

Brimming with Courage and Determination

The Story of Maxi Librati



by Miry Gross



■ Left to right: Ambassador Nissim Zvili, Miry Gross, Beatrice Halpern Boukris, Maxi Librati, Avner Shalev, Shaya Ben Yehuda, Nathan Eitan



■ Avner Shalev (left) and Maxi Librati look at the newly dedicated memorial to the Librati and Touitou families.

■ “Dear parents, I promise you – a short trip cannot hurt anyone. Surely we will discover new horizons, and when we meet again I will be able to tell you all my adventures, a story that is starting to become beautiful and unexpected, yet brimming with courage and determination...”

These words were written by Maxi Librati to his parents, Moshe and Itta Librati, in September 1943, as he traveled from Drancy to an unknown destination. His parents had remained in Saint Fons (a city near Lyon), and Maxi threw the letter into the street hoping someone would find it and pass it on. Miraculously, the letter was delivered.

The “short trip” began by 18-year-old Maxi that September turned into a journey that included Auschwitz, the Warsaw ghetto, and a death march towards Dachau, Kaufering and Allach, where he was finally liberated.

“Unexpected, yet brimming with courage and determination”—even then, the young Maxi chose these words to shape his approach to the world. Anyone who reads his testimony or knows his life story is struck by Maxi’s attitude. A stubborn courageousness saved Maxi’s life several times in the course of his incarcerations in the camps. That same courage and determination, the amazing ability not to sacrifice the values in which Maxi believes—friendship and loyalty, and a love for humanity, the Jewish people and the State of Israel—all led him to rebuild his life and succeed on a grand scale, becoming

“King of the Sentier” (a Paris street known for its Jewish fashion houses).

But Maxi never forgot those who did not make it back, and he never ceased telling their story. A valiant and stubborn fighter for Holocaust commemoration, as well as on behalf of Zionism and his community, Maxi understood long ago that the way to build and rebuild oneself was through action.

On 1 June, a ceremony was held to dedicate the grove and garden established at Yad Vashem with the generous help of Maxi Librati. Among the guests attending the event were Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev and former ambassador to France Nissim Zvili. The grove and garden are dedicated to Maxi’s parents, Holocaust survivors from the Chriqui family who were saved thanks to Righteous Among the Nations Georges Amblar, as well as to the Touitou family, which found no such helping hand and perished in the Holocaust. The tranquil location overlooking the landscape of Jerusalem provides a resting place for visitors coming to the Mount of Remembrance, and symbolizes a bridge between the past and the future.

The event also marked the publication of Maxi’s life story, *145922* (Yad Vashem, 2008,



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in Hebrew and French), written by Maxi Librati with the help of his friend Beatrice Halpern Boukris. Grappling with the unexpected, the ability to take life as it comes, the capacity to accept the bad along with the good, the gift of growing enthusiastic and passionate with every new idea and project—these have kept Maxi eternally young, always ready to act, to assume new tasks and to take on the new challenges life throws his way. Maxi’s testimony, aimed at the younger generation, brims with these messages of life.

Holocaust survivors, members of Maxi’s generation, have shouldered and continue to bear the burden of remembrance, and lend their work its moral authority. Yad Vashem is committed to transmitting the legacy of the survivors to future generations. Maxi Librati, a true friend and partner, has assumed the responsibility of sharing that commitment with us.

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