

בס"ד

מכון יעקב אבנות

Manhattan High School for Girls

Lingering NOTES

תשפ"א • GENEALOGY ANTHOLOGY

וענתה השירה הזאת... לעד
כי לא תשכח מפני זרעו



Lingering Notes

*the music and the missives
of our forebears
which resonate with us*

and

*the legacies we embrace
to become
their lingering notes*

This publication has
been anonymously sponsored
לזכר נשמת
All of the Kedoshim
who perished in the Holocaust

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

With appreciation to

Ms. Chanie Gotlieb
Project Director

Mrs. Ettie Cohen
Historia Chair

Rebbetzin Peshi Neuburger
Genealogy Project Editor

Mrs. Avigayil Finkelstein
Genealogy Project Assistant Editor

Mrs. Dena Szpilzinger
Genealogy Project Designer

Mrs. Tsivia Yanofsky
School Principal, Menacheles

Mrs. Estee Friedman-Stefansky
Principal, General Studies

A MESSAGE FROM OUR MENAHELES

This Genealogy Digest is the impressive culmination of a year long research project, and an actualization of the Torah injunction *שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך*. The essays in these pages dovetail with the outstanding presentations of our students to their proud families just a few weeks ago, and both are part of the historic mission of our nation to preserve the legacy of previous generations so that it may instruct our current situation.

We walk today in the gargantuan footsteps of our grandparents and great-grandparents. Despite the fact that the radiance that emanates from their narratives is but a small fraction of their great light, that collective light continues to illuminate the path in a morally bankrupt, decadent world.

This compilation includes giants of spirit who profoundly enriched the world of Torah scholarship, men and women who clung to their religious ideals and convictions with tenacity, individuals who contributed qualitatively to the world of *Hatzalah* and Jewish culture, and men and women with unique character traits that leave us gaping with admiration many years after they have departed from this world. As I read these riveting accounts, I could not help but reflect upon the honor of educating the progeny of such illustrious forebears.

The obvious lesson gleaned from the hours of research that our students have invested is that their actions, too, are significant and will be recorded for posterity and indelibly imprinted in the DNA of their own children b”H.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Chani Gotlieb, an erudite scholar and visionary who is the grand architect of the Genealogy project. She has given our students a priceless gift. I would also like to acknowledge the indefatigable efforts of Rebbetzin Neuburger, a brilliant editor and beloved advisor with whom our students spend so many enjoyable and meaningful hours; Mrs. Dena Szpilzinger, our much celebrated and talented layout designer who lends her distinctive flair to all of our publications; Mrs. Ettie Cohen, a mechanechet par excellence who always goes above and beyond, and Mrs. Avigayil Finkelstein, an alumna, whose talent and thoughtful contributions are a source of great pride.

I would also like to acknowledge our Senior Class of 2021, whose contributions to this digest are a reflection of their unique flavor and character. In the spirit of genealogy, may you bequeath that flavor to many future generations who will dot the landscape of our glorious nation.

Mrs. Tsivia Yanofsky

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION *by Chani Gotlieb & Rebbetzin Peshi Neuburger* 8

VIRTUOUSO
by Chana Povarsky 10

A GADOL OF GREAT NOTE(S)
by Tzirel Shtierman 14

GO FORTH AND GO FURTHER
by Becky Bral 16

MAGNUM OPA
by Yvee Rosenthal 18

UNKNOWN CALLER
by Yael Farkas 20

A VALIANT SOLDIER
by Michal Englander 22

IT IS A TREE OF LIFE TO
THOSE WHO HOLD FAST TO IT
by Naomi Landy 24

THE MUSIC TRAIL
by Chana Lipschutz 27

OUR CROWN JEWEL, A LEVI OF GRACE
by Chava Bamberger 30

WE ATE HER CAKE AND HAVE IT
by Nechama Mandel 34

BOBBY'S STORY
by Leora Wisnicki 36

A VERY REAL ESTATE
by Nava Stefansky 38

SWEET SINGER OF SOUTH AMERICA
by Ilana Katzenstein 41

SINGING THROUGH THE STORM
by Dina Rothman 43

A BIRTHDAY GIFT
by Ilana Katzenstein 44

THE SONG THAT NEVER ENDS
by Sarala Levy 46

“THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME”
by Jenny Rapp 48

LETTERS ARE HER LORE
by Chavi Golding 50

THE FRANCO FAMILY: A MODERN DAY EXODUS
by Leora Shweky 54

OF MUSIC AND IRONING BOARDS
by Tova Schwartz 56

THE MIGHTY PEN
by Leah Harris 60

Introduction

It is comical, and somewhat jarring, to watch a muted dance class. People wave their hands in the air, shake their heads from side to side, and take small steps and sweeping strides that get them nowhere. A madhouse. Yet when the sound goes on, the scene becomes an artistic and coordinated expression of the music.

To the outside observer, the history of the Jewish people appears to be an unending out-of-step dance. The dancers seem to move aimlessly from one end of the world to the other, driven by persecution, oppression, and poverty. Their dance floor is repeatedly invaded by competing ensembles bent on stealing their limelight. In the ensuing struggle the Jewish dancers are beaten, ostracized and expelled, but just when it seems that they have been dealt the final blow, they reappear on stage with renewed vigor and resume their dance, only to be forced off once again. A tragic comedy indeed, until you add the music.

ועתה, כתבו לכם את-השירה הזאת, ולמדה את-בני-ישראל... והיה כי תמצאן אתו רעות רבות וצרות וענתה השירה הזאת... ליעד כי לא תשכח מפיו ורעו. (דברים ל"א: ט, כ"א)

And now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel... It will come to pass, when many evils and troubles confront them, that this song will testify before them as a witness, for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their children

This anthology is a compilation of the many family songs that have been passed down to our senior students, and which they will one day, G-d willing, teach their offspring. Each of these young women has begun to discover the singularity of the song of her personal heritage. To be sure, many of them came into this project knowing some facts, and having heard various stories. But the *mesorah* of every family, like the Torah itself, begins to sing when it is poured over, and studied in depth. The tedious work slowly morphs into a labor of love, as the budding genealogist begins to hear the lyrics and melody of her inheritance, and to own it. In time, she becomes an instrument that conveys its beauty, and if she stays the course, takes her place in the orchestra which unites the many tunes and chords of *moreshet Yisrael* into a transformative symphony that gives meaning to our eternal dance.

It is our hope and prayer that this project will contribute to our national effort to preserve and teach our song to future generations, and that we will soon be privileged to perform in the breathtaking finale of our three- millennium-old musical production, as it reaches its crescendo.

Chani Gotlieb
Rebbetzin Peshi Neuburger

“והנה אין בשירה הזאת תנאי בתשובה ועבודה רק היא שטר עדות שנעשה הרעות ונוכל ושהוא יתברך יעשה בנו בתוכחות חימה אבל לא ישבית זכרנו וישוב ויתנחם ויפרע מן האויבים בחרבו הקשה והגדולה והחזקה ויכפר על חטאתינו למען שמו אם כן השירה הזאת הבטחה מבוארת בגאולה העתידה.”
(רמב"ן, דברים ל"ב מ')

This song is promised unconditionally, and independent of *teshuvah* or wholehearted service to Hashem. Rather it is a written testament that evils will come, that we will endure them, and that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, despite his fury, will never erase us from history. He will, very surely, return and be comforted, avenge us our enemies...and forgive us for our sins for the sake of His name. And so, this song is a clear promise of the future redemption.

Ramban Devarim 32:40

Virtuoso



Chana Povarsky



Rav Dovid Povarsky circa 1940

“Abba, why don’t we sing *zemiros* anymore? I remember being a little boy on your knees in Vilna, and singing *Kah Ribon Olam* together...it must have been on *Shabbos*.”

“That’s true; it was just as you say.”

“But why don’t we sing anymore in *Eretz Yisrael*? Why do we just rush through our *Shabbos* meals?”

“When we lived in Vilna under the Communists, I worried about how you and your siblings would end up. Would you care about being Jewish? Would you ever know how to *taitch a pasuk*, let alone make a *leining*? Then, it was important that we sing. At the very least, I hoped, you would be left with the memories of *Shabbos zemiros* at your father’s table. But here in *Eretz Yisrael*, we are no longer burdened with that concern... and so, we rush to get back to our learning...”



Rav Shalom with his father,
Rav Dovid Povarsky, Bnei
Brak circa 1990

Rav Shalom Povarsky, my grandfather, mesmerized the audience with this vignette from his childhood as he eulogized his beloved and saintly father, Rav Dovid Povarsky.

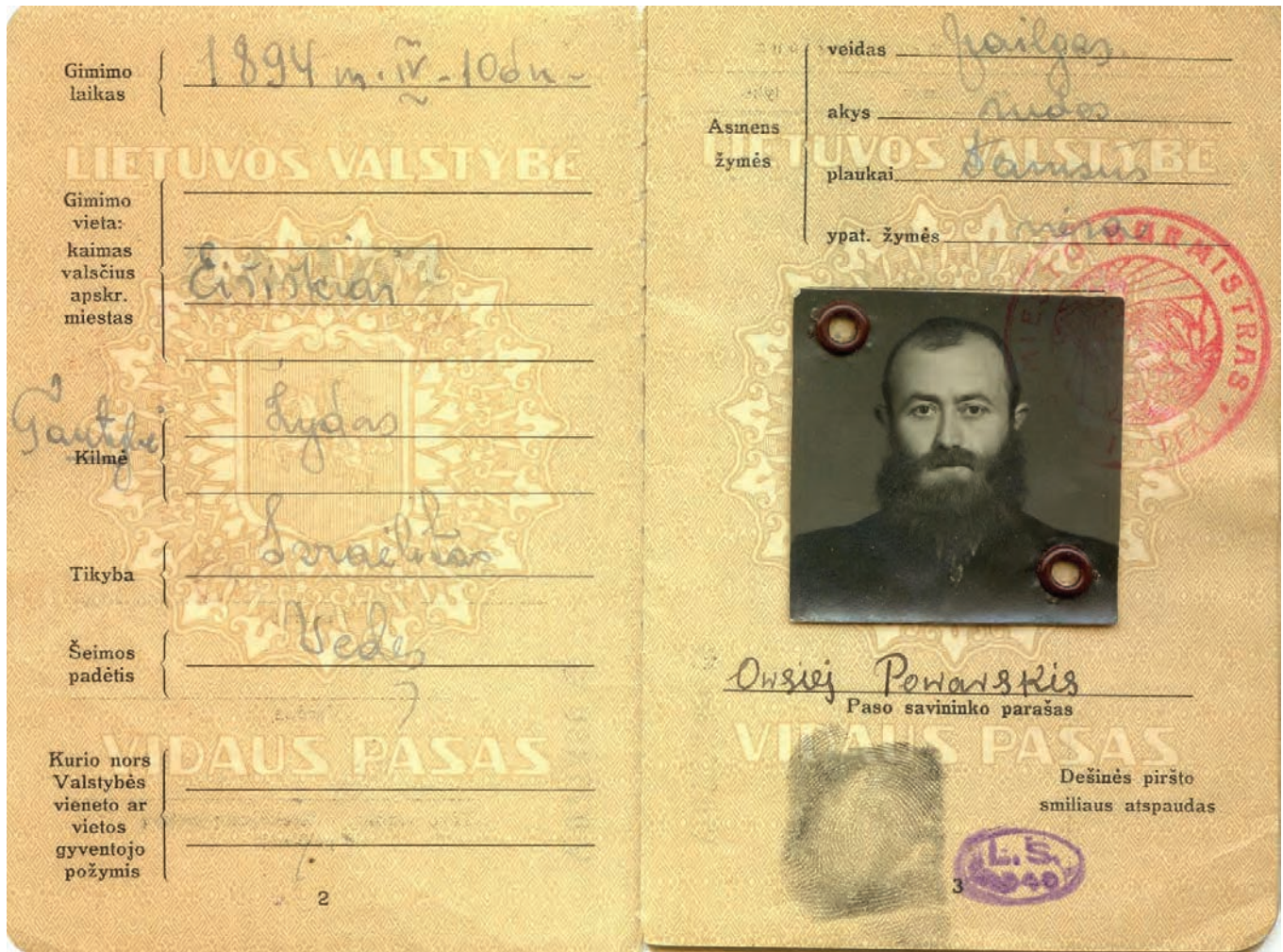
My *Saba Raba*, Reb Dovid Povarsky *zt”l*, whose brilliant mind and legendary *hasmadah* led the world-class Yeshivas Ponovezh for half a century, almost from its inception, understood that when endangered, the Jewish soul is best nourished through song. That music imparts feelings of connectedness that can carry us through the night. Yet he never lost sight of the most enduring *shirah*, the song that is Torah. The symphony of dedicated Torah scholars who devote endless undistracted hours to capturing the beauty of each *pasuk*, *mishnah*, and *sugya*. They are the



*The three Povarsky brothers,
(l to r) R' Berel, R' Chaim, and R' Shalom
Bnei Brak circa 1955*



*Ponovezh Yeshiva class photo, 1954. Rav Dovid
Povarsky is pictured to the right of the Ponovezher
Rav, Rav Yosef Kahaneman, and to the left of
the Mashgiach Ruchani, Rav Eliyahu Dessler.*



The Polish passport of Rav David Povarsky

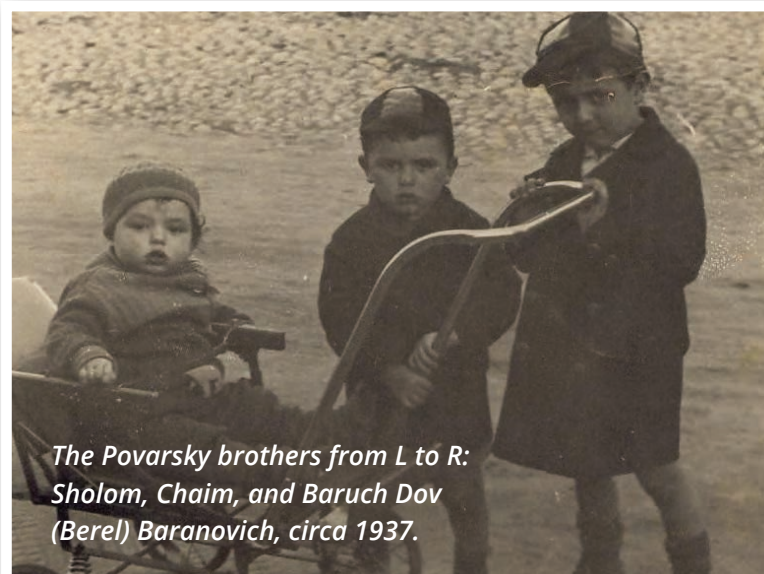


virtuosos who transform and elevate their listeners with the magic of their music. So when the dawn arrived, Rav Dovid steeped his family in the rhythm he knew best; the *dapei gemara* which were the sheet notes for his compositions.

The fruits of Rav Dovid's labor are countless and speak for themselves. Among them are thousands of *talmidim* who, fortified with the inspiration they drew from his character and his Torah, went on to create lives and homes that reflect his teachings. Above all, the very children about whom he agonized in Vilna have emerged as models of *yiras shamayim* and scholarship, and, like their renowned patriarch, thoroughly devoted to Jewish education. His eldest son, Rav Baruch Dov Povarsky, or Reb Berel as he is fondly referred to, follows his father as *Rosh Hayeshivah* of Ponovezh. His second son, Chaim, serves as dean of the Touro Law School, one of only two American law schools under orthodox Jewish auspices. His daughter, Miriam Pines, is the only one of the children to be born in Israel, and has dedicated her life to educating young Jewish women of high school and post high school age at the Rav Wolf Seminary in B'nei Brak.

The third son, Rav Shalom Povarsky, passed away this year. He was the *Rosh Hayeshivah* of *Yeshivas Kol Torah* in *Yerushalayim*, and is remembered for his well-crafted *shiurim* and the warm connections he developed with his students. To me, though, he was my *Saba*. For many years, I saw *Saba* and *Savta* Povarsky twice a year; once when they came to us for *Sukkos*, and again when we spent the summer in Israel. Their *Bayit Vegan* apartment fills my childhood memories,

especially *Saba's* study which was lined - ceiling to floor - with bookcases packed with *gemaras*, handwritten notes peeping out of their well-worn pages. But most of all I remember him learning with grandchildren. It kind of happened. First he would ask them what they were learning, and the next thing you knew he was learning it with them. I know, because my brother, Dovid, was among them. And the music goes on.



The Povarsky brothers from L to R: Sholom, Chaim, and Baruch Dov (Berel) Baranovich, circa 1937.



David with his grandfather, Rav Shalom Povarsky, 2019



Rav Shalom Povarsky in Kol Torah, Bayit Vegan

A Cadol Of Great Note(s)



Tzirel Shtierman

It is hard to believe. For four years, my friend Chana Povarsky and I have sat together in hundreds of classes, but only last week did we discover that our great-grandfathers must have been similarly connected! Sitting in the *beis medrash* of the *Mirrer Yeshivah* in interwar Poland, they undoubtedly heard the same *shiurim* from their beloved *mashgiach*, Rav Yerucham Levovitz, whose notes were transcribed with my *Zeida's* golden pen. And though they escaped from the European inferno and went their separate ways - her *sabba rabbah* to Israel and my *Zeida* to America - each became a Torah maestro.

My great-grandfather, Harav Aharon Yeshaya Shapiro, was raised in pre-war Pinsk in a family of *Karliner-Stoliner chassidim* who embraced intense Torah study. By fifteen, *Zeida* was a budding *talmid chacham* - they say, the youngest *bochur* in the *Mirrer Yeshivah* - with an extraordinary flair for writing, and a handwriting '*k'vad Hashem*'. So much so that Rav Chatzkel Levenstein charged him with transcribing the *shmuezin* of the Alter of Kelm. Shortly thereafter, at

the age of nineteen he was selected by Rav Yerucham to travel to Grodno to assist Rav Shimon Shkop with the preparation of his trailblazing work *Shaarei Yosher*. R' Aharon Yeshaya remained there for two years, and was rewarded with daily *shiurim* by Rav Shimon, always related to the particular piece he was then preparing for publication. Years later, he also facilitated the publishing of the notes and *sefarim* of Rav Yerucham, his cherished mentor.

For all the time he spent writing and rewriting the insights and rulings of the Torah luminaries of his time, R' Aharon Yeshaya invested many hours each day into his own learning as well, and continued to be recognized for his keen scholarship. Additionally, he was blessed with a beautiful voice and a fine ear for music. In harmony with his passion for Torah, the *niggunim* and *nusach* of the Karlin-Stolin tradition struck a deep chord within him. He was also blessed with an uncanny memory for *tropp*, the traditional cantillation of Torah texts. Rav Yerucham used to say that if you supplied the *tropp* of any *pasuk* in *Tanach*,



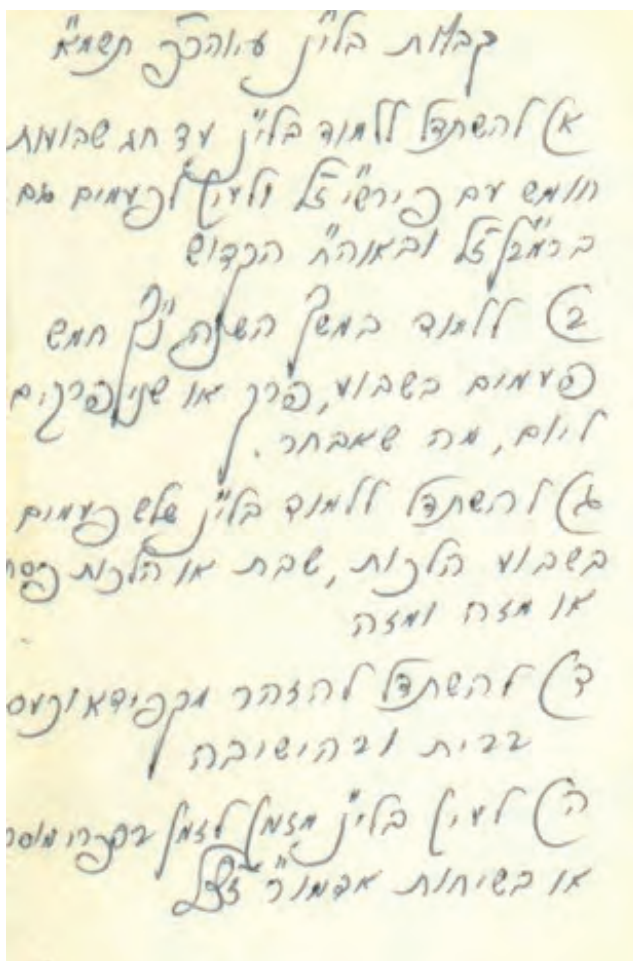
Aharon Yeshaya, circled,
with Mir Yeshiva boys
Poland 1925

R' Aharon Yeshaya could identify the verse.

In 1939, the war broke out and changed the trajectory of Zeida's life. By then a married man with two small children, he emigrated with his family from Riga to the U.S. mainland by way of Vladovostok, Japan and Hawaii. They brought virtually nothing with them, other than 220 pounds of books and manuscripts which they carried from place to place over a period of six months. Finally, they joined Rav Yisroel Stamm, R' Aharon Yeshaya's father-in-law who had left Europe several years earlier, in New York City. In time they settled into their new surroundings, and R' Aharon Yeshaya continued to learn for 12-15 hours a day, and to maintain his *Karliner* customs. Ultimately, Zeida rose to be a cherished *maggid shiur* and father figure to countless students in *Yeshivas Torah Vodaas*. For four decades, he nurtured every student according to his needs. Long after a study session ended, he

would devote time to explaining and re-explaining until everyone understood the Talmudic passage of that day. He gathered their notebooks, reviewed them, and gently pointed out how their writing skills might be improved. His constructive criticism, his *talmidim* recall, was delivered and accepted with love.

Zeida's intellectual drive was always complemented by his musical soul. In 1959, fearful that the melodies of his youth might be lost, R' Aharon Yeshaya recorded many of them. In fact, the tune long associated with the *zemer, Kah Echsof*, is known as "Rav Aharon Yeshaya's *Niggun*," even though it was not he who composed it. *Kah echsof noam Shabbos*. I long, Hashem, for the sweetness of Shabbos...*Kedushas haShabbos hamis'achedes b'Torasecha*. The sanctity of Shabbos which unites with Your Torah. Indeed, Zeida's love of *zemiros Shabbos* and *limud haTorah* united in a masterful symphony.



Rav Aharon Yeshaya's Kabalos from the last year of his life, Brooklyn, NY.



Harav Aharon Yeshaya Shapiro



Rav Aharon Yeshaya (Left) with Reb Yeruchom Levovitz (center), mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva, circa 1925, Poland

Go Forth and Go Further

לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך



Becky Bral

Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's home...

לְהִנָּאֲתָרְךָ וּלְטוֹבָתְךָ

For your benefit and for your good

These words initiated the process which culminated in Jewish nationhood. They also capture the saga of my family whose journey from their birthplace and ancestral home in Iran was ultimately for their own good and for the benefit of our people.

My father experienced *lech lecha* before he ever saw the words. With the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979, violence reigned in the streets of Tehran. Fearing that their fourteen-year-old son, my Abba, might be drafted into the Iranian army, his parents, Baba *a"h* and Maman Shahin, sent him off on a plane headed first for Switzerland, and then Israel. He left behind a large extended family, and what had once been an idyllic life, including many beautiful Jewish customs and traditions. Yet for all the pain of being separated and alone, he began to develop greater Jewish connection.

In an interview I conducted with my father, he said: 'When I went to Israel, after I learned Hebrew, that's the first time I started reading the Torah and understanding it...it was very fascinating for me to learn *Sefer Bereishit*...and what G-d wants from me...'

Less than two years later, my father travelled to America, where he finished high school and later



L-R: Pedram, Shahin, Pouya.
Tehran, Iran, circa 1985

attended Yeshiva University. Meanwhile, his parents and two siblings remained in Iran until 1985, at which point it became clear that life in Iran would never go back to normal, and they, too, prepared to leave. First, they obtained forged ID's because Jews were not permitted to legally travel out of the country. Next, they visited the *kevarim* of Mordechai *Hatzaddik* and Esther *Hamalkah*, where they prayed for *hatzlachah* with their escape. My grandmother, aunt, and uncle left first. They flew to Italy for visas, and then to America for a joyful reunion with Abba. Baba *a"h* needed more time to sell their property and tie up loose ends in Iran, and by the time he was ready to leave two years later, he was forced to travel by camel to Pakistan, disguised as an Arab. From there, he flew to Austria, where, after a few months, he received his visa and finally left for America. For the first time in six years the Brals were all together again.

I am touched by Maman Shahin's appreciation of

their journey. As she said in our interview, “The Revolution was not easy, but it was so good for the Jewish people. Why? Because our children are now religious...they know who they are; they know how to live in the right way. I'm happy about that.”

I, too, am happy. And eternally grateful to Maman and Abba for going forth from their birthplace, for my benefit and for my good.



Reading the birchot hatorah



*In Chof Hakarmel, Israel
Abba on the path to Yemin Orde
Youth Village, circa 1980*



CIRCA 1966
*Back row L-R: Nassereh, Mahnaz, Salim Khan (Mahnaz's husband), Parviz Khan (Nahid's husband)
 Front row L-R: Mansour holding Pourang, Shahin, Sousou holding Sasan, Mehdi, Nahid holding Avraham,
 Mehdi Khan (Mahroch's husband), Mahroch, Behnaz holding Naim (Mahroch's son), Soleyman (Mehdi's son).*

Magnum Opa

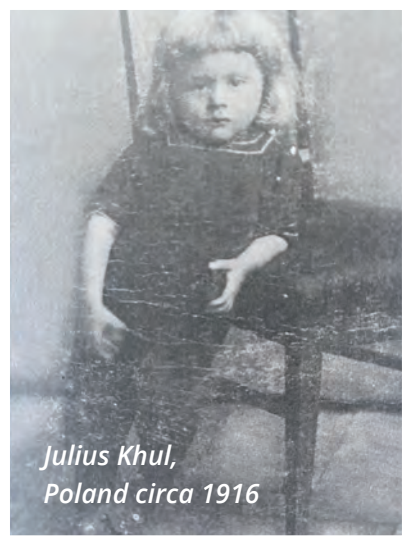
Yvee Rosenthal

Late last spring, in commenting on my family tree, Ms. Gotlieb wrote:

The most well-known name on your tree is, of course, that of Julius Kuhl. However, since a lot has been written about him, it will be challenging for you to write an original essay... I would not suggest you write ...about him.

Well, that settled it. I was not going to research my revered and beloved great-grandfather. But something unexpected happened. Ms. Gotlieb found Opa Julius's captivating memoir which, thankfully, changed the course of my research.

Opa Julius, or Chilik, was born in Sanok, Poland in 1913. During WWII he served as an attache in the Polish legation in Bern, Switzerland. This diplomatic post enabled him to take part in the undercover campaign of the Lados Group carried out in that legation. The group used diplomatic channels to issue passports from South American countries to Jews threatened with extermination in Nazi occupied Europe. The bearers of these documents were deemed by the Nazis to be "foreigners," and potential prisoners for exchange. And so, they were sent to transit camps instead of death camps. Opa Kuhl was a key player in collecting the funds and purchasing the blank passports from South American diplomats. It is estimated that the Lados Group issued such passports for up to 10,000 people, and for hundreds they became tickets to life.



Julius Kuhl,
Poland circa 1916

I had always been proud of Opa Julius. But how, I wondered, did Chilik, an impoverished *yeshivah* boy from Poland make it into the Polish legation in Switzerland? It turns out that it all began with his *Yiddishe Mama*. As I read Opa's memoir, I discovered that she almost lost him three times.

The first occurred during WWI. Sima Pesel and Yitchak Izak Kuhl, and their two small children, fled Sanok together with most of the town's Jews. They were headed for Hungary, and in the carriage the Kuhls dozed off for a short time. When they awoke they were startled to see that Julius, a toddler at the time, was missing. They could only guess that he had fallen out of the hole on the floor of the carriage. Terrified, they retraced their steps and found Julius lying half dead on the forest floor. In the morning they continued on to Hungary, and amazingly, Julius lived on.

Back in Sanok after the war, the cholera epidemic took the lives of Yitzchak Izak and Chilik's sister Bluma, leaving mother and son to fend for themselves. To support them, she sold food rations from a grocery store which abutted their living quarters. More than once they were subject to frightening break-ins. One night, a group of men burst through the glass doors shattering glass everywhere, and Sima Pessel pleaded with the attackers to spare the life of a widow and her son. By some miracle, they did, and once again Julius lived on.

Dundestare
Taxe fédérale
Fr. 20.-
bezahlt
perque

Certificat d'identité
Identitätsausweis
Certificato d'identità No. 10-758

La Division de police du Département fédéral de justice et police certifie, après examen, l'identité de l'étranger sans papiers ci-dessous désigné:
Die Polizeibteilung des eidgenössischen Justiz- und Polizeidepartementes bescheinigt auf Grund der von ihr vorgenommenen Prüfung die Identität des nachgenannten schriftlosen Ausländers:
La Divisione della polizia del Dipartimento federale di giustizia e polizia attesta, in base all'esame da essa compiuto, l'identità dello straniero indicato qui sotto sprovvisto di documenti:

Nom de famille
Familienname
Cognome Kuhl
Prénoms
Vornamen
Nomi Julius
Né le
Geboren am
Nato il 24 juin 1913 à Sansk (Sologne)
Profession
Beruf
Professione Trav. pol.
Observations
Bemerkungen
Osservazioni

Le titulaire de ce certificat ne possède pas la nationalité suisse.
Der Inhaber dieses Identitätsausweises ist nicht Schweizerbürger.
Il titolare di questo certificato non possiede la nazionalità svizzera.
The holder of this certificate is not a Swiss citizen.
El portador de este certificado no es un ciudadano suizo.

Signalement: - Connotati

Stature
Grösst
Statura 160 cm
Cheveux
Haare blond-roux
Capelli
Yeux
Augen bruns
Occhi
Nose
Nase droit
Naso
Visage
Gesicht
Viso ovale
Signes particuliers
Besondere Kennzeichen
Segni particolari

Signature du titulaire: Unterschrift des Inhabers:
Firma del titolare:
Julius Kuhl

Ce certificat est valable jusqu'au
Dieser Ausweis ist gültig bis zum
Il presente certificato è valido fino al 5 octobre 1950

Délivré à Berne, le
Ausgestellt in Bern, am 5 octobre 1949
Rilasciato a Berna, il

Le chef de la Division de Police
Der Chef der Polizeibteilung
Il Capo della Divisione della Polizia
p. o.

Après l'expiration de sa validité, le certificat doit être renvoyé à l'autorité qui l'a délivré.
Nach Erlöschen seiner Gültigkeit ist der Ausweis der Behörde, die ihn ausgestellt hat, zurückzugeben.
Non appena sarà spirata la sua validità, il certificato dovrà essere rispedito all'autorità che l'ha rilasciato.



**ID Document
of Julius Kuhl,
Switzerland 1949**

At the age of nine Opa contracted typhoid and became deathly ill. He thought his time had come, and wrote a little note which he placed under his pillow. 'If I die please put me next to the grave of my father.' When she found the slip of paper, Sima Pessel cried her eyes out, but Julius lived on.

In the end, though, she gave him up, so that she wouldn't lose him. Sanok in the 1920s was modernizing. Sima Pessel began to notice that Julius dressed one way in *yeshivah*, but another way in the company of his more modern friends. So my great-great grandmother made a brave and painful decision. She sent him off to a *yeshivah* in Baden, Switzerland, hoping that he would find in his *rebbeim* father figures who would strengthen his mind with Torah and nurture his spirit with Yiddishkeit. She would not be reunited with him for seventeen years.

After two and half years in *yeshivah*, Julius enrolled in the University of Bern. His thesis on Swiss-Polish trade brought him to the attention of the Polish legation in that town. The bright young man was hired in 1940 by Aleksander Lados, the Polish Envoy. And that is how he found himself in a position to save Jewish lives.

I can't help but think that my great-great-grandmother was something of a modern day Yocheved. Like the mother of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, who had the foresight and courage to send her son off into the Nile to save him from Egyptian brutality, Sima Pessel sent my Opa Julius off to a faraway unknown place to save his soul. And in some small measure, he, too, became a player in easing the burden of his people.

Unknown Caller



Yael Farkas

At the age of forty-two, my Zaidy finally received *bar-mitzvah* wishes from his mother.

It was 1971, and the phone rang in my grandfather, R' Binyamin Schiff's apartment. He picked up the receiver, and in moments was transported back to 1939 Vienna, to the terror which gripped his family after the Nazi takeover. His father, Yosef Schiff, was desperate to bring his wife and two children to safety, but could only manage to obtain the necessary documents for himself and Binyamin. The boy was eleven years old when they set foot on American soil in 1940.

Father and son settled in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Plagued by survivor's guilt and the throes of poverty which were a painful contrast to the comfortable life he had enjoyed in Vienna, my great-grandfather was often unable to care for his son. Binyamin spent his summers in orphanages. He never spoke about his *Bar-Mitzvah*, and I can only imagine that it was, at best, a simple event tinged with sadness and longing. The scars of being torn from his family never faded, and for the rest of his life he searched for some sign of them. As a young girl, *my* mother would look for the names of *his* mother and little sister, Gina, in the phonebook, hoping against hope that she could find them, and make her father happy.

And now, over thirty years later, Zaidy's face turned white as his mysterious caller described a conversation which had taken place in a Budapest cafe in the early 1940's between himself and a young woman. Her name was



Yosef Schiff's public transportation card
Vienna, 1923



Leah Schiff



Binyamin Schiff

Leah Schiff, and she was Binyamin's beloved mother. Amidst the fear and frenzy of war, Leah made the man promise that if he survived, and she did not, he would find her son, and deliver this message: 'Your mother was thinking of you on the day of your *Bar-Mitzvah*.' It had taken many years, explained the stranger, to find Binyamin, and now, he was finally able to keep

his promise. With that, he hung up and never made contact again.

How proud Leah would have been of the man her son became! Of how he courageously forged ahead to become a successful businessman, a sharp Torah scholar and a loving father.

A Valiant Soldier

Michal Englander

Stories of Jewish heroism during the second world war abound, while comparable accounts of the noteworthy Jews of WWI seem few and far between. I am the proud great-granddaughter of a Jewish American soldier who served in WWI, and whose story has been preserved because of a letter he wrote which was picked up by the American press in 1918. His name was Samuel Lesser.

In 1912, Birch Avraham Lesser became the founding president of Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin in Brownsville, Brooklyn. He had nine children. In 1917, as WWI raged through Europe, his nineteen-year-old son Samuel enlisted in the U.S. Army, unbeknownst to his father. The following year, from 'somewhere in France,' he penned a powerful letter to Birch Avraham. His unwavering patriotism and steadfast commitment to Judaism tugged at the heartstrings of many Americans and Jews, and the letter was widely disseminated. His words speak more loudly of his character than any description I could offer:

'Don't worry about me as I will come home safe and sound with the will of G-d. Brace up... Face it with a perpetual smile on your lips. The Lord has thrown the United States into the great conflict to assist in wiping out the present regime ruling the bloodthirsty and barbarous German nation...It is a privilege for a father to give his son for such a great cause. Remember how our patriarch Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son in reply to the Almighty's call. My taking part in this war of nations should also be



Samuel Lesser in France. C. 1918



A card Samuel Lesser sent to his father. C. 1918



An article written about Samuel Lesser while he was fighting in WWI. Included in this image are Samuel's two medals. C. 1918

borne by you and others with pride and honor, as the L-rd of Hosts has willed it so. I am going forth to do my duty to the L-rd on High, and to my country.'

After being honorably discharged from the army in 1919, Samuel Lesser studied architecture at the Pratt Institute. But the job market proved to be a new battleground. He would work diligently from Monday through Friday, but on *Shabbos* he stayed home. Consequently, on the following Monday he

was informed that he was no longer employed. This pattern repeated itself many times, until finally, Sam decided to give up architecture and join his father in the insurance business. His unflappable commitment never waned, and unlike many American Jews of that period, he remained *frum* for the rest of his life. As I see it, he was the perennial soldier, fighting for his ideals and doing his 'duty to the L-rd on High,' to the very end.

Ft Is a Tree of Life to Those Who Hold Fast to Ft

A TRUE STORY



Naomi Landy

*Seventeen daring Fakters hide from gun and knife
They stow their Sefer Torah and hold on for dear life.*



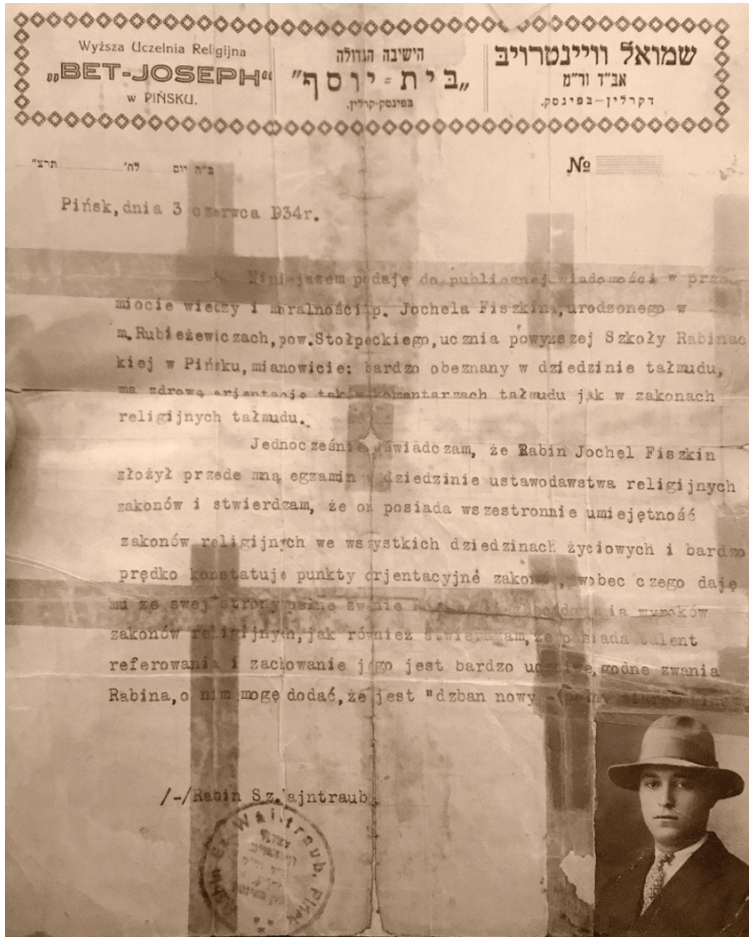
*Rabbi Yechiel Fishkin with the sefer Torah
he saved from Lithuania, June 14, 1992*

They were the only Jewish family left in the small Lithuanian town of Alshad. The others had been transported to Telz where they dug their own graves and were shot to death. But the Fakter family owned and operated a leather factory, and the Germans were in need of new boots and winter clothing. So they kept the Fakters on, until they could figure out how to run the shop themselves. Dumbrowska, the local priest, understood that the days of the remaining Jews were numbered, and sent them an urgent message: ‘What are you waiting for? They’ll kill you, too! I’ll

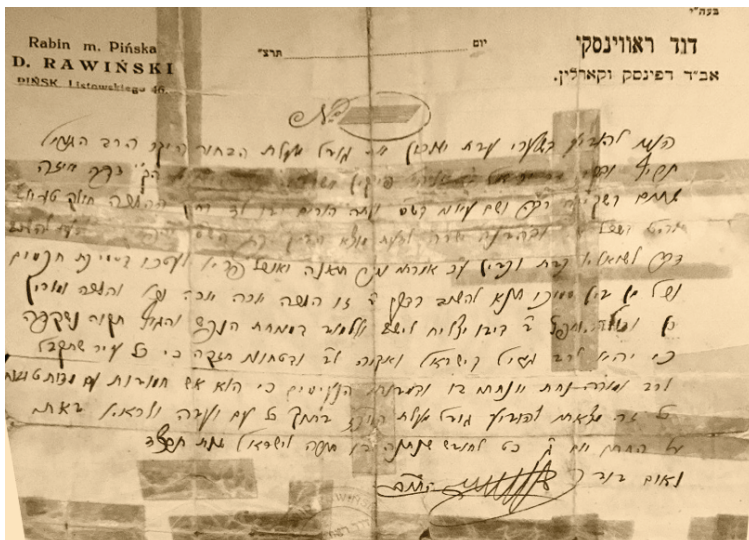
help you escape!’

True to his word, Dumbrowska convinced Kerpauskas, a farmer from a nearby village, to hide the Fakter family. My *Zeidy*, Yechiel Fishkin, and his bride of six months, Feiga Fakter, joined them. Just before they went into hiding, the men removed all the *sifrei Torah* from the town’s shul. The trustworthy priest stored most of them in the church basement, but the smallest one went with *Zeidy*. The escape took place during *Sukkos* of 1941, on an eerily quiet night. The Fakters were led to the small Kerpauskas attic where they began a long period of hiding.

The attic floor was covered with hay, and there was a small stove. Late at night they would bathe in the kitchen downstairs, using ashes as soap. There was never enough food. But they had *siddurim*, a *tallis* and *tefillin*, and davened daily. The women all recited *Tehillim*. Bubby’s two sisters-in-law had babies in that attic, delivered by Bubby’s brother Yisrael. There were many scares. One day, scores of Germans came to the house searching for Jews, and one of the babies started to cry. The door to the attic opened, and everyone held their breath. But it was only Kerpauskas. “Now I see G-d watches you,” he said. He had heard the baby’s cries, but the Germans standing right next to him had not.



Yechiel's first certificate of Semichah from Rabbi Weintraub, 1933

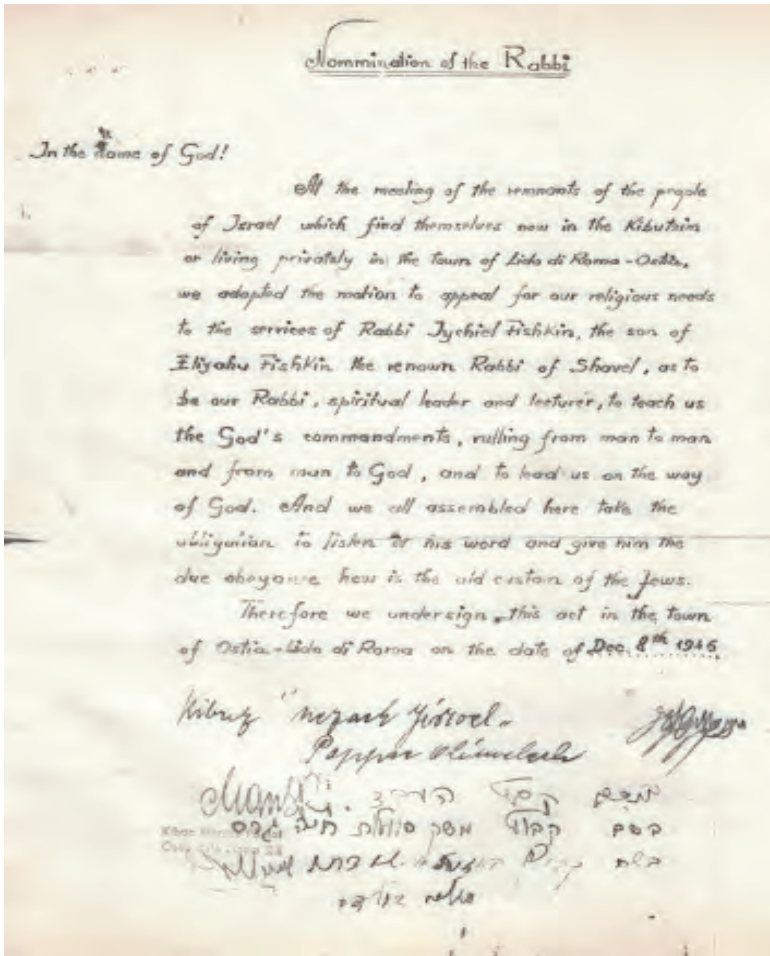


Rabbi Yechiel Fishkin's second certificate of Semichah from Harav Dovid Rabinski, 1934

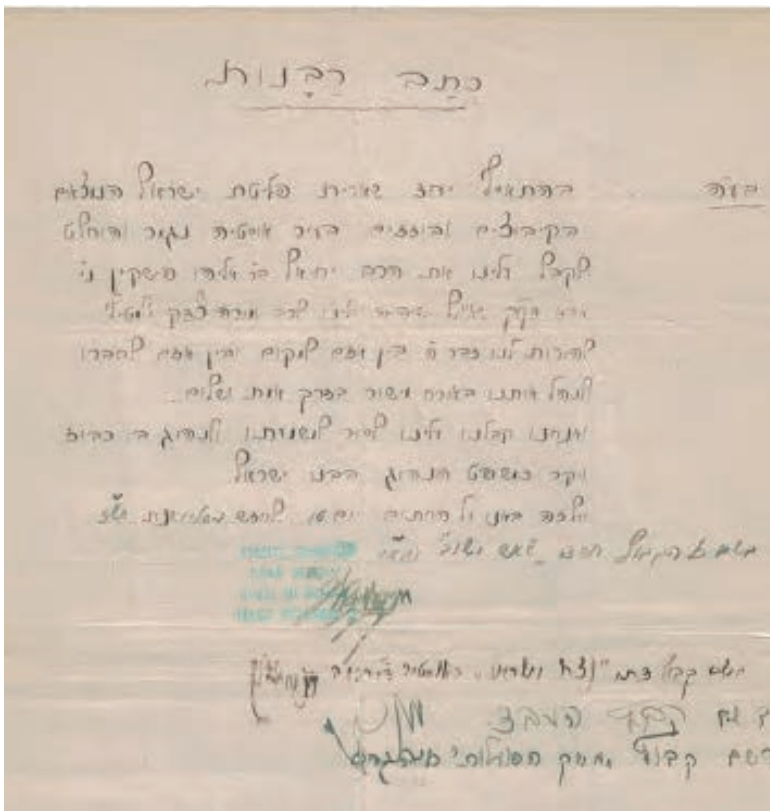
The attic, however, was a short-lived solution. Some workers in the house began to suspect that people were hiding in there. To avoid being discovered, the Fakters left on a cold, snowy night, and headed for a nearby barn which stored hay and straw and seemed deserted. Once inside, they dug out a cave underneath the barn. It was the first night of *Pesach*, and they cried because it was *Leil Haseder*, and there was nothing to eat.

It soon became clear that the barn was not quite as abandoned as it seemed, and after six or seven weeks they moved to a new, more secluded hiding place in the forest. Once again, they dug a cave out of straw, and it was a tight squeeze for the seventeen of them. They survived on bread and water, though even that was scarce. Occasionally they heard the hissing of snakes, and when it rained the men spent the whole night bailing out the water. Worst of all, there never seemed to be enough air to breathe. Nor was there sufficient oxygen to keep a match lit, so they lived in darkness, and tried to sleep their days away. Cramped as they were, the Torah remained with them in the corner of the cave, and in the crevices of their hearts. *Zeidy* and the men put together a Jewish calendar so that they could keep track of *Shabbosos* and *Yomim Tovim*. And on Friday nights, Bubby's aunt would strike two matches, make a *berachah* over her 'candles,' and savor their short-lived light.

They remained there for two and a half years, and Kerpauskas helped them whenever he could. But shortly after *Pesach* of 1944 a Lithuanian woman spotted someone outside the cave, and it was time to move again. About a kilometer away they dug a third cave into a hill and used a wooden pipe to connect to the surface for air. They were so cramped that if one moved, all moved. It was so unbearable, that Bubby left the cave to seek the help of the mayor of the town who



Rabbi Yechiel Fishkin's appointment to Rav of Lido di Roma, August 23, 1946



knew their family. She pleaded with him until he agreed to hide them all in his attic.

And then, on - of all days - *Simchas Torah* of 1944, the Fakters and their Torah were liberated by Jewish Russian soldiers. Freed from the darkness of the cave, they were startled by the sunlight. And by the sorrow which awaited them. They learned that most of their families had perished. In cruel and painful ways. The Lithuania they knew felt like a graveyard, and *Zeidy* moved on to a town called Shavel where he was *rav* to nearly 100 orphans...for no pay. From there to Vilna. To Lodz. To Czechoslovakia. To Austria. To a DP camp near Rome, Italy where, again, he served as rabbi, and began a family. And somehow, we don't know why, the *Sefer Torah* went with him.

Sponsored by Rav Ahron Kotler and Rav Yisroel Gustman, *Zeidy* and his family took a boat to America and settled in East New York. From there to Canarsie. Then Bensonhurst. For forty years he delivered fiery *drashos*, and quietly drove and carried packages for widows. Until he joined a rabbinic retirees *kollel* in Chicago. And every step of the way, that *Sefer Torah* came along. When *Zeidy* passed away in 1997, *Bubby* came to live with her children in New Jersey, and since then the Torah has been hosted by a number of them. Many descendants have *leined* from its parchment at their *Bar Mitzvahs*, and many more, *be"H*, are yet to come.

Yes, Zeidy kept on moving, with his most beloved wife,

And now we have that Torah, and hold onto it for life.

Torah is a tree of life for those who hold fast to it. That, quite literally, is my family's legacy.

The Music Trail



Chana Lipschutz

With special thanks to Sophie Fetthauer



Mejer Podrabinek
1896 - 1982

Cenealogy research is like a detective's mission, with any oral testimonies, photos or documents found serving as vital clues along the way. Each individual leaves a paper trail behind, which if we can trace it, begins to paint for us a picture of a person's unique life story. With so many documents digitized nowadays, the search has become easier and can be conducted without traveling far from home.

My sleuthing initially only revealed a very brief biographical sketch of my great-great-grandfather. Mejer Podrabinek was born on December 20, 1896 in Bialystok, then part of Russia, today located in Poland. He died on May 1, 1982 in Jerusalem, at the age of 86. He married Sonja (Shaina), and the couple were blessed with five children: Ida, Pinya, Moshe, and twins, Shaya and Fruma. It was Fruma (Faye) who was my great-grandmother.



The twins, Shaya and Fruma,
in Bialystock age 5

My Bubby Faye then shared the story of her family's daring escape from Poland to Shanghai by way of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Their journey took them through Vilna, Lithuania, via Vladivostok, Russia and then onto Kobe, Japan, until they reached Shanghai, China. It was in Shanghai that the family eventually found refuge. Beyond this, we had known next to nothing about the family's experiences.

The next breakthrough in my quest came when further exploration yielded an academic essay about Cantor Podrabinek, written by a German scholar.

Sophie Fetthauer was interested in Mejer's cantorial career for the book she was writing on refugee musicians in Shanghai between the years 1938 and 1949. The book is to be released this coming July. In her essay, Sophie mentioned that she was unable to track the living descendants of Cantor

LOKALNOTIZEN

Das vierjaehrige Jubilaeum des Freundeskreises

Samstag abend versammelten sich die Mitglieder des Freundeskreises zu einer schlichten, den heutigen Verhaeltnissen angepassten Feier. Der Vorsitzende Herr Lutz Hamburger ermahnte die Mitglieder, in der heutigen Zeit treu zu einander zu halten und einer fuer den anderen einzustehen. Herr Rabinner Dr. Kantorowsky forderte zur Pflege der juedischen Ideale auf. Aehnliche Gedanken wurden noch von weiteren Rednern zum Ausdruck gebracht. Grossen Beifall fand das von Herrn Mecklenburg verfasste Tischlied. Ein humorvoller Vortrag des Herrn Werner Hamburger fand ein lebhaftes Echo. So vereinten sich die Mitglieder des Freundeskreises zu einigen angenehmen Stunden.

Das Konzert der Agudas Jisroel in der S.J.Y.A. Schule

am kommenden Sonntag verspricht ein kuenstlerisches Ereignis ersten Ranges zu werden. So spielt, der schon in

Deutschland als hervorragender Geiger bekannte Professor Alfred Wittenberg, das Beethoven'sche Violinkonzert. Hans Bergmann mit seiner schoenen Tenorstimme wird selten gehoerte Arien von Haendel usw. zu Gehoer bringen. Herrsch Friedmann, jiddische Volksliedersaenger wird das Publikum durch ein neues Programm erfreuen. Eine besondere Ueberraschung ist das erste Auftreten von **Ober-Kantor Podrabinek** von der Russischen Synagoge. Die Begleitung der Kuenstler liegt in den Haenden des bekannten Pianisten Hans Baer, der als Solist "Campanella" von Liszt spielen wird.

Bezahlung der angekauften Baumwollvorracte erfolgt in Goldbarren

Die Shanghai Filiale der Central Reserve Bank of China teilt mit, dass die erste Teilzahlung in Hoehoe eines Viertels der Depositquittung fuer angekaufte Baumwollvorracte nach folgendem Schema in

SEITE 4 SHANGHAI JEWISH CHRONICLE DIENSTAG, 18. JANUAR 1944



Brennmaterialien
fuer Haushalt u. Industrie
zu billigsten Preisen
kaufen Sie stets am besten beim
Kohlen Centrum
Max Kalenscher Coal Co.
635/35 TONGSHAN ROAD

IMPERATOR
Heute lustiger Abend
MIT JENNY RAUSNITZ, FRITZ HELLER, GERHARD GOTSCHALK
Kapelle WILLY ROSNER
Stimmung — Humor Lokal gut geheizt

ENSEMBLE
Bekanntmachung
Auf vielseitiges Verlangen beginnt die Premiere des amuesanten und spannenden Kriminalstueckes
Parkstrasse 13
im EASTERN THEATRE am Mittwoch, den 19. Januar um 8 UHR ABENDS.
Karten bei Frazer, Wayside

EASTERN THEATRE 5. FEBRUAR
ADOLF BREUER bringt als naechste JAZZ-SCHLAGEROPERETTE
"Bezambendes Fraeulein"
4 Bilder von RALPH BENATZKY in der Starbesetzung
Lily FLOHR, Karla BREUER, Jonny RAUSNITZ, Fritz FRIESER, Herbert ZERNIK a.C.
Kartenvorverkauf hat bereits bei Praeger, 37. Wayside—begonnen

S.J.Y.A. SCHOOL 627 East Yuhang Road
Sonntag, den 23. Januar 1944, 8 Uhr abends
Konzert
der AGUDAS JISROEL zu Gunsten ihres "SABBATH-TISCH"
MITWIRKENDE:
Professor Alfred Wittenberg (Violine), Prof. Hans Baer (Klavier), Dr. Erich Marcuse (Klavier), **Oberkantor Podrabinek (Bialystok)** von der French Synagogue Tenant de la Tour, Hans Bergmann (Tenor), Herrsch Friedmann (Bariton). Im Programm u.a.: Violinkonzert von Beethoven, seltene Lieder und Arien von Haendel, Haydn, Verdi und juedische Volkslieder.
Karten von 15 - 40 \$ incl. Tax. Vorverkauf bei Praeger, Wayside Road. Der Raum ist gut geheizt.
Treffpunkt zum gemeinsamen Uebergang 7.30 Uhr. Tongshan Ecke Desu Rd.

Teilladen oder LAGERRAUM mit Telephonegelegenheit im Distrikt guenstig gelegen gesucht.
Chiffre 2277.

SEITE 2 SHANGHAI JEWISH CHRONICLE MITTWOCH, 5. JANUAR 1944

GAS- u. ELEKTROHERDE, ein- u. zweiflammige GASKOCHER hochwertige KRISTALLE, KAFFEE- u. SPEISESERVICE (fuer 6 und 12 Personen), HAUS- u. KUECHENGERAETE, ferner
SINGER - HAUSHALT - NAEHMASCHINEN
ALLER KLASSEN
kaufen zum
allerhoechsten Tagespreis
ZYDOWER BROS.
611, Tongshan Rd. 865, East Seward Rd.

S.J.Y.A. SCHOOL 627 East Yuhang Road
Sonntag, den 9 Januar 1944 8 UHR ABENDS
KONZERT
Der AGUDAS JISROEL zu Gunsten ihres "S-BBATH- TISCH"
MITWIRKENDE:
Professor Alfred Wittenberg (Violine), Prof. Hans Baer (Klavier), **Oberkantor Podrabinek (Bialystok)** von der French Synagogue Tenant de la Tour, Hans Bergmann (Tenor), Herrsch Friedmann (Bariton).
Karten von 15 - 40 \$ incl. Tax. Vorverkauf bei Praeger Wayside Road. Der Raum ist gut geheizt.

Advertisements and article in the Shanghai Jewish Chronicle about a concert in which Mejer Podrabinek performed. The concert took place on January 9, 1944 at the S.J.Y.A School as part of a benefit organized by Agudath Yisroel called "the Shabbos Tisch"

Podrabiner and failed to find out more about his life after leaving Shanghai. Intrigued, I made contact with her and we exchanged details. I shared what I knew about the present and she gave me the information that I was missing about the past.

Sophie generously shared advertisements with me that had been placed in the Shanghai Jewish Chronicle, inviting the community of Jewish exiles to a concert on January 9th 1944, in which Mejer Podrabiner would participate. This concert took place at the S.J.Y.A. School as part of a benefit organized by Agudath Yisroel called “The *Shabbos Tisch*.”

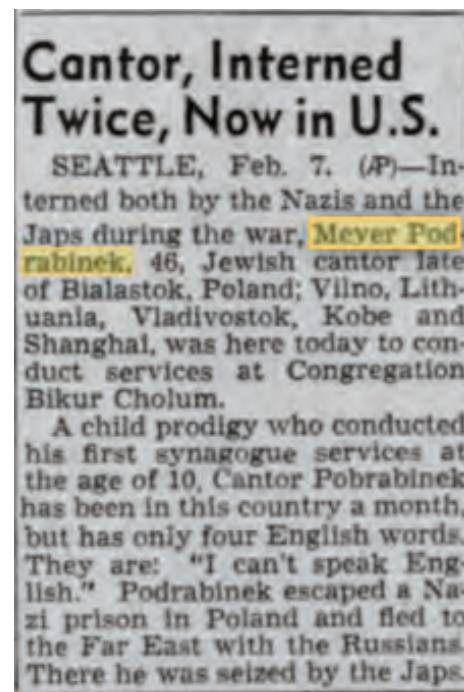
In Shanghai, the German and Austrian refugees were mostly conservative. This led Mejer, an Orthodox man, to seek work within the Russian-Jewish community. By early 1944, he had risen to the position of chief cantor at the Russian Novaja Sinagoga.

As I was putting the finishing touches to my presentation, I was fortunate to come across an unexpected find, one more piece of evidence.

It was a newspaper clipping from the LA Times dated February 8th, 1947, announcing the arrival of Mr. Podrabiner, Cantor from the Far East. The article traced his musical career all the way back to the time he sang in shul as a child in his hometown of Bialystok. It was remarkable to learn that Mejer was known as a child prodigy, apparently conducting services when he was just 10 years old. I was fascinated to notice the change in the spelling of Mejer’s name to Meyer, in the LA Times article. This seemingly insignificant change was the reason why this article eluded me until this point. It highlighted for me the critical importance of spelling in any genealogical research.

Though my great-grandfather left an impressive trail that allowed me to trace the various places in which he served as a cantor, I could not find any existing recordings of his legendary talent. I subsequently learned that while many of Mejer’s admirers sought to acquire recordings of his *chazzanus*, he refused to produce any for fear that they might be played on *Shabbos*.

So it seemed that my detective work had revealed my great-grandfather’s true legacy. While there is no record featuring his songs, Mejer is remembered for his perfect record of *Shemiras Shabbos*.



A notice in the LA Times announcing the arrival and upcoming cantorial work of Mejer Podrabiner in the US Issue: Feb 8th, 1947



לוית חן הוא לראשנו

Our Crown Jewel, A Levi of Grace

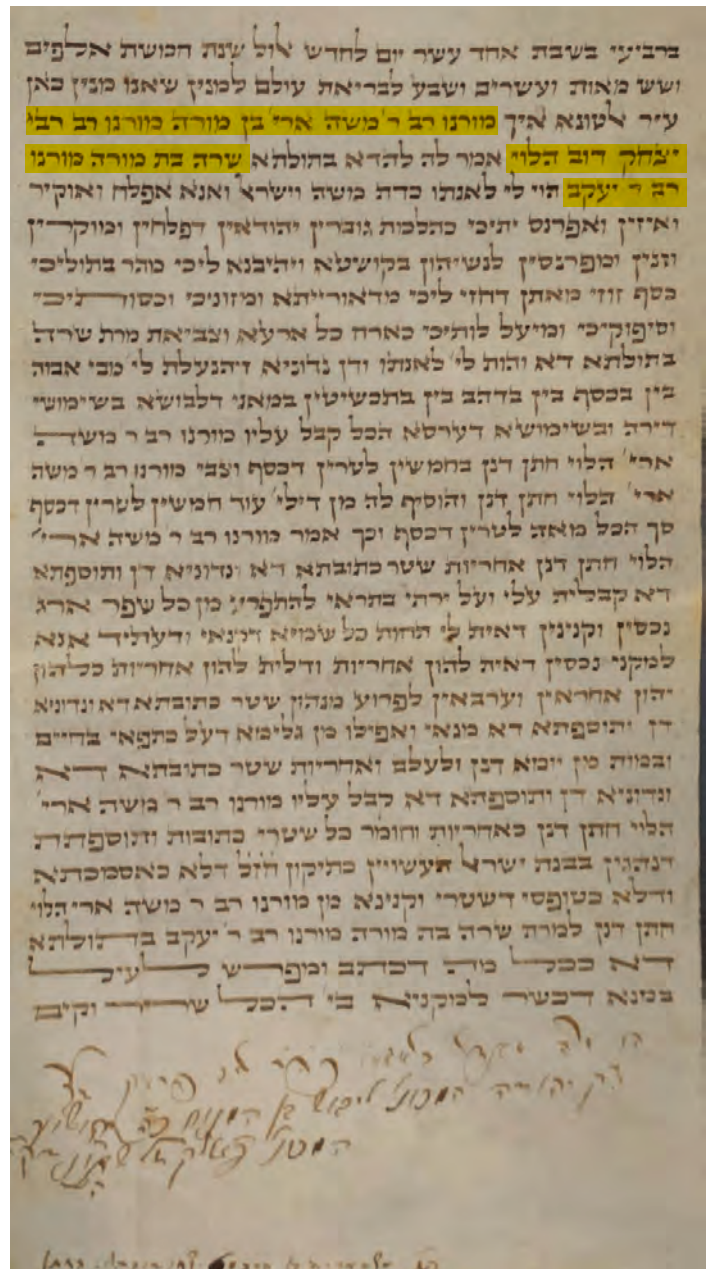


Chava Bamberger

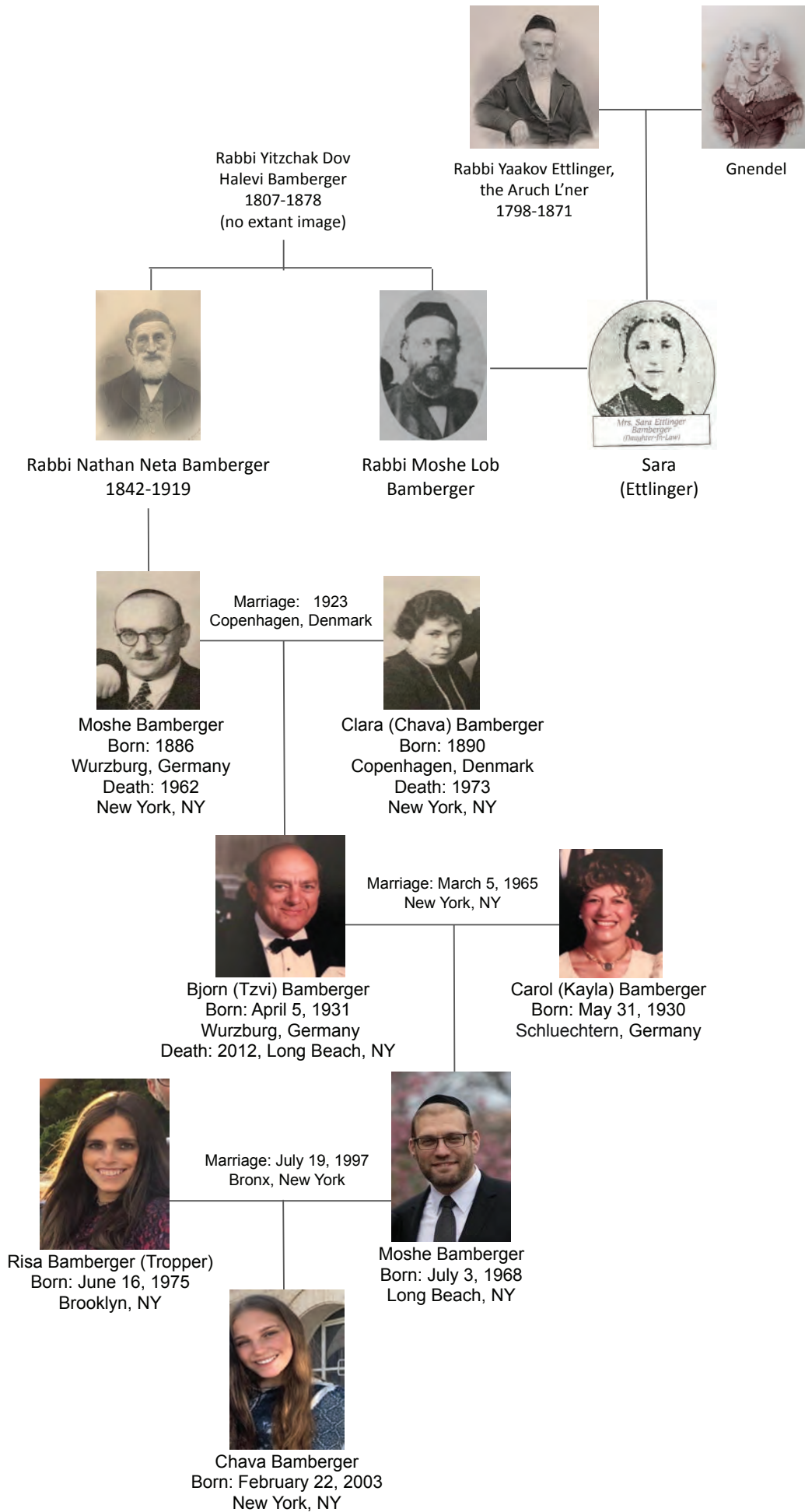
“Yes, I am his great-great-great-granddaughter.” That is my simple response each time a *rav, talmid chacham*, or Jewish historian asks me if I am a descendant of the Wurzburger Rav. Invariably, they proclaim their reverence for Rabbi Yitzchak Dov HaLevi Bamberger, who was considered to have been the last great Talmudist of Germany and one of the preeminent *halachic* authorities of his time, as evidenced by the vast scope and worldwide readership of his legal responsa. Always, I am brimming with pride which I humbly try to contain.

Rabbi Bamberger was born on November 6, 1807, in the tiny hamlet of Wiesenbronn, Germany. His parents’ one wish was for him to become a genuine *talmid chacham*, and he did not disappoint them. He attended the Talmudic high school of Fuerth, one of the most elite *yeshivos* in Germany, where he grew day by day in his mastery of *Gemara* and *Shulchan Aruch*.

Mindful of our Sages’ warnings against using Torah as an instrument through which to earn a livelihood, the budding scholar opened a small shop in Wiesenbronn as a means of supporting his parents and siblings. Legend has it that sometimes, when he was particularly engrossed in learning and a customer entered the store, he would ask the patron if there was not some other shop where he could purchase his needs. After Yitzchak Dov married Kayla Wormser in 1830, she took over much of the day-to-day running of the shop so that he could dedicate himself to



Kesuva of the marriage of the son of the Wurzburger Rav to the daughter of Rabbi Yakov Ettlinger, the famed Aruch L’Ner.



the uninterrupted study of Torah. This newfound tranquility allowed him to begin writing his many classical works on diverse topics of Jewish law.

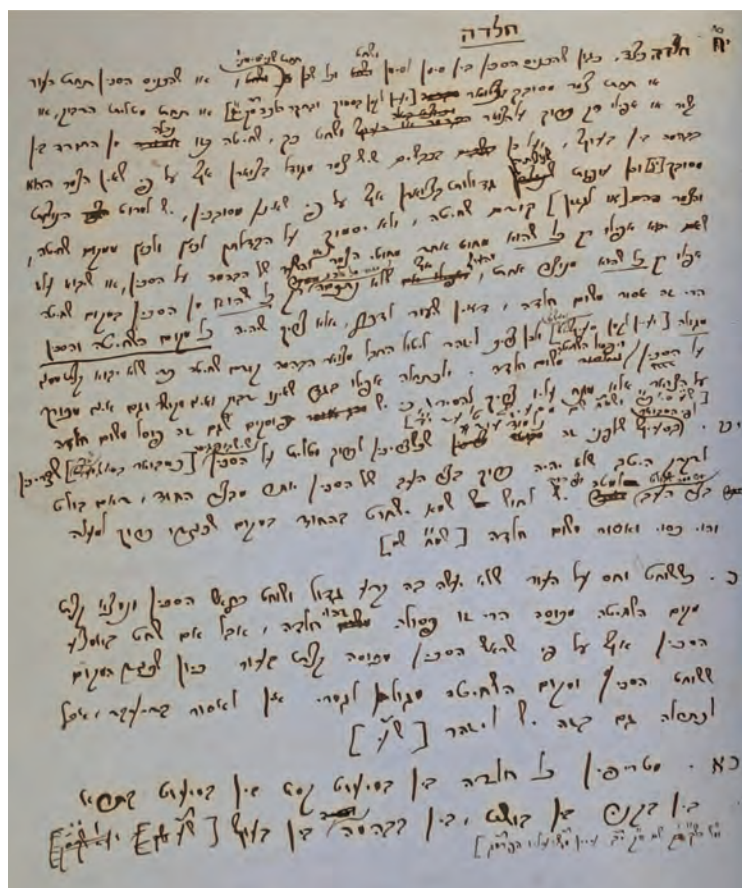
In December of 1837, Rabbi Bamberger was invited by the chief rabbi of Wurzburg, Rabbi Avrohom Bing, to become his rabbinic assistant. Shortly thereafter Rabbi Bing retired, and in April of 1840 Rabbi Bamberger was elected to be his successor.

Beyond his extraordinary scholarship, the new Wurzburger Rav was a model of principle and fine character. People were awed by his kindness in giving his brand new shoes to a stranger who could ill afford them; by his scruples in insisting on a receipt at the bridge lest the toll collector be tempted to pocket the money for himself; by his wisdom in advising a childless couple to build a *mikvah* in their home in order to avoid the arduous monthly journey to the nearest town which had one. But above all, he is remembered for ensuring the future of *Yiddishkeit* in Germany.

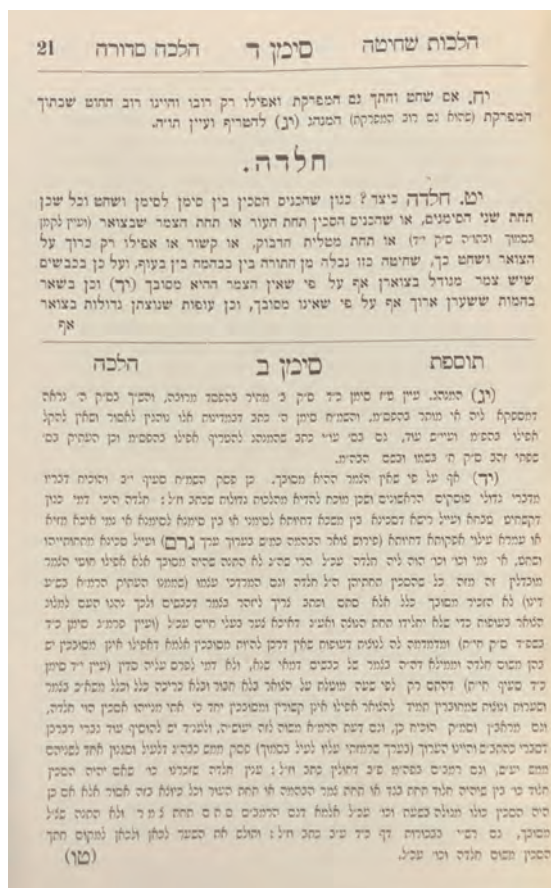
Top on his agenda when he took over the Wurzburger rabbinate was bringing an end to Jewish ignorance among



The first printed edition of Moreh L'Zvachim.



The handwritten manuscript of Moreh L'Zvachim on the topic of Chaladah.



The printed format of the manuscript.

the youth of his community. In 1855 he opened a Jewish elementary school. This highlighted the urgent need for qualified and engaging orthodox teachers throughout Germany, so the Wurzbürger Rav embarked on an ambitious project in 1864: the founding of the Teachers Seminary in Wurzburg. Its inaugural class had twelve students. A year later enrollment nearly doubled, and by 1878, the school boasted 164 graduates who accepted teaching positions all across Germany.

Without a doubt, the greatest challenge to traditional Judaism in Germany at that time was the reform movement which had taken the community by storm. The voice of Jewish orthodoxy had been muted to a whisper. In Frankfurt, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch obtained the right to withdraw his Orthodox followers from the general Jewish community. Rabbi Bamberger, who was equally passionate in the fight against the reformers, differed from Rav Hirsch in his approach to achieving the same goal. He believed that secession would preclude many susceptible Jews from having the slightest exposure to Torah and authentic Judaism. Therefore, when asked for his opinion, he argued for small concessions which would keep the Frankfurt community intact and curb the tide of the dangerous *zeitgeist*.

Despite the many trials and tribulations which he confronted as a sought-after spiritual leader, the Wurzbürger Rav enjoyed a long and fulfilling life. He and his *mechutan*, the famed Rabbi Yaakov Etlinger of Altona, author of the *Aruch La'ner*, were the undisputed halachic authorities for German Jewry. Rabbi Bamberger's responsa were regarded as vital rulings for posterity, and three great Torah luminaries - Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor of Kovno, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin of Volozhin, and Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin - insisted on publishing them after his passing, despite his own humble reluctance to do so.

The Wurzbürger Rav left this world suddenly on the second day of *Sukkos*, in 1878. Davening in his *shul* that morning, he was called up for the *levi aliyah*, and upon returning to his seat, collapsed and died. All of German Jewry mourned together with the community of Wurzburg for the singular *Levi* who had graced them with his leadership. He was the crown jewel of our family, and to this day, inspired by his legacy, many of his descendants continue to faithfully serve Jewish communities throughout the world.

The Kiddush cup of the Wurzbürger Rav. It has a lid, which was in keeping with his minhag to keep wine from kiddush on Shabbos day for the havdalah ceremony.



We Ate Her Cake and Have It



Nechama Mandel

Layers of perfectly formed puff pastry separated by the whitish cream peeking out around its sides, topped with that irresistible sprinkling of confectioner's sugar. Every Sunday, as I walked through the door of my great-grandparents' home on East 22nd Street, I breathed in the familiar aroma of Babi's kitchen. She kissed my cheek, and I headed for the dining room where we enjoyed some good family time. I could barely follow the quick Yiddish repartee, but the cremish, which was waiting for us on a platter on the table, presented no language barrier.

Actually, at first, I just licked off the sugar and handed the rest to my father. As I grew older, I acquired a taste for the rich, savory cream filling, and by the time I was a teenager, I polished off the whole thing. Now that I think about it, my appreciation of my great-grandmother's story, of her trials and triumphs, of her

high points and challenges, has developed in much the same way.

At first I just licked off the sugar, and absorbed only the most basic details of Babi's life. I was well aware that she was an awesome baker and cook, that her native tongue (as I heard in her weekly conversations with my mother) was Yiddish, and that she had grown up in Europe. I also knew that she had experienced something called a holocaust, but I can't say that I knew what that meant. Most importantly, perhaps, my grandfather would tell me the story of his *tefillin* over and over again. He described how, one day, just before his *Bar Mitzvah*, as he was practicing donning *tefillin*, there was a knock on his door. His gentile neighbor was looking for a playmate. He quickly removed the *tefillin* but when he opened the door his friend wondered aloud why there were red marks on his left



*Marriage of Sara Shechter and Avraham Yitzchak Moshkovich
Svalyava, USSR, November 8th 1946*



*Sara Moshkovich (Shechter)
and her family
Svalyava, USSR, 1958*

arm. Zaidi couldn't tell him the truth so he improvised, and explained that he had been playing with a rope. I did not know why he couldn't tell him. Nor did I understand that this story spoke volumes about Babi.

As I grew to be an adolescent, I became more curious. I listened more. And I started to taste the cream of Babi's life. I became more conscious of her thick European accent. I began to ask questions about her former life. I gradually realized that my grandparents never knew *their* grandparents, and that *they* had accents too. I found out that they had left Europe in 1978 and come to America. My grandfather explained that they had been anxious to leave because they were unable to freely practice Judaism in Communist Ukraine. He mentioned also that there was a waiting period before they finally got their visas, which I assumed had something to do with permission. That's when I learned the reason behind the *tefillin* story. Zaidi couldn't tell the boy what he was really doing because he had to hide the fact that he was Jewish. I also heard stories about Babi's guests in Europe. When people were passing through the town, they were always directed to my great-grandparents' house. Babi cooked and baked for the whole community. She prepared weddings a full week before the *simchah*, by cooking the food in the host's home.

Now, over a year into my genealogy project and

counting, the sugar and cream are no longer satisfying. I am devouring the whole cake. I now know what the Holocaust was, and how it ravaged Babi Suri's family. One Friday night in shul, a man overheard my grandfather speaking to my mother who was three years old at the time, and remarked that they shared the same dialect of *Yiddish*. After a few rounds of 'Jewish Geography,' the man realized who they were, and delivered a heart-wrenching piece of news: Babi's brother and father had made it through Auschwitz until the day before liberation, when they tried to escape and were shot. Forty years of not knowing were over, but the certainty brought little relief.

Armed with my newly acquired knowledge, I stand in awe before my ancestors. I recently learned that during their teenage years, my grandfather and his siblings rose each morning before the crack of dawn because their mother, my Babi Suri whom I knew as a wiz in the kitchen, insisted that they don their *tefillin* and *daven* every day before eating breakfast and then leaving for school at 7 A.M. I am humbled. In the heart of Ukraine, a spiritual wilderness where Jewish observance was strictly prohibited, a religious family blossomed because of the steadfast spirit of one courageous woman. Indeed, our cake is rich.



Sara Shechter and her classmates
Kivvazd, Czechoslovakia, c. 1936

Bobby's Story



Leora Wisnicki

I was barely six years old when I lost Bobby Faigy, yet she will forever be a vibrant part of who I am. I often stare at what has become an iconic family photograph of the two of us, and can almost feel her warmth when I recall nestling into her to listen to the story of Heidi. Heidi, the fictional little girl whose grandfather was her whole world, was the character that Bobby Faigy brought to life as she read that classic children's book to me night after night. And now, it is my turn to tell *her* story.



**Avraham Yaakov Rudah,
father of Faigy and Sonia.
This is the only known photo
of my great-great-grandfather,
found serendipitously at
someone's home in Israel.**

Bobby Faigy was only 14 when her sister Sonia had had enough. It was 1939, and standing on line for her daily bread ration she watched a Nazi shove a young boy to the ground and thrust a bayonet toward his head. Sonia knew that a group of young people were planning an escape on Friday night - the one night when the SS officers were in weekend mode and a bit less attentive to infractions. It was then and there that she resolved to join them.

When Sonia approached her father for permission, there was tension in the air. How could he possibly let his young daughter escape on her own, and on a *leil Shabbos* no less?! But how could he not? He decided to allow her to go...but only on condition that she take her younger sister Faigy along. Their goodbye was very emotional; he looked at them and made them promise to stick together. "*Tovim Hashnayim Min Ha'echad*," he insisted. Two are better than one. As the parents parted from their children their father added one more instruction: "Stay on the *derech hayashar*."

His final words got them through the war. Sonia quickly got over her hesitation to take her little sister along, and the two clung to each other through thick and thin because two, they always kept in mind, are better than one. Soon after they left home the group

took to the forest which was not as closely guarded as the city. As they made their way to the Russian border, German planes swooped down so close that they felt the ground shake beneath them. In that moment Faigy wasn't afraid; she felt Hashem even more closely than the planes. She looked up at the sky and said, "*Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad.*" Fifteen years old and very much her father's daughter.

The nights in the forest were terribly cold, and the days were unbearably hot; food was hard to come by, but every so often they found a diner along the way. Faigy was getting skinnier and skinnier, but her father's

image appeared to her, 'go in the *derech hayashar*,' and she couldn't eat anything that wasn't kosher. She lived on bread, water, and vegetables for years. But she survived. Together with Sonia. Two sisters alone, sometimes separated by circumstances, but always making their way back to each other. The precise details of their harrowing journey, like their family, are lost. Yet the flavor of Bobby Faigy's childhood, the love of her grandparents, the faith of her father, and the wisdom of her mother come through loud and clear on the videos and recordings she left us. As do her own resiliency, conviction, and regal bearing. She was a queen, and I yearn to be heiress to her throne.



Leora with Bobby Faigy

A Very Real Estate

Nava Stefansky

Opa was a real estate wiz. He understood that there was no estate as real or enduring as the heart of B'nei Brak.

Harav Yissachar Meir Stefansky grew up in Switzerland, in a spiritually charged and deeply religious home. After the war the Stefanskys immigrated to America, where Opa eventually established his own home. He used his keen business acumen to start a real-estate company. Yet he shied away from the American mindset, culture and pastimes, and immersed himself, instead, in the study of Torah. He would not leave for work before completing a full morning *seder*, and refused to interrupt his learning or compromise his standards, even if it meant losing a deal. Despite this unusual way of doing business, or perhaps because of it, he



Opa and his brothers in Switzerland



Opa sitting and learning



Opa In Eretz Yisroel, 1968

was blessed with great *siyata dishmaya*, and became a recognized and respected real-estate magnate. Never, though, did he strive for a life of luxury; his home was devoid of elegant fixtures or furniture, but adorned, instead, with frequent visits from *talmidei chachamim*. Opa happily distributed vast amounts of money to Torah institutions in America and Israel, but shunned the limelight. Because of his sensitivities, no plaques were hung in his honor, save the one insisted upon by the Telzer *rosh hayeshivah*, Rav Chaim Mordechai Katz, when Opa contributed generously to the rebuilding of their fire-ravaged dormitory.

In 1968, Opa took a life-altering trip to *Eretz Yisroel*. As he walked the streets of B'nei Brak which throbbled with Torah living and learning, he longed to raise his children in that environment. Then and there he purchased an apartment on *Rechov Devorah Haneviah*, down the block from the famed Lederman shul, whose modest, unassuming physical structure belied the treasures of the Torah world who filled its space. Opa picked up his family of 14 children and moved to the center of that world.

In B'nei Brak, my grandfather continued tending to the needs of many Torah scholars and institutions,



My Father walking with Rav Dovid Povarsky to the Ponevezh Yeshiva



*Harav Yisachar Meir Stefansky
1933-2019*



Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky with Oma



Oma and Opa

but gave up the day to day running of his real estate business. Instead, he spent all day, every day, learning in the famous *Kollel Chazon Ish*. B'nei Brak also afforded him the unique opportunity to fulfill the mandate of *Chazal*, "*hevei misabek ba'afar ragleihem*," and sit at the footstools of *gedolei Yisrael*. With that in mind, he was determined to win the privilege of driving the Steipler Gaon, who did not easily accept rides. After a number of creative attempts he was successful, and eventually became recognized as the official driver and one of the right-hand men of the Gaon. The warm relationship between the two later extended to the Steipler's son, Rav Chaim Kanievsky. Opa sent all of his sons to learn in *Yeshivas Ponevezh* and became especially close with the *Rosh Yeshiva* Rav Elazar Menachem Shach.

I will never forget Opa's *levayah*. For all of his efforts to escape the public eye, hundreds of people packed the streets of B'nei Brak to pay tribute to the man of few words whose bold and generous actions spoke loudly. Among them were the many *gedolim* whose friendship and admiration he had earned. It is no surprise that his recliner at *Devorah Haneviah 5* remains empty. Who could sit in his place?



Opa waiting for the Steipler Gaon



Rav Aharon Yehuda Leib Shteinman and Opa



Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv and Opa



Rav Chaim Kanievsky and Opa



Opa Driving Rav Shach



Rav Elazar Menachem Shach and Opa

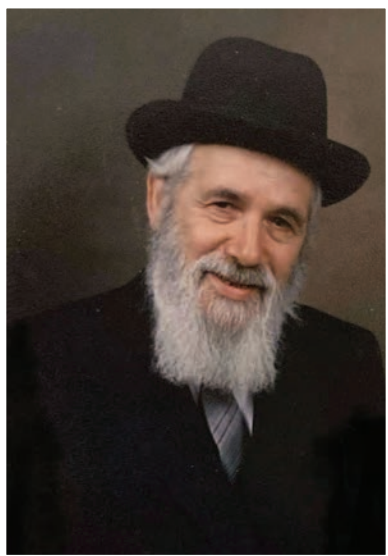


Rav Dovid Soloveitchik and Opa

Sweet Singer of South America



Ilana Katzenstein



*My great grandfather,
Wolf Farber. (1918-2008)*

The Paso Shul in Argentina was transformed, during the 1950's, by the soulful singing of the gifted *ba'al tefilah* who led the davening. Flanked on either side by his sons Avraham Moshe, Zvi, and Chaim, who sang harmony, R' Wolf Farber intoned the words of *kedushah* that he loved so much. *Mimkomecha malkeinu sofia...ki mechakim anachnu lach*. Appear to us from Your place, our King, for we are waiting for You. How many of the *mispallelim* knew, I wonder, that my great-grandfather had spent lonely years anticipating Hashem's appearance.

Born in Zurich, Switzerland and raised in Karlsruhe, Germany, Zaza (as we fondly refer to him,) left home in 1932 at the age of fourteen, and headed for the *yeshivah* in Brigel, Poland, where he studied for four years. Because his parents had been born in Poland, when he turned 18 he was in danger of being drafted and needed to leave the country. He took leave of his rebbe, R' Moshe Lipschutz, whose parting words - *your mazal lies overseas* - baffled him, and



Great Paso Synagogue in Buenos Aires, Argentina

tried to join his family, who were by then in Holland. He was denied entry, and smuggled himself in, only to be stopped, in 1938, by policemen asking for the papers he did not have. Not wanting to endanger his family, he assured the officers that he was just passing through, and boarded a train bound for Antwerp, Belgium. From where he was again forced to leave. To Switzerland via France. To Italy. To Luxembourg, until it was no longer safe to be there. At which time he boarded a boat and sailed to the port of safety in Uruguay. When he arrived at the harbor in 1939, he met a man he had known from Italy, who began to help him with his belongings. As they were walking together down the steps of the boat, Zaza asked if they could stop for a moment. He remembered the words of the Brigl Rav, understood that for now his destiny lay in South America, and felt compelled to pause and

thank Hashem for that moment of clarity.

Six months after his arrival in Uruguay Zaza moved on to Argentina where, at long last, he was permitted to stay. There, he was employed as a furrier, but withstood the ultimate test of commitment every week when he refused to work on *Shabbos* and was out of a job on Monday. Within the Jewish community, though, he was in high demand, both for the *shiur* he delivered, and for the ability he had to move people with his stirring renditions of age-old *tefilos*. At times he even traveled to Uruguay and Brazil to serve as their *shliach tzibbur*.

My family cannot easily recall Zaza's melodious *zemiros* and *tefilos*. We do, however, treasure the song of unswerving faith which is his legacy to us.

My grandfather, Rabbi Zvi Farber in choir uniform. Argentina, circa 1957

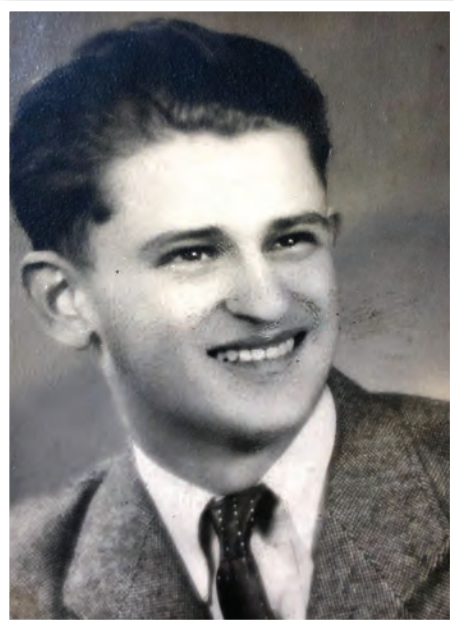


(L-R) Wolf, Zvi, Chaim, Avraham Moshe, Lili. Argentina, circa 1950

Singing Through the Storm



Dina Rothman



Yitzchok Itche Weissman



*Chaya and Yechezkel
Weissman, in
Lazne Luhacovice,
Czechoslovakia, 1946*



R' Yechezkel Weissman

Jews weather raging storms with songs on their lips. At the end of 1943, when my great-uncle Yitzchok Itche Weissman was only twelve years old, loud and angry anti-Semitic threats racked his hometown of Zilina, Czechoslovakia. A learned Polish refugee named Rachmiel warned the town's Jews of what would follow. Yitzchok's father, Yechezkel, the town *chazzan* and *shochet*, believed him, and built nearly a dozen bunkers for his family in different people's homes. In the spring of 1944, after a number of close calls with Nazi officers, Yitzchok found himself hiding together with Rachmiel in one of these bunkers. The situation had become extremely dangerous. 'We were living in fear...hanging by our fingernails.' There, the older man distracted the boy by teaching him many *perakim* of Torah. And *kapitlach* of *Tehillim*. And songs. Two of these songs kept him going, because their words spoke to the times, and their music uplifted his spirits. The first was *Rachem*. Have mercy. *Al Yisrael Amecha*. On Your nation of Israel. *Rachem*. Have mercy. The second was a *Yiddish* song popularized by the famous *Chazzan* Yosele Rosenblatt. It was entitled "*Shofar Shel Mashiach*," and Rachmiel helped Yitzchok remember its timeless words.* Pleading with David *HaMelech* to rise from his grave and restore his *malchus*, the Jew longs, as well, for the sweet sounds of David's harp that will accompany the words of *Tehillim* which he wrote, and which Jews continue to sing, in the best of times and in the worst of times.

**Family lore has it that "Shofar Shel Mashiach" was familiar to Yitzchok, because it had actually been composed by his father, my great-grandfather, R' Yechezkel Weissman, when he was a twenty year old butcher and a member of Chazzan Rosenblatt's choir.*

A Birthday Gift



Ilana Katzenstein



Julius Nager. New York, circa 1970

On his sixth birthday, my Uncle Pinchas received a present from his grandfather, my great-grandfather, Julius Nager. No one remembers exactly what it was, but for all of his descendants, the letter which accompanied it was the greatest gift of all.

(July 1966)

My Dear Pinchas:

It is your birthday...

Do you know what gift I would really like to give you, if instead of being your grandfather I was G-d's messenger and could bequeath a miraculous gift? I would wave my rod and wish for...the love for Torah...

Did you ever hear the story of the businessman who was visiting Europe? He decided to visit the world-famous leader and rabbi, the Chofetz Chaim. When he arrived at the rabbi's home, he was ushered into a room in which there stood a plain table and some benches... He turned to the rabbi and inquired: "Rabbi, where is your furniture?" The rabbi, showing no surprise, turned to his visitor and asked: "Where is your furniture?" "But I am only passing through this city, Rabbi, I do not need my possessions with me," he responded. "True", answered the Chofetz Chaim, "I, too, am only a passer-by in this world. Like yourself, I do not concern myself with material furniture when I am passing through."

Is this not a wonderful spiritual thought? We need some furniture in this world of ours, but we must not devote all the years of our G-d endowed life accumulating physical assets...

It is not too early to teach you that G-D gives us everything; that He is constantly watching us; that He fills our lives and that He must be thanked every time we take a bite to eat or liquid to drink. As you go through life, you must remember there is no person more important to you than G-d...

Let me end this letter with a final story:

A man eagerly desired to purchase a number of accessories for his car. He wanted a radio, a new heater and air-conditioner for summer-driving. He felt he needed new chrome on the doors, a new clock on the dash-board. There was only one major difficulty that stood in his way- money. It seemed that the only way he could raise this sum of money was to sell the car itself. And that is what he did. Pinchas, do not allow the accessories of life to usurp the place of life itself. Stocks, bonds, bank-accounts, new cars, television-sets, split-level homes, are only accessories to life and not life.

Travel with the furniture you need for your trip: a good heart, a clean mind, an open hand, love of G-d and fellow-man and a burning desire to study Torah...

Your Opa Nager

Opa was born in Leipzig, Germany in the early autumn of 1908. He received a public school education, supplemented by Torah studies in an afternoon *cheder*. He worked as a merchant in a German iron shop, but was dismissed from his job following the Nazi edict which excluded Jews from many forms of employment. He packed his bags and fled to Lisbon, Portugal, where he joined Professor Adolfo Benarus in an underground organization which saved thousands of Jewish refugees. In 1937, Julius returned to Germany and met Eva Weinreb. After a whirlwind courtship, the two were married in Berlin. In the



Julius Nager as a child with his siblings: (L-R) Asher, Toni, Julius, Sophie. Karlsruhe, Germany, circa 1912.

interest of safety, they moved back to Portugal. The first years of their marriage were dampened by the news from Germany, but they began a family with the birth of twin daughters, my grandmother, Ruth, and her sister Naomi. For a while they lived comfortably in Lisbon, but *yiddishkeit* was dwindling, and in 1943 they decided to move to America where the twins could receive a richer Jewish education. They arrived in New York in August, and settled in Washington Heights because it had a shul, school, and *mikvah*. Opa Nager was always ready to move. Each time he left many material possessions behind, but brought with him 'a good heart, a clean mind, an open hand, love of G-d and fellow-man, and a burning desire to study Torah.' All of which he bequeathed to us in his letter.

The Song That Never Ends



Sarala Levy

When I close my eyes, I picture Zaidy sitting close to me on the soft seat of the swing which hung for years from the beams of his deck in Monroe, but has recently been moved to my porch. He is telling me many things, carefully filling me with stories of his youth and the ancestors he reveres. But my thoughts always return to the same conversation: 'Why,' I ask him, 'did you marry Bubby?' Without any hesitation, he shoots back sweetly, "You are the reason."



R' Shraga Feivel Zisman with his wife Leba Blooma (Raskin), Lithuania c. 1930's

My grandfather, Rav Dov Ber Zisman, passed away on the 28th of Adar this year. He was among the last, or perhaps the very last surviving *chassid* of the Kovno Ghetto. At the ages of 10 and 9 respectively, he and his brother Leibel received coveted *brachos* from the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, the revered *Rayatz*, Rav Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn. Of their family, only the two of them survived the war, and all of us have always wondered if that is why.

It took many years for Zaidy to share the horrors of the war years. But once he did, it was as if a wellspring of ancestral treasures had been released. Most important for me was the picture which he painted of his larger-than-life father, R' Shraga Feivel Zisman, whose thriving dry-goods business provided much material comfort, but was secondary to his passion for *Yiddishkeit*. Avraham Tory, secretary of the Kovno Ghetto's Council of Elders (*Ältestenrat*,) and well-known for the meticulous diary in which he tracked three years in the Kovno Ghetto, recorded an event

which took place in October of 1943, and which captures R' Shraga Feivel's personality:

"This year, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur were very sad days. Before Sukkos, however, the mood in the ghetto relaxed somewhat ... To celebrate the holiday some traditional sukkahs were erected, made from planks and covered in thatch. Even some etrog and lulav were found. Some Jews were eating in sukkahs... This made me wonder about the Jewish will to live, which does not disappear, even

in the ghetto. It seems that a sharp knife is at our throat, yet we do not lose courage. We do not cease to be Jews...

In the afternoon, I was urgently summoned to the workshops. Germans from the city government office were waiting there. Walking quickly to the workshop, I came across a sukkah. Its door was open. Inside I could see a bearded Jew wearing a black hat, He was dressed in his yom tov attire, and his face was glowing with joy. A few more men were sitting in the sukkah. They were singing a chassidic song accompanied by the clapping of hands and the stomping of feet. They sang with devotion and enthusiasm, as if the ghetto and the German rulers did not exist.

The bearded Jew noticed me and came out of the booth. He took me by the sleeve and asked innocently: "what are you doing in our neighborhood on Sukkos? Shalom Aleichem!... A gut Yom Tov!" He was in high spirits - even a bit tipsy.

“Have you eaten in a sukkah this year?” the bearded Jew asked. “No,” I replied. “I have not had the time. Excuse me, I am in a hurry.” The Jew - incidentally, a former Kovno merchant by the name of Zisman and an acquaintance of mine- looked at me with uncomprehending eyes... He grasped me by the arm and dragged me into the sukkah. “Please come in!” he said in a resounding voice. I repeated my explanation: “I must hurry to a meeting affecting the whole community.” But my reply failed to produce any effect on the bearded Jew. “Come in just for one moment,” he said, and forcibly seated me on a bench inside the sukkah...

It turned out that the bearded Jew was celebrating the Bar Mitzvah of his son. He asked me to drink a glass of vodka and to recite the blessing thanking G-d Who made us holy with His commandments, and Who commanded us to dwell in sukkahs; also the blessing over wine and bread. Needless to say I was asked to taste the cake. As we were eating, the Jew burst into song again: “If you say you are in trouble, the Lord’s compassion will sustain you.”

These words carried a special and profound significance in this sukkah in the ghetto. The Jews in the sukkah sang with passion and faith in the kindness of G-d. Myself and my mission nearly forgotten, I joined the chorus and the faith.

I arrived at the workshop late. The Germans from the city governor’s office were waiting for me impatiently. I settled some minor matters with them and went back to the Altostenrat office...

Throughout the day I remained under the good impression of the festive atmosphere in the chassidic sukkah. I admired those pious Jews and envied them for their ability to set themselves free from the yoke of the ghetto, from the everyday troubles which keep pressing on each individual and on the community as a whole ... “If you say you are in trouble,” sing the Jews filled with faith, “the Lord’s compassion will sustain you.” Fortunate is the believer.

And fortunate am I, the great-granddaughter of the believer. R’ Shraga Feivel Zisman was sent to his death a few months later, but his sons, my grandfather Berel and my great-uncle Leibel, brought the song to America. And while I still ache from the freshness of Zaidy’s passing, I am ready to carry the Zisman tune and its words of hope and faith forward. *Im amarti matah ragli chasdechah Hashem yisadeini.*



**The Zisman brothers:
Leibel (L) and Berel, NY 1946**



**The Zisman family before the war. Berel and Leibel were the sole survivors.
L-R: Tzivya, Leba Bluma holding Chaim Yisroel, Leibel, Berel, Shraga Feivel**



Berel, (L), and Leibel (R)

“Thank You For Your Time”



Jenny Rapp

“באמת קומט מיר שווער צו שרייבען מיינע פארגאנגענהייט... אין דערצייט קען מען דורך לערנען וויפל דפים גמרא”

‘In truth it is difficult for me to write about my past. In the time it takes to do that, I could learn several pages of Gemara.’

So begins my great-grandfather’s memoir. Handwritten on a legal pad over two decades ago, the chronicles of his life are recorded in his native tongue of Yiddish, unpunctuated, and in a stream-of-consciousness style. Not an easy read.

I never met Zeidie Shloime, and I may never have read his memoir had it not been for the rigorous requirements of a high school genealogy project. But I am very glad I did, because his words have humbled me. His accounts of the excruciating ordeals he endured with equanimity and faith leave me breathless, and set a bar for *emunah* that I will ‘ever aspire to live up to.

As a Hungarian forced laborer, and later as a Russian prisoner of war, my grandfather had numerous brushes with death. At one point, he was taken with a group of inmates to Camp 58, a Russian POW camp where they worked in fields. Their food was limited to cabbage soup, bread, and, occasionally, kasha. One day, on the way from the camp to the fields, Zeidie Shloime slipped out of line to pick some mushrooms and hid them in his shirt. He began eating pieces as he walked; by the time he reached the fields he felt sick and fainted. When the guards couldn’t wake him, they declared him dead and brought him back

to the camp to be embalmed. There, a nurse whom he had befriended in Davydova saw him. She snuck into the morgue at night and fed him soap water until his body expelled the toxic mushrooms. In the morning, he was taken to the hospital back in Camp 58.

His wife, Freida, and their four children did not have such good fortune. They were murdered in the Auschwitz gas chambers. Years later, Zeidie Shloime reflected on the births of his children: “That was the *hashgachah pratis* of Hashem Yisbarach, to bring to this world *korbanos*, so that they should be ready to go on the *mizbeiach al kiddush Hashem*, together with her [Freida], eight years later.”

After the war, Zeidie Shloime met a talented and quick-witted young seamstress, also named Frieda, and asked her to marry him. The couple lived in Prague for a few years, and their first son, Israel, my grandfather, was born there. Zeidie Shloime continuously struggled to support his new family through many stages and transitions: after emigrating to Israel, then as they journeyed out of Israel, and ultimately in America where they set down new roots.



Yaakov Shlomo Sendrovic

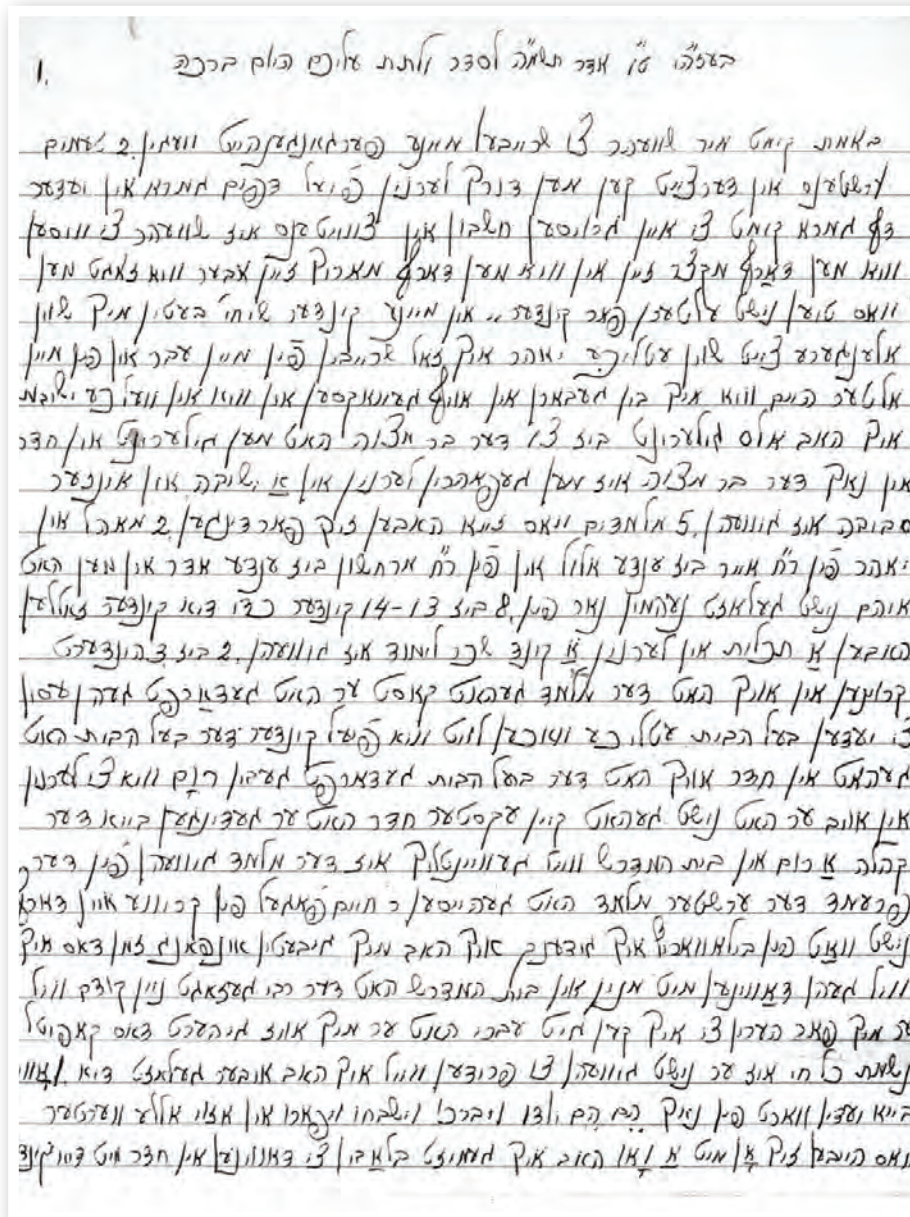
Yet through all the changes which he navigated during his lifetime, one thing stayed the same. Zeidie Shloime remained

steadfast in his *emunah*. He ate only kosher in the Hungarian Labor camps, recited *Tehillim* regularly as a prisoner of war, and frequently invoked the assurance of David *Hamelech*, *hashleich al Hashem yehavechah v'hu yechalkelecha*, cast your burden upon Hashem and He will support you, as he worked hard to make a living.

There is so much I would like to ask Zeidie Shloime. But there is also one thing I would like to tell him. Your time, Zeidie, was not wasted. Through your writings I came to know the meaning, and value, of bedrock *emunah peshutah*.



Zeidie Shloime's children from his first wife: Avraham Leib, Baruch, and Sarah Yuta. Upon mentioning them in his memoir, he commented: "That was the hashgacha pratis of Hashem Yisborach, to bring to this world korbanos, so that they should be ready to go on the mizbeach al kiddush Hashem, together with her [Freida]..."



The first page of Zeidie Shloime's memoirs. Handwritten, unpunctuated on a legal pad. Written 1985-1992.

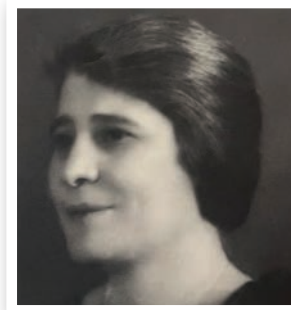
Letters are her Lore



Chavi Golding

“To you my dear beloved children who I love so much dearly, I would like to ask you for a favor. That you children all live in peace one with another and always do the right thing, watch your religion, and you will make me happy... my outfit is in the closet; see that they don't exchange it for another [referring to her special “*Mashiach* dress”, which she purchased to have set aside to be worn when the *Geulah* would arrive. The black and gold dress is still in the possession of, and treasured by Rabbi Yosef C. Golding.] ... with all my love, Mama.”

(An excerpt from Necha Golding's living will)



Necha Golding

But far beyond her own words, the words written to her by others testify to the legendary life of my great-great-grandmother, Necha Golding. A treasure trove of letters signed by the illustrious *Roshei Yeshiva* in pre-war Europe address Necha using the most superb accolades. They meticulously record and express their immense gratitude for her magnanimity in undertaking to financially sustain the *yeshivos*. But there is more. The letters reveal the depth of the personal relationships which Necha forged with the spiritual giants of her time. The clerical accounts,

at times typed by a secretary, are followed by handwritten personal messages in Yiddish, inquiring about the well-being of her family, congratulating her on happy occasions, and offering condolences when appropriate. What makes these ordinary exchanges so special is the fact they were penned by the Chofetz Chaim, Rav Kahaneman, Reb Elchonon Wasserman, and Rabbi Aharon Kotler to name a few.

The hub of Necha's activities was The Belnord, an apartment building in Manhattan, both a New York City landmark and a personal landmark for me



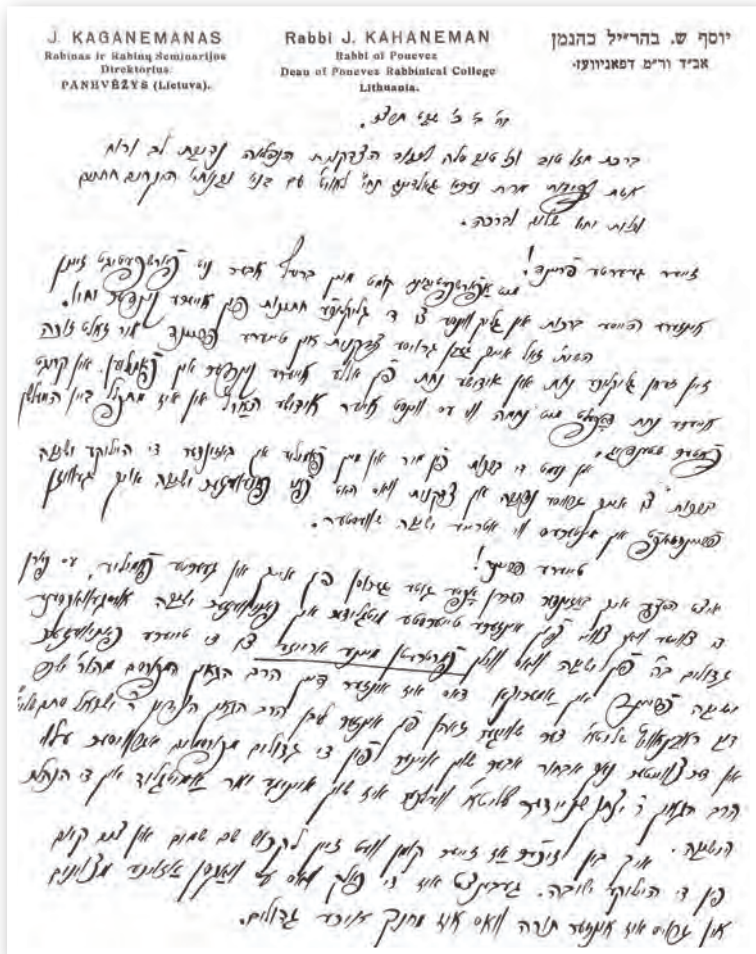
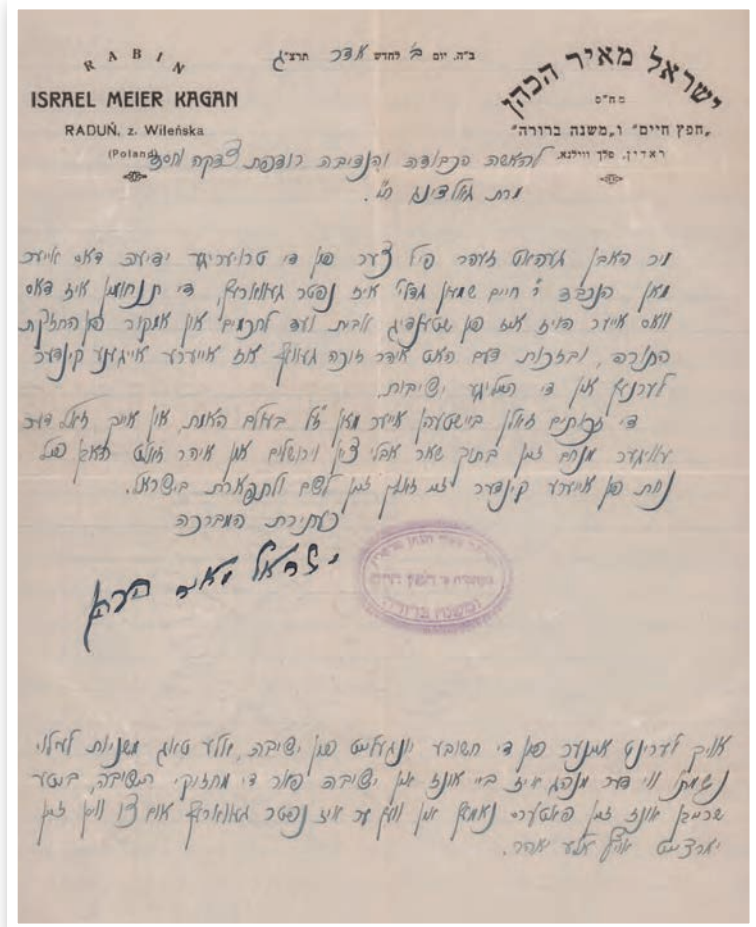
Receipt for donation to Mir Yeshiva



Necha sponsored the publishing and printing of Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein's sefer, the Levush Mordechai

and my family. It was there that my great-great grandmother helped establish *Torah* in America. Her apartment was indeed magnificent, but the stories I've been told about what transpired in its walls are far more spectacular. Throughout the 1900's it was home not only to generations of Goldings, but equally to many prominent *rabbanim* from Europe, Russia, and Israel.

Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein, famed *Rosh Yeshiva* of Slabodka, was the earliest guest of the Goldings when he came to visit America in 1926. As the *yeshiva* movement struggled to cover its growing debt in early twentieth century Europe, many rabbinic leaders came to fundraise in America. Realizing that they could ill afford to pay for hotels and kosher food, Necha hosted these rabbis in comfort and style, for a week, months, or sometimes even years. They left with generous donations and valuable connections. This extraordinary hospitality extended, during the summer months, to the Goldings' home in Tannersville as well. Reb Baruch Ber Lebowitz, R. Reuven Grozovsky, Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein and Reb Elchanan Wasserman all studied in the Golding Gazebo in Upstate New York.





In 1928, tragedy struck. Hours before the *shabbos bar mitzvah* of the Goldings' son, Yossi, he was killed by a car that jumped the curb as he was walking with his friends. Guests arrived at the Golding home bearing gifts and ready for celebration, only to find out that they were now in a house of mourning. Necha spoke at the funeral, calling to the One above: “*Ribbono Shel Olam!* You gave me an empty vessel. I give You back a *tzaddik*.”

Many *rabbanim* sent their condolences. One of the most moving messages was conveyed by Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein. His words are so powerful that Rabbi Yosef C. Golding (my great uncle) still sends copies of his letter to mourning families who suffer similarly devastating tragedies. An excerpt reads, “...When, G-d forbid, a great tragedy must befall the entire Jewish nation, in order to save the people, the One Above takes a single sacrifice, thereby rescuing the entire Jewish nation from major tragedy. The One Above chooses the sacrifice from the best... You can be consoled by the great merit that your son has in the World Above, the True World, in which, through his punishment he merited to save the entire generation... Your devoted friend who hopes only for your good, Moshe Mordechai Epstein”.

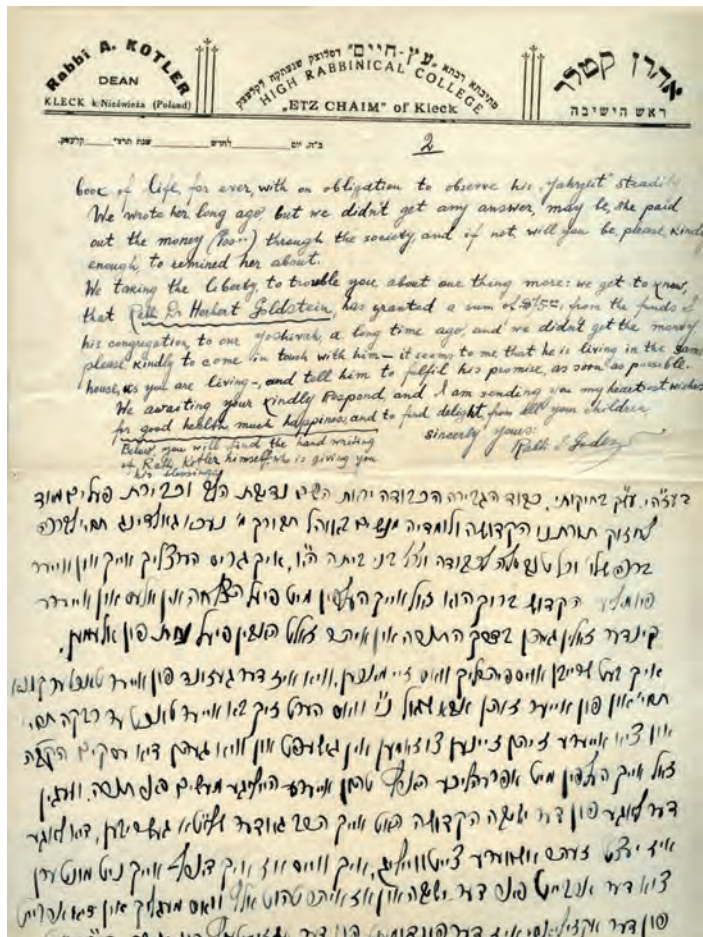
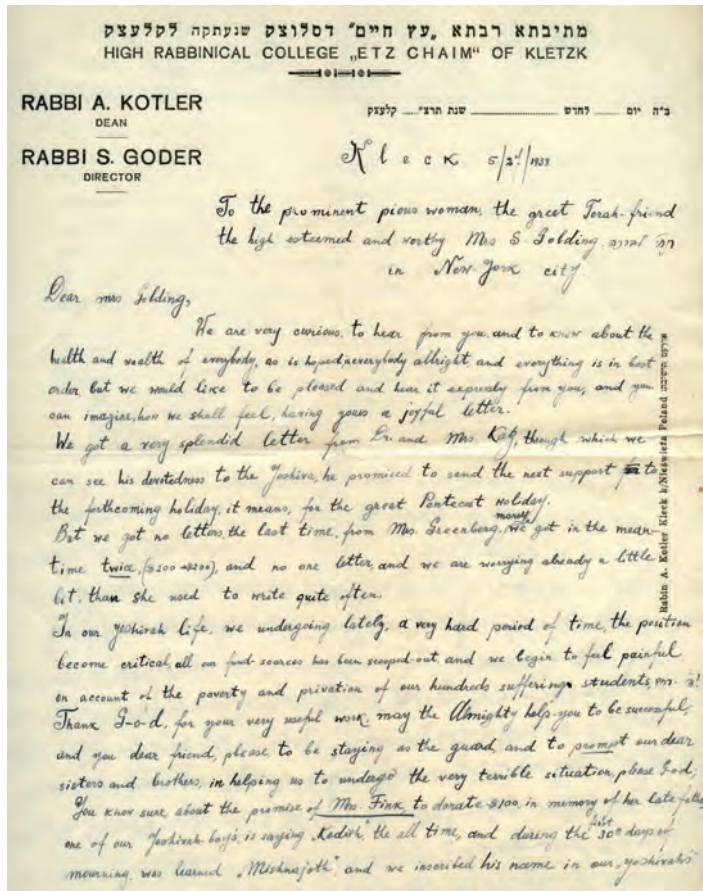
With courage, Necha forged ahead. She was a staunch supporter of the famed Mirrer Yeshiva in Poland, and from New York she founded the Mirrer Yeshiva Ladies Auxiliary. When she traveled to Mir to visit her sons, the *yeshivah* hosted a banquet in her honor. Though it was a marked departure from the norm which discouraged the presence of women in the *Beit Midrash*, both Rav Finkel



and Rav Levovitz brought Necha to the steps of the Aron Kodesh, where she was introduced to the students. Pointing to Rav Finkel, the *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rav Levovitz declared: "If this man is your father, then this woman is your mother!" Shortly after Necha returned to America she anonymously arranged for indoor plumbing to be installed in the *Mirrer Yeshiva* for the first time. During World War II, Necha's support continued as the Yeshiva moved to Japan and Shanghai, in dire financial straits.

In the years leading up to the war, Necha hosted numerous Torah luminaries. In 1936, *Harav Aharon Kotler* graced her home, where she held parlor meetings to raise money for his *yeshiva*. Five years later, when Rav Aharon was able to escape from Europe to America, he was welcomed once again by the Goldings. Fortunately, the connections he had established during his previous trip proved invaluable in building *Beis Medrash Govoha*, the premier *yeshiva* in America to this day. At Necha's funeral, Rav Aharon cried and spoke through his tears, "She was the *Tzaddeikes HaDor*. There will never be another like her. She was like a daughter to me; I cannot continue..."

The matriarch I discovered in my research was astounding. Her selfless philanthropy awed me, yet I wondered how to incorporate her goodness into my own life. I am only eighteen, and do not possess the means to be a world-acclaimed philanthropist. I began to reflect, as well, on the duality of *yichus*. It is at once a great honor, and a daunting responsibility. We dare not rely on the righteousness of our grandparents. And then it struck me that we can follow their lead by serving Hashem with the unique gifts which He imparted to each of us. I pray for the wisdom to find the Necha Golding in me.



The Franco Family: A Modern Day Exodus



Leora Shweky

It was the year 1943 and my grandmother, Sally, found herself on a boat, headed towards an unknown future. She was 9 years old, with only her three young siblings to look to for comfort. They were on a ship bound for America from Shanghai, China, where they had said good-bye to their parents.

My grandmother's parents, Sara and David, had married when Sara was just 15. She had been promised to David, the son of her uncle Aharon from the United States, by way of an arrangement made between her father Abhou and Aharon when David and Sara were mere babies. This was the common practice in the Syrian Jewish community, and ensured that children would marry into good families, with similar values and traditions. Their wedding took place in Israel in 1932, where they were privileged to be married by Rav Kook, the chief Rabbi of Israel at that time. Immediately after the wedding, Sara and her husband moved to the States.

David's successful import business took him to

China every few months and the family eventually moved to Shanghai to live more comfortably together. Those first few years were filled with luxury, experience, culture, adventure and day-to-day bustle. The foreign residents in Shanghai lived under joint international authority. Shanghai, with its lively nightlife and bustling streets, became known as the Paris of the Orient.

That idyllic life changed when World War II began to rage across Europe, causing ripple effects in Asia. In 1941, the Japanese attacked China. Foreigners were required to wear armbands identifying their nationalities, and to observe curfews. With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, tensions escalated. Many Japanese citizens and Japanese Americans were placed in internment camps in the United States, and as a response, internment camps were established in China, and filled with citizens of allied nations. In 1942, the Franco family was sent to a camp in Shanghai. They were not treated cruelly but had limited resources; each family was provided with only 15 feet of space. The worst part was the starvation diet of rice, cabbage and horse meat, and the bouts with malaria, dysentery and worms. But as long as the interned foreigners observed the rules, they were allowed to hold dances, stage dramas, engage in sports and organize their chores and schools.

In 1943, a prisoner exchange took place. As American citizens, all the Francos qualified for this exchange, except for Sara. Sara and David decided that for the safety of their children, aged 2, 5, 7, and 9, they would send them on a boat to America to live with David's father in New York. Sara and David remained in Shanghai, praying for the war to come to a



Franco family in Shanghai

swift end, so that they could be reunited with their children.

The children traveled on the Japanese ship, the Teia-Maru, with its Allied and neutral nationals. It docked in Mormugao, a neutral Portuguese Indian port, and the site of the exchange, on October 16, 1943. The Teia-Maru was more crowded than the internment camps they had left in Shanghai; its 1,503 passengers crammed into public rooms, and slept in every available nook and cranny. In Mormugao they met the Allied exchange ship, a Swedish liner called the Gripsholm with its cargo of Japanese nationals. After about 6 days in Mormugao, the Swedish ship set sail for New York carrying the 4 Franco children.

The journey of many weeks was difficult and dangerous, with Sally's sister falling dangerously ill. Upon arrival in New York, the children were to be sent to their grandfather in Bensonhurst. This, however, proved to be infeasible, so each of the children was sent to a different relative. A strange new normal set in, but after a year of living away from their parents and separate even from each other, my grandmother

and her siblings could not bear it any longer. Their grandfather saw their distress and found a new apartment large enough to accommodate all of them.

Finally, the war ended. Back in China, the Allied forces liberated the internment camps, and as my great grandparents, Sara and David, exited, news reporters caught the moment and snapped their picture. Thankfully, the photograph was posted on the front page of The Daily Mirror. My great uncle happened upon it on his way home from school and recognized his parents. He ran home with the news and his grandfather nearly scolded him in disbelief. Incredibly, the photograph also let the family know that they had a new baby brother.

Later, my grandmother's parents would describe to them how the discovery of that pregnancy had filled them with dread, until Sara suggested they name the baby Moshe. She hoped that this innocent baby would lead them out of China, just as Moshe *Rabbeinu* had led the Jews out of Egypt.

And he did.



The Shanghai Evening Post American Edition, Dec. 3, 1943, page 1. Credit to MRL 12: Foreign Missions Conference of North America Records, Series 2B, Box 33, Folder 9, The Burke Library Archives (Columbia University Libraries) at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

FRIENDS AND KIN CONVERGE ON N.Y. TO MEET GRIPSHOLM REPATRIATES

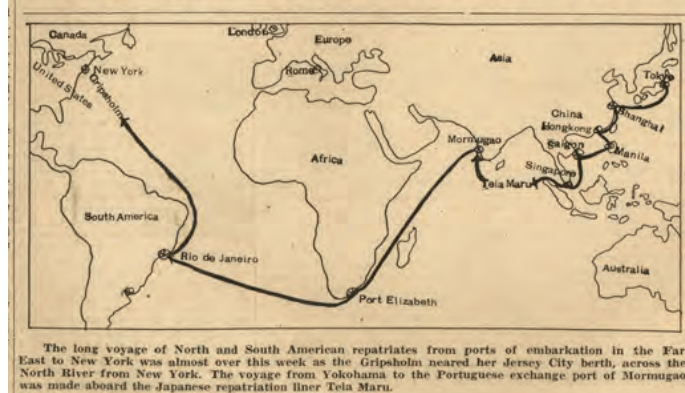


Photo Credit: Sephardic Heritage Museum

Of Music and Frowning Boards

THE POETIC LIFE OF RABBI SAMUEL ADLEMAN



Tova Schwartz

I dreamed I died and
To His throne was brought,
To lay before the Court on High,
The work that I had wrought.

I pointed to the temples
That I had built in pride,
The grandeur of brick and stone,
That His Spirit might abide.

In great expectation
I waited for His smile,
But my heart froze within me,
As He frowned at me awhile.

Quickly I poured before Him
The sea of words I'd spake,
Words of hail and thunder
To make man's heart awake!!

Pleased I felt would He be
With the fervor of my zeal,
But the roar of His displeasure
Made my blood congeal!

Thus I stood before Him,
My mind within me rife,
A single act to justify
His giving me a life.

He then passed before me
The things I'd thought were grand,
Yet by the light of Heaven
They were nothing in His hand.

As I turned defeated,
Another life gone waste,
A voice that I'd forgotten
Made me turn in haste.

Standing there beside Him
Was a stranger I could not place.
His voice to me familiar,
But I did not know the face.

My mind raced through the years
In an effort to recall,
Where had I seen this man before,
That he'd now save my fall.

God benign gave to me
The memory of that day,
When one act of kindness
Could not before me lay.

I remember now how it was,
In the press of daily task,
In the midst of things important
He'd come to comfort ask.

Something deep within me
Saw this as life supreme,
A mercy shown to someone
The fulfillment of Almighty's dream.

*"The Rabbi" was written by Rabbi Samuel
Adleman, poignantly read at his Levaya
in 1966, by Rabbi Daniel Goldberger.*

My great-grandfather wrote this poem about a Rabbi, perhaps himself, who at the end of his life, was searching for “a single act to justify His giving me a life”. The poignancy of his words is not lost on me. As I learned more and more about Rabbi Samuel Adleman, I realized that he was a man whose fifty years, in fact, were full to the brim of acts to justify his life. He built many temples of grandeur, yet never lost sight of the needs of the desperate souls seeking comfort. As my grandmother keenly described when I interviewed her in February of this year, her father was a “one man show,” possessed of the full gamut of virtues for which we all strive.

Born in 1916, Samuel’s young adulthood was colored by the Great Depression. At the age of fourteen he was forced to work in a laundromat pressing shirts in order to bring some money home for his family. Ironing, though, was not Samuel’s forte, and his boss was encouraging when he heard of Samuel’s plan

to enroll in Yeshiva University and train as a Rabbi. Fortunately, an elderly Jewish man, who was pained by the high rate of assimilation, sponsored the tuition for three boys to attend YU. Samuel Adleman was one of them, chosen for his exceptional oratory skills and his love of music and prayer. This man’s kindness greatly inspired Samuel, who himself, years later, personally paid for two boys to attend *Yeshiva*.

While studying at YU, Sam held on to his second dream of becoming a singer, and he moonlighted as a *chazzan*. Ultimately, this led to the fulfillment of his third dream. During the *Yamim Noraim*, he was serving as cantor in a small town in Newark, NJ, and he needed to borrow some sheet music. He found his way to the Nullman brothers, both popular *chazanim*, who were happy to help. They told him to go upstairs to the piano and take anything that he wanted. Upstairs, Samuel found more than music sheets. Tova Gittel Nullman, my namesake, was there ironing her brothers’ shirts. And in Bubby’s words, “the rest is



*The RCA delegates with Rabbi Shlifer (middle). Moscow 1956
Rabbi Adelman is standing on the left.*

history.” They were married in 1939, and moved to Dover, New Jersey to take on their first Rabbinical position.

Dover was not a religious community, and Samuel accepted the challenge with grit and gratitude. After receiving *semichah* from Rav Zuber in 1940, Rabbi Samuel Adleman became Dover’s Rabbi, *shochet*, *chazan*, and Hebrew school teacher, at the age of 24. While living in Dover, World War II broke out and between 1941 and 1945, Rabbi Samuel Adleman served as the army chaplain at the Veteran’s Hospital in Lyons.

In 1951, the family moved to Morristown, New Jersey. Rabbi Adleman battled to keep the community

on the Orthodox path, yet after a year, it succumbed to the Conservative movement. That marked the end of his role in town, but, undeterred he continued his efforts to uphold the tenets of Judaism in his next position as a Rabbi of Newport News, Virginia. Incredibly, in that same year, Rabbi Adleman also carved out time to found a *Kiruv* organization called Torah Pilgrimage, a forerunner of NCSY.

Rabbi Adleman served as a Rabbi in Newport News, Virginia until 1957, when he was ready for his next challenge. The family moved to Denver, Colorado, where the opportunity to impact yet another community awaited them.

Perhaps less well known was the fact that

Russia: Communicating Through Tears

In 1956, Rabbi Samuel Adleman joined a delegation of five Rabbis from the orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, to Communist Russia. This was the first group of Rabbis to visit the USSR since the end of WWII. Their goal was to verify reports about the conditions facing the Jewish community under the Soviet Regime. It took them a year to receive their visas. They traveled to Moscow as well as Kiev, Odessa, Rostov-on-Don, and a number of towns in Georgia. In each city they were given the opportunity to address the congregations in Yiddish or Hebrew, expressing the concern of American Jewry for their Soviet brothers. In Moscow, Rabbi Shlieffer, the Chief Rabbi at the time, knowing that they were being bugged, kept repeating that everything was fine. Rabbi Samuel Adleman whispered into his ear, “I hear your words, but I look at your eyes and see what’s in your heart, and I know the truth.” Rabbi Shlieffer started to cry, and Bubby herself teared up as she recounted this to me. In Russia they communicated through tears.

Bubby then shared another story that still makes her cry. “When my father told it, he cried, so when I tell it I cry,” she warned me. At The Great Synagogue in Moscow on Shabbos, Rabbi Samuel Adleman got up to speak. It was *sunset* and women were seen coming into the shul straight from work. Whatever he had planned to say that evening, we will never know, because he spoke straight from his heart to these women. He described the commitment of the Jewish women in *Mitzrayim* and in Europe, and pleaded with the women in the audience to do their part to continue the legacy of the Jewish people. Bubby read me some words from Rabbi Adleman’s diary about his experiences in Russia: “As I write these lines I think of Bubby [Bubby Batsheva from Kiev.] I’m here where she lived and suffered. I pray that in her memory my trip and the conscience that I am enduring will bring some good for our people.”

My great-grandfather returned home from this trip without his *tefillin*, *siddur*, or any food. He had

Debbie, Rabbi Adleman's daughter, had special needs, and this inspired him to advocate for people with disabilities. In 1953, Rabbi Adleman spoke in honor of a local activist, making reference to his own personal experiences. "No one but those who have been chosen by G-d for this special assignment can understand what it means to be told by some well-meaning professional – "She will never be normal." His words are as relevant today as they were then. But Rabbi Samuel Adleman did not stop at words; he was a man of action. In 1957 he started a school in Denver called Hope Center, where he set up workshops and programs for people with disabilities.

"He did care to live beyond himself," was a line from one of Rabbi Samuel Adleman's poems. While

these were words he wrote about someone else, they so perfectly captured how he himself lived.

Bubby concluded her interview with a timeless lesson she had learned from her father. "Bringing out the worst of people is nothing. The *kuntz* is bringing out the best in people—that takes the brains and the heart." I imagine that armed with the 'words of thunder that he spoke to make men's heart awake,' the 'fervor of his zeal,' and the many acts of compassion he performed for strangers who had 'come to ask for comfort,' he was welcomed to the Eternal World by the crowned *tzadikim* basking in the warmth of the *Shechinah*.

purposely left them there for the Jews in Russia, who lacked basic Jewish artifacts.

But not all was lost. In his 1960 New Year's message to his community, Rabbi Adelman reflected on the ray of hope that he had seen peeking out of the dark Russian sky.

"Yet it was in the midst of this modern Egypt and its forty nine degrees of spiritual uncleanliness that my colleagues and I discovered the only meaningful resistance among our people. For, to our amazement, we found scattered groups of Lubavitcher *chassidim* that had somehow managed not only to survive, but to continue to find strength and to transmit it to their children."

Upon his return to the USA Rabbi Adelman hastened to 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. There, at the headquarters of *Chabad*, he hoped to find the answer to the question with which he grappled as a Rabbi; "How to captivate the hearts and hands of our people for G-d and his Torah?" He was "expecting to

find an imposing building as would befit this gigantic challenge to Russian Communism."

Instead he found "an old building badly in need of paint and repair and a middle aged soft spoken and gentle rabbi who seemed hardly a match to Khrushchev, whom I had met in Moscow."

"The answer was obvious. To overcome material gigantism, one does not have to meet it on its own level...The simple answer to material gigantism is in being spiritually gigantic."

And it was this message that he delivered to his congregants, imploring them to commit themselves to Torah and courageously defy the dictates of their host materialistic culture.

Rabbi Adelman continued to advocate on behalf of the Jews of Silence. In fact, the last time Bubby heard her father speak in public was at a rally for Russian Jewry in 1966.

The Mighty Pen

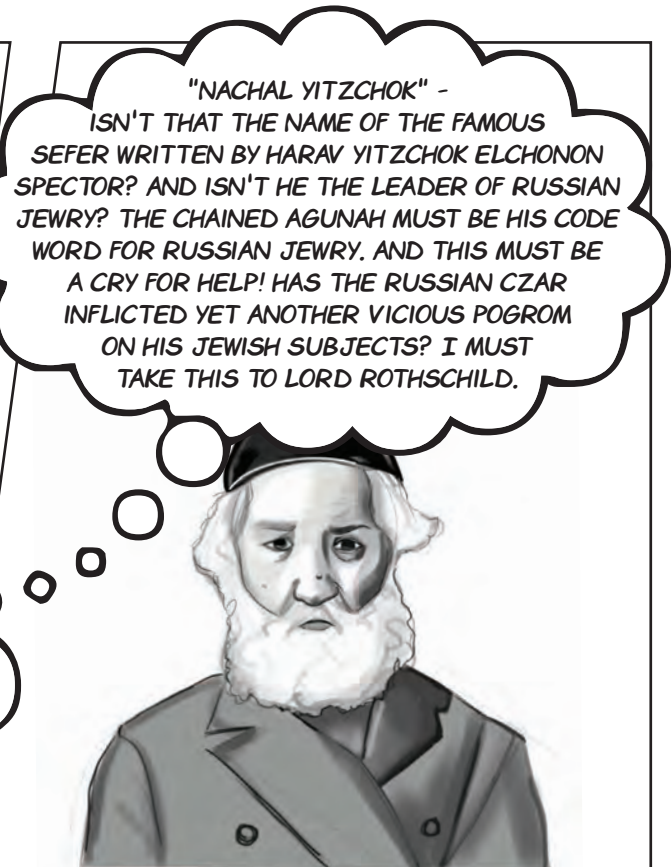
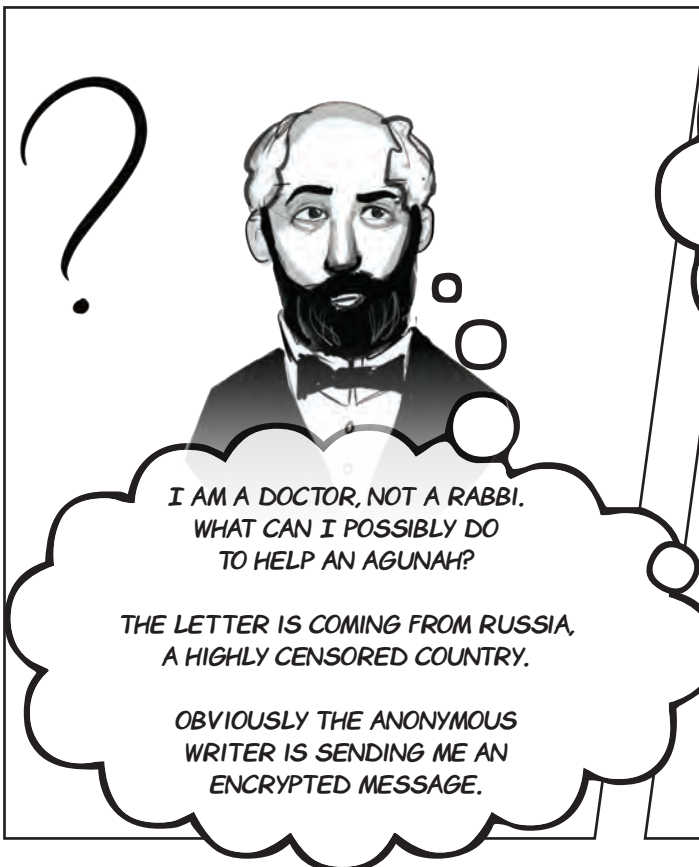
A GRAPHIC ESSAY

by Leah Harris

IN THE HEART OF LONDON, ON A COLD WINTER DAY IN JANUARY OF 1881, DR. ASHER ASCHER, PRIVATE PHYSICIAN OF LORD NATHANIEL ROTHSCHILD, RECEIVED A LETTER POSTMARKED IN RUSSIA. INTRIGUED, DR. ASCHER RIPPED OPEN THE LETTER, AND READ IT CAREFULLY.



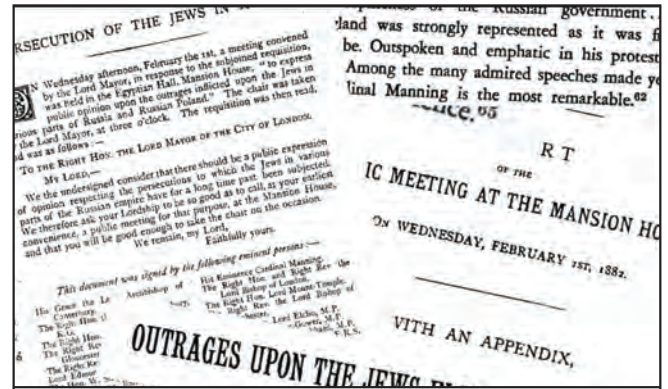
"Tomorrow, with the second post, I will be sending you a kuntrus called "She'elas Teshuva" signed by Nachal Yitzchak, on the matter of a forlorn agunah. On the top I will write, "Be with the mouths of those who have been sent by Your people..."When you receive it, study it in depth, and try to assist the agunah by freeing her from the chains that bind her. May Hashem help those who help his people."





MANSION HOUSE INITIATIVE
FEB 1 1881

LORD ROTHSCHILD SPRANG INTO ACTION. AN URGENT MEETING WAS HELD AT THE MANSION HOUSE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF LONDON. WORD OF THE CRUEL POGROMS IN RUSSIA FINALLY REACHED THE WESTERN WORLD. THE AUTHOR OF THE LETTER HAD CLEVERLY EVADED THE EYE OF THE CZAR'S CENSOR.



BEFORE LONG THE NEWS MADE IT TO THE PRESS. THE OUTCRY RESOUNDED THROUGHOUT THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.



R' Yaakov
Halevi Lipschitz



R' Avrohom Halevi
Lipschitz



Gittel (Lipschitz)
Wein



Eliezer Wein



Rifka (Wein)
Harris

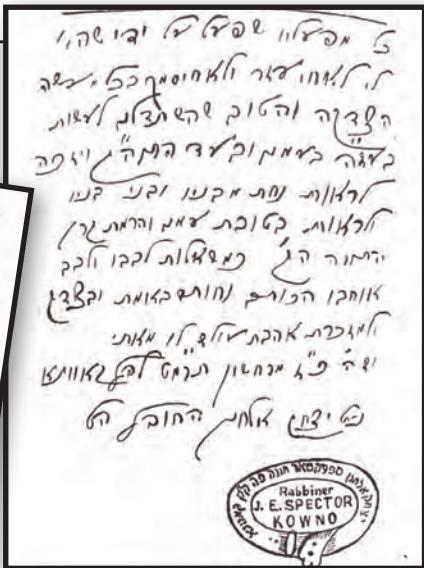


Leah Harris

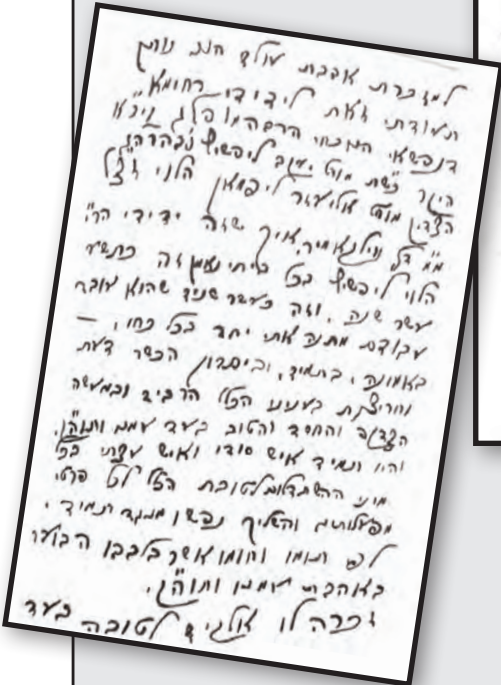
BUT WHO WAS THE
MASTERMIND BEHIND THIS
LETTER? WHOSE INGENUITY
FOUND A WAY TO DEFY THE
RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES?
LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO
MY GREAT- GREAT-GREAT
GRANDFATHER,

**RAV YAAKOV HALEVI
LIPSCHITZ**

CONTINUED...



A recommendation letter from HaRav Yitchok Elchonon Spector testifying to the loyal and dedicated ten year service of his right hand man, Rav Yaakov Halevi Lipchitz



IN HIS CAPACITY AS THE RIGHT HAND MAN AND CONFIDANT OF RAV YITZCHOK ELCHONON SPECTOR, HE PENNED MANY A LETTER ON BEHALF OF THE GADOL.

ULTIMATELY HIS WRITING WAS TRUSTED TO BE AN ACCURATE REPRESENTATION OF THE WORD AND OPINION OF HARAV SPECTOR. AT A TIME WHEN THE INSIDIOUS HASKALAH PHILOSOPHIES SWEEPED THROUGH A LARGE SWATH OF EUROPEAN JEWRY, RAV LIPSCHITZ DARED TO CONFRONT THEM. USING THE VERY TOOL WHICH DISSEMINATED THEIR ANTI-RELIGIOUS VENOM, THE NEWSPAPER, HE BEAT THEM AT THEIR OWN GAME.

HALEVANON BECAME THE ANTIDOTE TO THE DAMAGE THEY HAD WROUGHT. SIMILARLY, HIS HISTORICAL WORK, ZIKHRON YAAKOV, WAS A COUNTER HISTORY TO THE BIASED SECULAR ONES PUBLISHED AT THE TIME.



THIS PAST YEAR AND A HALF OF DISCOVERY HAS REVEALED TO ME AN ANCESTOR WHO WAS A GIANT. I HAVE GRAPPLED WITH HOW I COULD POSSIBLY DO HIM JUSTICE IN A FEW WORDS. AND WHILE PERHAPS I CAN'T, IT HAS BEEN A LABOR OF LOVE TO PRESENT HIM THROUGH THE ARTFORM I LOVE MOST.

PORTRAITS ARE MY PASSION. I AM INTRIGUED BY PEOPLE'S FACES AND THE STORIES THAT THEY TELL. SO I WORK HARD TO CAPTURE SHADOWS AND WRINKLES AND FURROWED BROWS, RESOLUTE MOUTHS AND TWINKLING EYES. SORROW AND JOY, TRIUMPH AND DESPAIR. AS I DISCOVERED THE FACE OF MY ANCESTOR, I NOTED EVERY NUANCE OF HIS CHARACTER AND DEEDS, SO THAT I COULD OFFER YOU ONE SMALL BUT TRUE PORTRAIT OF THE MAN OF PRINCIPLE THAT WAS RAV YAAKOV HALEVI LIPSCHITZ.



END

ROOTS & SHOOTS

Discover the ancestors and relatives
you never knew you didn't know.

Let me guide you through your genealogical journey.

Chani Gotlieb

Experienced Genealogy Researcher
Spielberg Certified Interviewer

chanigotlieb@gmail.com

