did not want to eat or see anyone. She was in their bedroom lying on Aharon's side of the bed, smelling his body on the sheets and pillows.

"I am ready now to go to the cemetery and say goodbye to Abba," Ola said quietly to her daughter.

"Ema," explained the daughter, "we are sitting Shiva now and we do not leave the house." "But you know what, on Thursday, when Shiva is over, I will take you to see Abba," she told her lovingly.

On Tuesday evening, while people came to pay their respects at the house, Ola refused to come down and see them, or even come down for the prayers. Her daughter came upstairs to her room and noticed that Ola was having a hard time doing anything. The daughter helped her put her nightgown on, and had to help her climb into bed, which was very unusual.

During the night, Ola did not cough, as she had been doing for a while. It was strange, thought her daughter, and a strange feeling engulfed her. No coughing, no sound of going to the bathroom, the fear spread all over her.

She woke up her husband early in the morning and announced to him, "My Mom is dead." "Please go and check on her, I cannot do it," she cried. Stunned, her husband walked to the bedroom where Ola was. He did not come back for a while, and the daughter heard him talking to their oldest son. With somber faces both her husband and her son came to tell her that, indeed, Ema was dead.

Ola died in her sleep at the age of 89. She died with a kiss from God.

They kept their promise and took her to see her Aharon that Thursday. She was buried next to him exactly one week after he died.

Ola could not live without her Aharon. Without him, there was no life and no reason for living.

The two love birds are side by side, close to their daughters, and the daughters know that their parents are with them at all times, smiling and enjoying seeing all of them following in their footsteps.

They taught the family, and especially their daughters, so much. But the most important lesson the daughters learned from them was how to love unconditionally their mates, children and grandchildren.

May they rest in peace and may the next generations learn from this beautiful love story.

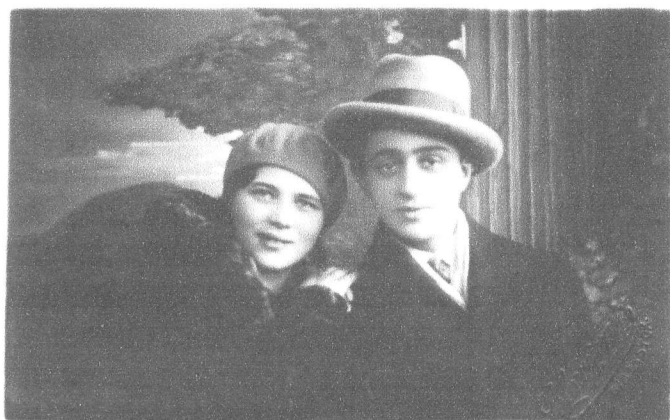
This story is dedicated to my parents, Aharon and Golda (Ola) who were married for 64 years.

They taught me how to be compassionate, forgiving, appreciative and most of all how to receive and give love.

I hope that with this story, my family through the years will get to know their roots and remember a small part of history that is totally lost.



OLA AND AHIRON WEDDING



OLA AND AHRON LATE 1920



AHRON 1929



OLA 1929



OLA AND AHRON 1932



ROSA AND ITKA 1932



YAAKOV



MANNY AND ITKA



MANNY AND HIS WIFE 1936
SONYA



ITKA 1936



FAMILY

1950

Should you visit Tel Aviv and would like to know where things took place, here are few addresses:

First Apartment was located on Fireberg Street No. 26, first floor.

Second apartment was located on Mazeh Street, No. 53, second floor

Third apartment, and final one was located on Israelis Street No. 17, third floor.

First Hardware store was located on Arbah Aratzot Street, No. 3

Second Hardware Store was located on Derech Petach Tikvah 8