

I first met Roman and Barbara in 1999 during their service as Pastoral Leaders on Ebenezer's Odessa Base. Having lovingly and faithfully raised their own family in the States, they were now obediently, and with great dedication, answering the call of the Lord to minister to His family.

As my wife and I took part in the day-to-day activities of the base and sailings, we sensed in Roman and Barbara the servant hearts of a true mother and father in the Lord. Their commitment and love for the Jewish people and the Ebenezer teams in their care shines through these pages. In sharing so intimately with their readers, they have honestly spelled out the challenges they faced, the hardships, the sacrifices, and the pain of separation from their own family. But through everything, we see the outpouring of God's grace and faithfulness, bringing strength, perseverance, joy, and great blessings.

The ministry of Ebenezer-Operation Exodus is now engaged in helping Jewish people go to Israel from all nations, and I believe these pages bring helpful, encouraging, and honest insight for those considering serving the Lord out on the field in these challenging and significant days.

—Alan R. Field
International Coordinator
Ebenezer-Operation Exodus

One of the most remarkable events in the last fifty years has been the bringing back of Jews from Russia and the Ukraine by Christians. I cannot recall another instance in Jewish history where Christians gave of themselves wholeheartedly and with time, energy, and money to help the Jews return to the Land of Israel.

It was my privilege to be with Gustav Scheller at the birth of Ebenezer. The ministry was born during the first Gulf War in January 1991 in the safe room of the hotel in Jerusalem, where the International Prayer for Israel Conference was being held. It was an extraordinary experience, where people had to wear gas masks during the prayer times and the matters for prayer were written on a board that everyone could see. It was during those days that God spoke to Gustav, and after he had shared what the Lord had said to him with some of us, we confirmed that God had indeed spoken to him. The work of Ebenezer thus was born.

Roman and Barbara Fialkowski have written their own eye-witness testimony of the amazing development of the Ebenezer work. From their own experience they recount the story of God's faithfulness and grace toward the Jewish people.

The great influx of Russian Jews to Israel is a remarkable phenomenon. It is evidence of the trustworthiness of God and His Word. "Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,

and declare it in the isles afar off; and say, ‘He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd does his flock’” (Jeremiah 31:10.) The Word of God in all its parts is both reliable and relevant. We cannot trust our newspapers and magazines, but we can trust God’s Word. It lives and abides forever.

—Lance Lambert
International Author and Bible Teacher
Jerusalem, Israel

It was during Gustav Scheller’s attendance at the Institute of Ministry School, Bradenton, Florida, that he received his call and vision to become involved with Israel in the Middle East. Almost immediately after graduation was the beginning of Ebenezer’s vast ministry. *Parting the Black Sea* is a prophetic, timely, must-read treatise for every God-loving servant interested in end-times events.

—Dr. Gerald G. Derstine
Chairman of the Board, Gospel Crusade, Inc.
Founder and Director, Israel Affairs, International, etc.
Christian Retreats, MN, FL, NY, Founder
Institute of Ministry, Founder

God is calling His children back to their ancestral homeland, and against all odds, this miracle is happening before our very eyes. Experience the fascinating journey of one couple committed to the prophetic, end-times move of God known as “Aliyah.”

—Robert Stearns
Executive Director/Founder Eagles’ Wings Ministries
New York

Parting the Black Sea will touch your heart and move your soul. Roman and Barbara share a fascinating story of how their lives were intertwined with Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Brazil, Vietnam—and all involving Israel and the Jewish people. You will see how God literally picked them up, moved them out, and completely changed their destiny. They said it best, “The God who parted the Red Sea to enable the first exodus is the same God who parted the Black Sea to enable our part in the second exodus.” We both found their story to be intriguing and heart rending!

—Dr. James M. Hutchens
Brigadier General (US Army, Ret)
President of *The Jerusalem Connection, Inc.* (www.tjci.org)
and wife, Dr. Pat Mercer Hutchens, author, teacher, and practicing artist

Parting the Black Sea is a must-read. This true life story will captivate you and move your heart like none other. It is a story of love. It is a story of sacrifice and courage. It is a story of God's faithfulness to His Word and to His people.

I met Roman and Barbara shortly after their return to the United States. They came to our church one Sunday morning, and after the service, Mom Detweiler introduced me to her beloved foster daughter and son-in-law. In that moment of divine appointment a deep and abiding relationship between us was born. I knew nothing of their lives, but by the Spirit of God I felt a depth of sacrifice I had never felt before. I pulled up chairs, called to my husband to join us, and said, "Tell us your story." We listened in awe as their words tumbled out. They were words filled with God's never-ending love carried deep within the hearts of a humble man and woman who gave all to go and rescue His beloved ones and bring them home—words filled with drama and danger and joy mixed with the pain of a mission ended and the intense struggles of re-entry into American culture.

In that moment I knew a book must be written. The story had to be told. The story is now here. I invite you to enter another world—where a people whose depth of suffering will never fully be known, where God's faithfulness to His Word shines forth ever brightly, and where God uses humble, faithful servants as His own arms of love to return His people home and redeem a people unto Himself. I invite you to experience the heart of God Himself—*Parting the Black Sea*.

—Pastor Anita Malizzi
Hopewell Christian Fellowship
Telford, PA

P a r t i n g
t h e
B l a c k S e a

P a r t i n g
t h e

The Prophetic Fulfillment of a Second Exodus

B l a c k S e a

Roman and Barbara Fialkowski



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This book is dedicated to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is also dedicated to all the Olim who made Aliyah from the land of the north to their Promised Land, Israel. Thank you for allowing us to be a part of your journey. We will never forget you.

Shalom



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With the writing and completion of this book, I have come to realize that most things in God are a process. After seven years of carrying this burden, I have to pinch myself at times to believe that this book is finally completed. Through the highs and lows and depths of discouragement, to the first word ever written and to the last steps of publication, Lord, you were there. You provided for and met every need. I want to give you center stage and thank you with my whole heart for the inspiration to write during a time of deep disappointment and loneliness. It was through the writing of this book that we experienced the restoration we truly needed. Lord, thank you for seeing this work through to completion.

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I want to thank my husband, Roman. I love you, Babe, for your strength and courage to *lay it all down*. I am honored to be at your side in this hour. Thank you for the genuine role model you are for our children and for the unconditional love exchanged between all of us.

I want to thank our children Shannon, Roman, and Keith, for their awesome support and generosity of life that gave us release to accomplish this work. Without your hearts to give the go-ahead, there would be no book. Thank you for your sacrifice.

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To my “Mom Detweiler,” I will never be able to put into words all that my heart holds for you. You modeled a life before me that was steeped in humility, kindness and love. Through your gentle and quiet spirit I came to know Jesus in a real and living way. I am honored to be called your foster daughter and am deeply grateful for the rich heritage you imparted into my life. *I miss you so much.*

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Thank you to all the Ebenezer volunteers who unselfishly gave of themselves in the work of Aliyah.

Finally, I want to thank all the prayer warriors for their prayers, especially all those who pray for Israel every day and all those behind the scenes who continually asked about the progress of this book and gave a word in season when it was badly needed. Thank you for your love and support. God bless you.

“Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying: ‘Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, the days are coming...that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah...And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.’”

—Jeremiah 30:2, 3



Prologue

THEY WERE LIKE human mules. The ragtag team of men hoisted twenty-four thousand pounds of luggage, bag by eighty-pound bag, onto their backs and up the gangplank of the ship destined for Haifa, Israel. Held together with tape, rope, and belts, the luggage mirrored the lives of the bedraggled souls who had packed them. It was as if these stalwart volunteers from around the world hunched not only under the physical weight they carried but also under the decades of oppression it represented.

The December snow transformed the Odessa port into a treacherous kaleidoscope of white. As the Black Sea conjured a biting wind, the men gingerly mounted the slushy steps. Their eyes, barely visible between scarves and fur-trimmed hats, bulged from the Herculean strain. “Oopa!” “Ach!” “Umph!”

As if mocking them, a perfectly good escalator stood idle next to the makeshift stairs. The Ukrainian guards took joy in creating this final roadblock in returning the “Olim,” the Hebrew term for Jews, to their homeland. The hammer and sickle still cleaved to their hearts; the men sneered, saying the escalator would not endure the weight.

Once the luggage was on board, it was the women’s job to see that the bags were delivered to the proper cabins. It took two of us, stopping to rest a few times, to deliver one bag. The corridors seemed narrower

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than the width of the suitcases, which banged against our knees and legs as we made our way to the rooms.

By the end of the day, my palms blistered, my legs were black and blue, and I felt like I had played in a football game. The welts and bruises from the last sailing that had just begun to heal on my husband, Roman's, back were once again raw. I longed for our bathroom back in the States, the never-ending supply of hot water. But hot water, like many of the amenities we took for granted at home, was a luxury in Ukraine. It was only available twice a week, so we'd have to wait two days to take a lukewarm shower at the base.

This was just one of fifty sailings Roman and I helped launch during our two years in Ukraine. The physical, emotional, and spiritual strength necessary to enable each one was absolutely divinely inspired. It never ceased to amaze me how the Lord did this—how He brought Roman and me thousands of miles from home, took us away from our own children to seek His out, and prophetically brought them to their promised land. Called from the corners of the earth, we were a bunch of ordinary nobodies. But together we became God's hands, feet, and heart. In the end, the aching bones, the dire homesickness, and the primitive living conditions didn't matter. We were privileged and grateful to be in the midst of this—actually walking and breathing the Scriptures.

When our time in Ukraine was up, we had seen 16,000 Olim return to Israel. We had helped these people, many of them sick and elderly, to move from darkness into light. Through the grace and faithfulness of God, we had given them something they had lost long ago—that internal sunrise—hope.

But the mission field is a battlefield. The scars it left required a walk through my own personal wilderness before they could heal. So it has taken many years to tell this story. Like a Faberge egg, I have held it close to my heart, afraid that the telling might shatter its significance, afraid that no one would understand. It was so unbelievable that even Roman and I do double-takes whenever we look back.

But now, for many reasons, it is time for this story to be shared. One reason is that my children and their children need to understand why we left them, and why and how this work eventually overshadowed everything, even them. I've tried to explain it, but I always fall short.

Prologue

Another reason this story needs to be told is that the world needs to understand “Aliyah.” Fulfilling scores of Old Testament prophecies, this re-gathering of the Jewish people to Israel continues to unfold as a historic miracle. This book attempts to describe the grass-roots efforts that undergird this prophetic work.

Lastly, and maybe most importantly, it is time for this story to be told because it proves the timeless promise of the Scriptures. It proves, time and again, that God “is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). And through the hearts that were changed after hearing the prophetic words of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, this story shows the keeping power of God’s Word, proving that “it shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

Why we were chosen to do this holy work is a question as wide as the wind. Just as Felix and Oscar were *The Odd Couple*, Roman and I were *The Ordinary Couple*. Whenever I speak about our work overseas, people ask how we came into it and how we were able to leave everything, even our children, to do it. So I have attempted in the first part of this book to describe who we were before the Lord called us, and how, over the course of the unlikeliest of lifetimes, He drew us into a universe beyond anything we ever could have asked or imagined (Ephesians 3:20)—a universe that so transformed my vision, it’s as if I’ve been given an anointed pair of binoculars. I can now direct my gaze to any point in my life, focus in, and see God—the God of Israel—in all the details.

Chapter 1

Who We Were

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,” says the Lord,
“thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

—Jeremiah 29:11

FROM A DISTANCE, even the most complicated jigsaw appears seamless. But up close, you can see how each part interlocks, how they come together to create that picture on the box. Roman and I met in 1969, but it would be decades before our picture would come together. Yet, in each other we found the pieces to anchor and create the frame—the pieces of our hearts that had been lost when we were catapulted to adulthood.

I was one of five children. Our family burrowed like moles into the lowest of low-income city housing, changing apartments the way most people change their socks. I still don't understand, especially through the haze they operated in, how the tenants always knew the precise day and time the welfare checks would come. No matter where we lived, the scenario was always the same. As if in a communal sixth sense, people would gather around the mailboxes. In a party-like atmosphere, they'd smoke and shuffle on a carpet of butts, while waiting for the mailman as if he were the Messiah.

My father had his spot, propped against the front doorframe in the lobby. His hands trembled as he chain lit homemade cigarettes,

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his pants barely cooperating with the makeshift belt tied around his withering frame. His shirt was the one he'd slept in. On those days, I worried about getting the dollar I needed for my bus pass. School was fifteen long blocks away, and it seemed like I was the only kid who had to walk so often. My mom would always argue with my father for the money before he got a chance to blow the whole check on booze and tobacco. I think that's why she started sending me to the country in the summers through the Fresh Air Fund—so she could get me away from that environment.

The year I turned ten, after five summers as a “Fresh Air Kid,” I stayed with a family in Pennsylvania, the Detweilers. They were unlike any of the other families I had been sent to. There was no smoking, drinking, or abusive behavior. There was always plenty of food—no one said anything if you took an extra portion or asked for seconds. And Mrs. Detweiler was different from any of the other moms. She gave me hugs all the time, ignoring the turtle shell of protection I had grown. Based on our mutual requests, the Detweilers became my permanent summertime family. It wasn't until twenty years later that I figured out what was so different about Mom Detweiler. It was that she always had acknowledged the Lord. She brought Him into conversations and thanked Him before meals. She and her family became the blueprint for the way I wanted to live. And in large part, I owe my faith to her. She has always been my “mom.”

When I was fourteen, my mother died of uterine cancer. Whether my father couldn't take care of us or chose the bottle over us, I'm not sure. But my brother, three sisters, and I were separated and placed in foster homes. The Detweilers weren't an option for me because they only had been a summertime family. But had it not been for Mom Detweiler, the darkness surely would have won.

For the next four years, I was bounced from home to home, with an occasional stay in a boarding school. Unfortunately, the horrors you hear about those places are all true. But through every change and shift in homes, Mom Detweiler kept in touch, tracking me through the foster agency I had been registered with. She sent me letters, cards, and packages for Christmas and birthdays. In response, I'd write thank-you notes back to her. Whenever I'd get a little extra money, I'd call her.

Who We Were



Roman's father was a Polish prisoner of war from 1939–1945. In 1944, his mother and her family were taken from Ukraine, separated, and placed in German labor camps. After the war, the labor camps became refugee camps, and that is where Roman's parents met, married, and had three children. They lived in these camps until they immigrated to the U.S. in 1951. Again, looking through those anointed binoculars, I can see the God of Israel watching over Roman's life. At five years old, he came to this country on a ship with hundreds of other immigrants, sailing from a land of oppression and persecution to a land of freedom and opportunity. Only the Lord knew that five decades later Roman would again be accompanying a shipload of immigrants, again sailing from darkness into light.

Like mine, Roman's father was an alcoholic. But he was also abusive. When Roman's mother finally walked out, his father told him that he wouldn't be able to keep the family together unless Roman dropped out of school and got a job. He was only sixteen. His father's income as a carpenter was minimal, but it was his drinking that continued to threaten their finances. So after finishing tenth grade, Roman quit school and got a job in a local dress factory.

Roman worked five and half days a week on a schedule that would impress even today's corporate efficiency experts. Up at six in the morning, he made breakfast, packed lunches, and got his two younger brothers to the bus. After that, he drove to work, where he had to punch the clock by eight. On the way home, he stopped at the general store to pick up whatever they were running short on. In the evenings, he helped with homework and made sure the boys had dinner and were washed and in bed before nine. On weekends, Roman worked Saturday mornings. The rest of the time, he washed clothes, cleaned the house, and looked after his brothers.

Roman took care of his family this way for two years. When his father remarried, Roman enlisted in the marines. He served in Vietnam for a year, then studied for and earned his GED.

Roman and I were married in 1970, just a year after we met. As I made my way down the aisle, I thought of my mother, missing her more

Parting the Black Sea

at that moment than at any other time since her death. And I realized that I hadn't really grieved for her before. I don't think I knew how. It was as if I had been protected from feelings that would have destroyed me and kept me from this moment. But as I approached Roman and saw the mix of loss and longing mirrored in his face, I knew that it was okay now. It was okay for two throwaway kids to abandon their armor and begin to heal the tender spots that for so long had needed attention.

In hindsight, our wedding song seems as perfectly orchestrated as the puzzle that began to take shape as we danced our first dance as husband and wife. It was indeed "A Time for Us." It was a time of mending the past and weaving it into the future—a future so skillfully woven into our hearts that its tapestry required decades to complete. And at its center was the Weaver Himself—the One whose passion became our passion, whose vision from the beginning of time became our vision, and who made a single seed sprout in two hearts.