

## Pat Boone and the *Exodus* Memorial

By Jerry Klinger



Pat Boone, world famous singer, movie actor and writer has been a lifelong friend of Israel. His active continuing career has spanned over 62 years, selling more than 46 million albums, 38 Platinum top forty singles, starring in 12 movies and a hit T.V. show. Yet, he will modestly tell you, he thinks "his song" *Exodus* was the high point of his career.

A month ago, I contacted his office and asked if he would be willing to receive a personalized, numbered print of the famous ship, the *Exodus*, leaving Baltimore Harbor in 1934. She wasn't known as the *Exodus* then. She was named the President Warfield, after the President of the Old Bay Line. The Warfield was a luxury Chesapeake Bay steamer, overnighting people in luxury from Baltimore to Norfolk and back. The print was going to be personalized to him by the last surviving crew member of the *Exodus*, Sam Schulman. I asked if Pat would be willing to sign and personalize a print back to Sam. Sam is a good friend.

It took a day or two to get through the reasonable filter process, after all many people try and contact Pat for various reasons. Pat's response, it would be an honor for him to help.

I am centrally involved in the *Exodus* story. The society, which I am president of, the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, is creating and funding the first ever memorial, specific to the *Exodus* in Israel.

Ironically, there are memorials to the iconic ship, the catalyst for the birth of Israel, in Germany, France, Italy and the U.S. but nothing in Israel. There is nothing in Israel until now.

July 18, 2017, outside the International Cruise Ship Terminal, at the port of Haifa, about 300 yards from where the dramatic story of the *Exodus* played out, the Memorial will be dedicated. 2017 is the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ship's arrival in Haifa.

The Memorial is the most significant to the *Exodus* in the world. It will be dedicated during a historic, international event with major significance to the United States and Israel. The dedication will be a major opportunity for the U.S. and Israel to publically remember, reaffirm and honor their special relationship.

On multiple levels, the human drama of the *Exodus* became the catalyst for the birth of the modern State of Israel

The *Exodus* was an American Holocaust rescue ship. She was American funded. She was crewed by American World War II veterans with Haganah leadership. Her mission was to rescue 4,515 desperate Survivors of the Holocaust, unwanted by the world for surviving, trapped in European Displaced Persons Camps. In some cases, the DP camps were adjacent to the Concentration Camps where the Nazis had tried to murder the Survivors just two years before.

Though promised a home in British Mandate Palestine through the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the British denied the Survivors permission to enter because of Arab resistance. It was the same before the outbreak of WWII. The British closed Mandate Palestine to desperate Jews and 6,000,000 were slaughtered.

I shared an idea with Judy. Sam will personalize a print of the *Exodus*, by noted maritime artist Paul McGehee, to Pat Boone. Pat will, in turn, personalize one to Sam. I was going to do everything by FedEx.

She looked at me incredulously. "You will not mail anything! You will take the prints personally and get them signed even if you have to fly all over the country!" Knowing better than to argue with "She who must be obeyed", I made arrangement and booked my flights. I was going to bridge history.

Taking an early morning flight to LAX out of Miami, I landed and went to Pat's office on Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood. Pat was waiting for me along with T.V., photographers and P.R. It was certainly much more than I expected. Pat's easy and very welcoming presence put all uncertainty aside. He was tanned, with broad sunglasses and very relaxed. He had a firm handshake, a warm, natural smile, a youthful look accented by his electric orange tennis shoes. We talked.

Time passed, we were ushered to his office conference room, and positioned a table with a wall filled backdrop of his hit albums.

This was not the first time I was before T.V., photographers and media. One part of the signing was different. A T.V. crew present conducted their interview in Mandarin. The *Exodus*, even 70 years after the events of 1947, is still that significant. The story resonates with the Chinese community.

Sam Schulman was a teenager in 1947. He was 18. He wanted to go to Palestine. He, like the other American volunteers onboard the old, worn out WWII surplus ship *Exodus*, wanted to do what they could to help the Survivors of the Holocaust. All the volunteers understood that if captured, the British could throw them in prison for ten years. They went anyway.

One of the volunteers onboard was Bill Bernstein, a Navy Veteran, one of the very few crew members on the *Exodus* with any previous naval experience. He was the second officer. Bill wrote home about what he saw and felt as the *Exodus* awaited the arrival of the refugees in open, secret, convoys to Sete, France for boarding. This time, he wrote to his family back home in San Francisco: "*Our people have only one burning desire - - - the second deliverance to Eritz Israel. The first migration was supposedly the handiwork of God; the second one, we fight for!!!*"

Bill did fight. He was murdered by a British truncheon crushing his skull. 22 miles at sea the British ordered the unarmed *Exodus* to stop and surrender. The *Exodus* continued running hard for the shallows of the coastal waters where the British could not go with their deep V hulled destroyers. Two destroyers rammed the *Exodus* trying to crush her hull, possibly sinking her and killing 4,500 Survivors, of whom 1,300 were children.

Boarding parties were sent onboard with guns blazing and truncheons flaring. The Jews resisted with everything they had, tin cans of kosher beef, water hoses....

In the uneven fight, three Jews, including Bill had been killed. 147 wounded. It became very clear to the *Exodus'* commanders; unless she surrendered the British would kill them all.

The British took control of the *Exodus* and brought her into Haifa's Harbor. As the *Exodus* came into view of the Promised Land, ashore, the sounds of singing could clearly be heard coming from the ship. The refugees were singing the Hatikvah with all their hearts.

The British had prison ships waiting for the brutalized refugees. The prison ships, some complete with cages, took the refugee prisoners back to the land of death – Germany. The British were intent on teaching the Jews a lesson.

Journalists present in Haifa saw the pathos differently. They shared the horrific scenes with the world. World opinion began shifting in favor of the Holocaust Survivors.

Aboard the *Exodus* was a Methodist Minister, Rev. John Stanley Grauel. He was an eyewitness to what had happened during the British attack. Rev. Grauel was smuggled by the Haganah to Jerusalem to tell the story of the *Exodus* to the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine sent to investigate the Mandate. Before Rev. Grauel told the story of the *Exodus*, the Committee had refused to consider Holocaust Survivor testimony. After Rev. Grauel, the Committee agreed to go to Germany and take Survivor Testimony.

That testimony proved crucial. The Committee changed their position and recommended to the United Nations to partition the Mandate into two States, one Jewish and one Arab. November 29, 1947, four months after the *Exodus* arrived in Haifa; the State of Israel was born. 2,000 years of exile and homelessness ended, a Jewish state was reborn on its ancient land.

Pat Boone is a man of deep Christian religious convictions. He firmly believes that Christians have been grafted onto the tree of the House of King David. They are one with the Jewish people. He wears a Cross about his neck and a Star of David. Elvis Presley, a fellow Tennessean, Pat's friend and fellow super star did also.

The world had a short memory, especially of the Jewish struggle for a home so shortly after the Holocaust. Memory and sympathy passed as a drop of water in the desert. The Jews themselves did not speak of the Holocaust. Author Leon Uris, a Jewish veteran of WWII, a Marine did. He was tired of Jewish self-hatred.

Researching the founding of Israel, he focused on the iconic story of the *Exodus*. 1958, his novel, *Exodus*, was published. The novel became an international best seller. Film producer Otto Preminger picked up the movie rights and brought out the 1960 mega-hit movie, *Exodus*, starring Paul Newman. For the first time, much of the world saw on the giant screen the dramatic story of the birth of Israel. Ernest Gold wrote the powerful and hypnotic theme music to the movie.

Preminger, Gold and Chappell Music agreed there could never be lyrics that would capture the feeling, the vision, and the soul of the *Exodus*. Time and again submissions were rejected.

Pat Boone had not only read Uris' book but also saw the Preminger movie. It stirred inside of him. Christmas 1960, his wife Shirley called him to come and wrap presents. Pat stood mesmerized playing the theme music to *Exodus* over and over. He told me he must have played it twenty or thirty times wondering about lyrics. He wanted to sing what he was feeling. All of a sudden, an inspiration came.

Within 20 minutes, his lyrics to the *Exodus* theme music were completed. Hurriedly, he scribbled the lyrics onto the back of a nearby card. "*This land is mine, God gave this land to me...*" With each line he played the music again and the lyrics poured out. It was not simply music lyrics he put to paper, it was love and a statement of faith.

Pat presented the lyrics to Preminger, Gold and Chappell Music. Without hesitation they too felt the power of the lyrics. The theme music to *Exodus* had words and a voice to sing it. The Song resonated for millions upon millions of Jews and Christians alike. The song became known as the Zionist Second National Anthem. 2010, the card upon which Pat had written the lyrics to the *Exodus* was donated and accepted with honor and respect by the Jewish National Memorial to the Holocaust, Yad Va'Shem.

After Pat finished writing the lyrics to the *Exodus* on the back of that random card, he turned the card over. It was a Christmas card. It had two S&H Green stamps on it. Pat told me that the stamps represented "Redemption".

For Pat and for all believing people, there is no such a thing as a coincidence. He is very familiar with the term Beshert. Whatever happens, happens for a reason. It was intended to be. "There are no coincidences he told me."

We met again, privately at his office later that afternoon. We talked about family, about who we were and our hopes. We talked about the *Exodus* Memorial dedication. He wanted that "his song" in some way will benefit the memory of the *Exodus*, the future for Israel and good for all of God's creations.

Questions about the *Exodus* Memorial project can be directed to [JASHP1@msn.com](mailto:JASHP1@msn.com)



The *Exodus* Memorial Hyperlink is:

<http://www.jewish-american-society-for-historic-preservation.org/internationalprograms/exodusmemorialisrael.html>