

THE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF ALEX'S LIFE:

*a biography by Suzanne Singer
from "... to step forward ..."*

Alex was born in White Plains, New York, on September 15, 1962. Three months later we moved to Croton-on-Hudson, farther north in Westchester County. In Croton, we lived on a quiet street with a swimming pond up the hill and acres of woods and a stream behind our house. Alex was our second son. His brother Saul was thirteen months older.

Daniel was born three years after Alex, and Benjy the youngest, eighteen months later.



The boys grew up outdoors. They swam in the pond and made plaster foot casts in the beach sand, explored the woods as the seasons changed, raised wild turtles and watched them hibernate in the winter, cared for rabbits and gerbils, tapped maple trees and boiled the sap to make tiny amounts of syrup.

Even as a little boy Alex loved to fix, build, and figure out how things worked. He had enormous energy and buoyant, contagious good spirits; and when he had an idea he immediately tried to make it happen. He began to draw when he was about four or five years old.

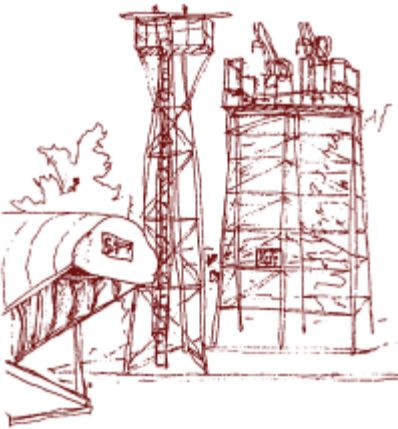
As Saul and Alex moved closer to Bar Mitzvah age, Max and I realized that we wanted our sons to know more about Judaism and how to think of themselves as Jews. We decided that a sabbatical year in Israel would be a meaningful Jewish experience for the boys, and in the summer of 1973 we left Croton-on-Hudson to spend a year in Israel.

Max and I and the four boys arrived in Jerusalem on August 22, 1973, about two weeks before the start of school, shortly before Alex's 11th birthday, and only about six weeks before the surprise attack by Egypt that started the Yom Kippur War.

As our year in Jerusalem drew to its end, we were reluctant to leave. We thought that another year would let the boys learn more Hebrew, would allow us to continue the wonderful hikes and explorations of archaeological sites in Israel and would deepen our many new friendships. So when Max was asked to stay on as Managing Director of the World Institute we decided to stay another year.

Because that decision was made twice more, our time in Israel extended to four full years. During three of those years Alex attended Israeli public schools in Jerusalem. Then in 1976-1977 he and Saul went to live and work at Kibbutz Kissufim and to attend the





A few months after basic training and jump school were completed Alex's unit was assigned to guard duty on Israel's northern border. After three months on the "front line" Alex was sent to the sergeants' course, and immediately after that was offered a chance to go to officers school. He accepted. This extended his army service by a year. After completion of the officer course in October 1986, Alex was assigned as an infantry instructor in the Air Force. Feeling that he wasn't doing enough in the Air Force, Alex started looking for the opportunity to lead an infantry platoon. In May 1987 he got his chance in the Givati brigade.



In August 1987 he was moved with his new platoon to the Lebanese border next to the security zone in southern Lebanon that is patrolled by Israel. On the 15th of September, Alex's 25th birthday, he and 11 other men were dropped by helicopter onto a very rugged ridge in the foothills of Mt. Hermon, about a mile into Lebanon. They were to set up an ambush to try to intercept terrorists on their way into Israel. Unexpectedly, they landed among a group of about 30 terrorists who had hidden themselves among boulders. Alex's commander, Ronen Weissman, was the first to be hit by their fire. When Alex, who was the second officer on the mission, landed he was told that Ronen was not answering the radio. Alex took a medic and went to help Ronen. When Alex reached Ronen, he too was shot and killed at the same spot. Some time later, not knowing what had happened to the two commanders, another soldier from the platoon, Oren Kamil, was sent to help them. He too was shot and killed at the same spot. Outnumbered, and without their officers, the remainder of the small Israeli force continued to return fire until they were reinforced and the band of terrorists retreated, unable to continue their mission to attack settlements in Israel.

Alex was buried on September 18, 1987 in the military cemetery on Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem.

Thirty days later there was a memorial program for Alex at the Embassy of Israel in Washington. Family and friends read from Alex's letters and journals and some spoke of their memories of him. Saul read a letter he had written to his dead brother that expressed one of Alex's lasting messages to all of us. In it, Saul said: "Your message to me is one word. 'Do.' Do as you believe and people will follow you. Do not just *know* what is right, *do* what is right. Only then will other people follow you. Only then will you have the power to affect the world."

After Alex died, we gathered his writings - his three army journals, the hundreds of letters that Alex had written to us and to friends, and his senior thesis from Cornell, *Letters from the Diaspora*. We hope Alex's words and art will inspire young people as

they struggle with some of the same questions that Alex asked himself as he tried to translate idealism into action.

- *Suzanne Singer*