

## Tomi Stern (1946 – 2001)

In amintirea unui prieten bun



Au trecut 10 ani de cand Tomi Stern nu mai este. De 10 ani, in fiecare decembrie, Irina impreuna cu familiile Liebermann, Wachter, Hollander, parintii si copiii intre timp deveniti adulti, se reculeg la mormantul lui Tomi, fiecare cu gandurile lui. De data aceasta s-au hotarat sa ne impartaseasca amintirile si sentimentele lor legate de prietenul disparut.

Prima mea amintire dateaza de cand aveam vreo 5 ani. Pe cand mamele noastre discutau despre rochii si taioare, noi ne jucam in camera vecina. Tomi s-a catarat pe un scaun si a reusit sa coboare de pe dulap un borcan de gem, din care, amandoi pofticiosi, am gustat fara masura.

Tomi savura gustul unui snitel, parfumul unei gutui, aroma zmeurei si pereii zemoase. Manca nu de foame, ci de chef, era de fapt un estetik al placerilor culinare. Dar nimic din ce e placut si bun nu ii era strain. Avea o pasiune pentru soare si mare, pentru poker si bridge, pentru matematica si discutii despre politica si vrute si nevrute. Mai presus de toate, era generos in prietenie si in marea lui dragoste pentru Irina.

Caldura pe care am primit-o de la Tomi, continui sa o port in mine. Avea darul prieteniei - interesul sincer pentru destinul celui alt. Deja foarte bolnav, se bucura cu maritimie daca celui alt ii mergea bine. Imi spunea "Getuka". E de ajuns sa-mi aduc aminte si ma inseninez printre lacrimi. *Getta*

### *Aniko*

It has become an annual tradition, friendship rite really. This is the 10th year. This is: visiting Tomi Stern's grave - the ACE of spade in bridge terms, good friend and with a personality larger than life.

As usually I update him with what happened during the year. He is listening, I am sure. All his friends and his friends' children are there. He was well liked. After visiting for a while we gather at a hungaro - middle eastern eatery. He would have approved.

He made friends easily and left us with a gift of common memories.

If today we meet through the wonderful web site maintained by Tomi's wife Irina and edited by Getta - the BJT - we can thank Tomi as it was his original idea.

I knew Tomi for many years. I first met him at the Bleiers playing bridge. It was one of his passions in life. He was good at it and he continued to play his whole life. From time to time he will show us newspaper cutouts with his results at various championships.

He loved to travel and loved vacations. He could not understand why some of us live to work, he worked to live. Cherished his leisure time and when not traveling the world, visited the city, taking in the various neighborhoods, the movies, the food. At food our tastes met, it was a ritual of ours to exchange impressions: where you can find what in Toronto, new restaurants and places to enjoy.

He loved well-made things and was prepared to pay the price for quality. I always admired his clothes and his sense of elegance. When he complimented on something I wore, I knew that was the right thing. He was very straightforward and would not be just polite or nice.

It would be unfair not to mention Tomi's devotion to Irina. I was told they met in the sea, Irina saving him from the waves. He saved her back and brought her first to Israel, then to Canada. They were very close, soul mates really. One can only admire Irina's devotion and her work to keep his spirit alive.

Recently, cleaning a cupboard, I stumbled upon old letters from Tomi. He wrote to us in Africa about his Canadian immigration experience in the 80's. I loved reading them again. They are accurate vignettes of Toronto at that time and how he and Irina found their places in the new world. It would be nice to hear his opinions about the world we live in today. I think he would like the instant gratification offered by technology. I'm sure he would use an Apple computer. He would not have a Facebook account. He would play bridge on the internet. He would be a good friend.

### *Tibi*

I was in a car in New York ready to visit Soho with friends when a phone call from Toronto delivered the unbelievable, shocking and sad message: "Tomi a murit". I asked immediately to stop the car; I did not want to be seen as I cried. With tears, like a child, or like somebody who lost a dear friend. I was in tears for the first time since my father passed away 10 years before!

The only episode in our lives which was shared only by Tomi and myself, not mentioned by anybody, since it was not known, was working together at Elbit in Haifa. Before that, while we had lunch together in the cafeteria

shared by a few companies on the Advanced Technology Platform, he mentioned that he was getting bored missing challenge in his work at Elscint. He accepted my proposal to come and work with me at Elbit and was hired within an hour. (Do not forget: Israel was the country that won a war in six days. Things there happen fast).

Obviously he landed in my group and I could observe him as a worker, putting aside our friendship. For his first assignment he got a week and he gave the impression that he is doing... nothing! He was moving around, talking with people, befriending them and never in a hurry. Yet at the end of the week the work was done - I wonder when - and it was perfect! He was that fast and reliable. After that I never worried about what, or rather how, he was doing.

I am no exception in our group of friends, I loved him very much and I miss him.

### *Evi*

Just like every year, Irina and our group of friends, the Hollanders, Wachters, Rothensteins and Liebermanns together with our by now grown-up children, assembled at Toronto's Pardes Shalom Cemetery for our annual memorial of Tomi Stern. For all of us, it is so hard to accept that ten years have gone by since he left us.

As I approach his gravesite, every year I hear his voice saying: Na... jottetek meglatogatni – ati venit sa ma vizitati – you came to visit. It is always followed by the question: ce mi-ai adus – what did you bring for me? And the answer is the same: always two bouquets of three freesias: one red, one yellow and one blue. Our little ritual dates from the time he was no longer well enough to enjoy much of anything else, so we transitioned to flowers – it was his wish that his beloved “niece” Dana and us bring him freesias, one stem (and only one) of each colour.

And there we all stand, each of us with our own thoughts, remembering Tomi, our friend, brother, uncle. It is said of some people that they are larger than life – Tomi truly was. He was gregarious, he was smart, when he laughed, you could hear him from miles away. He enjoyed life, he enjoyed bridge, he loved politics, he loved travel, he called my Mom Annie regularly to discuss the world's events, he was our wonderful devoted friend, he doted on our daughter Dana. But above all, he cherished Irina, his beloved wife and soul mate.

Tomi was the only son of Illa Schlesinger and Szasza Stern – for his parents he was a gift that arrived late in life and was their true pride and joy: the sun rose and set on Tomi. He was a precocious child, his Mother always said, who showed his mathematical gift early – he could count well and play Romi

from a very early age. We were actually cousins, my grandfather and his great grandfather were brothers, so, although I was several years younger than him, I was a generation older than him.... at times I teased him to call me Aunt Evi :-).

Tomi was one of the first engineering graduates in Computer Science (class of '68) of the Polytechnic Institute in Timisoara - a profession so very fitting for him; it combined his mathematical strategic thinking with his imagination. He excelled and was appreciated everywhere he worked - first in Timisoara at the Institutul pentru Technica de Calcul (ITC), then in Haifa at Elscint, and in Toronto at Geac Computers.

Tomi loved exquisite things - and had a special eye for them. He could spot right away a quality outfit, no doubt an inheritance from his talented Mom, and he always knew where to buy the best food items - cheese and grapes were some of his favourites. And of course, he found Irina in the Black Sea at Costinesti... or it was the other way around...

For us, Tomi, or Sternuletz as we liked to call him, was more than a dear friend, he was truly part of our family - always there for us, for our parents, and for Dana. For Dana, Tomi was her "Big Friend" who always knew how to show special interest while she was growing up. He was the one she had endless conversations with, entrusting him with important thoughts and happenings. When Dana was a flower girl at a wedding, Tomi and Irina just "dropped by" to see how cute she looked all dressed up. He also loved when, at three years of age, she told him that we are "dzewish" - he kept reminiscing about this for many years. We were incredibly touched that at Dana's graduation ceremony, Irina brought Dana a special gift - it was one that Tomi had left to be handed to her at this milestone day in her life.

As I am writing this, so much comes back to mind. The time we were having our first parties in Timisoara (he always checked if I am bringing sandwiches with winter-salami and eggs) , the time when Tomi organized the "ladies bridge school", the time when we were together in the ulpan in Bat Galim and were overjoyed to share a celebratory ice-cream with our first paycheck, the time Irina and Tomi arrived in Canada, the time when we were getting ready for the Toronto reunion, and even though he was so very ill, he made sure to personally choose a most suitable venue. And I could go on and on....

Tomi meant so much to each of us - truly a lifelong friend. We will lovingly remember him always and forever.

### *Ghita*

In December 29, 2011 it was 10 years since Tomi passed away. We visited him, like every year, with Irina, the extended Hollander, Wachter,

Rothenstein and Liebermann families.

Tomi was my best friend and life-long bridge partner.

We met in the summer of 1963 when we attended the official "curs de pregatire" for University. Although he was going for the admission exam for "Electrotehnica" and me for "Chimie Industriala", the physics and math courses were held together. One day both of us were late, I was sitting on a bench in the park outside the "Constructii" where the courses were held, he came by and we started talking... math.... Several months later, Peti Naday who was also at "Chimie Industriala" proposed that a few of us get together and play cards. He approached Tomi and Pali Weinberg and I brought in Peter Hollander (whom I know since the first half of the last century). We started playing poker and soon we started playing bridge. Soon after that BJT got into being...

I have many, many memories with Tomi, who as all of us who know him, was a gregarious person and a "motek". A very, very good friend, I would say he was like a brother to me. He was really Dana's uncle from my side, as Dana had a real uncle from Evi's side.

We spent lots of time together playing bridge in Timisoara and Haifa, less in Toronto (my fault), but we spent much more time together with our families.

We went to a bridge tournament to "Baile Felix", the first time the two of us sleeping in the same room - we told the reception that we were a "pair" (which we were when we played bridge). We spent, the two of us, a few weeks at the Black Sea in "Mangalita" one year, and we went, again the two of us, to Moscow and Leningrad in 1969 with the Biroul de Turism pentru Tineret.

After 1971 we lived close by in two new "blocuri" close to the "Fintina Punctelor Cardinale". When we went to play bridge, we used to discuss what went wrong and what went well for a long time close to the fountain. As it was always getting late, Evi just had to look down from the 9th floor to see us and she knew that all is OK, except it was always uncertain how long we are going to continue...

Upon arrival in Israel in 1977, we stayed in the same Ulpan in Bat Galim/Haifa. We knew that he had a girlfriend in Bucharest and that he was planning to marry her, but it did not happen while we were there. We met Irina the first time when they came to Canada in late 1979. Here in Canada we had many get-togethers on various occasions just our families, or with friends, mostly with the Wachters and the Hollanders.

It was always fun to be with Tomi, he really had a special gift. Among others, I always loved to eat with him, as he knew what the best is and where to find it. He watched over Dana as she was growing up as a real uncle in many ways.

Although he was not in very good shape, he participated in the planning of the first Timisoara/BJT reunion in September 2001 here in Toronto, and he was part of it and enjoyed meeting all the old friends. It meant a great deal for him and for us.

He has been with us all these years, and now, after ten years since he left us, it felt good to write a few loving lines about him.

### *Dana*

The special connection I had with Tomi was due to many things - he was my father's best friend, he was close to my mother and rest of my family. Most importantly, he loved me as if I were his own. The love was mutual.

My earliest memory of Uncle Tomi and Aunt Irina was visiting their apartment in Toronto and being asked to grind coffee beans in their manual coffee grinder. I felt quite important being asked to do this task and took a lot of joy in doing it. As I grew older, Tomi and I frequently had lengthy conversations. Whether it was about school, my hobbies or world issues, he was always interested in what I had to say and offered his advice. I have fond memories of spending time together with family, but also cherish the meals we shared just the two of us. Of course, we only went to places that offered the best food, with our main course often being schnitzel.

When Tomi passed, I was at a crossroads. Just finishing my undergraduate, my next steps in life were not quite so clear. When Irina presented me with a gift from Tomi at my convocation, I was touched that he had set something aside for me. The gift gave me comfort, and I knew that he would be watching over me.

Now, 10 years later, I think he would enjoy the fact that I am living in the city to which he and Irina immigrated to Canada. I know that he would be proud of what I have accomplished and he and my husband would have gotten along very well. They share similar qualities, including good taste in food and clothing.

As they have for the past 10 years, my Uncle Tomi's love for others and love of life will continue to live on for many generations to come.

### *Peter*

I met Tomi the first time at the ripe age of 11 or 12 at the Sports Medicine Clinic on Semenicolui Str. In spite of the fancy name, the clinic was dealing mostly with physio for kids. Here we were, two delightful, well fed Jewish kids with flat feet with a mission: to work out our flat footedness. Well ... so

much for our flat feet... No matter how flat they were they could not keep us away from two armies...

We crossed paths again later during our high school years at the SSE rowing club on the banks of the Bega river, where Tomi acquired his sea legs. We became closer friends after entering university and we started to play cards together with George, Peti Nadai and Pali Weinberg. While at the beginning we were dabbling in poker as well as in bridge, and sometimes wondering what we are really doing, some of us took the game seriously and made themselves known as dedicated players. I believe everybody agrees that Tomi had not only excellent player qualities but he was an excellent host. The occasions when he was hosting the game were real treats for our tummies. No matter how the game was, everybody went home happy.

For a while our ways parted since I went to enjoy the freedom of choice in practicing my profession... Consequently I missed, or almost missed events, since my trips home were random, almost accidental. Further to such a random trip I ended up thanks to Tomi, unexpectedly and unprepared at George & Evi's wedding.

We followed Tomi to Israel, he followed us to Canada.

While we had completely different lifestyles, we kept in touch, almost daily by phone, as well as visiting each other. We were fortunate to grow older in a peaceful and fairly uneventful manner until we hit our fifties. Then things started to go wrong ...

We got even closer after we got both seriously sick. In spite of the seriousness of our situation we were joking and calling each other "szimulans" and "work dodger".

It is hard to believe that more than 10 years went by since I heard his "szia Dagi". No more chatting since. However, at least once a year we stop by at Tomi's headstone for a brief while to say: Rest in peace my dear friend...

