

# Chaim Potok

February 17, 1929 - July 23, 2002

Condolences and Remembrances

via e-mail

*Condolences have come in to the website in the months following the death of Rabbi Chaim Potok. All of the condolences have been printed, placed in a folder, and given to Mrs. Adena Potok. Now, on the first anniversary of Potok's passing, the condolences are being made available to users of the website. To protect the privacy of the writers, only initials are used below.*

## Remembering Chaim Potok

Chaim Potok's readers soon recognize that he is writing about subjects that are very close to his own life and culture. Potok's personal experiences infuse the characters that he created. One such example is found in *The Book of Lights*. The Rabbi travels around Korea with the tablets of the law mounted on the front bumper of his jeep and then we discover in *Stars and Stripes* Potok posed with a similar jeep! In *The Chosen* much might be discerned about the relationship between Chaim Potok and his father.

In *The Chosen* Potok writes the story of two boys and their fathers. At that pivotal moment in *The Chosen*, Reb Saunders says, "Let my Daniel become a psychologist. I have no fear now. All his life he will be a tzaddik. He will be a tzaddik for the world. And the world needs a tzaddik." Reb Saunders had found a way to give up his dream for Danny and let him follow his own heart. Reb Saunders was able to abandon his own dream for Danny by finding an even larger vision for Danny. The relationship between Potok and his own father must have played a profound role in writing these wrenching passages, for Potok had to break with his father's vision for him and become his own man. Sadly, Potok's father did not live to see even the success that came from the publication of *The Chosen*.

The condolences that poured in to the website confirmed to me that what I had experienced in reading Potok's books, hearing him speak, and associating with him, were widely felt. Potok's father didn't live long enough to see the blessing that his writings would bring to millions of readers around the world. At the time of his death Rabbi Potok had become a "tzaddik for the world." And, the world needed a tzaddik!

William M. Allen

July 23, 2003

## Condolences

I was taught in the Nazarene faith/tradition. Part of my education was dramatically shaped by Chaim Potok. The book "The Chosen" was a vital element in my theological formation, as well as my biblical understanding.

I would love to be able to communicate this to the family of this man. Is there any means through which I may be able to do so?

I thank you in advance for any help or guidance in this regard.

Thank you,  
J S

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My deepest condolences to the family of Chaim Potok and to you and all who knew him. I was deeply saddened by the news of his death. Chaim Potok was the first writer who challenged me, both intellectually and morally. His writings, both fiction and non-fiction, made me question my thoughts on everything, made me wonder what meaning I gave to my life. They still make me question my views on Life and Death and I expect they always will. Without him, my view on the world would have been different, more shallow without a doubt.

I am saddened in two ways. Saddened by the death of this unique man, and also saddened by the thought that I will never read a new story of this writer. I was looking forward to the third Asher Lev novel, which I believe he still wanted to write. Is it strange to regret the loss of a novel that was never written, whilst a man's life is so much more precious? Strange it may be, but a writer is a time traveller; he crosses time and place and his writings - when they are as rich as Potok's - are here to stay, to challenge and enrich the lives of people perhaps not even born yet. With that in mind, I am not ashamed to say I regret the loss of the unborn Asher Lev novel; one only 'grieves for the unwritten novels of a truly great writer.

In 'The Chosen', Reuven's father says: 'A man must fill his life with meaning, meaning is not automatically given to life...A life filled with meaning is worthy of rest. I want to be worthy of rest when I am no longer here.'

Chaim Potok is certainly worthy of rest.  
May his writings go on inspiring and challenging us.

A D  
The Netherlands

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I just saw an announcement of Chaim Potok's death on The Jerusalem Post's website. I am sure his family will find your website comforting in the years to come.

Y S

I am so sorry that Chaim Potok passed away. He was an inspiration to me and, more than once, I felt that he knew my own story. He was wise, imaginative, and wrote to my heart. My condolences to his family. May each live a long life.

C G S  
Canada/Israel

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I always wanted to write to Chaim Potok letting him know how much I enjoyed and was inspired to become a Jew. Raised as a Catholic, I fell in love with a Jew and his writings made me yearn to become a Jew. Thanks.

J M

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I'm sure you're currently being deluged with e-mails on the passing of Rabbi Potok. If possible, please pass along my condolences to the family. I recently began reading Rabbi Potok's novels in the past year and he has quickly become one of my favorite writers and has helped changed and inform my feelings and thoughts on my faith and culture. His passing is a great loss but I will always be grateful for all that he has brought to me and thousands of others.

Regards,  
B W

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To the family of Rabbi Chaim Potok

Dear Sir, Dear Madam,

I have always found great pleasure in reading Chaim Potok's books. He offered me a view of a world which I would otherwise have hardly known and for which I am eternally grateful.

I am not Jewish myself, so it was intriguing for me to learn about another culture from his books. They taught me a great deal about Jewish culture which I would otherwise probably not have known. At the same time his books are fundamentally universal, relating of themes such as friendship and the (non) adherence to tradition with the ensuing generational conflicts. I shall continue to read his books with great joy. Chaim Potok is undoubtedly one of the best authors whose books it has ever been my privilege to read.

I offer you my sincere condolences with your loss and remain,

yours sincerely,  
M D  
(Belgium)

The world mourns the passing of a truly great man of God, whose literary works brought understanding to people of all faiths. His presence was a great gift to us and to future generations.

A P

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I don't know if this is the right place to say this but I had to pay my respects to the familie and friends of rabbi Chaim Potok.

Yesterday I heard the news as I was about to go to bed. I couldn't sleep the first hours. The work of rabbi Potok ment more to me than I can explain in words. He made me look at the world differently. He made me understand the people surrounding me although I am not jewish (I was brought up in a conservative christian church).

At that time I didn't want to be a christian any more because of the horrible things 'they' did in the world for such a long time. After reading Davita's hart I realised I had the chance to do it differently.

I am thankful for the things he left behind.

With regards,  
T B  
Rinsumageest (The Netherlands)

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I wondered if there were a book to sign, to send a message of love at his passing?

A A

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Dear Mr. Allen,

As a great admirer of Chaim Potok's writings - and his soul - thank you for your website.

I know that he is mourned not only by Jews, but by all people of faith who seek to build bridges between commitment to a religious tradition and openness to the world.

I am a Catholic priest, and I will be celebrating Mass tomorrow for Chaim's eternal rest. As someone who was deeply inspired (as I was, later) by Evelyn Waugh's Brideshead Revisited, I am sure he would not object.

Thank you for your most fascinating website - I was able to come across articles I had never found before, most preciously Mr. Potok's commentary on his own writings.

With many thanks,  
Rev. R L  
Montreal, Canada

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I wish to say how sad I am to hear of Rabbi Potok's passing. The first book I read of his was *In the Beginning*. It was one of the newest books in my high school library. After that I sought out all of his books. I actually thought I was one of the few people to read his work. I didn't even know how to pronounce his name at the time. I think his books connected with anyone going against the grain, and made you feel you still an important part of the world around you. I am so grateful I picked a book by its cover that day.

K J

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Mrs. Potok,

I was saddened to hear of your husband's passing. He has been my favorite author for many years. I am a Jew by choice, and much of the culture and faith I have learned from your husband's wonderful writings. Now, my daughter shares my love of his work and I am certain she too will pass it on to her children someday. His work and brilliance and love of Judaism will live on for all generations. My thoughts and prayers are with you and your children at this sad time.

L E

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I was so sad to hear Rabbi Chaim Potok died Tuesday. I was introduced to him by my favorite English teacher, Mrs. Jacobs, way back in 1967. Of all his books, I still think I like "The Chosen" best though the Asher Lev books come closely behind. I recently bought a copy of "Wanderings" and now will read it with a bit of sadness because the rabbi is no longer with us. Still, I am glad for all the wonderful books he left behind.

I had written Rabbi Potok an Email asking him if he'd consider writing an update to "The Chosen" and I didn't hear back from him. I figured he was really busy and I was just a reader of no great importance or stature. I certainly did NOT know he was fighting brain cancer and I feel absolutely tiny for being upset that he didn't respond to my Email.

Anyway, please send my condolences to Mrs. Potok and the rabbi's family. I'm Roman Catholic myself but it was directly from re-reading "The Chosen" and "The Promise" that I became really interested in Judaism. And for that, I am eternally grateful and thankful. I hope the rabbi didn't suffer too much; I know brain cancer can be nasty but he would not have wanted to suffer, nor did he ever deserve to. And now he's up in heaven with my mother (she died 11 years ago) and I hope they are getting acquainted. Sincerely, Rosemary E. L L E, NJ

PS - thank you for letting us send Email condolences to the family. Please let them know how glad we are Rabbi Potok took up writing. He gave a wonderful gift to millions of people ... the Gift of Chaim Potok.

R L

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I remember pulling a book from the library shelf in my high school in El Paso, Texas when I was 15 years old. The name of the book was My name is Asher Lev. My next memory is a few days later, sitting in the gym, up in the bleachers, with tears streaming down my face as I finished the book. I had never had a book impact me so intensely or grip my soul for my entire life.

I am now in my 40's and have continued to read each of Rabbi Potok's books (several times of course), marveling at the atmospheres he creates, the tension and beauty within each story and the magical way he teaches about life and the joys, triumphs and tragedies along the way. I once was drawn to simply dissect his sentences, just to try and understand how a few words of his could make such an impact where other authors would need an entire book.

While my life has been blessed and enriched by knowing his works, my heartfelt thoughts and prayers are with his family, friends, and colleagues with whom he shared every day life. The Lord be with you as you go through this time of mourning.

J L

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Dear Mrs. Potok,

Please accept my most heart felt condolences for the death of your husband. I am sure you already realize what a truly gifted person he was. It is not easy to reach across cultural & religious barriers forged over thousands of years, yet Rabbi Potok's literary and social works did exactly that. I myself and many of my former alumni are a testament to the power of his words. As a teenager I had little to no exposure to anyone of the Jewish faith, however as a Junior at the all boys Catholic Prep School, I was required to read the novel My Name Is Asher Lev. From reading this book and the interest it sparked in other Jewish writers, I was able to form a lasting respect and appreciation for the enduring culture of the Jewish people. I feel that books such as those written by Chaim Potok allow us a glimpse into cultures that are very different from our own yet remain an integral part of our society. It is terrible that so many people, Jewish, Christian or Muslim, see only the differences between us yet are blinded to the most unifying truth our people cling to, the eternal presence of God in our lives. The words of men like Chaim Potok are a testament that that truth can give sight to those who desire it; may this truth grant him access to the eternal grace of God. May God richly bless you in your time of need.

Sincerely,  
J C

Dear Mrs. Potok,

My family grieves with yours at the loss of your husband. Rabbi Potok's work comes from a soul that we have come to love dearly—as one loves a teacher, a friend, a father. My wife and I will raise our young children with a changed perspective because of these books. Our thanks and prayers are with you.

Sincerely,  
C S  
J S

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My heart fell a little when I read today of Mr. Potok's passing. I have been proud for years to call him one of my most favorite authors. Through his books I saw worlds and lives I knew little or nothing about. They fostered a deep interest in me of Judaism and Jewish culture. I feel that his books will always be special for me, and hope they will have the same impact in the lives of my children. I regret the loss of this great person, and will hold to the legacy he has left in his writings. My deepest sympathies and wishes to his family.

Thank you,  
M C— Salt Lake City, Utah

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Mrs. Potok,

My heart goes out to you and family and friends at this time. Although I only knew Chaim Potok through his literary works, he made an impression on my heart and soul that I will carry with me and that will continue to inspire me forever.

My Name is Asher Lev and Davita's Harp moved me in particular ways. I had always hoped to find my way to a reading and tell him in person how thankful I am that he became an artist and sustained the courage to put forth his voice out into the world.

Writer Allen Ginsberg once wrote "human seraphim". That special complement comes to my mind. It appears to me that your husband was "human seraphim". I wish you and your family all of the health and happiness in the world.

Sincerely,  
T G  
Buffalo, NY

Dear Mrs. Potak,

I heard on the news the other day of your husband's death. I had never met him, but was sad to hear of his death and somewhat puzzled as to the depth of the feeling. It occurred to me later that one of the reasons was that I had read *The Chosen* many years ago and was moved by the story. More importantly, the story awakened in me my desire for living and working in the academy — the love of scholarship and learning. The characters in the story represented to me the passion for learning, for knowledge, and for truth as well as the inevitable tragic aspects that accompany living out this passion. The story crystallized for me all of this and I naturally went on to read everyone of your husband's novels.

So, I like to think of my little sense of sadness as a way of honoring the writer who can touch and move people. I hope this brings some small moment of comfort in the midst of loss and mourning.

Peace,  
R L

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Chaim Potok opened my world and made me think in new ways. I am forever appreciative.

C H  
Melbourne, Australia

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He will live forever in his books. He will be with us forever.

L

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...e un profondo ringraziamento. Con i tuoi libri ho imparato ad apprezzare gli ebrei, miei fratelli nella Fede, ma ho anche approfondito la mia stessa radice religiosa. Mi mancherai molto!

A

My deepest sympathies for your loss. And I thank you because I must assume that you, who have shared so many years with Mr. Potok, have had a great deal of influence in the life of this man and his work that have so enriched my life. Reading his books is like observing a master sculptor

I am a relatively new fan of Mr. Potok's work as only a few years have passed since I stumbled across "*The Chosen*". And I am forever changed.

T U

My deepest condolences to the Potok family at this time.

F W

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I would like to share with the family how sad I am for your loss and how glad I am that Chaim Potok lived. Since my teenage years he has been one of my favorite writers. My Name is Asher Lev stood on my shelf as bent and beat up as Keourac, Joyce Johnson, Judy Blume, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Tom Robbins to name a few. His books fulfilled a questioning for me about my upbringing in the Orthodox Jewish World. I grew up with many unanswered questions and I could look to My Name is Asher Lev for a friend and understanding of this growing conflict. I have read many of his books and soon will buy the children's books for my children. However, there was something special for me in My Name is Asher Lev that brings me to reread the book over and over throughout my life thus far.

This may sound corny but truly there are no words to describe how much your father and husband touched my life through his writings. I mourn his death and praise his life and most of all his creativity.

Thank you and all my best wishes to you!!

S G

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Enschede The Netherlands 26/7/2002

Dear Mrs Potok,  
I love the books of your husband and the humanity that he put in them.  
I am sorry for your loss.  
May The Almighty be with you.

W K

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Dear family and friends of Chaim Potok,

my first introduction to the Jewish religion and culture was through the breathtaking story The Chosen. After this book, I couldn't not read the other novels of Chaim Potok's hand.

My deepest sympathy to all of you. The world has lost a good writer, but you have lost so much more. May God be with you.

K H, The Netherlands

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We were avid readers of Chaim Potok's novels as a youth and are sorry to hear of his passing. Our condolences to his sister, Bella Sovolofkly, a fellow RJC congregant!

E and E S

Mrs. Potok,

My deepest condolences on the death of your husband. His novel "My Name is Asher Lev" has had the deepest effect on me over the years as I have tried to reconcile my faith with my art. I don't think that anything I've read has impacted in the way that "Asher Lev" has. I was always so amazed at his ability to create characters that I could so easily relate to. I am deeply indebted to his life's work and of course to yours as well.

the LORD giveth and the LORD taketh away.  
Blessed be the Name of the LORD!

blessings to you  
b

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I was dismayed to learn of Rabbi Potok's death. I read The Chosen as a teenager, and as a South Florida protestant, it opened my eyes to a world that was not my own. I devoured several additional books (The Promise and My name is Asher Lev) and have purchased others at times when I sought some reading for relaxation or enlightenment. I own Wanderings and refer to it often. This past Christmas, my daughter found a copy of The Gift of Asher Lev on the net and gifted it to me. I have introduced her to the writings and hope that she will enjoy them and learn from them as much as I.

I felt fortunate to hear a rebroadcast of a 1987 interview on Fresh Air yesterday while traveling. Hearing the author speak personally of his growth and development offered more enlightenment into the meaning of his works. I am saddened to have this reason to reread and relish the craft that Chaim Potok brought to us. My heartfelt condolences go out to you and your family at this time of sorrow.

Sincerely  
J C

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Mr Potok's books have inspired me how to deal with and how to understand people with different backgrounds than myself.

I want to thank him that and for all these hours in silent, reading the books.

My condolences to Mrs. Potok.

S H

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My comndolences to the death of Chaim Potok.

I am a German immigrant to Canada. I am a retired Gynaecologist. My wife was Jewish.

I read the "Chosen" in December 2001. It was my first Potok. In February 2002 I had aneurysm surgery which went well.

However, I had a series of life-threatening complications following the

surgery. Reading more of Potok's books kept my sanity during the days of inability to sleep and pain. I am very grateful for the reading I was able to do. I loved the book on the refuseniks.

I shall remember Potok with gratitude.

W S

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I would like to express my deepest regret and feelings to the family of Mr. Potok. I was shocked at hearing of his death. Only knowing Mr. Potok's books since 1995 I have been a great fan of all his work.

I want to wish his family all the strength and support they can use in dealing with this loss. My thoughts are with you.

Best wishes,  
M, the Netherlands

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Mrs. Potok and family,

I am a Christian from Texas, and Mr. Potok is my favorite author. I have every single one of his books. He made me see how close God is with his writings. I will miss him greatly. I'm very sorry for your loss.

D M

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Partecipo personalmente al lutto che ha colpito la Signora Adena Potok e i suoi famigliari.

Piango la perdita di uno stimato partner di pensiero che desideravo fortemente conoscere di persona.

P C

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With sadness, I learned that Chaim died this week.

I read with great pleasure his books translated in Dutch. I do know little about the author unless through his books but his books are my friends forever...

E

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Our Condolences to Mrs. Potok. My wife and I have been readers of Chaim's works for years. And when I was in seminary in Kansas City, in the early 80's, I attended a presentation by Chaim at a local Synagogue. I still have a recording of that talk. He has greatly influenced my thinking and understanding of the relationship of faith and "secular" life, he has been a blessing to me and my wife.

You are in our thoughts and prayers.

M D

The world has lost a great man. May his memory be a blessing.

B S

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I first read *The Chosen* in the early 1970s. I awaited each new novel with great anticipation. My condolences go out to his family and friends.

P L

Een herinnering in liefde is een herinnering voor altijd.

Dank voor al uw prachtige boeken.

J G

The Netherlands

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The first book I read by Chaim Potok was *My Name is Asher Lev*. This book helped me navigate through my teen years in the 1980's.

Just this winter I read *The Gift of Asher Lev*. Again, I found strength to navigate through a difficult patch—this time a divorce.

I promised myself that I would one day meet Potok the rabbi, scholar, father, husband, artist and friend.

Perhaps my reading and rereading of his works this year was the meeting I desired.

May your family's grief be tempered with joy.

And thank you, Chaim Potok, for being a part of my life.

Love and Light

M H

African-American

P T

Daughter

Sister

Friend

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Dear Mrs. Potok:

I have been enriched by your husband's writings. My truest condolences on your loss.

J G

Elmhurst, Illinois

I was saddened by the death of Chaim Potok because he brought so much pleasure and joy into my life through his writing. The world and more personally the United States has lost a great artist. Mr. Potok taught me so much. I grew up in Brooklyn but never knew what was really going on in the Jewish community. I loved *The Chosen*, *The Promise*, *My Name is Asher Lev*, *The Gift of Asher Lev* and my favorite, *Davita's Harp*. I wish the world did not have to lose such a great artist.

L W

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You're welcome. I read "The Chosen" almost by accident one year, and have since read all of the novels. Time to start on the rest, I guess. As I told my lady friend, who first told me that she saw the notice of his death online, some people should not be allowed to die. Potok wrote universal truths and merely set them in the worlds of his own youth.

G L

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Mrs. Potok and family,  
I am a Christian from Texas, and Mr. Potok is my favorite author. I have every single one of his books. He made me see how close God is with his writings. I will miss him greatly. I'm very sorry for your loss.

D M

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Partecipo personalmente al lutto che ha colpito la Signora Adena Potok e i suoi famigliari.  
Piango la perdita di uno stimato partner di pensiero che desideravo fortemente conoscere di persona.

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You are in our thoughts and prayers. The world has lost a great man. May his memory be a blessing.

B S

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PL

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Dank voor al uw prachtige boeken.

J G  
The Netherlands

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I promised myself that I would one day meet Potok the rabbi, scholar, father, husband, artist and friend.

Perhaps my reading and rereading of his works this year was the meeting I desired.

May your family's grief be tempered with joy.

And thank you, Chaim Potok, for being a part of my life.

Love and Light  
M H

Dear Mrs. Potok:

I have been enriched by your husband's writings. My truest condolences on your loss.

J G  
Illinois

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Mrs Potok,

From the first time I read a Chaim Potok novel (The Chosen) as a sixteen year old high school student, I was captivated. I began to read his other novels as I was able to get my hands on them and fell in love with his lyrical writing style. My Name is Asher Lev became my all time favourite novel, even above my entire collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy novels, and gradually my collection has grown to be fairly complete. Once I even tried to read Wanderings from cover to cover but I think that was a bit ambitious.

When I read news of his death today in a magazine I was saddened to think that his writing has now come to an end. However, I think this will serve to make re-reading his existing works an even more precious experience. I trust that this knowledge will help to lessen your grief at this time, even if only by a little. I have many favourite authors (as a professional librarian this is somewhat of an occupational hazard), but none come close to the respect and affection in which I hold Chaim Potok.

Please accept my condolences for your loss at this time,

M M  
Brisbane, Australia

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Chaim Potok's writing has given my faith more meaning. I, like his characters, live the questions, knowing in deep inner places that this is truth-ful living.

He will be missed. May everlasting light rest upon him and give him peace. Now and forever... Amen, Amen

Shalom, N, Australia

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Dear mrs. Potok,

I'm a jewish girl who lives in Holland and I want to send you my condoleances for the loss of your great husband. I loved him so much, even though I didn't really know him off course, only because of his wonderful books. And thru his books he really helped me going thru a difficult time.. I wish you all the strengt and luck to pass this stage in your life...May hashem stand by you. But we may off course never forget the most wonderful man on the world..Chaim Potok, a true legend..

With all my love and regards  
zichrono livracha.  
P P Amsterdam

I just wish to thank Chaïm Potok for some of the most wonderful and moving novels I've ever read, for the ideas he let us shared with him. He will definitively will survive through his words all around the world.

H, from France

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I guess that I am late again.

Only a few weeks ago, I wanted to send an email to Mr. Potok to thank him for his work.

I am the grand- and grand-grand-daughter of European Jews who gave up their religion. I therefore wasn't raised in any tradition, neither orthodox nor "lite".

I wanted to thank Mr. Potok for everything I learned about my roots through his books. And for making me realize that I already carried so much of them in me, even unconsciously.

My most grateful thanks to him and my respects to Mrs. Potok.

S U

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Hello,

Attached please find a poem that I wrote for Chaim Potok upon hearing of his passing. I'm sorry, I don't know how to express condolences except in this way. This is the saddest news I've heard in months.

P K

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Dear Mrs. Potok,

I, like millions of your husband's fans, will miss his work terribly. His novels made me so incredibly proud to be Jewish, and motivated me to learn, learn, and keep learning Torah.

With sympathy,

L B

I humbly offer my condolences to the family and friends of Rabbi Potok. His writings have opened my eyes to a culture and viewpoint I would most likely have never thought to explore. His ability to convey feelings and emotions with words made me look at art as something dynamic and a gift from within the artist. I gained compassion and tolerance for those who may not share my point of view through reading his fiction and nonfiction work. I am truly sorry for his passing. I am afraid my world has been made a little bit smaller with his parting. But that can never outweigh how much bigger AND better it has been made by his presence. May God grant you comfort in your time of sorrow.

Respectfully,

J E

L M, lettrice grata di molti romanzi, porge condoglianze e preghiere

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I am greatly saddened by the sudden departure of Chaim Potok, a great author and an unforgettable friend.

I fondly remember the meetings we have had over the last ten years, full of spirited conversation, combined with several visits to the Museum of Modern Art in Amsterdam - a city he greatly loved - and several in-depth interviews about his work and his philosophy of life.

In his person he matched in a unique way a great sense of tradition with a sharp awareness of modernity, epitomised in his statement: "...for thinking people, Jew or non-Jew, I don't think it is possible to think this world anymore without thinking Holocaust."

Through his novels he endeared himself to millions of readers world-wide and earned himself a lasting place in the canon of Jewish-American literature.

My profound sympathies extend to his wife, Adena, who throughout the years of hardship first and fame later has been a great source of support and true partnership, and to the Potok family.

May they find some comfort in the thought that Chaim Potok's work, including his paintings, will always be remembered.

M B

('my Dutch critic' as Chaim was fond of saying)

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Hello. I just wanted to extend my condolences to the Potok family for the loss of Mr. Chaim Potok. I read most of his novels, and enjoyed them tremendously. His stories resonated with me, especially his search for individual truth among collective history. His contributions will be remembered and celebrated.

I am sorry for your loss.

Sincerely,

C S

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Mrs Potok,

I want to give you my condolences for your loss.

Chaim Potok was, or better is, my favorite writer.

He allways will be.

Anyway, I want to wish you strength in these sad times.

Regards,

N E-H

(from the Netherlands)

I hope you will forgive me, for my bad english.

Dear Mrs. Potok,

Hereby I want to send you my condolences. And wish you a lot of strenght.

I have met your daughter Naama years ago, we have met in Amsterdam, and also in Jerusalem.

Unfortunately we lost contact, but I would be very happy to speak to her again, and also to send her my condolences.

Maybe it is possible to give her my address and email address so we could be in contact again.

My name: P L

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That you may not know any grieve anymore.

P

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Dear Mrs. Potok,

I'm sorry for the loss of your beloved husband. Please accept my deepest condolences. I read "The Chosen" in my early twenties and it impacted me tremendously. Whenever I've been asked who my favorite author is, I've always replied Chaim Potok and, of course, the book "The Chosen". Thank you for sharing your husband with the world.

May your loving memories bring you comfort and peace through this difficult time.

Sincerely,  
C Y

---

I am writing to extend my condolences to Mrs. Potok and to honor the memory of Rabbi Potok. Although I am not Jewish, his books have had a profound influence on my life. I was blessed to have heard Rabbi Potok speak at a Jewish Community Center in Norfolk, VA when I was in high school (late 80's). When I applied to the University of Notre Dame, I wrote an essay for admissions about The Promise describing it as the most influential fictional book in my life.

After seeking to become a Catholic priest for many years, I have found peace in a secular life and now am pursuing a graduate education in psychology, inspiring mostly by a desire to help those in mental need, but also from the inspiration I received while growing up from books like The Chosen and The Promise.

Rabbi Potok has truly been a blessing in my life, and I wanted to thank and honor him and his wife for their contribution to making a better world.

Sincerely,  
M M

Hi,

I was telling my friend about his work and found this web page. I was shocked and sad to learn his passed. I loved and respect his writing. I am deaf and grew up not very religious home. I had trouble understand why I am different from the others until I read his books. His stories had help me understand my identity and feel better with who I am as a Jewish person. Davita Harp was my favorite because it helped me to have compassion of my father (he passed away in late 70's and his father was underground Marxist) I am very grateful for his writing and I will miss him dearly.

B M

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Mrs Adena Potok,

My sympathy at the death of your husband and friend.

I am a compulsive reader of fiction, an informal student of theology and woman trying to live an authentic life of faith in a religious tradition beset by clericalism, conservatism and misogyny. I am also an oddity in my family of origin, none of whom share these passions. As well, it seems my great-grandmother's family denied their Judaism to protect themselves against a life of prejudice.

The books your husband wrote informed my understanding of faith, courageous inquiry and intellectual honesty, respect for tradition and obligation to live by a living tradition. He set me on my path of inquiry into Judaism, and welcomed me into a sense of shared origins in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Thank you for sharing your husband with his readers. The world is a richer place for his life among us.

My prayers for your consolation,  
V W

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I was 3/4 through Wanderings when I heard of Mr. Potok's death. I, a 73 year old non-Jew and non-Christian, am deeply saddened to realize that there will be no more Chaim Potok writings.

I first read My Name is Asher Lev many years ago and since then have read and re-read all of Mr. Potok's works of fiction many times. His books, along with The Fountainhead, have changed my life - for the better, I think.

Mr. Potok is already greatly missed.

B H  
Warne, North Carolina

Debra, [FORWARDED]

I hadn't heard that Chaim Potok died. What a tragedy for the literary and philosophical world. I did teach a class this summer in July. I once again required the class to read his Zebra and other stories. The response was so positive; he seems to reach into the souls of those who listen! I asked the students at the end of the class to write an evaluation of the class, including the selection of books I asked them to read. ( they fill out an evaluation of my class for the department, but I wanted a different type of evaluation- -one in which they could feel free to talk about the requirements, the readings etc. Even though the evaluation was voluntary, 98% resonded. They overwhelmingly loved POTOK. In fact, most wished we could have spent more time discussing his stories.

I think I will re re-read his novels, just to feel in touch with him in some way. I read Asher Lev last October and loved it more the second time I read it. Do you find that true yourself? That you enjoy some novels more the second time around? I think that is a testimony to Potok's greatness as a writer; readers can always find something new and wonderfully human in his works.

Thanks for letting me know about Potok's demise- -what a sad day for all of us.

S

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In 1969, my aunt and uncle, gentiles (as I am) heard about three small Jewish children who were up for adoption in Dallas, Texas. To the surprise of the adoption agency, they wanted to adopt all three of them, ages 4, 9, and 10.

The adoption went through, and they began the task of raising them. In 1972, I picked up a copy of "My Name is Asher Lev," one of the most profound—and powerful books I have ever read. After finishing it, I gave it to my aunt and uncle to read. While no doubt other forces were also at work, I believe Potok's novel played a large part in my aunt and uncle's decision to abandon the idea of rearing their children as Christians and instead give them the opportunity of preserving their Jewish heritage. They enrolled the children in private Jewish Orthodox academies in both Dallas, and later, Atlanta. As much as possible they tried to keep their home steeped in the Jewish traditions. All three of these children are grown, and are making their way in life, their Jewish heritage intact.

I was quite saddened to hear of Mr. Potok's passing. His writing sang to me on every page, more song than prose. The world is going to be a poorer place without Chaim Potok in it, but his words will live on forever, I suspect.

E P

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About 6 years ago, a friend sent me a copy of "The Gift of Asher Lev" insisting that I read it. I was captured at once, as she knew I would be, by Rabbi Potok's great gift to humanity, his writings. Since then I have devoured the majority of his stories. He expanded my cultural understandings and opened my mind and heart to questions. I waited in

expectation for completion of the Asher Lev trilogy.

I am deeply saddened by the knowledge that there will be no new words to read, but filled with joy and wonder by those words he has left us to ponder again and again. My deepest condolences to his family.

Sincerely,  
W M

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I would like to offer my condolences to Rabbi Potok's family and friends. As a gentile I learned most of what I am privileged to know about the Jewish Faith from the writings of Rabbi Potok. It inspires me know more and to hold Jewish people in high regard.

B S

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I extend my condolences to Mrs. Potok, and the entire Potok family. It seems just yesterday that I first found *The Chosen* on a bookstore shelf, in 1968. From those first words, I was transported, captivated, entranced. Through all these years, as I read and enjoyed each new book as it appeared, I returned to the older ones again and again, discovering fresh wisdom and subtle nuances.

I was re-reading Davita's *Harp* the day I heard of Mr. Potok's death. I felt as though I had lost someone so dear and close to me, a friend I had never actually met. It seemed to me that a great light had been extinguished, that a cherished voice had been stilled forever, that a man of tremendous understanding, passion, and insight was simply gone. But today as I took all his writings down from my shelves to reminisce about the first time I read each one, I realized that for untold generations of readers and dreamers he is eternal in the way that God intended. I realized that the joy and pain and truth in his words will never die.

For his family, it is the myriad of intimacies and humor and shared love that we the readers can never know, that will make this passing so terrible. No one can really understand your mourning, your tears. I can only say that I truly regret this loss you have suffered. The world has lost a gentleman and a scholar.

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Dear Ms Potok,

I was stunned to hear that your husband had died. Your husband's writings have brought me great joy I often re read his books as I always get something more out of them.

I can remember reading "The Gift of Asher Lev" during a wonderful train journey going through the South of France ... every time I re read that book it reminds me of that time.

His books have taught me so much about the Jewish people and faith than any other source of information and in my opinion help create for me a greater understanding and tolerance for all peoples.

My thoughts are with you at this time,

A F-B

Stafford Brisbane  
Qld Australia.

One of my greatest memories as a teacher revolves around Rabbi Potok. I had previously corresponded with him via e-mail and knew he was diligent in responding to questions. Last year, in a grade eleven English class, one of my students had a question about Asher Lev. I was unsure of the answer and suggested the student e-mail Rabbi Potok the question. The student and I went to the back of the room, logged onto my e-mail account and the student sent his question. I will never forget his reaction when, the very next morning, I read to the entire class the answer.

What a delight that a man such as Rabbi Potok would, take the time out of his busy schedule to answer the question of a Canadian high school student. I think few writers would do so.

Blessings and peace be with the Potok family

D G  
Stettler, Alberta, Canada

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Dear Mrs Potok,

I really want to express my condolences with the loss of your husband and to the family with the loss of a very special man. I think I have read most of the books he wrote and I am sorry that there won't be any more. I remember him as the author that gave me some light on the Jewish way of life. I encourage my daughters to read his books, because they are important to understand what is happening in these days. I wish you and your family strength and God's blessings for the next period in your life without him.

S D-C  
's-Hertogenbosch  
The Netherlands

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Chaim Potok's work has blessed me for the past twenty-one years. I lost track of how many times I have read "The Chosen." As a Christian clergyman, I am indebted to Chaim Potok for his luminous insight and wisdom. Thank you, G-d, for giving us Chaim Potok!

D E  
Long Island City, New York

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Hello Mrs. Potok

I am one of untold numbers of Chaim Potok fans. Such a gift his writings have been. My goddaughters are Jewish and I am fascinated by Jewish culture. Because of his books, I drink tea from a special glass.

I can't imagine what a loss it must be for you. Forty-four years together is almost forever. My thoughts and prayers are with you in your grief and during this gigantic transition time.  
Peace,  
M M

To Potok Family,

The world has lost a great author...a great man. I am so sorry for your loss and for our world's loss.

T S

---

Never having read Rabbi Potok's work, after hearing the report of his passing and the replay of an interview with Terri Gross, I immersed myself in *The Chosen* and then *The Promise*. I cannot praise the man and his work better than has already been done, but I wanted to express my sadness that we have lost him. Once inside Reuven's world, I don't want to leave it.

L W  
Nashville, Tennessee

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Dear Mrs. Potok,  
I was very sorry to learn from the newspapers of the death of your husband. The death of one's husband is a difficult and painful experience for all of us, for he is a person who played a unique role in one's life and only the passing of time can help us adjust. A voice which was familiar is silent now. A person who was there always, is gone now; everywhere there are signs of his life, his thoughts, his pictures and reminders which make us think of him and make us believe that he is still with us. Your husband once wrote: "I go where the truth leads me." I believe that in the end he has found the right way. His stories are the best for me I have ever read.

With all good wishes to you and your family at this difficult time.

L Z, Hamburg

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My Dear Mrs Potok,

First of all I apologize for my English. I hope to be able to describe all my love and devotion for your husband's works. He was, and remains, my favourite writer. No other writer was able to make me feel so involved in a plot and a story. I am a journalist, 43 aged and works in Bologna -northern Italy. I have been learning through your husband's books an unknown and wonderful world: those of the Jewish/Yiddish traditions and history. I have not any particular religious inclination: but if I'd have one it will be Judaism. Please have all my love and affection.

A M

Dear Mrs. Potok:

I was greatly shocked and saddened by the news of the loss of my favorite writer and your husband, Chaim Potok.

I discovered Rabbi Potok's writing 12 years ago, and each novel has touched me in a different way. As a Native American (Navajo/Pueblo Indian), I was raised about as far away from the Jewish religion and culture as anyone could be. Yet, I can identify with the situations encountered by Asher Lev, Gershon Loran and Davita. My saying that reminds me of the story Rabbi Potok told of being a young Jewish boy who, at the age of 16, was greatly touched by the emotions and lives of Evelyn Waugh's characters in *Brideshead Revisited*.

Rabbi Potok's writing always illustrates love and devotion to one's culture, faith, community and world. I think of Potok when I read the words of William Wordsworth, "What you have loved others will love and you will teach them."

I must love *My Name is Asher Lev* and *The Book of Lights* the most, because I read them at least once a year. I have constructed a multi-media lesson plan around *My Name is Asher Lev*, and I am preparing to offer another presentation at the end of August to my book club.

Luckily, we have the words of Chaim Potok to keep him alive in our memories.

The best to you always.

Most respectfully,

D H-B  
Garden City, Kansas

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I've read 3 books by Chaim Potok - "The Chosen", "My Name is Asher Lev" and "The Gift of Asher Lev." They were beautiful stories and beautifully written. The world will miss him.

E S

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I have been a fan of Chaim Potok's work ever since I read *The Chosen* in high school. It's now 10 years later, and I've become an 8th grade English teacher in Tennessee, and *The Chosen* is one of the books I teach each year. With every rereading, the beauty of Dr. Potok's writing touches me, and that ending never fails to make me cry, even more so than any part of *My Name is Asher Lev*.

I was deeply saddened to hear that the author of some of my favorite books had passed away, and I offer my condolences to his family.

L H

---

Please extend my condolences to the wife of Chaim Potok. His writings were a significant discovery in my life, and his words remain clear and influential in my mind. He made the world better. Bless him forever,

M W

sorrow...

I met Chaim Potok in a period of my life that I will never forget.

Your stories are now part of me.

Your words sound like the music of many days of my life: images and feelings that helped me to better understand me and others.

sorrow...

good bye Chaim

E R (Italy)

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Your husband's novels touched me in so many ways: philosophically, emotionally, spiritually. I will mourn his loss, as will the literary world.

J C

Cleveland, Mississippi

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Hello,

My name is C W. I'm a graduate English student. I must say that the work of Chaim Potok has had a profound effect on my life. I am a Protestant, but the work and the world of fiction that he created inspired me to study Hebrew in college and inspires me to think and question and live every day. Please forward my condolences to Mrs. Potok. Her husband was a great man, and he will be missed.

Thank you,

C W

---

Ce que Chaim m'a fait découvrir (ou plutôt redécouvrir) c'est la chaleur bien particulière de l'ambiance qui exhume de ses livres.

Lire ses romans c'était comme visiter une nouvelle ville, un nouveau pays ou l'on avait l'impression d'avoir déjà habité.

T S

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For Mrs. Potok,

I do not know a lot about your husband, but I read and truly appreciated many of his novels. Though I was raised as a Jew, we did not follow many of the tenets of Judaism at home, and when I was reading your husband's works - mostly in Dallas of all places - I had a friend who had been raised Orthodox in Chicago, and I was forever calling her to ask questions.

When Davida's Harp was published, I was in the hospital in Dallas. Since our insurance provided a private room for only \$2 a day beyond the regular charges, I requested a private room. The only one available was on an oncology floor, and since I was/am not - thank God - a cancer patient, there was one nurse who was forever coming to visit.

I was reading Davida's Harp - though very slowly because I was quite groggy from the medications they were giving me. This nurse, though not Jewish, would read over my shoulder and ask me questions that, fortunately, I could answer.

I wanted to think of a way to thank her for the extra care she gave me with all of her visits, and I had my husband stop at a bookstore and pick up another copy of the book, which I gave to the nurse along w/ a note telling her that she was free to call me w/ any questions. She thanked me and started crying.

On the day before my discharge, this nurse came and said she'd come to say good-bye because the next day she'd be off, and she wanted to thank me. I asked what she was thanking me FOR since I am not the most submissive patient - to put it mildly. She said that she was thrilled by my fighting back because it was good for her - ordinarily working w/ cancer patients - to have a patient w/ the will to fight back AND whom she knew would go home WELL. I was never before or since praised for being a pain in the neck. She also thanked me for the book and said she's taken some books about Judaism from the library to help her read. She had, she said, been raised to think that all Jews had horns and tails, and she was grateful for my friendship and for giving her the opportunity to learn that Jews are human beings. She said she was sure this 'lesson' would help her in dealing w/ other patients.

So not only did I immensely enjoy the work, I also learned much from it and, at times, passed on that learning. I was driving when I heard that your husband died, and I had to pull off the road to compose myself enough to be able to drive safely.

Please accept my sympathy on such a loss to the entire world. Though I have suffered much loss in my life (what Jew hasn't?), I cannot begin to understand your personal pain on losing a husband who will be missed by so many people around the world - people you do not know.

Regards,  
S S

Cranbury, NJ

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I was terribly saddened to hear of the death of Chaim Potok. I have been deeply touched by his work. I would like to pass my condolences to Mrs Potok

J M

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Dear Mrs. Potok,

I was very grieved to hear of your husbands death. I have read every one of his books that I could find and have always felt that I have been changed for the better after reading them. I will always be grateful. I know you will miss him much more than I but his death is a loss for everyone.

Sincerely,  
A D

great books  
P S

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my condolences to his family  
J E

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Dear Mrs. Potok,

I was deeply saddened to learn of Rabbi Potok's passing. My sincerest sympathies to you and your family. Your husband's book, My Name is Asher Lev, is the most moving thing I have ever read. I can only assume that a person who could produce such thoughtful and poignant work must have been a wonderful person to know. May God comfort you in this difficult time.

Sincerely,  
J D  
Vancouver, B.C. Canada

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I am so saddened to hear of Rabbi Potok's passing...his books gave me great joy and opened new worlds for me. I can truly say I would not be who I am today had I not read his inspired novels and writings.

...D R

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It is with sorrow in our hearts that we write to you Mrs. Potok. I teach 12th Grade Advanced Placement English at Brentwood High School in Brentwood, Tennessee, just outside Nashville, Tennessee.

My classes read My Name Is Asher Lev each summer and then we do art presentations on the ISMS of contemporary art. It is one of the favorite units each year.

Three years ago, Dr. Potok was here in Nashville at the Municipal Auditorium. Most of the students attended with me that night. It was the highlight of our year. We especially enjoyed his message to the young people.

We will miss him. The world will miss him.

L H

Thank you for this website. I have been out of touch with the news for the past few weeks and only today learned of Chaim Potok's death. Potok's writing has had a profound influence on my life, going back to the age of 13 or 14 when I first read *The Chosen*. Few writers share his unique sensitivity, humanity, and ability to truly touch a reader's heart. I only wish I had had the nerve to send a "fan" letter of appreciation years ago, although I am sure he received many.

Respectfully,  
A D

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Dear Mrs. Potok,  
My search for reading and learning more about your husband is mixed with joy and grief. I had just finished reading "The Chosen" again, when I decided to look up information on your husband and his works. To my dismay I found that he had passed away less than a month ago. My prayers go out to you. I can only say that my joy was in seeing all the pages available to explore and learn about your husband's work.

I had forgotten how much I was stirred inside when I read "The Chosen" the first time. I thank him for helping me to learn, to understand, and for placing the desire in me to keep on with my own personal studies. I passed the book on to my daughter. I can see already that your husband's work is, and will always be, timeless.

Sincerely,  
R G  
Michigan

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On the day that I heard NPR's report of Chaim Potok's death, I wrote in my journal:

"My hero, Chaim Potok, has passed away. In a strange and sad way his life and his lifework have come to a close just as my own life and lifework as a writer are beginning."

A few years ago, I had the privilege of hearing Chaim Potok speak at Pacific Union College. I remember him recalling the pivotal event in his life when he discovered "Brideshead Revisited," his first introduction to serious fiction. As such, Evelyn Waugh became a significant force in the shaping of Chaim Potok's lifework.

In a parallel way, "My Name is Asher Lev" is to me what "Brideshead Revisited" was to Chaim Potok. That incredible something that the young Chaim Potok discovered in Evelyn Waugh's writing, I discovered in Chaim Potok's books. And thus, Chaim Potok is my Evelyn Waugh. And "My Name is Asher Lev" is my "Brideshead Revisited."

I imagine that I was born with the dream of becoming a writer. For as long as I can remember, the written word has been my most constant, viable connection to the outside world. At four, I taught myself to read and found myself at home in the world of books. However, growing up in a conservative Seventh-day Adventist home, I was only allowed to read non-fiction books. I read biographies, encyclopedias, and true stories. Nevertheless I intuitively knew that I wanted to write stories that were different than the ones I was reading.

When I was about 13 years old, my brother came home briefly during the summer and inadvertently left lying around the house a copy of "My Name is Asher Lev." I picked up that book—my first introduction to fiction—and my world was changed. I was overwhelmed with amazement and sheer joy at the way Chaim Potok used words—

the same words I had seen in other books but pieced together to form altogether new and stunningly beautiful sentences. I was fascinated by Asher's inner struggles with his religion and gift. I felt Asher's pain and angst and pull between the worlds of his religion and his art. I knew then that I wanted to write books like Chaim Potok. An older Jewish male writer had somehow reached across an abyss to touch the heart of a young protestant Japanese-American girl.

I am now 29 years old and just starting out in my career as a writer. I am still a Seventh-day Adventist and I am a fiction writer, which in these circles is sometimes a contradiction of terms, it seems. Yet I remain loyal to both. Someday I will have my own books published. And when I see my name on the covers of those books I will see also the name of the writer who changed my destiny, for through his books Chaim Potok acknowledged and affirmed the struggle between religion and art that is so very real to me.

The most precious of the books on my shelves remain those written by Chaim Potok. Even now, I sometimes return to my beginnings and read "My Name is Asher Lev" once again. I have read that book countless times already, and every reading renews within me the astonishment and joy and power of fiction.

Shortly after his presentation at Pacific Union College, Chaim Potok granted me a short response to an email message. "Thank you for your email message. Yes, the struggle goes on and on. I'm pleased that the Asher Lev novel spoke to you in a special way. I wish you much success with your writing," it reads. I have framed that email message, and every so often I stare at those words, "Yes, the struggle goes on and on."

Those words say to me, "Like Asher Lev, you as a writer will forever be struggling between your religion and your art." And yet it is such a beautiful struggle that constantly redefines the fragile, complex world that I know. I think Chaim Potok knew the beauty and richness in that struggle even more deeply than I do. That is the gift and the legacy he leaves within the pages of his books. And for me personally, it is also a mark on my destiny that I treasure forever.

Sincerely,  
S F-J

Sacramento, CA

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hi. i'm sarah and i want to condole with adena and her family upon the death of the biggest writer and philosopher. he really had a gift, and we all owe him much. i'm really sorrowful for his death, and i like his family to know that i'm stand by them. chaim will be always alive within us!

S

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Dear Sir,

I feel silly writing this e-mail, it seems such correspondence is reserved for avid readers of certain writers. I have only read one novel by Chaim Potok, but after being so moved by that first novel I am sure I will read more and more, and eventually I will be better able to understand Chaim Potok and his work.

Anyway, I am a young woman who is very interested in Judaism (though I'm not Jewish) and I am leaving for Israel in 2 weeks to study Hebrew. I was at the beach this week and spotted the novel "The Chosen" on a shelf at a bookstore (or perhaps it chose me) and bought it. The only reason I picked it up was because the cover showed a man wearing a kippa and I am quick to read anything concerning Judaism.

I began reading the novel on the beach and continued when the sun disappeared and eventually finished it during the car ride home, despite car-sickness! :)

This is getting too long, I'll just say that the novel was profound and beautiful. Upon apprehending some of its messages and meanings, I was stirred and inspired and it was often the catalyst to some very new and liberating realizations. I cannot explain to you. The novel has definitely helped me in my quest to understand the nature of the human soul. After reading the words of Reb Saunders to his son Danny I was moved to tears. It's amazing that someone can be touched so deeply by a person who she's never met. Truly a person that puts forth such a good thing in the world lives on. I feel like thanking someone.. thank you.

J H

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I am very sorry to hear of the death of Chaim Potok. His books have always touched me and I re-read them over and over again. As a woman who converted to Judaism my especial favourite book was Davita's Harp. I even bought myself a door harp and the sweet tinkling sounds remind me of Rabbi Potok's wonderful talent for writing and how his books always made me feel a part of his characters' lives. He was a great man and a great writer. He will be truly missed.

Affectionately  
C K'

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Chaim Potok's truly inclusive world perspective will be missed in the literary world. Of his body of work, The Gift of Asher Lev still haunts me; only a kindred soul could have described the depth of alienation Asher felt that was so mysteriously juxtaposed to his love for family and tradition, and his longing for a groundedness that could not be his in this life.

His apprehension of God is something too complex to comment on in a brief space, but deserves mention. Like Asher, Rabbi Potok was a conduit. His understanding and encounter of Mystery was truly transcendent and beyond the grasp of the merely religious, who do not know what they may miss in their pure allegiance to form. Asher's solitude was the consequence of his having been singled out for "the gift", one that Rabbi Potok himself surely possessed. I often wonder what Asher would be thinking in old age, if he could ever possibly feel at home in this world; and if not, how he would eventually come to terms with it. In my own imagination, Rabbi Potok, through his writing, began for me a dialogue with many characters—especially Asher Lev—that I am sure won't end.

I don't know how to give an author greater tribute than to say a part of him remains with us and is at the same time transcendent—an idea I believe Rabbi Potok would well understand.

Sincerely,  
L C-B

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I am terribly sorry to learn of the recent passing of Chaim Potok. I recall with pleasure a memorable afternoon in his home, enjoying tea and discussing his ideas and experiences as a writer (I was a graduate student preparing my PhD dissertation on his works, at the time). He was a fine and gifted man who did much to assert the value of hope in a post-modern world.

I would add that in early July I was invited by the International Solomon University, in Kyiv, Ukraine, to give a series of lectures on Chaim Potok's Vision, during their fall semester. I will undertake this series with pleasure, although saddened to report on the death of this excellent novelist.

Sincerely,  
K W

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Chaim Potok was a wonderful, wonderful human being. He opened up a whole new world for me (with his books) when mine was about to cave in...he saved my sanity.

Sincerely,  
J C

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My warmest condolences for the loss of your husband.

He has been a great novelist, but moreover a great teacher of enduring values and of never-ending research.

His loss is a great miss for all of us, but to us - his readers - he has left his books, and to you - his family - I am sure he has left so many treasures that they will keep him always among you and close to you.

With warm sympathy,  
A S  
Milan - Italy

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I extend my most sincere condolences to Mrs. Potok and the Potok family for their loss.

This evening I was searching the Internet to see what other titles Mr. Potok had written that I could acquire. My wife and I read "The Chosen" and "The Promise" during July and August of this year. We presently belong to a Reform Synagogue, Congregation Beth Jacob, in Plymouth, Massachusetts. "The Promise," an extremely powerful book, drove me to such active introspection that waking up in the middle of the night, with my heart pounding, was seemingly an everyday occurrence. Mr. Potok's insightful writing suggested so many questions to me about my own Judaism that I was riddled with uncertainty as to the spiritual direction I was taking within the confines of the Jewish religion. I formulated a great many questions for my Rabbi as a result of this writer's work. Frankly, I have never been so moved by a book of this genre before.

A great loss. I pray he and his family enjoyed a rich existence together.

Sincerely,  
M H

Plymouth, Massachusetts

I am sorry to hear about the death of your husband. I am 48 years old, and I have just recently finished reading his novels, "The Chosen, The Promise, and Davita's Harp." They are wonderfully written and my only regret is that I didn't discover this wonderful writer until later in my life. He was a man with a wonderful insight into the struggles and joys of the Jewish community during the WWII era.

I am looking forward to reading his other works.

Again, let me send my condolences to you and your family.

May G-d continue to bless you and keep you under the shelter of His wings.

J

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I just discovered Mr. Potok's works. I just finished The Chosen. Your website is indeed a tribute to Chaim Potok. I am now reading My Name is Asher Lev. I must give NPR credit for enlightening me as to the depth of his work. I am not Jewish, but reading his work, I wish I was.

Regards

J H

---

My husband and I are only now beginning to read and love your husband's work. He is an inspiration to the quest of truth and art today and we love him and already miss him. There is a quote I love but must paraphrase from Victor Hugo. He said... the closer I come to facing the infinite the more I write the more I find in me to write.. there there must be more." I am sure Chaim is continuing his art in spheres we cannot yet see.

Bless you,

D J

---

I was out of town when Chaim Potok passed away, and I just learned of his passing in connection with the theatrical production of "The Chosen."

I was a classmate of Chaim's during high school in New York, but went to

Europe with my family after graduation. I did not see Chaim again until I came out to California in the late '50's, and bumped into him in a Santa Monica deli. I then found out that my late Aunt (I S knew him well through his Jewish educational activities in L.A..

My late father, Rabbi A R was very impressed by The Chosen, and was responsible for my reading the novel.

I tried to attach to this email a page of our Yeshiva high school yearbook, which coincidentally has Chaim, my brother and myself shown together on the same page. It mentions his great interest in literature and writing, even at that early time.

My sincerest condolences to his family.

A R

Santa Monica, CA

First, I would like to offer my condolences to Mrs. Potok and relatives.

It was a shock to me when I heard that Chaim Potok had died. Suddenly all kinds of memories came back to me. I was 1984 and I was 16 when I read my first novel of Chaim Potok: *The Chosen*. My English teacher at school recommended it to me. From that moment on I was addicted to Mr. Potok's novels.

This was storytelling in the deepest sense of the word. I was there, in the story. I sat on a chair in the room, and saw what happened. I experienced the silence treatment myself. It was getting deep under my skin and right into my heart. I was touched, moved...and I recognized so many things.

I read more and more novels by Chaim Potok, and always I recognized this lonely child who was 'different'. Who had a special gift, or just felt different and struggled with its family. It was comfort to me that the children grew up to be such strong persons. That one could survive it and choose for the things he or she felt inside, that had to be done. It helped me and comforted me in my own struggles in life.

Chaim Potok was my favorite writer, the best storyteller I know. Someone who could write and touch the deepest of your soul. I always felt grouchy when I finished a novel. Gone were the people I had learned to love. It felt as if something dear had been taken away from me. And thank god, sometimes there was 'Part Two', as in *The Chosen - The Promise*, and *My name is Asher Lev - The gift of Asher Lev*.

Sometimes there were just these wonderful sentences in a novel, that shot like arrows into my heart and gave me shivers. Like on the last page of *The Promise*. Where Michael looks up at the sky.

'Sometimes I still see faces,' he said.  
I asked him what he was seeing now.  
'Clouds,' he said.

I could go on and on, but I won't. Mr. Potok leaves a wonderful legacy that speaks for itself.

I would just like to thank you for your time reading this, and share my memories with me.

Kindest regards,  
N N  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Dear Mrs. Potok,  
I am writing to tell you that I am deeply sorry for the loss of your husband. He was and will always be my favorite author. He is the one who has inspired me to investigate a career in writing. I have been touched by his books, and I will continue to learn from them. I attended a lecture that he did at Calvin Collge two years ago, and I thoroughly enjoyed his speech. He will be greatly missed.

God bless you,  
R A

---

I just wanted you to know that the writings of Chaim Potok have gotten me through some very dark times in life. I am a theological student and I struggle with the very issues Potok addresses in "The Chosen" and other books, and I re-read his books every year. Along with C.S. Lewis, Potok is an author I would aspire to write like someday.

In the Name

C H  
WBSi Web Development

---

The Asher Lev stories have had a profound effect on me. With only 18 more pages before I finish ( for the first time) The Gift of Asher Lev, I will feel a deep sadness at closing the book. Truly, both books were important contributions to modern writing, culture, and thought.

I feel blessed to have experienced the gift he had given the world and subsequently, left behind.

Thank you,

B C  
Port Alberni, British Columbia, Canada

---

Dear Mrs. Potok,

Rabbi Potok is by far my favorite author, and always has been. In particular, My Name is Asher Lev and The Gift of Asher Lev are two books I re-read annually, and have for years.

I turned 50 last August 15th, also a major feast in the Roman Catholic Church in honor of Mary. Part of what I did that early, pre-dawn morning, was to dance in front of a statue of her, in prayer and in thanksgiving, having just finished my annual read of both books, above. Later that morning, at a Benedictine monastery, the priest celebrating the Mass spoke at length of the Jewish tradition of dancing with Torah. He commented that we hardly begin to know what such a joyful expression this is as Christians, and that we have much to learn. I was quite excited, as my early morning prayer and his sermon felt so linked to my experience of reading Rabbi Potok's books.

I e-mailed Rabbi Potok several days later, and he very kindly responded, pleased by my story.

Thank God for the gift of Rabbi Potok, and may the wings of angels bear you up as you grieve his loss.

Many blessings always,  
M K

---

Mrs. Potok,

Your husbands books were my favorite. I always tell people to read them because they touch at such a personal level. I want you to know, I think he was an amazing person.

R

---

As Asher Lev was moved by Michelangelo's Pieta, I was deeply moved by My Name is Asher Lev. Mr. Chaim's novels will live on as a testimony to his great gift.

C W

---

Dear Mrs. Potok,

It is with sorrow that I was informed only today that your husband had died in July 2002. Please accept my sympathy upon the death of a great man and a great author. We, in our high school, have enjoyed his novels for many years; I always recommend "The Chosen" to the high school students as a way to learn about the Jewish faith, relationships between parent and child, and how to live your faith which they discovered in the novel and in the life of your husband. I purchased all of your husband's novels for our high school libraries in the schools where I have been employed as a librarian since 1977.

Once again, my sympathy.

S M. A K

New Ulm MN

---

Hi,

I knew the writer but had never read something.

Now I am reading 'The Chosen' and I love it. It was a long time before I read such book I liked so much. I am going to read more of him.

It is sad that he is gone now... otherwise I would surely write him a mail.

Give my condolences to Mrs. Potok and family.

Self I am trying to get my first novel published but it is difficult. I write in dutch / flemisch (Belgian dutch it is) so excuse me my poor English.

Anyway I am writing my second novel about an Iranian friend of mine.

I suggested 'The Chosen' to him.

Great writer, he really was.

Greetz

K M

BELGIUM

---

mrs. potok,

i was so sorry to hear of your husband's illness and death. he was a man who, more than any other author in history, drew attention to how art and religion intersect — how they must intersect if the artist and believer are to be true. and i am so grateful for his passion, for his ability to see beauty in simplicity, and for his inimitable vision which saw each person's experiences as part of the greater story of humanity. he was an amazing writer and an amazing person. i hope, in any way possible, to continue what he started... in the way i view religion and in the way i see people.

with much sympathy and much gratitude,

c s

waynesboro, pa

---

In death new life is given.

I heard an archived interview with Chaim Potok this summer following his death. I heard him speak of unity across religions and views. I made a mental note to look up this author.

I have since read The Chosen, The Promise, I Am the Clay, My Name is Asher Lev, and am now working my way through Old Men at Midnight. I have passed on The Chosen and The Promise to my 19 (almost 20) year-old daughter who I will visit at school later this month. She finished both books and I look forward to talking with her about them.

Some day goodness will be seen for what it is in all its forms and "covers" despite its disparate rituals which can lead followers away from the most basic goodness.

Chaim Potok's books are a blessing to me. I celebrate his life.

T K

Frederick, MD

---

This is not the letter I intended to write when I first came to this site.

I read "The Chosen" several years ago, and was so moved by the book that I resisted reading the next one, for fear

that it would not maintain the emotions that “The Chosen” had aroused in me.

On July 21, 2002 I bought “The Promise” and “Wanderings”. I read “Wanderings” first, and greatly enjoyed the scholarship and writing skills Mr. Potok brought to the material.

Yesterday I finally started “The Promise” and could not put it down. I found so much of what I was looking for in myself that I couldn’t bear to see it end. How did he know?

I almost never send “fan mail”, but I wanted to thank him for the insights he provided to me (and I’m sure, millions of others). Instead, I can only thank all the others who made it possible for him to write what and how he did.

I cannot wish to turn the clock back - I can only take what I have learned about myself and work to make a difference in the future.

Yours, with love and prayers,

A H

---

Please accept my honest sorrow for the great lost. I’m a fervent reader of the Chaim Potok’s books. Since many years ago, when a friend gifted me “My name is Asher Lev”. It was a big impact in my mind and soul. I say thank you to the Lord for the lives (and books) of people like Chaim.  
God bless you in he deep.

M O  
España

---

Sono una lettrice italiana di Chaim Potok, uno scrittore che amo moltissimo e che mi ha dato moltissimo. Mi è difficile dire quello che significano i suoi libri per me, però credo che per lui sia vero quello che dice il profeta:  $\sum$  se tu dai all'affamato (peinvnti) il pane della tua anima (tòn arton ek yuchV)  $\sum$  allora brillerà fra le tenebre la tua luce% (Is 58,10).

L M

---

Dear Mrs Potok,

Today I heard the sad news that Mr Potok has passed away. It is shocking and upsetting and he will be missed an awful lot. I would like to offer you my sincere condolences.

Obviously, I never had the pleasure of knowing your husband personally, but he was one of my favourite authors. His books have given me a lot of pleasure, comfort, inspiration and stimulation over the years. There was always a lot of kindness and wisdom in the stories and I was always touched by the sincerity and humanity in your husband’s writing. It made me think and taught me a lot. He was a great story-teller. And it may sound strange,

but when I first read The Chosen I felt as if I had found some kind of home, despite me not being Jewish. It was one of the most wonderful books I've read and after that I had to seek out all of your husband's writings. They were all wonderful and they all gave me that same warm feeling. It was always a shame when another book had been finished.

All of the above goes for my brother Roland as well. We're both Dutch and discovered your husband while studying American Studies. We live in London now.

Chaim Potok was a brilliant and amazing writer and from what shines through in the books and the articles I've read it seems that he must surely have been a very special person.

I wish you and your family all the best in the difficult time ahead. Hopefully it will bring you some comfort knowing that your husband's work has touched so many people's hearts and minds and will continue to do so in the ages to come. His works and his memory will live on forever.

Sincerely yours,  
E Z

---

I thank Chaim Potok for sharing his knowledge and wisdom. Our culture is enriched and advanced by his work.

R W  
Richmond, KY

---

I am very sad to hear about Mr. Potok's passing and would like to send my condolences to the family. For many years I have enjoyed the writings of Chaim Potok and they have become my favorite books. I am a Christian and first read My Name Is Asher Lev in a 8th Grade English class in Texas. It was my favorite book of that year - the writing was captivating and the story, just amazing. I have spent many years collecting hardback copies of Mr. Potok's work and have a greater understanding and appreciation of Jewish history and family life because of his novels and non-fiction work.

I hope that you will take comfort in knowing how loved and appreciated Mr. Potok was through out the world and I (as I am sure many others will) will pass on his books to my children so that they can experience the magic and beauty of his writings.

A P  
Dallas, Texas

---

Dear Mrs. Potok,  
Your husband's novels have helped me, as a gentile Christian, to understand the Jewish culture, struggles, and faith. In sympathy & appreciation,  
J C

dear Mrs. Potok

your husbands books have inspired me i am a christian and his use of the jewish insight and insecurity has helped me work through that. i started reading his book Davita's Harp as a school project i have now read three of his books and plan on reading more. thank you so much for reading this e-mail i know that you are in sorrow still, and honestly i am sad also, he touched my life through books and i will always remember the lessons his books have taught me. (i plan on looking into his plays i plan on going into theater as a major in college.)  
my condolences,

K G  
Pine Tree High School

---

Greetings from Canada:

William, I just want to say that I read the book and saw the film, The Chosen. Although I am not Jewish I loved that story!

I am so sorry to hear of Mr. Potok's death.

I know that Robby Benson once said in an interview that this was his favourite film. No wonder!

I just want to convey my sympathies to Mrs. Potok and thank you for this web site.

Sincerely,

M C

---

Dear Mrs Potok,

I was shocked to hear that your husband passed away several months ago, and that I did not know about it.

He was one of the finest writers of our time, and one of my most favorite.

It was my father, playwright and author Peter Weiss (Marat/Sade and other plays) who in the 60's first introduced me to Chaim's works.

Less than a year ago I had some email correspondence with your husband. He was very kind and I was planning to write to him again. It is sad that I will not be able to do so.

My mother, who also was a writer, passed away in August this year. In July I spent all my time caring for her and failed to read newspapers or watch TV. Thus I did not hear the news about your husband.

My mother's death was a huge loss for me and I understand so well what you are going through.

kindest regards,  
R W (artist, see web site below)

Belleair, FL

Mr. Allen,

My name is Roger H. I just wanted to let you know that I truly enjoy your website on Chaim Potok. Though I saw and spoke with him only on occasion, I loved him as if he were my own Father. At his memorial service, Naama gave a most moving statement, as did Akiva, Rena, Adena, and Rena's husband. I thought they might make a good addition to your site. I'm sure you do many things, but this is noble work. He's a great man, and his family reflects that. They are all so sweet, intelligent, charitable, and I'm fortunate to be working some with Akiva and Naama.

Thank you for the work you do. I would enjoy meeting you one day. Also, if it's all right with you, I will inform you of progress toward the creation of the film about ASHER LEV and invite you to events that may develop in that regard.

Again, thank you,

R

---

Dear Mrs.Potok!

I want to say that it is very said that such a great writer like your husband has died. I read almost all his books and I like the dirtiness of his style of writing.

All the best,

P M  
Zeist, The Netherlands

---

Hallo

Dankzij uw man ben ik me gaan intersseren voor het jodendom in het algemeen. Ik ben hem hiervoor zeer dankbaar.

T B

---

Dear Mrs. Potok

I have only recently discovered Mr. Potok's books and have been enlightened by them.

I'm reading each and every one in a row and have discovered a whole new world.

I wish to extend my sincere condolences to your and your family, he will be remembered forever through his masterful work.

Yours sincerely,

B B  
Rome - Italy

Chaim Potok's writing has been a continual inspiration to me and to learn of his premature death in the summer was a great sadness. I regularly re-read his novels and the measure, for me, of a great writer such as Chaim, is that each time I find something new - something I hadn't discovered before. I so longed for the third 'Asher Lev' - whether or not he intended to complete a trilogy I can't know but it seemed to me we were left waiting for it at the end of 'The Gift'. I am a Jew (an English Jew) from the Progressive community here and Chaim was able to draw me into the world of Hasidus and make me feel - however much I disagree with the exclusivism of the orthodox community - that I understood them. The warmth of the Ladov (Lubavitch of course) radiated from the pages. That's quite an achievement.

But the fact that Chaim was not exclusively concerned with the orthodox Jewish world enriched his writing so much and brought him to a much wider audience I'm sure. I will continue to read, and re-read, his work and thank him and his G-d for his gift.

A W

---

Chaim Potok is person who relatively unknown in my country I think he was some the great religious man ever I known. "Religion" in my country never stop making a dangerous situation.

I am glad to found "The Chosen"; I never thought Judaism become some enemy whenever Cultural never become some dangerous to the other.

Thank you

D P

---

ist appears as if I had known Chaim Potok personally and for a long time. Sad to realize that there will be no further additions to the subtle stories inhabited by so many people whom we are happy to have met through Chaim Potok's help.

I came to read him by happenstance. Few novels are equally well researched and equally well told. Love for man and his quest for the important answers to the few difficult questions in life. That is what I have to thank Chaim Potok for.

I will reread him many times over.

H-G K

Vienna, Austria

---

As a senior level English major at Clearwater Christian College, I was required to write an in depth research paper on a book, the critical work on the book, and the author. I chose My Name is Asher Lev. I loved the book because Asher's struggle to find his identity exemplifies the struggle of every person who is artistically bent and profoundly religious to create good art while maintaining his/her religious integrity. But even before I read Asher Lev I knew

that I wanted to use a book by Chaim Potok. I have been a voracious reader since I could sound out letters, but when I read *The Chosen* at sixteen it was the first time I ever had the experience of entering a completely foreign world. As a Baptist growing up in rural Florida, my schools in Brooklyn in the 1940s were as foreign to me as Mars, yet Rueven and Danny became as real to me as any people I'd ever met. From *The Chosen* I also gained an enduring fascination with Jewish culture, both religious and secular. I just want to thank Mr. Potok, albeit somewhat belatedly, for giving me the gift that every reader is looking for: the door to a new world. Thank you.

K T  
Tallahassee, FL

---

I'm sorry and very saddened to hear of Mr. Potok's death. Since I was a freshman in High School, I've read *In the Beginning* once each year. His writings have been a big influence on my life. His philosophy of learning and love of teaching has made an impact on me that will be with me for the rest of my life. His writings will always be alive in my heart and hopefully he will remain an important writer and philosopher for many generations to come. One day when I have children I will want them to read his books and writings just as my parents had wished for me to do the same. I will never forget the wonderful words that were printed at the end of *In The Beginning*: "Never forget the past, as you nourish the present."

A W  
Netherlands

---

I am very late, but I just learned he's dead and could not refrain from sharing my grief, although I am just a reader of his work.

I am deeply sorry, we shall all miss a great novelist and - I believe - a great man.

M R  
Milan, Italy

---

I was standing in Hastings today flipping through books by Chaim Potok. I picked up *Old Men at Midnight*, which was new to me, and learned that Chaim had died.

Standing in the middle of Hastings, with my 16-year old daughter beside me, I cried.

When I was 16, *My Name is Asher Lev* changed my spiritual and intellectual landscape forever. I am indebted to Chaim Potok more than I can ever explain. I am proud to say that my daughter shares my love for the works of this beautiful man.

We will miss him.

Sadly, but feeling blessed that he lived,

C W

dear Mr. Potok

I've read all your books and I read them again and and again.  
I wished you'd lived longer, so I could read more books of you.  
Thank you for so many happy hours.  
I'll think of you often and wish your family strength and  
my love.

Y K  
Netherlands

---

Dear Mrs. Potok,

I want to express my condolences for the loss of your husband. He has been a very rich blessing to my life.

I am an Orthodox Christian and I love learning about Judaism. I am so grateful to God and the faithfulness of the Jewish people who have kept your faith alive through the centuries. I don't want to offend you with my Christianity, so I won't elaborate. Suffice it to say, I know that it is the same Spirit that burns in me and in every other Human created by the Master of the Universe, that becomes alive when I worship Him - or when I'm reading a book by Chaim Potok (indeed other Jewish writers as well).

I am so amazed at the testimony of God's love and faithfulness to His chosen people. The establishment and maintenance of Israel after the centuries is a miracle in itself of God's love and activity in the lives of His people - if the "world" would just open it's eyes to see it. (I also believe that the Jewish people are beautifully underrepresented in our nations various rehabilitation institutions such as drug and alcohol treatment centers, psychiatric hospitals and prisons to name a few.)

I know this is not a typical letter of condolence, and I apologize if I have been inappropriate or insensitive. I thank you that I can at least express my thankfulness and respect to you that I feel for your husbands' writing and for the wonderful Jewish people "out there" that are such good examples to me as a Christian and a human being.

I look forward to my continued reading and learning about the spiritual roots of my own faith through people like your husband-

Shalom,

J in Oregon

# To Chaim Potok (1929-2002)

I

Hanging on the cross, a thief  
on his right, a thief on his left,  
Christ cried out, My God, my God,  
why have you forsaken me?

Rabbi, Rabbi, why have you  
forsaken me?

II

The orange-seated 4 train bears  
ever uptown. Under black Harlem,  
Alice has already told me the news.  
The Times lies across our knees.  
A history of your life in half  
a page and a photograph.  
Born Herman. Often called Chaim.  
Turned to literature. Dreamed.  
Conjured up. Wrote. Returned.  
Recalled that. Said.  
Obituaries, always in the past tense.  
Train and street numbers climb.  
Bronx sunlight for you,  
a Bronx son.  
Dark, dark world.

III

Chaim. Life, alive.  
Chaim. Not alive.

IV

Williamsburg, old world within  
chameleon city of York.  
Kingdom of black-garbed, bearded  
men, boys with skullcaps, earlocks.  
Talmud. Torah.  
You peeled the skin of  
Hasidic Judaism  
in your stories.

V

Mothers console children:  
You can write stories on the side,  
paint by night.

You could not be consoled.  
Asher Lev could not be consoled.

VI

Paintings I most want  
to see don't hang  
in museums, galleries,  
don't lean against studio walls,  
on easels:

Village Burning.  
Young Man Journeying I.  
Young Man Journeying II.  
Old Man Journeying.  
Scholar-Saint.  
Scholar Journeying I.  
Scholar Journeying II.  
Village Death.  
Brooklyn Crucifixion I.  
Brooklyn Crucifixion II.

By heart I learn the paragraphs  
in which Asher paints.  
His story in your words keeps  
Milosz and Steinbeck company  
on my shelf. I read it before sleep,  
before meals, before writing a poem.

VII

Shalom, Chaver.

-K K

Native Pole. In Queens for 12 years. Senior at Stuyvesant High School

July 29, 2002