

Chapter 5: Cowboy at the University of Wyoming

In September 1963, I flew from Israel to New York City. Although I had been to New York City before on the exchange program, things were different for me on this trip. There were no friendly, smiling faces waiting to assist me. I was a tall, muscular young man with poor English language skills, surrounded by suitcases in one of the busiest and least friendly airports on the planet. I had left the old land, the beaches, the ironic laughter, and the ten million

opinions in Israel and just landed in a what seemed to be a frantic, enormous ant colony. No one seemed to notice me, let alone stop their own busy activities to ask if I needed help. What a change from my last visit. However, I knew that there would be a solution, and I would find it one way or another.

The Israel that I had left was a very small country, roughly the size of the U.S. state of New Jersey. The shortest distance from east to west is nine miles, near Netanya, where



Rodeo at the Cheyenne Frontier Days, Wyoming
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/2794>



I had attended Wingate College. The longest north to south distance, as the crow flies, is 290 miles. At that point, I did not yet know about the shocking size differential. All I knew was the frantic and unfriendly crush of people at this huge airport complex in New York City.

In Israel, people got around the country by riding the bus, walking, or hitchhiking. Naturally, I assumed it was the same thing in the U.S., so I asked an airport worker for directions for the bus to Laramie. Now came the next shock. The fellow told me that Laramie did not exist! He told that it was only a popular American television program and there were no buses going to an imaginary place. Eventually, I found the bus terminal but there were only buses to downtown New York City and none scheduled for Laramie, Wyoming. "Now what?" I wondered.

A man on the plane had told me that many wealthy New Yorkers needed to move their cars from the East Coast to the West Coast. The idea was that these people would fly in comfort and would hire someone to drive their car. He told me that if I could find someone who needed this service, I might even be paid to drive the car. What a fantastic opportunity this would be for me, now that I was stuck 2,000 miles from my destination in Wyoming. My driver's license was for riding motorcycles in Israel, but I trusted myself that with luck and charm this would not be a deterrent. I managed to locate an agency for driving cars to California, just as the man on the plane had suggested. Apparently, the man at the counter was satisfied with my driver's license, but perhaps he assumed that any policeman that I might encounter would not read Hebrew any better than he did.

The agency paired me with another young man. This fellow was Chinese and his English was worse than mine which, believe me, is saying something. We were assigned to drive a large, new, fancy Cadillac from NYC to California. I explained that I would be traveling only as far as Laramie, Wyoming, but neither the agency nor the Chinese seemed to understand or care what I was telling them. I finally realized that neither of us had any clue where Wyoming was located.

It was not very long before I discovered that the United States was vastly larger than Israel. When I had flown to Colorado, it was just a few hours of flight time covering a huge distance. But driving was a new and eye-opening experience. I had no idea that any place could be so huge! Israel had beautiful landscapes, but my entire country could fit into New Jersey. Here in America, there were roads after roads, hills, green forests, winding rivers, and open lush valley landscapes that seemed to stretch on forever. This America was so much larger than I had ever imagined, when I dreamt my impossible dream, staring at my old map in Hadassim with the elephant in Africa and the family in the Cadillac driving across America. Here I was in a Cadillac, but this country

was much bigger than the one I had assumed when I stared at the family on my map. This place was bigger than I had ever thought possible.

Unfortunately, the Chinese fellow was quite nervous and easily irritated. He never wanted to make comfort stops, and constantly ranted in Chinese. Despite my grumpy companion, I could see the natural beauty of the countryside as we drove from east to west. The green grasses and forests covering the mountain were more lush than any place in Israel. The rivers we crossed seemed enormous compared with the tiny Yarkon River of my childhood. Even the roads were wider and seemed to stretch on forever.

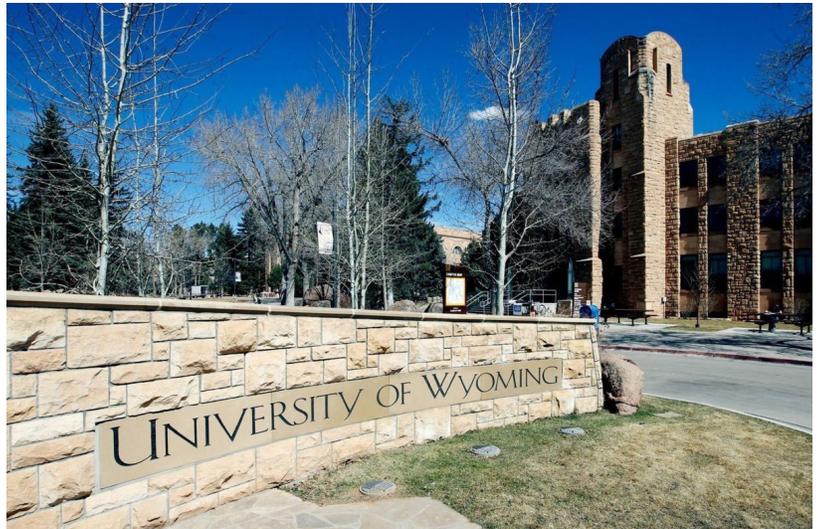
Eventually, the Chinese man left me at a bus station in South Dakota, near Mount Rushmore, where the presidents' heads are carved into the mountain. I had never seen such a huge carving and, once again, was impressed by the vastness of America and, seemingly, everything in it. South Dakota, with its mountains and Badlands National Park, could have been the moon for all its unique, but completely unfamiliar landscape!

I finally boarded a bus for Laramie, Wyoming. At least in South Dakota, the bus station attendant knew that it was a real place and not some television locale. After six hours of riding the bus, I arrived in Cheyenne. I changed to another bus and finally arrived in Laramie. It was an enormous relief to see a friendly face for a change when coach John Walker was there at the bus station to pick me up.

I stared at the town and the surroundings as we drove in coach Walker's car. Once again, I was mesmerized and awed by the nature and the surroundings of the town. I had never experienced beauty or grandeur like this. Until this moment, I had only known the warm Mediterranean sun and small hills which were nearly barren or covered with olive groves. The hills of Greece and Rome had been smaller and warmer than these mountains. Everything here was enormous and the Rocky Mountains that seemed to surround the town on the horizon were huge, rugged, and snow-capped at their summits despite it only being September.

I had left the warm, almost hot, Israeli climate in my shorts and sandals. The temperature this day was quite chilly for an Israeli boy who had rarely experienced temperatures below 60 degrees Fahrenheit. It was a crisp cool autumn day in Laramie which I would later look back upon as "balmy" after my first winter in Wyoming. But this first day it was a climatic shock.

Coach Walker's first stop was at Sears to buy a proper coat for me, otherwise I would have frozen to death. I noticed that all the people around me were big. In Israel, people were relatively small. At 6'1", I am considered tall by Israeli standards. When I looked around the store in Wyoming, I



University of Wyoming
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1059>

saw big hats and blue jeans on big people and felt that I had been transported into one of those Western movies I used to watch in Israel.

I could not understand one word of any of the conversations that I heard. The people sounded like cats meowing. Although I had trouble understanding the language, I discovered immediately that everyone welcomed me with a friendly smile and big handshake. What a difference from when I landed in New York or rode in the car with the fussy fellow. These people in the store did not even know me, but they acted as though I was their best friend. It helped to relieve the tension that I had felt up until now.

Laramie is the home of the University of Wyoming, and is nestled between two mountain ranges. Coach Walker pointed out waterfalls and specific mountain peaks as we drove to the University. While he was pointing out the beautiful nature and identifying some of the school buildings, I continued to be amazed, even snuggled in my new warm coat, how cold it was. It was only the beginning of September

and I was already cold. But the scenery was truly gorgeous and awe-inspiring.

Coach Walker took me to the sports dormitory and introduced me to my roommate who was one of the sprinters. The sports dormitory had its own restaurant in the downstairs area since the athletes were fed separately from the other students who lived on campus in other dormitories. The food was available in enormous quantities and was delicious. I was rapidly learning that everything in Wyoming was huge.

The next day was the first day of training at the fieldhouse. In September, it was too cold to train outside in Wyoming. The altitude in Laramie is 7200 feet and affected my breathing. Running around the field house was difficult but one of the other athletes explained that this was normal and that I would adjust quickly. The high altitude was a new experience but I rapidly adjusted probably because I was physically fit when I arrived.

I was given several discuses, and started throwing in the fieldhouse. How I loved the feeling that elevates your being, when throwing that round, nearly flat sphere. From that

point on, my daily life became a regular, predictable routine. The day started with breakfast, followed by the academic classes to which I had been assigned. Initially, I was unable to understand the teachers' English, but I was confident that eventually I would learn. Classes were followed by lunch, a two-hour rest period, and then back to the field house for training.

All of the track and field events as well as the entire football squad trained under one roof. The football players were the most enormous human beings I had ever seen. I could not believe the size of these athletes. I was amazed at the width and bulk of their shoulders and was surprised that their heads were completely out of proportion to the rest of their bodies. Another perplexing problem was why the university could not afford a round ball.

I wrote letters to my friends in Israel since there were no such things as cell phones. I tried to describe the size of these football giants. I had never seen such huge individuals and I was very grateful that they did not throw the discus. Needless to say, my experiences were with soccer, which is known around the world beyond the United States as football. Since I was unfamiliar with the American version of football, I also did not realize the size of the players was enhanced by shoulder pads.

My daily routine continued this way for weeks. One day, while throwing the discus at the fieldhouse, one of the football coaches started shouting at me. I had no idea what he was yelling nor why. Perhaps my discus had landed too close to the football players' area, but I was throwing in my designated area. I nodded my head, as though I understood, and continued to throw. The coach again screamed and ran toward me. In all of that screaming there was only one thing that I understood which was "son of a bitch!" The coach ran up to where I was throwing, waving his arms and ranting, raving, shouting, and cursing the entire time. I wanted to tell him to shut up, but when I went from the Hebrew expression in my head to the English translation that came out of my mouth, I told him "Close your hole!" For the coach, this was the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back. He lifted his clipboard high overhead and hit me with it. My military training produced an automatic reaction and I punched him hard in the stomach. He crashed the floor holding his midsection. Several athletes and other coaches rushed over to us. I turned and left the fieldhouse and went directly to my dorm.

As soon as I returned to my room in the dormitory, I began packing my clothes and belongings into my suitcase. I was sure this was the end of my college career in Wyoming and probably all of America. There was no doubt that I would





University of Wyoming track team

be kicked out after this episode. My heart sank and depression rose.

Suddenly, I heard a knock on the door which I assumed meant that the police were there to “take me away.” When I opened the door an older man in his 50s was standing there and started talking to me in Hebrew. Now I was sure I would be returning to Israel, since I was starting to hallucinate that Americans could speak English which converted to Hebrew in my ears. The man introduced himself as Dr. Martin Wolman and explained that he had served in the Israeli military as a volunteer in the 1948 independent war. He asked if he could come into my room and told me that he heard what had happened in the fieldhouse and asked to see my arm. I showed him the large gash on my arm made by the coach’s clipboard.

He told me, “Gideon, don’t worry, you do not have to leave. He explained that in America this aggressive behavior of the coach toward the athlete was against the rules. The coach, in this case, was the aggressor and I was the victim. In America, you are allowed to defend yourself when attacked. In fact, the coach owed me an apology, at the very least. Regardless, I did not need to worry anymore and I would not go back to Israel.

Dr. Wolman said that he was the head physician of the university. He took me to the school infirmary and treated my wound. Then I was invited to dinner at his house that evening with his wife. He also showed me his Cadillac which impressed me greatly at the time. We remained close friends throughout my college years and he was always available to



Competing in Denver, Colorado

help for years even long after I graduated from the University of Wyoming.

The day finally arrived for my first meet as an athlete representing the University of Wyoming. The meet was in Denver, at the University of Denver, and everyone watched anxiously. My performances were awesome that day and I broke both records for the university in the shot and discus. Coach Walker was ecstatic with my performance, as was I.

In addition, my English improved more rapidly than expected and I began to do better in all of my classes. My classes for the second semester would be more intense than those I had taken during the fall semester. They were more academically challenging and included more of the sciences, such as physiology, chemistry, and physics. The professors liked me and were impressed with my intense efforts to understand the material. I would go to each professor when I needed help and then immediately go to the library to get the extra books they had recommended. They were also very approachable when I had questions or needed help with some difficult concept. I think many of my problems were language related but the teachers were always willing to help. I was studying hard in school, training intensely in the weight room, and throwing as much as I could on the field.

Unfortunately, as much as I was fulfilling my dream of studying in America, I was lonely at school. I believe that some of this loneliness was because I was older than most of the members of the track team, since I had served three years in the military in addition to the two years of college at Wingate. I was 24 years old whereas the average Wyoming student was between 18 and 20 years old. Also, I missed Israel, my friends, as well as not having someone to share the academics and athletics. When I went to the track, no-

body spoke Hebrew or came from the same background as I. I longed for a companion from Israel.

One day, during training, I told coach Walker that I thought I should go back to Israel. He asked me why, and I told him how lonely I felt and that I missed my friends. He asked me if there was an athlete who was my friend and would be willing to come join me and compete for the University of Wyoming. One of my best friends was Gilad Weingarten who was an excellent long jumper. I told coach Walker about Gilad and, with no hesitation, he told me to bring Gilad to Wyoming.

I rushed to find a pay phone and called Gilad in Israel. I paid no attention to what time it was in either location.

“Hello Gilad, this is Gideon.”

It turned out to be in the middle of the night in Israel so, of course, I woke him up from a deep sleep. “What? Are you crazy?” he said.

“Listen. Would you like to have a full scholarship, like me, for the University of Wyoming? This would be an unbelievable opportunity for you to achieve all of the goals we talked about all these years while we were on the same team in Israel.” Gilad was in shock or maybe trying to wake up and determine if this was a dream or really a call from me in America.

“What’s the weather like in Laramie?” he blurted out.

I pulled my coat around me in the early snowy chill of October and said, “It’s just like Israel.”

Gilad agreed to come for the semester beginning in January 1964. I was still alone in the dorm, but I had Gilad’s arrival to look forward to for next year.

Despite knowing that Gilad would be arriving in a few months and having my studies and athletic events, I also missed Yael. Finally, after many romantic words and equally creative descriptions of Wyoming, she agreed to join me. She landed in New York on the day that Kennedy was shot, November 22, 1963. She took the bus to Laramie and we spent some happy times together. But she was not able to stay in Laramie since she had nothing to do. I lived in a dorm where she could not stay. She had nowhere to live and could not work since she had entered the US with a visa precluding her from working.

I had met a few Jewish families, and they offered to help us. One family, the Brodies, suggested that Yael live with them in Denver and I could visit on the weekends. She was supposed to help them with their children and housekeeping in exchange for a place to live. Denver was a two-hour drive from Laramie, which was not an insurmountable distance, so we all agreed to this plan.



The Brodie family

On the weekends when there were no track meets, I would go to Denver. Unfortunately, Yael had only been granted a visitor's visa when she initially entered the United States, which allows a person to stay for only three months. This meant that in January, Yael would have to return to Israel.

When I arrived in Denver one weekend, Mr. Brodie seemed to have solved the dilemma very neatly. He opened the front door, as usual, and said, "Hi, Gideon. Guess what?"

"What?" I answered with a baffled expression.

"You are getting married," he said.

"When?" I asked, in complete shock.

"Today," he answered.

His family had arranged the ceremony and even had a suit ready for me. So with the Brodies, the rabbi, and little else, Yael and I became man and wife. The arrangement was

Small wedding ceremony Yael and Gideon



for Yael to continue living with the Brodies since she could not live with me in the dormitory. We would have to find an alternative solution in the future.

I was afraid to tell coach Walker that I was married since I thought I would lose my scholarship. Shortly after the Christmas season, Yael came to watch one of the competitions against the University of Denver. I won the shot-put throw and then went over to talk to her. Coach Walker called me and said, "Hey Gideon, leave the girls alone."

I said "Coach, that isn't a "girl", this is my wife. "Your wife?" he exclaimed, "You never told me you are married."

I said to him, "Coach, you told me Merry Christmas when we left school in December. I always do what my coach tells me, so I married at Christmas."

I was worried that being married would affect my scholarship at the university so I needed a good explanation for the situation. I hoped my foreign background and less than perfect English skills would help me out of what could be a potential problem. My hope that an Israeli not understanding the meaning of "merry" in the traditional holiday greeting would make some sense.

Coach Walker smiled and shook his head. I guess by that time, he had become accustomed to my humor. I breathed a big sigh of relief and went back to throwing. I do not know if he realizes that he is the one who changed my life in more ways than one. Coach John Walker was, and continues to be, a wonderful man. Without his help and guidance, I would never have achieved the successes which I have accomplished during my time after the University of Wyoming.

With the spring semester beginning soon, coach Walker sent Gilad an airline ticket to come to Laramie. On the day Gilad was due to arrive, I waited with coach Walker at the bus station just as he had waited for me only a few months earlier. The bus arrived and Gilad was dressed in the same fashion as I had been wearing only a thin shirt with short sleeves, shorts, and sandals. Unfortunately, the day Gilad arrived, the temperature was 50 below zero. When he stepped out of the bus, Gilad gasped for breath in the frigid mountain air.

"What do you mean the weather is just like in Israel? How could you lie to me?" he was finally able to stammer as he shivered in the cold.

I replied, "When I was talking to you on the phone, it was 70 degrees."

He shook his head in exasperation. But to my great joy and relief, Gilad was there and I would not be alone anymore. We had been such good friends, hard-working athletes, and shared many common experiences in Israel, so I knew he would forgive me, eventually, for the climate. Picking up his suitcase, we went to buy some winter clothes for my frozen friend, Gilad.

The temperature in Laramie at times can reach -50 degrees Fahrenheit. One day, Gilad and I went to train in the fieldhouse. I leaned into the trunk to retrieve my shot put with my bare hand since I had forgotten my gloves. At that temperature, the metal shot put stuck to my hand. This had never happened to me before so I had no idea how to remove a shot put which is frozen to the hand. I used a towel to pull the shot out of my hand and the skin of my hand was ripped off with it. It was several days before my hand recovered enough for me to return to shot put practice.

Gilad and I shared a room in the same sports dormitory designated for athletes where I had been housed previously. Our room was on the same floor as the one housing the football players. Unfortunately, the track and field athletes and the football team did not share the same competitive seasons. Fall was football season and spring was track and field's turn for competitions. Thus, the football players had regulated sleep schedules during the fall months until Christmas. Following the Christmas break, the football players were no longer subjected to rules regarding hours for sleep. During the spring semester, the track and field athletes had their more stringent rules regarding curfews and lights off at night. Therefore, during the spring semester, Gilad and I normally had a competition every Saturday.

There was, thus, a mismatch between the competitive schedules for football and track and field. The off-season football athletes would stay out late on Friday evening and, when they returned to the dorm, there was loud shouting, screaming, music, and noise until all hours. This tremendous noise interfered with our ability to sleep. One of us would have to get up and go out to the area where the football fellows were having their noisy parties and ask them to please be quiet.

"Would you mind keeping it down? We have a meet tomorrow." we would plead.

"Okay, 'G-Boys.'" "G-Boys" was their affectionate name for us since we each had a name beginning with G. The players were always agreeable, but then they would open another beer and within minutes the noise level would be just as raucous as it had been before we asked. It seemed that no matter how many times we asked them to be quiet, the parties would revive shortly thereafter. They were not mean or vicious, but oblivious to their inconsiderate noise

Gilad and I decided that we had to find a solution for our problem. The following Sunday, at 4:30 in the morning while it was still dark outside, Gilad and I wrapped towels around our heads like pictures of Indian swamis. Then we sat crossed legged on our beds, closed our eyes, and began screaming loud, strange, and exotic noises at the top of our lungs. The sounds were deafening and we woke everyone on the hall. As the players were startled awake at this early and unholy hour,



Gilad in our room at the dorm

they groggily went downstairs to the supervisor on the first floor for help.

The supervisor sleepily came upstairs and knocked on our door. We continued to shout and scream at unbelievable decibel levels. Finally, the supervisor tentatively opened our door and saw us sitting on our beds while we screeched and wailed.

“What are you doing?” the supervisor asked us.

“We are praying,” we answered.

“Can I talk with you guys after you finish your prayers?” he asked.

We only nodded and continued “praying.”

After a reasonable period, we ceased our prayers, and we went to his office. The sun was just coming up on the horizon when we knocked on the supervisor’s door. He was a very nice man who liked both of us. He explained that our prayers were quite loud and woke everyone on the hall and inquired whether we could change the time or the location for our services. We explained that we understood how the

other people on the hall felt about the beauty of quiet when sleeping. We explained that if we were able to sleep in undisturbed quiet on Friday nights, we would probably be able to find a different time and place for our own Sunday morning prayers. We would be able to accommodate the sleeping comfort of others on the hall on Sunday morning easily if we could sleep quietly on Friday nights. He quickly understood the situation, and assured us that he would explain to the football players that loud noises on Friday night resulted in intensely loud prayers on Sunday morning. Quiet on Friday night meant quiet on Sunday mornings.

Friday nights were quiet after that. Occasionally, we would hear the players coming in late and if anyone made any noise, someone would say. “Shhhh, the ‘G-Boys’ are sleeping. Don’t wake them up or they’ll start praying.”

Gilad and I were continually surprised by America and its many opportunities. For example, when we arrived in the U.S. in 1963 and 1964, we had left a country that did not yet have television available for the masses. During my first visit to New York City as an exchange student, we had all ap-



Gilad and I discussing discus technique

peared on the Ed Sullivan Show. No one in Israel had known about this event. In Israel, visual entertainment was going to the theater for a movie. One day, Gilad and I ventured downstairs in our dorm and discovered there was a television set available for the athletes to watch. What an amazing magnet for two naive boys from Israel to discover. One evening we were sitting downstairs in the TV room with the other athletes watching a program called “The Fugitive.” We saw a man running with an injured arm and the police chasing him. We were surprised that this man who appeared to be badly injured was able to hide from the police without detection. The following Thursday night, “The Fugitive” was again on the television. We found it incomprehensible that the police had not caught him yet! America was the greatest country in the world, but the authorities could not apprehend a man with such a terribly injured arm. When we asked how such a situation could occur the other guys laughed at us. They explained that this was only a story and not an actual news event. We were informed that this chase had been going on for at least a year.

Another revelation for us was the crazy way the Americans danced at parties. We were familiar with the Waltz, Tango,

Samba, and, of course, many Israeli folk dances. But at the dance parties we attended, we witnessed bizarre moves with flailing limbs that looked more like people were being given electric shock treatments than any dance movements we had ever seen. The girls attending these parties were not going to let two good-looking guys just sit and watch. We were dragged onto the dance floor and were forced to learn how to dance. Soon we looked like active rag dolls, as we twisted and turned.

Other events which we thought only occurred in movies actually happened in the bars in the small downtown area. People would ride their horses down the streets, stop in front of a bar, and tie their horses to a post in the front. Then, with guns in holsters strapped to their legs, they would saunter into the bar to drink beer and play pool. Before I witnessed this with my own eyes I was sure this only happened in movies depicting times long ago.

One day, some friends invited Gilad and me to go to Cheyenne to see the rodeo. Cheyenne is a town about 50 miles east of Laramie which we had visited from time to time. However, neither of us had heard of a rodeo so we readily agreed to go see what it was. We soon learned that “Cheyenne Frontier Days” is more than just a rodeo. It is an outdoor rodeo and western celebration held annually since 1897 in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The event claims to be one of the largest of its kind in the world, drawing nearly 200,000 people every year.

Prior to the annual kickoff of Cheyenne Frontier Days on a Friday, the annual walking of the steers is held on the preceding Sunday morning. This event, which attracts considerable attention, is based on the running of the bulls in Pamplona, Spain. In 2013, 447 steers walked a three-mile course in unison into Frontier Park to await the forthcoming events.

Cheyenne Frontier Days features nightly concerts with popular music and comedy acts, a midway, a fair with rides, games, food vendors, wild west shows featuring Western riding, an Indian village, and a large internationally sanctioned rodeo. A common moniker for the event is “The Daddy of ‘em All”, based on its long history and the fact that the rodeo is billed as the largest such event in the world.

After walking around Cheyenne for a while, our friends “steered” us to the rodeo. We soon learned that a rodeo is a competitive sport that arose out of the working practices of cattle herding in Spain, Mexico, and later Central America, the United States, Canada, South America, Australia and New Zealand. It was based on the skills required of the working vaqueros and later, cowboys, in what today is the western United States, western Canada, and northern Mexico. Today’s sporting events involve horses and other livestock, and are designed to test the skill and speed of the cowboys



Yael and I at Wyoming University

and cowgirls. American style professional rodeos generally comprise the following events: tie-down roping, team roping, steer wrestling, saddle bronc riding, bareback bronc riding, bull riding, and barrel racing. The events are divided into two basic categories: the rough stock events and the timed events.

American rodeos, particularly popular today within the Canadian province of Alberta and throughout the western United States, is the official state sport of Wyoming, South Dakota, and Texas. The iconic silhouette image of a “bucking horse and rider” is a federal and state-registered trademark of the State of Wyoming. I assume this was the reason for the University of Wyoming mascots and nickname to be the “Cowboys”.

As we watched the events of the rodeo, Gilad and I shared a sense of wonder about these crazy Americans and their seemingly bizarre interests. In Israel, we had dairy cows which are docile and relatively harmless animals. However, in Wyoming, cow-related activities were of an entire different level. For example, these “cows” were not the sweet passive variety but rather they seemed to be massive, aggressive males with excessive levels of hormones.

One event is called steer wrestling. In this event, a horse-mounted rider chases a steer, drops from the horse to the steer, then wrestles it to the ground by grabbing its horns and pulling it off-balance so that it falls to the ground. Another event is called calf roping. This event involves riding a horse as fast as possible to catch a small cow, jumping off the horse, and wrestling the calf to the ground. The goal of this timed event is for the rider to catch the calf by throwing a lariat with a running noose around its neck, dismount from the horse, run to the calf, and restrain it by tying three legs together, in as short a time as possible. We assumed there

must be many good reasons for this event, but nothing in our background prepared us for one.

These cows, horses, and cowboy/cowgirl events continued for several hours. Each one was more fantastic and perplexing than the previous one had been. One of the most astonishing events was watching grown men trying to sit on the biggest, most ferocious bucking bull with long wicked horns and snorting like a dragon. Needless to say, we were flabbergasted. The entire day had been fun and certainly contained many surprises for two Israeli boys who had thought they had seen everything. Now we knew differently.

Gilad and I were older and had experienced much more of life than our friends and colleagues in the sports dorm. We studied and trained with great intensity because this was a one-time chance for our future, and we were going to make it the best opportunity that we could. Eventually, we adjusted to life in the United States. Our participation in the academic and athletic journeys became upbeat experiences. Our goals were to graduate and continue to study in a graduate school somewhere in America. We traveled around the country competing for the university and performed well enough to more than justify coach Walker’s belief in us.

Women chased us for our athletic prowess and good looks. Gilad liked the girls, but I was not someone who liked short relationships. Gilad never lacked for girlfriends. But no matter how much effort we expended in our athletic events nor, in Gilad’s case, how many girls he dated, we never shirked our studies. We helped each other like brothers in scholastics, training, and life events. We even combined our resources to buy a 1953 Chevy for \$150. This car provided us with more mobility and gave us a special sense of belonging in America. Few of our friends in Israel had cars at that time, so we were unique in that aspect of life as well.

Our 1953 Chevrolet





Yael at 8th month of pregnancy

One of the first track and field competitions early in September of 1964 was held at a local university in Elbert, Colorado. I amazed everyone, including myself, by throwing the discus 192 feet and 2½ inches. This distance broke both the Wyoming and the Israeli record, and was within 13 feet of the discus world record at that time.

*Should I follow my dream and go to Tokyo?
Or stay home with my wife and daughter?*



I was thrilled because now I had a second chance. A second chance to go to the Olympics, and a second chance to redeem myself after the poor showing I had in Rome. With a throw of this distance, I immediately qualified to represent Israel in the Tokyo Olympics in October 1964. It was a relief and a burden at the same time. This opportunity happens to only a few people in any country, and even fewer Israelis are given a chance like this.

There was only one problem; Yael was pregnant. This would not have been a problem except for the baby's due date, which was at about the same time as the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games. Needless to say, Yael was furious, and vehemently objected to me leaving for this competition. "What if she had the child while I was away?" she argued.

My tickets to Tokyo arrived with a departure date set for October 4, 1964. On that morning of October 4, 1964, Yael, who was living in Denver, went into labor. One of my school friends drove me to the hospital in Denver. Yael was already there, and ready to deliver the baby.

What a difficult choice I faced. I was supposed to catch a flight from Denver that night to Tokyo, and Yael was delivering our child. I was frantic, anxious, worried and perplexed. This was the most difficult choice I had ever encountered.

Yael in labor with Geffen Olympia Ariel





Gideon Ariel carrying the Israeli flag during the Opening Ceremony of the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1061>

Should I cancel my participation in the Olympic Games and stay with Yael? Or should I go to Tokyo for my last chance to compete in the Olympic Games, since I would never have another opportunity? Yael insisted that I stay. She begged and pleaded. I told her, "Please, Yael, understand that the discus has been my life. I received a scholarship in America because of this discus. I performed poorly in Rome and was criticized by everyone at the time. You and I will have long years together, but this is the last Olympics for me to compete. I must show my country that I can do better than I did in the last Olympics. I need to show Yariv and everyone who has supported me and believed in me that they were justified in their beliefs."

I realized that my choice had to be the Olympics. I had devoted my life to this activity. It had nurtured me throughout my childhood when only the belief in me by my mentors had given me hope, and it had given me a chance to study in the United States. It was an unfair choice, but one that I had

to make. In my heart and mind, I believed that Yael and our daughter would be lovingly cared for without my presence for the first two weeks. It was with these thoughts swirling in my head that I told her that I would have to go to Tokyo... but I would be back soon!

Yael was furious, but I felt a greater responsibility to the team and my country. I watched as my daughter's umbilical cord was cut, and left for the airport with tears in my eyes. I also left a message for Yael. "Please give our daughter whatever name you choose, but her middle name must be Olympia since I went to the Olympics on the day she was born." Yael named our daughter Geffen Olympia Ariel.

The Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games were the first Olympic Games to be held in Asia. The Olympic torch is ignited at the beginning of the Games, burns for the duration of the competitions, and is then extinguished after the last event has been completed. The Japanese athlete who carried the Olympic flame which was used to light the torch was Yoshinori Sakai.



Gideon Ariel participating in the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1062>

He had been chosen because he was born on August 6, 1945, the day the atomic bomb exploded in Hiroshima, as an homage to the victims and as a call for world peace. It was a fitting choice since the ancient Greeks had also stopped all wars and conflicts for the duration of their games.

But I was not enjoying a peaceful emotion as I marched into the Olympic stadium carrying the Israeli flag. I kept thinking that I had left my wife with our child alone in the hospital and anguished about the decision. Although I knew our friends, the Brodies, would take care of Yael and my daughter, it was not the same thing as having your husband and father around. I was unable to sleep at night, and could not concentrate during the discus practice sessions. As in Rome, emotions swirled and churned within me, and my throwing attempts fell well short of my previous performances. I felt such tremendous guilt about leaving my family at such a vulnerable stage. During the return trip to the U.S., I bought some souvenirs for Yael and my daughter. This was where my mind was. At the same time, I carried terrible guilt

for failing to perform well. So many of my friends and mentors had cared and placed their trust in me to represent the country well. I felt that I had failed them, as well.

After the Games, I returned to life at the University of Wyoming. Coach Walker helped me move my wife and daughter to student housing on campus. We could put our books and belongings down in a place called home. This was actually my first home.

Now that I lived in student housing with my wife and child, Gilad was alone in the dormitory. He came to my house every day and we still studied and trained together. But, at the end of the day, he always returned to the dorm room alone. I think my own domestic situation made him feel homesick for the close family lives that most Israelis have.

One day Gilad came to me at the end of practice and showed me two photos of two different girls whom he had dated in Israel, prior to coming to Wyoming. He told me, "Gideon, I am going back to Israel to get married. The problem is that I can't remember which of these two girls is the

one that has accepted my proposal. I have corresponded with Haya, but I can't remember which picture depicts her."

"Anyway, I am going to Israel to marry Haya," he said and "I am sure that she is in one of the two pictures. I will be happy either way." During the first school holiday break after this conversation, Gilad flew to Israel and married his beautiful wife, Haya. They are still married today.

When Gilad returned to Wyoming with Haya, we had a great time together at the university and with each other. My life had now expanded to include Gilad and Haya, and we were all enthralled with living in the States and with our success at school. Every day, Gilad and I continued to train and study hard. It was important that we maintained our scholarships and did well academically. We were both very dedicated to both issues.

Of course, money was extremely tight for both of our families. The university stipend for student-athletes was small. The money I received as part of my athletic scholarship at the university was \$15 per week and was inadequate for a family of three. Gilad and Haya were now the proud parents of a small son nearly the same age as my daughter.

Neither Yael nor Haya was able to work because of the ongoing problem with their visas. Visitor visas were for visiting only, not for working. Marital status had no effect on the visitor's ability to work. Therefore, Gilad and I had to supplement our meager athletic incomes with a variety of jobs. We moved furniture for a local company, cleaned cars, painted houses, and cleaned the gymnasium after basketball games.

Life for us had ups and downs, as with every married couple. Money was tight, and there were enormous linguistic and cultural barriers for all of us, even more so for Yael

With my daughter, Geffen Olympia, and my wife, Yael, after the Olympics in Tokyo





Yael, Geffen, and I at Camp JCC of Denver

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1066>

and Haya than for Gilad and me. In addition, our wives had young children to care for all day, while Gilad and I had our classes, training, and study demands. We were immersed in our jobs at the university and had few spare moments to spend in normal family life. In retrospect, it is easy to account for many of the problems that arose, but at that time there were frequent squabbles and arguments.

During each summer vacation, I worked at a Jewish summer camp in Elbert, Colorado. The camp's name was JCC (Jewish Community Center) of Denver. The first year I worked as a unit head and was assigned children ranging in age from 10 to 13 years. We had a variety of normal camp activities, as well as some that reinforced the values and content consistent with a Jewish theme. Of course, I concentrated on athletic events, which the kids loved. This was a beautiful environment in the mountains with nearby lakes. Yael, my wife, was the arts and craft director, and she taught all kinds of art skills, such as painting, clay modeling, and Israeli dancing. Thus, this summer work provided an opportunity to supplement our family income in a beautiful natural setting.

Each semester, the courses that I took were increasingly more scientific. One day, as I walked by the computer center, I was struck by the power of the university mainframe

computer. Most university projects were associated with oil drilling, since Wyoming had vast resources of petroleum. In fact, a large portion of the support for the athletic program was derived from oil royalties to the university. It was here that a small kernel of thought was planted with the nascent realization of the potential power of computers. I had not yet developed an idea for computer-assisted training programs, but I could envision the computer analyzing movements of all sorts.

I continued with ideas to enhance the fitness and strength for athletes. In the weight room, when a lifter wants to perform a bench press with a heavy weight, he needs two spotters. The purpose of the spotters is to assist the lifter with the weight in case he is unable to perform the exercise. Otherwise, the weight could crash down onto the athlete's chest and cause injury. Using spotters allows people to try to increase the amount they lift in a safe manner. I devised a mechanism to help in spotting movements with heavy weights, without having to interrupt two other people during their training, or for those times when no one else was in the weight room. The device I created employed posts on both sides of the bench with holes into which selector pins could be inserted. Then if the person lifting could not complete the



With my daughter Geffen Olympia Ariel, when young, and later in life

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1063>

exercise, there was no concern about dropping the weight, since the pins projecting out from the posts would prevent the weight from falling. This was one of the first selector systems for weights ever created. No one knew about this safety device other than the athletes who worked out in the weight room on a daily basis. I did not think of this invention as a product that could be bought and sold. All I knew was that it could help athletes lift heavy weights, safely, and free them from relying on spotters.

As older athletes who had both served in the army, Gilad and I were respected mentors to many of the younger team members. Although, in some cases, we were only three or

four years older, those age differences can make a difference, especially if you also served your country or performed in the Olympics. We were also more focused on our studies, since we had passed the “having fun and dating stage.” We now had eyes for a life beyond graduation, and the next logical step, getting into graduate school.

At the beginning of our senior year, we went to the book distribution center to receive our textbooks for the year. The student-athletes were given their books as part of the scholarship stipend. Most of our track and field friends, and Gilad and I arrived early to stand in line so that we could receive the newer books. Those students at the end of the line usu-

COWBOY TRACK STADIUM RECORDS

100	:09.6	Taylor Williams (Utah)	4/22/65
220	:21.8	Taylor Williams (Utah)	4/22/65
440	:48.6	Larry Stott (Utah)	4/22/65
880	1:55.3	Doug McDonald (Wyo.) vs. Utah	4/22/65
Mile	4:24.0	John Finlay (Wyo.) vs. Utah	4/22/65
2-Mile	10:05.4	John Finlay (Wyo.) vs. Utah	4/22/65
120 Highs	:14.4	Dennis Hall (Utah)	4/22/65
440 Int. Hdls.	:56.5	Walter Gibson (Denver)	5/ 1/64
Mile Relay	3:28.4	Wyoming (Harold Siek, Louis Pfrangle, George Mitcham, Tom Binning) vs. Denver	5/ 1/64
440 Relay	:41.4	Utah (Hall, Wells, Morgan, Williams)	4/22/65
Shot Put	50-10½	G. Ariel (Wyo.) vs. Denver	5/ 1/64
High Jump	6-3	Phil Napierskie (Wyo.) vs. Denver	5/ 1/64
		Bill DeVries (Utah)	4/22/65
Long Jump	25-1¼	C. Thomas (Wyo.) vs. Utah	4/22/65
Triple Jump	45-11¾	Judson Hart (Denver)	5/ 1/64
Javelin	178-½	Jim Crofts (Utah)	4/22/65
Pole Vault	14-1	John Snow (Utah)	4/22/65
Discus	170-11 ¾	G. Ariel (Wyo.) vs. Denver	5/ 1/64

ABOUT WYOMING

LOCATION: Laramie, Wyoming (Population: 19,000)

FOUNDED: 1886

PRESIDENT: Dr. John T. Fey

ENROLLMENT: 6,351

SCHOOL COLORS: Brown and Gold

NICKNAME: Cowboys, Pokes

FACULTY ATHLETIC REPRESENTATIVE: Dean Richard Kinder

ATHLETIC DIRECTOR: Glenn J. Jacoby

CONFERENCE: Western Athletic Conference

For additional information write, wire or phone:

BILL YOUNG

Sports Information Director

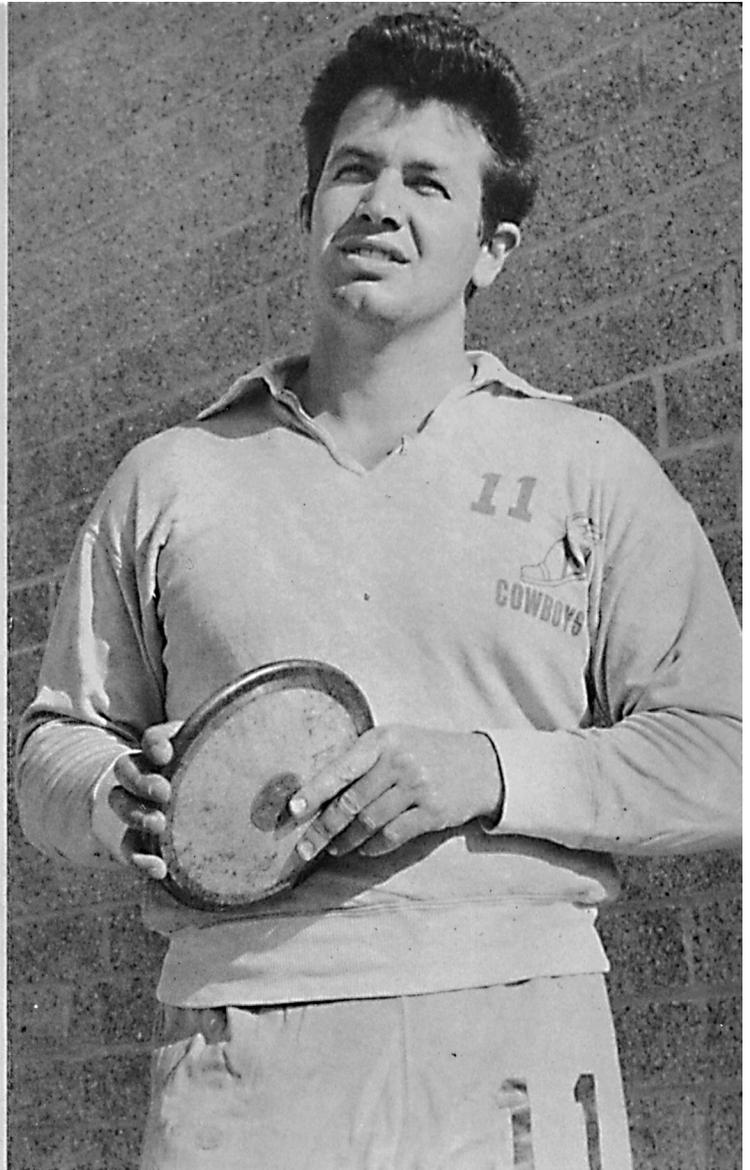
Memorial Fieldhouse

University of Wyoming

Laramie, Wyoming 82070

Phone: (AC 307) 742-2010 (Office)

745-4072 (Home)



Weightman Gideon Ariel



1966
WYOMING
TRACK



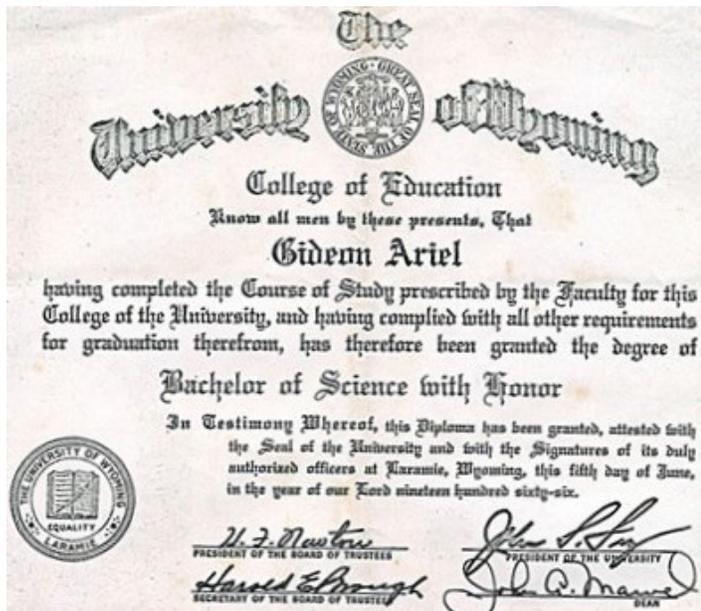
Staff photo of the JCC Camp, 1965

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1065>

ally had well-used books with writings in the margins and broken spines. Just when a faculty member arrived to hand out the books, all of the football team members swarmed into the room, pushing everyone out of the way, and stood at the head of the line. This line rearrangement was not met with any resistance. Since Gilad and I were at the front of the line, we refused to move and asked what the football players were doing. The answer shocked us. Football was the top sport, therefore, the players ranked first and received their textbooks first. Needless to say, this was a completely unacceptable answer to us. We refused to move and blocked anyone from receiving any of the textbooks. The irate football team sent a representative to the athletic director, Mr. Jacoby, who was at the top of the athletic pyramid. When he came to the room, Gilad and I explained the system and explained that this was inequitable. It should be, first come, first served, rather than receiving preferential treatment for football. Mr. Jacoby agreed and established the policy that the books were to be distributed according to the line. The first people in

the line were to receive their books first and there was to be no preference by sport. Following the cheers from the track and field athletes and all of the other minor sports members, the books were distributed. Gilad and I made sure that all of the people, who had been in line ahead of us, received their books before we collected ours. The football team members, as the last to arrive, collected the old, broken textbooks.

This was how I spent the three years of my undergraduate studies. I studied intensely, trained diligently, and traveled all over the western parts of the U.S. The states in the western part of America are much larger in size than those on the East Coast. The Western Athletic Conference, at that time, consisted of the University of Arizona, Arizona State University, Brigham Young University, the University of Utah, the University of New Mexico, and the University of Wyoming. Therefore, when the track athletes competed against these schools at their home locations, we would have to spend many long hours driving to and from the competitions. Gilad and I participated in these competitions



*Graduating with honors from
the University of Wyoming*

throughout the track and field season, which covered most of the spring semester. We were fortunate to see vast stretches of America as we drove from Wyoming, and we enjoyed every second of it.

One year, the competition in Las Cruces, New Mexico, happened to take place during the Jewish holiday of Passover. This holiday begins with a special meal, called the Seder, and is an extremely important event for Jews. It was not that Gilad and I were particularly religious, but the tradition and joy of the occasion, which is celebrated in a family and home setting, is something very special. As two Israeli fellows in America, we very much wanted to enjoy this celebratory meal, even if it meant that we were with people that were new to us. There is a special camaraderie among Jews on this day because of this event.

Of course, we knew no one in Las Cruces, so we decided to look for Ariel in the telephone directory. There were none. Next we look for Weingarten, and were surprised to find one. We called the number listed in the phone book and explained our situation to the man who answered the phone. Needless to say, the fellow was tentative about two strange men asking if they could come to his home for the Seder. He agreed to come to the university to meet us. When Mr. Weingarten arrived and discovered our legitimacy, he graciously invited us to enjoy the Seder with his family.

The next evening, scrubbed and happy, we went to Mr. Weingarten's house. During the Seder meal, the conversation turned to where people had come from, and how they got to where they were living. We related about our arrival at the

university in Laramie. There were about a dozen Weingarten family members and suddenly came the shocking discovery that one of the ladies was directly related to Gilad. Gilad's mother was this woman's cousin. There were tears of joy and immediate phone calls to Israel. Each of the family members had thought the other one had been killed in the Holocaust. It was a fantastically happy and joyful meal and the families are now reunited.

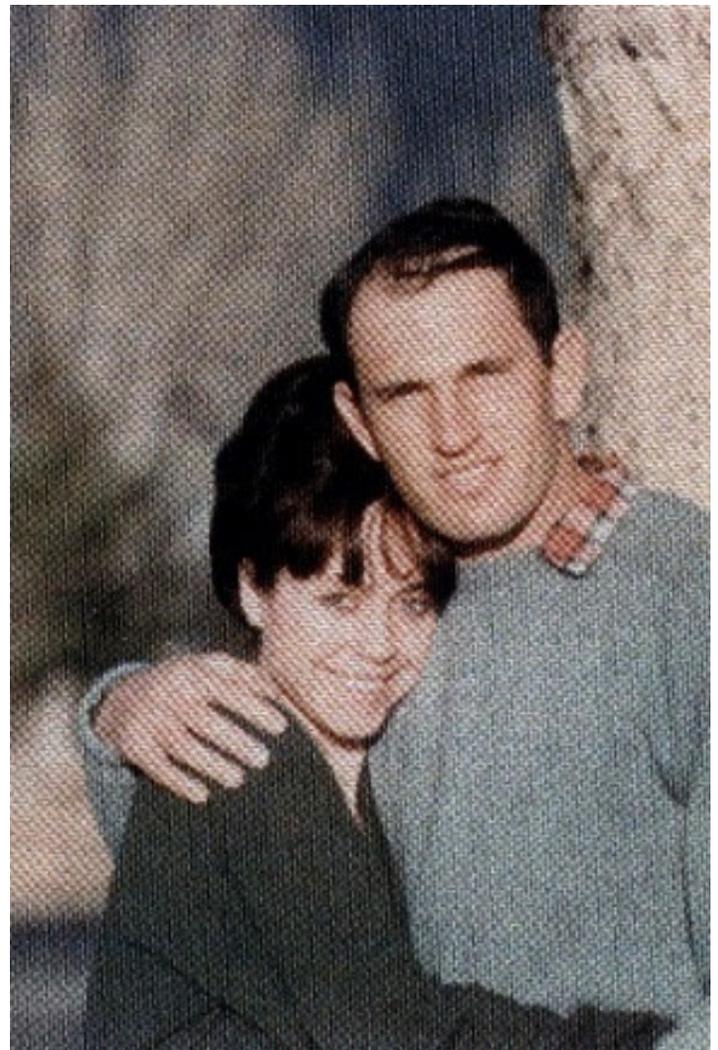
The next day, Gilad and I were again at the university competition, and returned to Wyoming with the knowledge that he had more family than he had previously realized.

Gilad and I were excellent students, and after four years of study, we were ready to graduate. Our hard work and diligent efforts had paid off since we earned our degrees with honors. From a maximum of 4.0, my grade point average was 3.8 and Gilad's was 3.9. Not only were we to receive our Bachelors of Science with Honors, but also, we were entitled



Gilad & Haya

<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1064>





*Ann, myself, and coach John Walker,
Laramie, Wyoming, 2015*
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1068>

to wear a special blue tassel and to sit on the dais during the presentation of degrees.

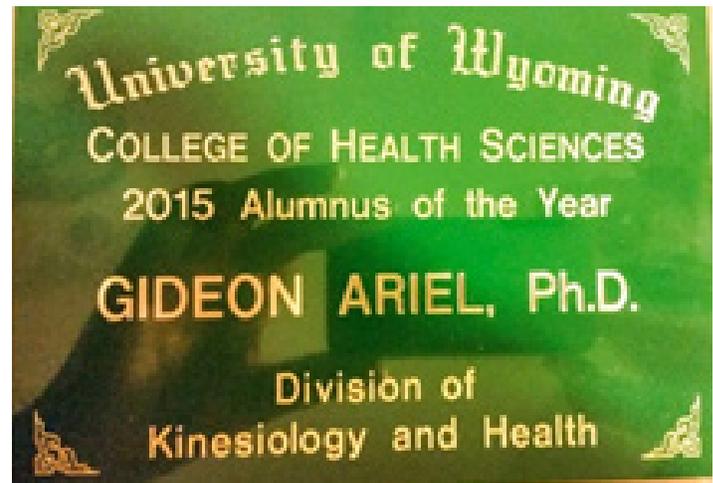
Several days before our graduation, we received our caps and gowns. Once again, we faced an American-made dilemma.

What were these dresses that they had given us to wear? I asked Gilad, “What do we wear under this gown?”

Gilad confidently answered, “Underwear, of course.”

On graduation day, we sat proudly on the dais, while the ceremonies and speeches went on around us. Suddenly, I noticed that the other men on the stage beside us, and the ones I could see in the graduating classes, had long pants under their gown. I furtively pointed this out to Gilad who sat next to me on the stage. Here were the only two members of the track and field team that were graduating with honors and from beneath our graduation gowns were bare legs above our white socks and black shoes. We struggled to pull the gowns down as far as they would stretch, but I doubt we fooled anyone who noticed our sartorial faux pas! Still, this clothing malfunction did nothing to deflect our joy, nor the success of our efforts.

At the ceremony, coach Walker gave a speech about how Gilad and I had performed and how far we had come since he had first met us. Our fellow teammates applauded us, and we were both extremely happy. Our wives in the audience beamed with pride as well. Even Geffen watched with great interest, as her father fiddled with his gown on the stage. I



*University of Wyoming College of Health
Sciences Achievement Award, 2015*
<http://arielnet.com/ref/go/1069>

remember thinking that, at the age of one and a half, she was not skilled in how to dress herself independently either!

Before our actual graduation, Gilad and I had discussed at length about where we would go to continue our education. I mailed at least 25 applications to various universities requesting an assistantship, so I would be able to continue my studies toward an M.S. Degree. Gilad was accepted at the University of Minnesota, since he had decided that psychology was the most interesting field of study. I was offered an assistantship at the University of Massachusetts, which I accepted since that school appeared to offer the greatest range of scientific options.

Following our June 1966 graduation, Gilad and Haya said goodbye, and left for Minnesota. I felt happy after four years of work, study, and athletics, and with a new life ahead of us, Yael and our daughter, Geffen, began the trip in our 1961 Plymouth from Laramie, Wyoming, to Amherst, Massachusetts.

We left those wonderful Rocky Mountains and drove east to settle in the Berkshires. The size of the mountains may have been different, however we began to encounter new peaks, not only for ourselves, but also, for the whole industry of athletic training.

Fifty years later, I returned to the University of Wyoming to receive their College of Health Science Achievement Award.

