A Journey Back in Time

By Michael Paull

It was August 25, 1984 and my wife, Colleen and I arrived in Prague for a two-day camping trip. She reminded me of an article we saw several years earlier about “War Veterans from Canada who are Buried in Prague.” She felt this would be a good challenge for me to try and find the cemetery where my Uncle Alex Podolsky is buried. So off I went to find the biggest war cemetery in Prague. I didn’t quite realize how big the cemeteries are, but finding a Belgian who could speak English and German, and a Czech who could speak German and Czech was not easy. We found the gatekeeper, who only spoke Czech to find out that I was at the wrong place. A discussion ensued, and the result was they felt the site was across the street, not the new Jewish cemetery across the street, but the Prague War Cemetery down the street. Half an hour later, I was in front of my Dad’s brothers grave: “Alex Podolsky,” who was killed in April of 1943. It was a very moving moment for me as I was the first of our family to find the gravesite.

In 2012, my cousin Michael Felber was in Prague and he also found the site. Because of his interest, Cory Felber, his mother, told me that she has her dad Mickey Dlin’s diary from the war, and would I like to see it? In it were a couple of passages about Alex, as Mickey was a good friend of Alex and also married my dad’s sister, Sybil Podolsky. This whole experience of learning more about my family that I never knew was an enlightening one. In Mickey’s diary he wrote, “**28/04/43: On arrival I got three wires. Two birthday cables and the 3rd was from Harry [Uretsky]: “Alex missing, going to Wyton to get details.” Everything seemed to go out of me. I always knew how much I loved Alex and I always worried about him & Harry but still I kept saying they’ll be all right. And they will. They must be.”**

Fast forward to May, 2013 where Colleen and I have another opportunity to go to Prague and luckily enough, my dad Cecil came with us. The day after we arrived we jumped on the subway and arrived at the cemetery. I was relying on my memory of 28 years ago and where the grave site was. It started to rain and we walked around for over an hour looking for the site. I knew I was there before, but just couldn’t remember the exact spot. Frustration set in, and we went back to the hotel, where I gathered my bearings and realized that we were looking at the first cemetery that I was at and not the one down the street. Back to cemetery we went, and had no problem going right to the place. The sun came out, the grounds were very well taken care of, and my dad got to visit his brother. It was a very special moment for all of us.

The story should really end there, but when we got home, JAHSENA got an e-mail from a woman in Prague who knew about Alex from the Heritage/Yerusha magazine of Fall 2006, and just wanted to know if anyone from Alex Podolsky’s family had ever visited. Debby Shoctor sent me the e-mail and I responded to the woman, saying that by coincidence, we were just there! I received another letter from her and she said: “Glad to hear your Dad was able to see his brother's grave. I wondered who had left the stones. There had been another family who left a poppy wreath recently with a note to an uncle they had never met.” The poppy wreath had been laid by Michael Felber.

In the future I will try and stay in touch with the woman from Prague who so graciously goes to visit and watches over my Uncle.