

## From The Parnas:

By Mark I. Wolfson



This week we commemorated Yom Hazikaron, which is Memorial Day in Israel and for Jews throughout the world. On this day, we remember all of those brave men and women who lost their lives in the Israeli War of Independence, those defending Israel while serving in the IDF, and those who perished in terrorist attacks. It is a somber and reflective day marked by special broadcasts on radio and television, flags flown at half mast, and a siren that sounds for one minute at 8PM when the whole country observes a minute of silence to remember the heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Yom Hazikaron reminds me of the monument in front of the entrance to the synagogue. This beautiful sculpture is a memorial to Yonatan Netanyahu, who was the leader and hero of the Raid on Entebbe, and the only one to sacrifice his life for the mission. The mission, called Operation Thunderbolt, was an attempt to rescue the 106 hostages taken from an Air France flight by Arab and German terrorists. 100 highly skilled commandoes led by Netanyahu were flown 2500 miles to Uganda for the rescue. The operation lasted 90 minutes, during which time 103 of the hostages were rescued, all of the terrorists and 45 Ugandan soldiers were killed, 30 Soviet MIG planes were destroyed, and tragically Yonatan Netanyahu was killed by a Ugandan sniper from the airport control tower.

Yonatan (Yoni) and his younger brother Benjamin (Bibi), who is now Prime Minister of Israel since 2009, grew up right here in Wyncote and attended Cheltenham High School. Upon graduation in 1964, he joined the IDF and gave 12 years of distinguished service before the operation in Uganda. He served in the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973, where he earned the Medal of Distinguished Service, Israel's third highest military decoration.

During the Eulogy at his funeral, Shimon Peres, then Defense Minister, said that "a bullet had torn the young heart of one of Israel's finest sons, one of its most courageous warriors, one of its most promising commanders - the magnificent Yonatan Netanyahu."

Netanyahu was also known for his personal letters, some of which were later published. Here are a couple of excerpts:

Letter to his parents, March 6, 1969:

"In another week I'll be 23. On me, on us, the young men of Israel, rests the duty of keeping our country safe. This is a heavy responsibility, which matures us early... I do not regret what I have done and what I'm about to do. I'm convinced that what I am doing is right. I believe in myself, in my country and in my future"

Letter to his brother Benjamin, Dec. 2, 1973:

"We're preparing for war, and it's hard to know what to expect. What I'm positive of is that there will be a next round, and others after that. But I would rather opt for living here in continual battle than for becoming part of the wandering Jewish people. Any compromise will simply hasten the end. As I don't intend to tell my grandchildren about the Jewish State in the twentieth century as a mere brief and transient episode in thousands of years of wandering, I intend to hold on here with all my might."

The memorial, which now belongs to KKMI, was donated to the National Museum of American Jewish History in 1986, when we shared the building with them. The sculpture was commissioned by a group of people led by Muriel and Philip Berman from artist Buky Schwartz([www.bukyschwartz.com](http://www.bukyschwartz.com)). Today, the monument and grounds are maintained generously by Stephen Friedman, and by volunteer Harriet Jaffe, who keeps them looking sharp. Mr. Friedman is a close family friend of the Netanyahus and went to high school with Jonathan and Benjamin.

As you can see in the picture above, the sculpture consists of four white marble vertical blocks, each 7' high and 2' deep and wide. The four blocks were cut from a single piece of stone. The inscription on the plaque behind the monument reads:

Entebbe, Jonathan Netanyahu, July 4, 1976.

They were swifter than eagles, they were faster than lions. The bow of Jonathan turned not back. II Samuel 1.22,23

Jonathan Netanyahu, 1946-1976