Due in large part to a College of Arts and Letters professor’s research, Fyodor Michajlitschenko was posthumously inducted into the list of Righteous Among the Nations at a ceremony at Yad Vashem on August 4, 2009, in Jerusalem, Israel. Fyodor’s daughter accepted the honor.

The Spring 2009 issue of Muses chronicled Michigan State University Professor and Director-Jewish Studies Kenneth Waltzer’s 2008 research at the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, Germany, leading to identification of Fyodor Michajlitschenko as “Fyodor the Russian from Rostov.” Michajlitschenko, a former prisoner in Buchenwald concentration camp, had protected and cared for then seven-year-old Israel Meir Lau (Lulek), who survived to move to Palestine and later become chief Ashkenazi rabbi of Israel.

In his memoir, “Do Not Raise Your Hand Against the Boy” (2005), Israel Meir Lau recalls the role played by the “angel Fyodor” who saved him: “He would steal potatoes to cook me hot soup” … “he knitted me ear warmers” … “Fyodor the Russian looked after me in the daily life like a father would for a son. His concern and feeling of responsibility gave me a sense of security.”

On the day the U.S. army liberated the camp, the day of his rebirth, Israel Meir Lau recalls that “Fyodor held me close to him and sheltered me with his body.” The two of them ran to the camp gate together. Lau never saw Fyodor again after Buchenwald.

Rabbi Israel Lau, the current chair of the Yad Vashem Council, extended a special invitation to Professor Waltzer to attend the ceremony honoring Michajlitschenko. Unable to attend, Waltzer sent a videotaped message to be played at the ceremony, saying that his only regret was that Michajlitschenko could not be acknowledged in person as he had died in 2006 prior to it being discovered that he had been Lau’s protector.

Waltzer added that he believes Michajlitschenko’s induction into the list of Righteous Among Nations brought the story of Fyodor or Rostow to a fitting conclusion.