

Eulogy for Boris Umansky  
Baruch ben Yaacov  
Passed away February 8, 1999

When someone passes away tragically at young age we often dwell on the lost opportunities that the survivors will not share with their loved one. Sometimes in our grief we may even question why life was given at all if it was destined to be cut short before its potential was reached. But when we reflect on a life, no matter how short, we realize that the memories of our loved one will remain with us forever, and we should thank God for the precious time that was shared.

Boris Umansky was taken from us too soon, and it is true that the dreams he had for his life in Canada will not be realized, but we can also look back on the life of a loving son, brother, husband and father who devoted himself to making the world a better place for others.

Boris was born in 1954 in Ukraine, in the city of Nikolayev. He was an excellent student and pursued his interest in foreign languages, first by attending an English school and then studying French at the Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages in Pietgorsk, Russia. It was here that he met his wife, Olga, who was studying German at the same school.

Following graduation he taught these languages to high school students for 14 years. He had an excellent reputation as a teacher, with almost all of his students continuing on to universities. Olga recalls that her parents, still in Russia, often received calls from Boris' former students asking about him. Boris had a nickname- the 'walking encyclopedia'. Thanks to his love of reading, he seemed to know everything. He loved history and was always willing to share his knowledge with others.

While he enjoyed his profession, he became a victim of the poor economy in Russia. Wages were very low, with teachers, despite their training, near the bottom of the pay scale. He often found it hard to buy food for his family which now included his son Peter and daughter Olga, and as a Jewish person, he was also a victim of discrimination.

Boris' brother, Alexander, had already emigrated to Israel, so in 1993, taking the first step to a better life for his family, he took Olga and the children to a new land.

Life in Israel, while better, was still hard for the family. Boris worked translating and editing Russian documents in to English and French. The children entered school, learning a new language and making new friends, coming closer together as they adapted to their new surroundings. It was in Israel that a new member of the family arrived. A puppy that they found wandering the streets of Ashdod was adopted and grew up with the family.

But Boris wanted the best life for his family and the tension and unrest both inside and around Israel led him to seek a new home. He dreamed of going to Canada, a country he admired for its cultural diversity and the peace that we enjoy in this part of the world. His attempts to gain entry to this country were unsuccessful at first but he persisted, refusing to give up, and finally in April of last year the family arrived in Vancouver. Typical of Boris, he recognized that a strong bond had developed between the family and their dog and even he was brought to Canada.

Knowing that he would not be able to return to teaching immediately, Boris took a job at a metal plant, and then sensing that better opportunities were available in Alberta, the family moved for the last time, to Edmonton in August.

It appeared that Boris' dreams of a better life for himself and his family were within reach. He and Olga began taking classes which would allow them to use the language skills they had learned in Russia as translators and editors here. The job that Boris had at Quality Colour Press together with the part time work that Olga did at Denny's allowed them to rent a large apartment so that Peter and his daughter Olga could continue their education and be comfortable in their new home. Olga remembers that her father was a kind man, who always helped her with her homework. He was eager to please people and was happy to help people in any way he could.

He lived up to his responsibilities which included caring for the family pet that he was walking on the cold winter evening when the accident that led to his death took place.

A loving husband, a caring father, a devoted employee, a friend to all that he met, is how we will remember Boris. A man who only wanted the best for his family and would pursue this dream for his lifetime.

As a community it is up to us to surround his family with love and help them in any way we can as they adjust to a life not only in a new country, but also to a life without the man who was their driving force.

In the face of the tragedy that has befallen them we often struggle to find words of comfort and solace.

My words to Olga, Peter, Olga and Alexander are to remember that Boris, your husband, father and brother, will always be a part of you. As long as you live, dedicate yourselves to the values and ideals which were so important to him while he was with you on this earth. In that way his memory and his living presence will live through you, so the kindness he showed others, the knowledge he shared and the love he gave will continue to make this world a better place.