

Holzman family makes connection with history

By Barry Fishman

Sara Holzman stood staring out the window for hours on end.

It was May 1944. She had just received the dreaded telegram announcing the death of her youngest brother, Flight Officer Mark Leslie Abramson, shot down over Denmark.

“She was in total shock. She was the oldest and he was the youngest. She was almost like a mother to him,” Sara’s son, John Holzman, remembers.

It was a devastating blow to this close-knit family, all of whom lived together in a

house in Rockcliffe. Although only 12 when his uncle joined the RAF, John fondly remembers walking the dog and playing catch with him.

“He was like an older brother to me,” he says.

Holzman decided it was time to go to Denmark to visit his uncle’s grave once again. This time, he would take along his son Mark Leslie, who is named after his great uncle.

“I found the visit very, very moving,” notes Mark. “Even now, I get very emotional because this is a connection. This is my history.

We didn’t know very much, but we always saw the pictures of Mark in his uniform at my grandmother’s apartment. I have learned so much more about my great uncle this past year.”

The catalyst for the trip was an article in the *Daily Telegraph* in April 2004 announcing that the citizens of the Danish village of Gamtofte were looking for family members of RAF Lancaster ME576 UL-X2 to attend a 60th anniversary commemoration honouring the eight men, including Abramson, who died when their plane crashed into a

church yard after being shot down by a German plane.

An Ottawa visitor to London noticed the story and sent it to CJOH television reporter Norm Fetterley.

After phoning every Abramson in the phone book and getting nowhere, Fetterley contacted the Ottawa Jewish Archives, who put him in touch with John Holzman.

The result was a story on CJOH and a name for John Holzman to contact for information about his uncle.

With the help of the Danish Embassy in Ottawa,



F/O M.L. Abramson in front of a Lancaster bomber.

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See next page

Holzman contacted the organizer of the commemoration, Elisabeth Olsen. Unfortunately, by this time, it was too late to attend the commemoration. Holzman decided to visit the following spring and Olsen was his host.

What struck the Holzmanns most about their visit is how the people of Gamtofte and the town of Assens, where the airmen are buried, keep their memory alive.

When they visited the local vicar's family, the minister's young adult children were all genuinely interested in learning about Abramson and the Holzman family.

"It was as if a connection between our history and theirs was being made in a very meaningful way," recalls Mark.

"It also helped me understand more about my dad's uncle whom I had never met."

Olsen, who as a young child heard and saw the many Allied bombers that flew over her town, became a connection for the Holzmanns by providing information on the families of Abramson's fellow airmen.

"She almost became a link by telling us about the families of some of the other crew whom we had never met and didn't know about. She showed us pictures from her big scrapbook," says Mark.

The Holzmanns believe the memorial and the well-kept cemetery are an acknowledgment by the people of Denmark of the Allied effort to free Europe from Nazi tyranny. Unlike in Canada, the young people are well aware of the sacrifices made.

"They are much more aware and involved with what went on during the war. Canadian kids today really don't know about something that happened 60 years ago. A lot of them don't even know there was a war," John says.

You can help remedy that by attending the Ottawa Jewish War Veterans of Canada, Ottawa Post Remembrance parade on Monday, November 7, 10:30 am at the Soloway JCC.

As well, on Saturday, November 5, special Shabbat services honouring our veterans will be held at local synagogues.