



Credit: Yoav Dudkevitch

Yehuda Bauer (1926–2024)— In Memoriam

A Eulogy to Myself

Yehuda Bauer



I know it is not conventional for the deceased to eulogize themselves. Usually their role is to lie there quietly and not hear others lauding and praising them. If they were able to hear, they would usually be horrified by the exaggerations and misrepresentations, and would blush with shame. The nature of the matter is that the deceased find it hard to blush. Too late. Such is also the current case. With this serious consideration in mind, I decided to write my own eulogy, knowing full well that the person who knows me the best, is myself. It will be a long eulogy, what can you do.

I hope I did not suffer too much as I passed on. They say the process of dying is unpleasant, but I cannot say how it went for me; therefore, I cannot report on it. In any case, any historian knows that oral histories have to be checked by cross-referencing. In this case, however, it's a hard thing to do. Since I believe neither in the afterworld nor in a supreme force that runs our lives and death, I am sure that my rest will not be in paradise but final. Oh well. Just one thing: as Herzl apparently said, don't do anything foolish when I die. This is intended for my sons, daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, but also to anyone listening.

All in all, I had a good life. I have nothing to complain about. I was born, as you know, in Prague, to parents who loved each other immensely—Uly and Viktor Bauer. Since I was a boy, I more or less

regarded my father as my god, up until this day. I look like him, have exactly the same body language, my voice is his voice. I simply imitated him. I did not rise to his towering moral stature, and that's a shame.

In 1943, we demanded on enlisting in the army or the Hagana, but were persuaded to finish our matriculation exams, and thus I headed out to the Palmach in early summer of 1944. After I was discharged, I studied at the Hebrew University for a year and afterward I received the only scholarship that the mandatory government gave to a Jew in the humanities. So off I went to Cardiff, Wales, equipped by my mother with the finest European attire, which was utterly unbecoming of a student in Britain in 1946.

Back in 1945, I was a member of the Hashomer Hatzar party, even though I had actually grown up in the Scouts movement and should have been one of the founders of Kibbutz Hatzarim. Instead of that I returned to Cardiff to finish my BA and MA. When I returned to Israel, I landed at Kibbutz Shoal on March 23, 1952. I arrived with Shoshana Hakim. Quaqu, who was born like me in Prague, welcomed me at Shoal. Gabriel Kitain, who was the work coordinator at the kibbutz, sent me to work in the field for hours on the hay wagon, piling straw bales. "If he hangs in there," he said, "he'll stay." I stayed.

My life of forty-one years on the kibbutz were good ones. I was a cattle herder, a cowboy as they say, a dairy farmer, and I enjoyed it. My doctorate I wrote under the guidance of Professor Israel Halperin in 1960, on the Palmach, because I was crazy about them. In 1955, I married Shula, and we lived together for thirty-five years. We raised two daughters. I lived with Ilana for twenty-five years after my divorce.

I worked a lot. I dealt with the ghastliest affairs that a Jewish historian can deal with and were it not for my family and my involvement in folk music, I could not have withstood it. Even when I began to deal with genocide, I did it first and foremost for the moral reasons that I had acquired from my father. I made the acquaintance of prime ministers, kings, and presidents, I gave great speeches, because after all I knew how to speak, as this eulogy proves. I knew how to express myself. The honors I received did tickle my ego, it would be a lie to deny it, but the main thing was to enable matters, including genocides, to be better understood. I was a co-founder of an international group that dealt with the theoretical side and also the political side of the matter: IHRA [The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance] and also GAAMAC [The Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes].

So what remains of Yehuda Bauer? A huge pile of books and articles. They will all be forgotten in the end, just as everything in this world is ultimately doomed to demise and oblivion. I leave behind five grown children—my two daughters and Ilana's three sons, eight grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, with more to come, and several thousand students in Israel and abroad. Perhaps they absorbed something of what I tried to teach them, and just maybe a little beyond.

Was I an Israeli patriot? A Zionist? Although I was not born here, this is my country, which I would not leave even if I were promised fortunes—which I actually was, and which I did not accept. I hope my offspring here will not leave this land because that tired cliché is right: We have no other country, and we have no other people, lousy as they are. As Chaim Weizmann once said: this is the best Jewish people we've got. One has to make of it what one can. I belong to this people even though in principle I find it hard to belong to a group of people that is willing to have me as a member. But after all, I did not choose to be Jewish. I was born into this affair by no fault of my own. The truth is that not only did I come to terms with it but I'm actually pleased with it. If you have to be born into any ethnic group, it is best to be born Jewish. It is a fascinating, annoying, offputting, thrilling, atrocious, wonderful people.

I do not believe in utopias because every utopia ultimately leads to murder. But I do believe it is possible to repair, if only a little; even the Jews; even the world—if only a drop. So, as I have said, give it a try.

Forgive me for this lengthy eulogy. I promise not to write another one. And don't cry—smile a little. It's worthwhile to smile, even to laugh, while you still can. So give it a try.

Shalom to you.

Translated from the Hebrew by Naftali Greenwood

