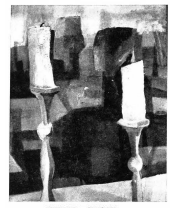
The Belica Memorial Book

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DEDICATION



By the next day, 30 April 1945, at 0:600, the Soviets launched an attack on the Reichstag, but because of German entrenchments and support from 88 mm guns two kilometers away, on the Berlin Zoo flak tower, it was not until that evening that the Soviets were able to enter the building. The Reichstag had not been in use since 1933, when it burned, and the insides resembled a rubble heap more than a government building. The German troops inside had made excellent use of this, and lay heavily entrenched waiting. Fierce room-to-room fighting ensued and it was not until two days later that the Red Army controlled the building entirely. ***The famous photo of the two soldiers planting the flag on the roof of the building is a re-enactment photo taken the day after the building was taken.***

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Berlin

כֵּן יֹאבְדוּ כָל־אוֹיְבֶיךָ יְהוָה וְאֹהֲבָיו כְּצֵאת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בִּגְבֻרָתוֹ
וַתִּשְׁקֹט הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה׃

"Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might." And the land was undisturbed for forty years.

--Judges 5:31

Supporters Honor Roll

The following members of our extended family of *landsleit*, friends and well-wishers, provided financial contributions to help make the publication of this book possible. Their generosity assures the preservation of this heritage for future generations, by which they have earned a large measure of our collective gratitude.

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International Jewish Cemetery Project
International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies

BELITSA: Lida, Vilna

Located at **53°°39' N, 25°°19' E**, 21 miles W of Navahrudak (Nowogródek), 16 miles S of Lida. 1900 Jewish population: 679. Yizkor *Pinkas Belica* (Tel Aviv, 1968).

"...the abandoned Jewish cemetery in Belica, which is almost 54 [sic] centuries old. Belica was once a Jewish settlement and at this time there are no Jews there. We organize *Voskresniki* (hours of unpaid labor) to clean the territories around the memorials, to fix them in case of vandalism. In February 2001 Zenon Bunko reported about the place where Jews from Lida and Vilnius were buried. We needed two and a half years to gather proofs, documents and to find sponsors. On the 13th of August 2003 the monument was opened. Boris Golubovich gave money for the fence (8mx22m) around this "third ditch". And Lida's painter and sculptor Richard Grusha put into the monument his talent and a great sum of his own money.

Source: **http://lidajews.narod.ru/indexen.html** [February 2004]

Belica (LDRG) - Regional Special Interest Groups [March 2008]

Last Updated on Monday, 16 March 2009 22:09

http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Lida-District/lida-dist.htm

Belica

בעליצע

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Translator's Foreword

This eighth translation, in a series, carries a special poignancy with it. Belica was a tiny *shtetl,* where the Jewish settlement never exceeded 150 families. Accordingly, its Jewish population was never as much as even a thousand souls. As it's Jewish population suffered the obliteration, that befell all of Eastern European Jewry, it would have been easy for its history to have been swept into the oblivion of lost memory that overtook so many other Eastern European Jewish communities, about which we, literally, have no enduring record.

And yet, that did not happen.

Despite the fact that the proportional decimation of its Jewish populace was no less severe than that of other communities, the few, who did manage to survive, were drawn to the same sacred commitment: to set down for posterity, their recollections of their lives, the tribulations that they endured and survived, and a testament to their grit, that is best embodied in the well-known metaphor: *Am Yisrael Chai!*.

As I have said before, neither the story, that is found here, nor its outcome, is new to us. Yet, there is something special about the Belica survivors' experience that gives added insight, added texture, to how those beleaguered Jews went through worse than Hell, and yet came out at the other end, to rebuild a new life, and carry on.

This compendium is especially rich in documenting the nature of the partisan experience. By dint of geography, Belica was located pretty close, to the nexus of the partisan resistance movement, that fought the Nazi Germans from the forests, of what was then Byelorussia. Accordingly, a significant number of the survivors, who then wrote memoirs, give us a more than average glimpse of what it meant to retreat into primeval forest, in the face of a modern military juggernaut, and how they survived, and counter-attacked against its predations.

We also learn, yet again, that it was not enough to simply fight against the Nazi Germans. We see, in stark relief, the dangers that they faced from the predation of anti-Semitic Polish partisan units, and those of the bands of Soviet POWs who roamed those forests as well, and who were fighting for their *Rodina.* And yet, despite the latter, when the liberation in the East came, the Jewish partisans did not hesitate in joining the Red Army, to make the final push on the Third Reich, and bring it down.

It is because of this, we dedicate this book to the effort of the Red Army in decapitating the Nazi monster, with the Fall of Berlin in Spring of 1945, some 65 years ago.

While, again, it is true that the tragic outcome of the telling is known in advance, the record is enriched by the endeavor of these writers, to tell this tale from their own unique perspective.

I am indebted to Tomasz Panczyk, in Poland, and Leon Szyfer of Vancouver Canada, for their assistance in assuring that my rendition of Polish names and places, transliterated from Yiddish into English, were done correctly. I am also grateful to my wife's cousin, Oskar Kleinberg of Toronto, Canada, for his assistance with the several occurrences of German in the text. A special vote of thanks goes first to my classmate, Sam (Shmuel) Blumert for his insight into some esoteric Hebrew, and to Dr. Thomas Z. Fahidy, of Waterloo Ontario, for clarifying Russian usage on my behalf. Finally, my thanks also go to Yeshaya Metal, the reference desk librarian at YIVO in New York City, who, as usual, was ever ready with a suitable insight regarding the occasional esoteric word that would surface from time to time.

WINTER 2010 *Jacob Solomon Berger*

Editor's Foreword

2 Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land...

...Has anything like this ever happened in your days\or in the days of your forefathers?

3 Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.

--The Book of Joel, Chapter 1

(Appears twice, once in Hebrew and then in Yiddish)

Page 9: "Candles of My Shtetl" *portrayed by the artist, Yaakov Rosenbaum*

With an ache in our heart that will not heal, and a sacred trembling tat does not dampen out, we provide with this, the small remnant of our Belica *landsleit* their descendants, those who knew them, and those who follow them – this *Pinkas* to memorialize our sacred community, which was torn out during the storm of annihilation that befell the Jews during The Second World War and was completely eradicated in the full sense of that metaphor. That desire, which nested in us during all of the years after the Holocaust, to erect a memorial, in the form of a book, to our community that was destroyed, was given physical form in this very book, a result of the collective effort of the Belica *landsleit* in Israel and America.

The foundation for the realization of the concept to publish *Pinkas Belica*, was laid by our prominent landsman Issachar Kamenetzky ל"ז – teacher and Zionist educator, writer and community activist. During his visit to The United States of America, immediately after the Holocaust (1947) he crystallized the idea with the landsleit there, and, in hindsight, created the three-sided union between the three concentrations of Belica *landsleit* of that time: The Land of Israel, America and Europe (the survivors in the D. P. camps in Germany, Austria and Italy). Among the latter, could yet be found those, who after having been in ghettoes, concentration camps, and partisan brigades in the forests, had written down their experiences of those times, and proposed, after the Holocaust, to flesh out and complete these memoirs with the thought of publishing them in print. It was in this manner, that the survivors of our community mad good the responsibility, in this Pinkas, to tell the world about the gruesome deeds of the Nazi Asmodeus, and his abettors, who with their own eyes looked on during the time that their relatives and friends were murdered and slaughtered, who in the last moments of their lives, gasped out the sole, holy prayer: remember, and do not forget!

In a circular from Issachar Kamenetzky to the landsleit in Israel (published in August 1956) it says: "...a large part of the material, especially about the period of the Holocaust, can already be found in the hands of the editorial committee. However, a not insubstantial part is missing, especially about the period between the two World Wars... If among you there are those who can spend the time, and tap memory for filling out the required material, and would provide some financial support for the publication of the book, it will not take long for us to make the book appear." Despite the fact that many years went by from the time that this

circular went out, the Pinkas bears witness (Four sections that take up more than 500 pages and 100 pictures) that this appeal elicited a positive and friendly response from the majority of the *landsleit* in Israel and the Diaspora. It is a fact that, approximately 60 *landsleit* retell their memories here, of the life they lived in Belica before its destruction, during the Holocaust period, and thereafter. The also give a description of the despair and feelings of sorrow that all of us carry, and will continue to carry for the rest of our lives, in our hearts – in memory of our beloved martyrs who were brought to their end in the gruesome Holocaust. It is necessary to emphasize, that because of a need to refrain from touching on the identity of the writer and his writing – in this specific area of material – many details and repetitions of detail have been omitted, as well as certain routines in content and form – something that was not avoidable, and can naturally be interpreted as factual and essential.

So long as Issachar Kamenetzky was still alive (he passed away in the beginning of 1964) and afterwards, when we continued without him, to carry the burden of tasks to have the Pinkas published – we jointed bore the load in partnership, giving it our best effort, carrying out with love and compassion this, which was for us, a sacred duty, in order to erect a monument in this form, on behalf of our community that had been erased from the Book of Life. And, for a blessing, let us recognize, along with Issachar Kamenetzky, the following scions of our town: The Rabbi, R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz, Yehuda Kusielewicz, and Israel Zlocowsky – who distinguished themselves with their commitment and activity for the publication of the *Pinkas*.

We bestow our blessings on the activists and members of the Belica Relief-Society in New York, both the veterans there, and the newcomers, who individually and collectively spent a very significant amount of money which assured the publication of the *Pinkas*. A special recognition for this is due to the Messrs: Hirsch Shimonowicz, Joseph & Faygl (Kreinowicz) Schleider, Hasia and Nahum Stotsky and Shimon Baker (Buczkowsky) – who individually spent larger sums and also dedicated their energy and time for the gathering and sending expenses, and other activities for this *Pinkas*.

We owe deep thanks to three friends who are not scions of Belica, each of whom, in his own area, provided support for the *Pinkas*. They are: The editor – L(ieber). Losh, a scion of Scucyn near Lida, who gave his best energies to the formulation of content and appearance; the artist Yaakov Rosenbaum, a scion of Suwalki who dedicated his artistic rendering to the memory of the Belica survivors, called '*The Candles of My Shtetl*' (page 9)[1]; the teacher, researcher and writer, Joseph Cohen-Tzedek, a scion of Vilna, who worked over and edited the scientific handling of the history of the Jewish settlement in Belica (page 31).[2]

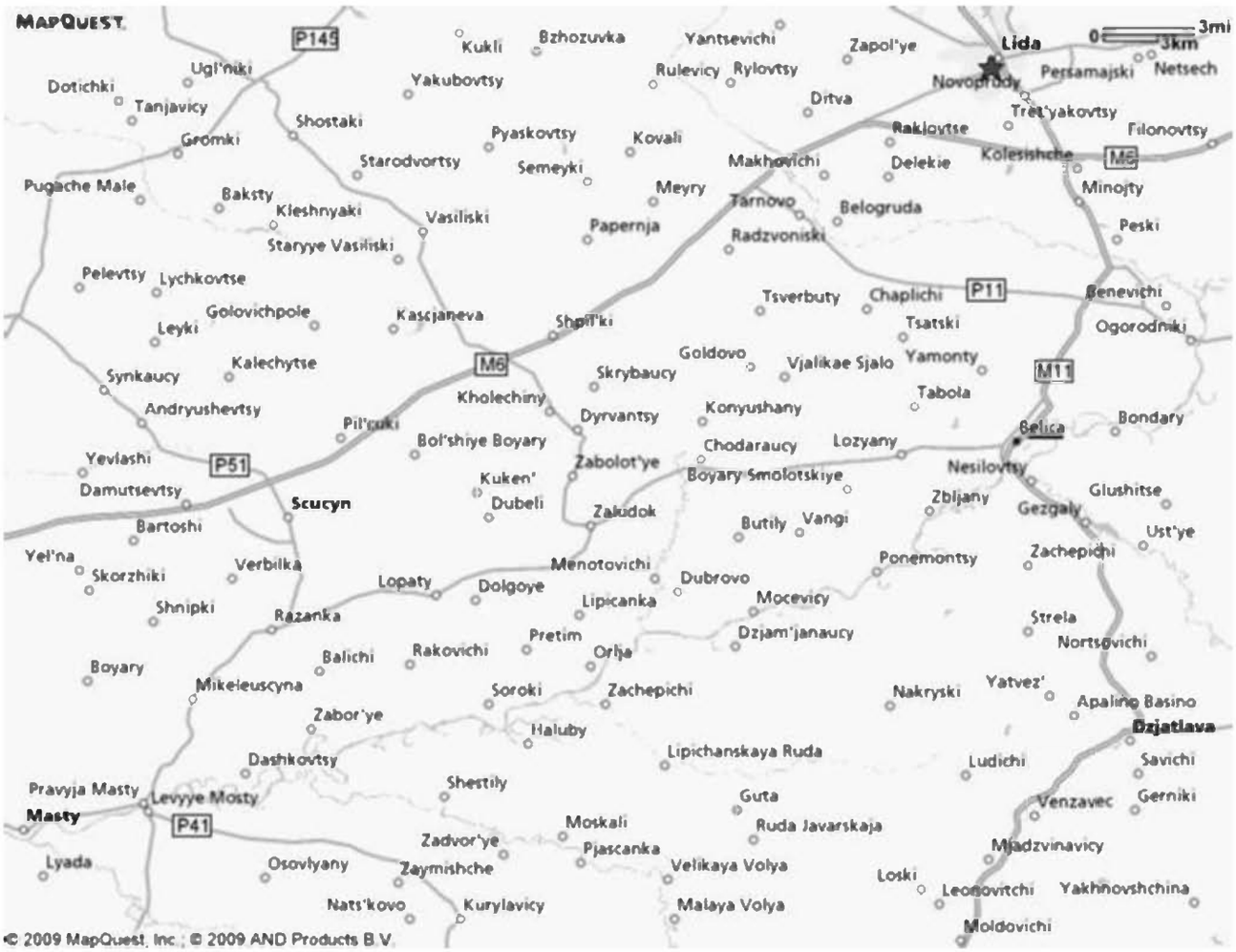
And to the end, our plea is placed before our dear Belica *landsleit*: Read this *Pinkas*, and review well the contents of its chapters, for your children and grandchildren, who did not know our community from up close, for whose memorialization we went through this sacred labor. We have been privileged in this respect, to see this *Pinkas* of ours appear at the time of the 20th Anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel, and very close to the great Jewish victory in the Six Day War, – and therefore, let it be a remembrance that will be guarded and celebrated by our community here forever, and that the souls of its martyrs will always remain bound up in the bond of life of coming generations – the guarantors of the rebirth of Israel.

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1 This has been relocated to appear on the frontispiece of this book.

2 See page 1

REGIONAL MAP



הקדשת הצייר יעקב רוזנבוים לתמונתו "נרות לעיירתי".

די וידמונג פון מאלער יעקב ראזנבוים צו זיין בילד "ליכט פון שטעטל".

Dedication of Yaakov Rosenbaum of his Picture, *"Candles of My Shteti"*

A Memorial to Our *Shtetl*

By Shimon Baker (Buczkowsky)

(Appears both in Yiddish & Hebrew)

Page 17: *A Memorial Tablet to the Martyrs of Belica in the Synagogue dedicated to the Ghetto Fighters, in Netanya.*

With a deep feeling of respectful trepidation towards the memory of our nearest and dearest, who were brought down in Sanctification of the Name, we publish this book about the life, struggle and destruction of the Jewish settlement in our home town of Belica that was cut down.

The publication of this book did not come about easily, it took over twenty years until it made its appearance. The material was not put together so quickly, and also the many pictures were not merely lifted out of existing archives. Rather, strenuous effort was demanded of the Belica survivors in Israel and The United States, in order to make it possible, so that this small 'folio' about the rise and fall of our shtetl community should find its rightful place, and no small amount of energy and delay was demanded of the book committee.

Let it be stated clearly here: our book does not present itself as a great work, and it does not have the ambition of excelling as a perfect work of literary language – this was not the purpose, despite the fact that the purity of the language and the details of style were given attention.

The goal of our *Pinkas* is to relate the biography of a Jewish settlement in a small shtetl near Lida, in the Vilna district, where families lived as Jews and went to their deaths as Jews, in a hostile environment. The gentile neighbors, in Byelorussian, Lithuanian and Polish towns, of which Belica was a part, as was the case in other vicinities, with compact Jewish settlements in Eastern Europe, were, in the 'best of times' – with only very small exceptions – ardent anti-Semites. Their real face was revealed during the German occupation, when not only Jewish property, but also Jewish blood was treated with abandon. They did not wait for so much as a spare minute, in order to murder the Jewish men and women, among them elderly people and children – and in many instances, they outdid the Germans. The sorrowful years of the Jewish extermination during the last World War showed that, even in the 'tranquil times,' it was an act of Sanctification of the Name on the part of the Jews in the cities and towns of Eastern Europe, to live in an environment so hostile to their presence.

With simple words, that derive their nourishment from the simple spirit of the Jewish soul, the *landsleit* from Belica, who survived only by a miracle, tell everything that they know of their home town. The ancient Pinkas of Belica, that transmitted facts from hundreds of years past, went up in flames, along with its faithful guardians; all that remained were remnants, and how they were retold orally, from generation to generation.

Everything that is related in our book, are things that come from the heart. The sorrowful experiences, and the energetic resistance against the bloody German enemy, when he sowed murder among the helpless Jews, was played out and carried on the shoulders of many of those who wrote, who share their work with us. It is their hope, that these will be words that penetrate the heart.

In a world that is prepared to forget – and has almost entirely forgotten already – the sins of the German nation, which under the leadership of Hitler, may his name be erased, took on the challenge of exterminating the Jewish people, our book puts forth a strong historical reminder. It is therefore perhaps a good thing, that it appears only now, some two decades after the end of the War – such a reminder is certainly more needed now that it was before.

The memorial book of Belica, though it had only 130 Jewish families, also serves as a reminder to the 'civilized world' with its 'democratic institutions,' that they morally bankrupted themselves with their silence. when Jewish blood was being spilled in Europe. Not one of the great world leaders so much as risked dipping a finger into cold water in order to save the Jews in the burning ghettoes and concentration camps from a certain death. In between the lines of this book, the involuntary question cries out: can such a world continue to exist?...

From this *Pinkas* of Belica, one can take away a picture of Jewish heroism and martyrdom under a variety of circumstances. The sense of Jewish solidarity manifested itself with great strength also under the most trying of circumstances. The helpless Jews did not shrink fearfully from death, even when they stood face-to-face with the German murderers, whether he wore a Nazi uniform, or not. Our book will serve as a monument to these martyrs.

At a time, when quibbling goes on with respect to 'what is a Jew' this 'tiny' book about Belica permits us to apprehend the extent, to which the Jewish people have been impoverished, as a result of the great cataclysm of the last World War. The annihilation of six million Jews does not only pose a matter of the loss of physical blood, but also the irreplaceable loss of spiritual and cultural value. In Belica, as had been the case in thousands of other prewar settlements, no 'theory' was needed with which to establish who was a Jew. If someone had posed such a question, he would have been thought to be insane. This is because in each Jewish *shtetl*, a fully variegated Jewish life blossomed, a wellspring of Jewish treasure and creativity could be found there.

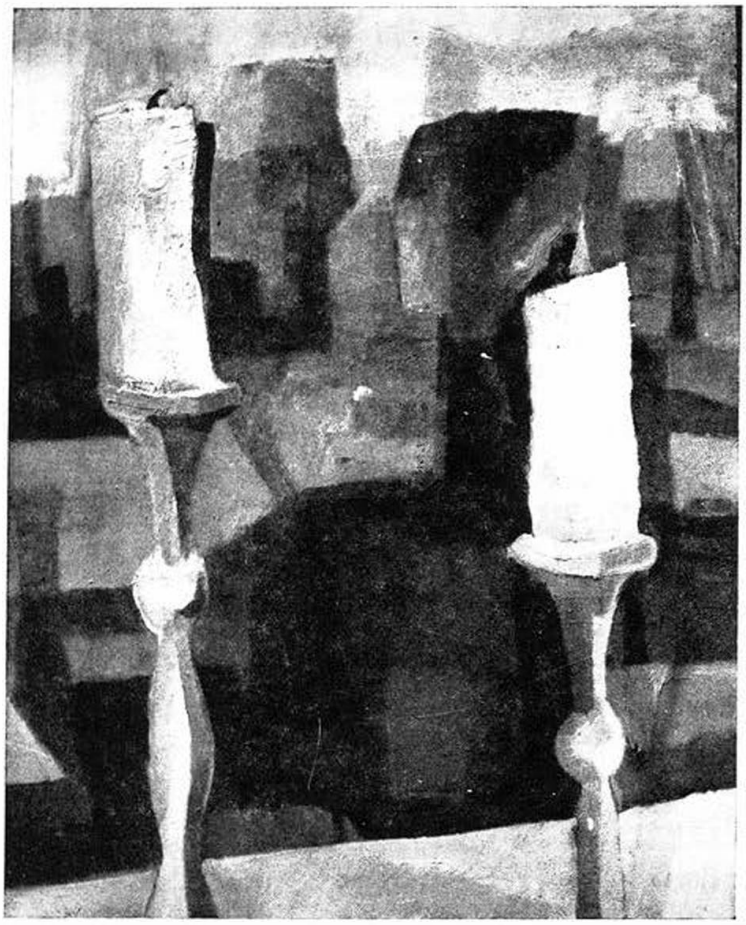
Belica was a tiny, impoverished *shtetl*. It was very hard to make a living there, and mostly survived from the weekly market day, which took place each Wednesday. However, it was powerfully laced through and through with Jewish values. A portion of Jewish life held sway in every Jewish home. Every Jewish child, even from the poorest family, went to the Yiddish-Hebrew *Volksschule* to learn. Did one need to ask 'What is a Jew?'

Our book will also serve as a memorial to the personalities of our home town. Many of these anonymous heroes of day-to-day life, have completely vanished from the Jewish arena, and will probably never be seen again, even in other manifestations.

Every Jewish shtetl in prewar times, as their Jewish residents, were strongly similar one to another, in appearance and in its activities. Despite this, each Jewish city and town, just like each Jewish individual, was a world unto itself. And therefore, it is good, that such Yizkor Books as the Belica book, which mirror the problems, struggles, and way of life and downfall of a variety of Jewish communities – appear more frequently. Every book is a new memorial, and a new testimony.

We hope, that in this book about Belica, a typical Jewish shtetl, which has appeared thanks to the commitment of the committee and all of the landsleit in America and Israel, will also touch the hearts of our children and grandchildren. this will help them to assess – and also preserve – our spiritual heritage coming from past generations.

Necrology



„נרות לעירתי" מאת יעקב רוזנבוים

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

A. A List of the First Thirty-Six (36) Martyrs in Belica

Shot During the First Mass-Killing Near the Russian Orthodox Church

28 Tammuz 5701 — July 23, 1941

Last Name	First Name	Description		Last Name	First Name	Description
Negnievitsky	Zechariah Shlomo			Fein	Rabbi Gaon R' Shabtai	Rabbi of the Town
Sokolowsky	Mordechai			Ilutovich	Solomon	From Lida
Tsigelnitsky	Eliyahu			Baran	Hirsch	
Kotlarsky	Mordechai			Baranchik	David	Son of Nissan
Kotlarsky	Yehoshua			Burstein	Aharon	
Kamenetzky	Yitzhak			Burstein	Hershl	
Kalmanovich	Azriel			Burstein	Pesach	
Kaufman	Abraham-Zvi			Gapanovich	Joseph	
Kaufman	Shfatya			Gernitsky	Pesach	
Kirschner	Yitzhak	The Shammes		Halperin	Yehoshua	
Kremen	Shlomo			Wismonsky	Abraham	
Rosensweig	Leib	A Refugee		Zager	Meir	
Rothstein	Reuven			Zelikovsky	David	
Radominer	Berl			Tatikansky	David	
Reisner	Yehuda			Mikulicki	Zalman	From Lida
Schwetsky	Meir			Novogrudsky	Abraham	
Schmuckler	Yaakov	Ya"Tz		Novogrudsky	Mendl	
A Refugee ?		From Dereczin		Nokhbaum	Nahum	
B.	**Addition to the**			**List of**	**those shot**	**in Belica**
Baranchik	Nathan	3 Tammuz 5701		July 26, 1941		
Stotsky	Fyvel	26 Tammuz 5701		July 21, 1941		
Kremen	Chaim-Yitzhak	26 Tammuz 5701		July 21, 1941		
Szeszko	Eliezer-Chaim			Aug-1942		
Szeszko	Nechama-Leah	His Wife		Aug-1942		
Szeszko		His Daughter		Aug-1942		
			*			
				Radka	Mayewsky	End Summer 1942
Stotsky	Bash'keh	End Summer 1942		Shlomo	Mayewsky	End Summer 1942
Stotsky	Resh'keh	End Summer 1942		Yehoshua	Stotsky	End Summer 1942
Rothstein-Stotsk	Daughter of Dobk	End Summer 1942				

C. The First List of those Exterminated in the Zhetl Ghetto

13 Iyyar 5702 —April 30, 1942

Last Name	First Name	Description		First Name	Last Name	Description
Odzhikhow sky	Yehudit			Novogrudsky	Shimon	
Odzhikhow sky	Rash'keh	Jonah's Wife		Novogrudsky	Min'cheh	His Wife
Odzhikhow sky	Rachel			Novogrudsky	Dob'keh	Their Daughter
Odzhikhow sky	Leib			Nussbaum	Dvora	
Odzhikhow sky	Ilka	His Wife		Negniew itsky	Joseph	
Orlansky	Chana	Hirsh'l's Wife		Negniew itsky	Shayn'keh	His Wife
		With 2 Children		Negniew itsky	Shmuel	Their Son
Baranchik	Breineh	Isaac's Wife		Negniew itsky	Esther-Rachel	Their Daughter
Baranchik	Chaim	Ben Shimon		Negniew itsky	Chava	Their Daughter
Baranchik	Chaim-Reuven			Savitzky	Moshe	
Bussel	Hirsch'l with Nechama	His Mother		Savitzky	Nechama	His Wife
Bussel	Noah			Sokolow sky	Chana	
Bussel	Rivka	His Wife & 2 Children		Sokolow sky	Shmuel	Her Son
Burstein	Zlat'keh			Stotsky	Yehudit	
Galinsky	Dvora			Stotsky	Faygl	
Gapanow icz	Mir'l			Pisechner	Chaya-Baylah	And 3 Children
Green	Benjamin			Fleischer	Zalman	
Green	Batya	His Wife		Fleischer	Velvel	His Son
Green	Esther-Rachel	Their Daughter		Kotlarsky (Halperin)	Chana	And Her Daughter
Green	Baylah	Their Daughter		Kaufman	Hinde	
Dziencelsky	Shlomo			Kusielew icz	Zalman	Son of Yudl
Dziencelsky	Rish'keh	His Wife		Kusielew icz	Yeshayahu-Moshe	
Dziencelsky	Esther-Rachel	Their Daughter		Krawczyk	Moshe	The Shokhet
Dziencelsky	Shmuel	Their Son		Krawczyk	Fruma	His Wife, & 2 Children
Dziencelsky	Moshe	Their Son		Krasnoselsky	Reizl	
Halperin	Peretz with Esther	His Mother		Krasnoselsky	Perl'eh	
Halperin	Raphael			Krasnoselsky	Gabriel	Her Son
Wolkow ysky	Tsipa			Kremen	Lieb'keh	
Wismondsky	Yitzhak			Kremen	Mot'keh	Her Son
Wismondsky	Fruma	His Wife		Kremen	Faygl	
Yudelevich	Pessia	The Cantor's Wife		Rothstein (Stotsky)	Dob'keh	And a Child
Mayew sky (Sotsky	Batya			Rubinow itz	Yehoshua-Mordechai	
Mayew sky	Child of Lejzor & Perl'eh			Shimonow icz	Alta	
Maggid (Kotlarsky)	Bracha			Shelyuvsky	Wolf	
Milkow sky	Alta			Szeszko	Joseph	
Meckel	Chaya-Esther			Szeszko	Rosa-Leah	His Daughter
Meckel	Pessia	Her Daughter		Szeszko	Sarah	His Daughter
Meckel	Chana, Her Daughter-in Law	and a Grandchild				

D. The Second List of those Exterminated in the Zhetl Ghetto

23 Av 5702 —August 6, 1942

Last Name	First Name	Description	Last Name	First Name	Description
Odzhikhow sky	Eliyahu		Mayew sky	Abraham-David	
Odzhikhow sky	Resh'keh	His wife & Children (Etka)	Molczadsky (Kotla	Henya	
Odzhikhow sky	Fyv'eh	Son of Nissan	Maggid	Yekhezkiel	Son of Abraham & Bracha
Irman	Shimon		Maggid	Elchanan	Son of Abraham & Bracha
Irman	Bash'eh-Malka	His Wife	Novogrudsky	Bat-Sheva	
Astrinsky	Henya		Novogrudsky	Shmuel-Shimon	Her Son
Astrinsky	Zalman	Her Son	Novogrudsky	Leah	(Wissmondsky)
Astrinsky	Sonya	Her Daughter	Novogrudsky	Herzl	
Orliansky	Mer'keh		Novogrudsky	Rivka	And Husband
Baczkow sky	Rabbi R' Chaim-Leib		Novogrudsky	Reizl	With Husband & Children
Baczkow sky	Breineh	His Wife	Savitzky	Leah	
Baczkow sky	Faygl	Their Daughter	Savitzky	Masha	Her Daughter
Baksht	Hinde		Savitzky	Dvora	(Kalmanovich)
Baran	Bayl'keh	With 2 Children	Savitzky	Leah	Her Daughter
Baranchik	David	Son of Yehuda	Fein	Mir'l-Yenta	The Rebbetzin
Baranchik	Sarah	Wife of Nissan	Fein	Chana	Her Daughter
Baranchik	Reuven	Their Son	Fleischer	Zalman	
Baranchik	Golda	Their Daughter	Fleischer	Bracha	His Wife & A Son
Baranchik	Reizl	Their Daughter	Fleischer	Rachel-Liebeh	
Baranchik	Red'leh	(Sheliuvsky)	Fleischer	Chaim-Yitzhak	Her Son
Baranchik	Gittl	Wife of Yoss'l	Fleischer	Mindl	Her Daughter
Bussel	Aharon		Fleischer	Freid'l	Her Daughter
Bussel	Golda	Wife of Aharon & 5 Children	Fleischer	Reizl	Her Daughter
Bussel	Mordechai-Meir		Kamenetzky	Hassia	(Rudaminer)
Bussel	Liebeh	Wife of Mordechai-Meir & 2 Child	Kamenetzky	Eliyahu	Her Son
Bronstein	Leah		Koppelman	Esther-Baylah	
Bronstein	Bash'eh-Dvora	Her Daughter	Koppelman	Mer'keh	Her Daughter
Galinsky	Joseph		Katsev	Shmuel	
Galinsky	Yaakov		Kaufman	Batya	Wife of Abraham-Zvi
Gapanovich	Shprinza	Lejzor's Wife & 2 Children	Klatchko	Gittl	(Stotsky) & A Daughter
Gapanovich	Noah-Abba		Krasnoselsky	Dob'keh	
Gapanovich	Itka	His Wife & 2 Children	Krasnoselsky	Shifra	
Gordon	Perl'eh		Krasnoselsky	Freid'l	Her Daughter
Garfinkel	Grunya	With 2 Children	Krasnoselsky	Bayl'keh	Her Daughter
Goldstein	Chaya-Tsirl		Krasnoselsky	Abraham	
Goldstein	Rachel'eh	Her Daughter	Krasnoselsky	Shayna	His Brother's Child
Green	Mordechai		Krasnoselsky	Chana	His Brother's Child
Green	Malka (Kremen)	His Wife & 2 Children	Krasnoselsky	Two Sons	of Sholom
Green	Chana (Lejzor's Wif	And 4 Children	Kremen	Batya	
Wolkow ysky	Leib'eh		Kremen	Zerakh	Her Son
Wolkow ysky	Shayna	His Wife & 4 Children	Kremen	Israel-Meiram	
Wolkow ysky	Rachel	With 2 Children	Kremen	Chaya-Elka	
Wismonsky	Chaya-Tila		Kremen	Rachel	Their Daughter
Zlocow sky	Shlomo		Kremen	Liebeh	Their Daughter
Zlocow sky	Miriam	His Wife & 3 Children	Kremen	Sarah	Their Daughter
Zelikow sky	Sarah		Shimonow icz	Mordechai	
Zelikow sky	Yekhezkiel	Her Son	Shimonow icz	Hirsch-Eliezer	
Zelikow sky	Tsip'eh	Her Daughter	Shimonow icz	Tzivia	His Wife, and a Son
Zhukhovsky	Shmuel		Shimonow icz	Itta	
Zhukhovsky	Zalman		Shimonow icz	Liebeh	
Yosselevich	Yoss'l		Shmuelew icz	Luzer	
Yosselevich	Zlata	His Wife	Shmuelew icz	Elkeh	And 2 Children
Yosselevich	Sarah		Shelyuvsky	Hirsch	
Yosselevich	Mordechai	Her Son	Shelyuvsky	Yehoshua	And Wife
Yosselevich	Chana	Her Daughter	Shelyuvsky	Yaakov	
Lozow sky	Chaya-Gittl		Shelyuvsky	Shifra	His Wife & 2 Children
Lozow sky	Abraham	Her Son	Shelyuvsky	Faygl	
Lozow sky	Rachel	Her Daughter	Szeszko	David	
Lozow sky	Aharon	Her Son	Szeszko	Leah	His Wife
Lass (Wolkow sky)	Fruma	And 2 Children	Szeszko	Batya	Their Daughter
Leibow itz	Chana		Szeszko	Dvora	(Who Was Deaf)
Leibow itz	Abraham	Her Son			
Leibow itz	Jonah	Her Son			

E. The List of those Exterminated in the Lida Ghetto

21 Iyyar 5702 — May 8, 1942

Last Name	First Name	Description		Last Name	First Name	Description
Baranchik	Chana	Nathan's Wife		Tsigelnitsky	Freid'l	Wife of Eliyahu
Baranchik	Rachel	Her Mother-in-Law		Tsiderovich	Moshe	
Baranchik	Moshe-David			Tsiderovich	Feiga	His Wife
Baranchik	Mitt'eh	His Wife & A Child		Tsiderovich	Shayna-Chana	Their Daughter
Baranchik	Mina	Daughter of Nathan		Kotlarsky	Moshe Eliyahu	His Wife & Children
Baranchik	Her Husband	And Children		Kotlarsky	Leib	His Wife & Children
Bronstein	Shakhna			Kalmanovich	Ziss'l	
Vishnievsky	Chaim			Kalmanovich	Feiga-Ethel	His Wife
Zlocowsky	Yudl	His Wife & A Child		Kalmanovich	Zivia	Their Daughter
Yankelevsky	Shprinza	Wife of R' Lejzor		Kalmanovich	(No Name Given)	Their Daughter
Jasinowsky	Taibl			Kalmanovich	Yitzhak-Eliyahu	Their Son
Jasinowsky	Shlomo			Kalmanovich	Dash'keh	
Motikansky	Mer'eh-Rivka	And 2 Daughters		Kalmanovich	Yeshayahu	Her Son
Novogrudsky	Chaya-Sarah			Kalmanovich	Baruch	Her Son
Novogrudsky	Eliezer	Her Son		Kalmanovich	Yitzhak	With Wife & Children
Sokolowsky	Moshe (from Kanusza	And Wife		Kamenietsky	Gittl	
Sokolowsky	Eliezer	Their Son		Kusielewicz	Gitt'eh	
Sokolowsky	Meir	Their Son		Kusielewicz	Hannan-Yitzhak	And Family
Sokolowsky	Leah	Their Daughter		Kremen	Elkeh	With Husband & Childrer
Stotsky	Velvel			Rubinowitz (Ku	Sarah-Dvora	And Family
Stotsky	Sonya	His Wife & 2 Children		Ruzhansky	Ephraim	
Fleischer	Yitzhak			Ruzhansky	Dob'keh	His Wife
Fleischer	Tsip'eh	His Wife		Ruzhansky	Rachel	Their Daughter
				Ruzhansky	Sarah	Their Daughter

F. The List of those Exterminated in the Scucyn Ghetto

22 Iyyar 5702 — May 9, 1942

Last Name	First Name	Description		Last Name	First Name	Description
Goldstein	Chaim			Sokolowsky	Eliyahu	
Goldstein	Rachel	His Wife & A Son		Sokolowsky	Esh'keh	His Wife
Zlocowsky	Hirsch			Sokolowsky	Dvora	Their Daughter
Zlocowsky	Shprinza	His Wife		Sokolowsky	Freid'keh	Their Daughter
Zlocowsky	Moshe			Sokolowsky	Bunya-Leah	Their Daughter
Zlocowsky	Sarah	With 3 Children		Stosky	Eliyahu	
Zlocowsky	Tanhum			Stosky	Chaya-Sarah	His Wife
Zlocowsky	Fruma	His Wife		Stosky	Chaim-Yitzhak	Their Son
Zlocowsky	Chaim-Shlomo	Their Son		Stosky	Moshe-David	Their Son
Zlocowsky	Perl'eh	Their Daughter		Stosky	Perl'eh	Their Daughter
Zlocowsky	Isser	Son of Joseph		Stosky	Michael	
Zlocowsky	David	Killed 6 Shevat 5702		Stosky	Baylah	His Wife & 5 Children
Zhukhovsky	Chaya	(Kaplan)		Poniemansky	Chaim-Yaakov	
Lozowsky	cHAYA	Wife of FyVeh		Poniemansky	Baylah	His Wife & 2 Children
Luszniacki	Moshe	Son of Aharon Tar Merchant		Fleischer	Chaim	
Meckel	Eliezer			Fleischer	Mer'keh	His Wife
Meckel	Baylah	His Wife & 3 Children		Kaplan	Mendl	
Meckel	Feiga	Killed 6 Shevat 5702		Kaplan	Dvora	His Wife and 3 Children
				Ratnowsky	Yaakov	
				Ratnowsky	Zivia	His Wife
				Ratnowsky	Mer'eh	Their Daughter
				Ratnowsky	Hassia	Their Daughter

G. The List of those Exterminated in the Novogrudok Ghetto

5702/5703 — 1942/1943

Last Name	First Name	Description		Last Name	First Name	Description
Itzkowitz	Gittl			Kharmat	Moshe (Henya-Leah	Zolocowsky's Husband) And 2 Children
Itzkowitz	Liebeh	Her Daughter		Mayewsky	Fishl	
Boczkowsky	Malka	Killed 11 Dec 1942		Fein	Yaakov	The Rabbi's Son
Boczkowsky	Mash'keh	Killed 11 Dec 1943		Kirschner	Tanhum-Aharon	
Baranchik	Min'keh	And 4 Children		Kreinowicz	Leah	
Galinsky	Benjamin			Kremen	Yaakov	Son of Shlomo
Galinsky	Shoshana	And 4 Children		Kremen	Bash'keh	His Wife
Gerinsky	Chaya			Kremen	Leah	(Itzkowitz)
Gerinsky	Fruma	Her Daughter		Shepshelevich	Berl	
				Sheshko	Natan-Moshe	
				Sheshko	Freidl	With Children
				Sheshko	Rivka	

H. The List of those Exterminated in the Dvarec Ghetto

5702 — 1942

Last Name	First Name	Description		Last Name	First Name	Description
Gapanovich	Eliezer			Nachumovich	Yaakov	
Gurevich	Miriam	Wife of Asher & 3 Children		Nachumovich	Golda	His Wife
Green	Eliezer	Son of Abraham		Nachumovich	Esther	Their Daughter
Zelikovsky	Meir			Nachumovich	Mamie	Their Daughter
Lev	Eliezer			Nachumovich	Moshe	Their Son
Meckel	Velvel	With Wife & Children		Nachumovich	Herschel	Their Son
Yevnovich	El'ke (Eisner)	With a Child		Fleischer	Mordechai	With Wife & Children
Leibowitz	Yerakhmeiel			Zwick	Meir	
Meckel	Yaakov	Son of David-Hirshl		Zwick	It'keh	His Wife & Children
Meckel	Berl	Son of David-Hirshl		Kliaczko	Doctor	
				Reisner	Dvora	
				Reisner	Leah	Her Daughter
				Reisner	Dob'keh	

I. The List of those Exterminated in the Village of Sielc

(The Neman Train Station)

5702 — 1942

Last Name	First Name	Description		First Name	Last Name	Description
Itzkowitz	Gittl			Kharmat	Moshe (Henya-L	Zolocowsky's Husba
Itzkowitz	Liebeh	Her Daughter		Mayevsky	Fishl	
Boczkowsky	Malka	Killed 11 Dec 194		Fein	Yaakov	The Rabbi's Son
Boczkowsky	Mash'keh	Killed 11 Dec 194		Kirschner	Tanhum-Aharon	
Baranchik	Min'keh	And 4 Children		Kreinovich	Leah	
Galinsky	Benjamin			Kremen	Yaakov	Son of Shlomo
Galinsky	Shoshana	And 4 Children		Kremen	Bash'keh	His Wife

J. The List of those Exterminated in Various Locations

5702 — 1942

Last Name	First Name	Description	Location
Odzhikhowsky	Bash'keh		Warsaw, 1942
Odzhikhowsky	Min'eh		Warsaw, 1942
Ivenietsky	Fyvel		Volkovysk 1942
Ivenietsky	Malya	(Jasinowsky) His Wife	Volkovysk 1942
Ivenietsky	Aviva	Their Daughter	Volkovysk 1942
Ivenietsky	Rena	Their Daughter	Volkovysk 1942
Amstibowsky	Hirsch		Baranovici 1942
Amstibowsky	Sarah	His Wife	Baranovici 1942
Amstibowsky	Malka	Their Daughter	Baranovici 1942
Amstibowsky	Aharon		Baranovici 1942
Amstibowsky	Kayl'keh	His Wife	Baranovici 1942
Baksht	Yaakov	August 1, 1941	Village of Dakodowa
Baran (Belitsky)	Baylah	With Husband & Children	Wiszniewic
Baranchik	Eliyahu-Chaim	In a Camp	Novoyelnya
Baranchik	Yeshayahu		Smolensk Camp
Grodzinsky	Yekhezkiel		Slonim 1942
Grodzinsky	Eera	His Wife	Slonim 1942
Grodzinsky	Moshe	Their Son	Slonim 1942
Wolkowysky	Israel	February 8, 1942	Novoyelnya Camp
Wolkowysky	Abraham		Zhaludok 5Sep42
Wolkowysky	Esther	His Wife & 5 Children	Zhaludok 5Sep42
Zager	Rivka		Astryna
Zager	Freida		Astryna
Zager	Leah	And Family	Vilna
Zhyzhemsky	Tsipa	(Kotlarsky) & Family	Vilna
Yankelewsky	Eliyahu	And Wife & Children	Dokszyc 1941
Leavitt (Kremen)	Shayn'keh	Daughter of Zerakh & Alta	Slonim, June `1942
Mayewsky	Chaim-Ber'l	And Family	Vasiliski
Novogrudsky	Kayla	And Husband with Children	Sielow 1942
Poniemansky	Meir		Zhaludok 5Sep42
Poniemansky	Baylah	And Children	Zhaludok 5Sep42
Poniemansky	Yitzhak	Son of Meir	Skrybowa 1942
Pisecner	Yehuda-Nathan	With Wife & Children	Zhaludok 5Sep42
Cederovich	Leah (Yankelevsky)	With Husband & Children	Vilna
Kamenietsky	Isser	And Wife & Children	Auschwitz
Koppelman	Elimelech	Son of Esther-Baylah, With Wife & Children	Vilna
Kaufman	Rabbi R' Yerakhmiel	Son of Shfatyahu, With Wife & Children	Amdur 1942
Kuritsky	Jonah		Vilna
Kuritsky	Et'keh (Gapanovich)	His Wife & Daughter	Vilna
Krasnoselsky	Yitzhak	Son of Gabriel	Smolensk Camp
Radominer	Lipa	Son of Ber'l	Smolensk Camp
Shimanovich	Chaya-Baylah		Ivie
Shmuckler	Ze'ev (Velvel)		Slonim 1942
Shmuckler	Leah (Daughter of	Etta Grodziensky)	Slonim 1942
Shmuckler	Chaim	Their Son	Slonim 1942
Shmuckler	Muss'yeh	Ther Son	Slonim 1942
Shepshelevich	Shayna-Liebeh	Daughter of Shlomo Kremen	Kozlovshchina 1942
Szeszko	Isaac	Son of Joseph, And Wife with Children	Vasiliski 1941

K. Those Who Fell on the Battlefront and in the Forests During the Partisan Fighting

1941 - 1945

Last Name	First Name	Description	Location
Odzhikhowsky	Bash'keh		Warsaw, 1942
Odzhikhowsky	Min'eh		Warsaw, 1942
Ivenietsky	Fyvel		Volkovysk 1942
Ivenietsky	Malya	(Jasinowsky) His Wife	Volkovysk 1942
Ivenietsky	Aviva	Their Daughter	Volkovysk 1942
Ivenietsky	Rena	Their Daughter	Volkovysk 1942
Amstibowsky	Hirsch		Baranovici 1942
Amstibowsky	Sarah	His Wife	Baranovici 1942
Amstibowsky	Malka	Their Daughter	Baranovici 1942
Amstibowsky	Aharon		Baranovici 1942
Amstibowsky	Kayl'keh	His Wife	Baranovici 1942
Baksht	Yaakov	August 1, 1941	Village of Dakodowa
Baran (Belitsky)	Baylah	With Husband & Childre	Wiszniewic
Baranchik	Eliyahu-Chaim	In a Camp	Novoyelnya
Baranchik	Yeshayahu		Smolensk Camp
Grodzinsky	Yekhezkiel		Slonim 1942
Grodzinsky	Eera	His Wife	Slonim 1942
Grodzinsky	Moshe	Their Son	Slonim 1942
Wolkowysky	Israel	February 8, 1942	Novoyelnya Camp
Wolkowysky	Abraham		Zhaludok 5Sep42
Wolkowysky	Esther	His Wife & 5 Children	Zhaludok 5Sep42
Zager	Rivka		Astryna
Zager	Freida		Astryna
Zager	Leah	And Family	Vilna
Zhyzhemsky	Tsipa	(Kotlarsky) & Family	Vilna
Yankelewsky	Eliyahu	And Wife & Children	Dokszyc 1941
Leavitt (Kremen)	Shayn'keh	Daughter of Zerakh & Al	Slonim, June 1942
Mayewsky	Chaim-Ber'l	And Family	Vasiliski
Novogrudsky	Kayla	And Husband with Child	Sielow 1942
Poniemansky	Meir		Zhaludok 5Sep42
Poniemansky	Baylah	And Children	Zhaludok 5Sep42
Poniemansky	Yitzhak	Son of Meir	Skrybowa 1942
Pisechner	Yehuda-Nathan	With Wife & Children	Zhaludok 5Sep42
Cederovich	Leah (Yankelevsk	With Husband & Childre	Vilna
Kamenetzky	Isser	And Wife & Children	Auschwitz
Koppelman	Elimelech	Son of Esther-Baylah, W	Vilna
Kaufman	Rabbi R' Yerakhm	Son of Shfatyahu, With	Amdur 1942
Kuritsky	Jonah		Vilna
Kuritsky	Et'keh (Gapanovi	His Wife & Daughter	Vilna
Krasnoselsky	Yitzhak	Son of Gabriel	Smolensk Camp
Radominer	Lipa	Son of Ber'l	Smolensk Camp
Shimonowicz	Chaya-Baylah		Ivie

Part One

חלק ראשון

ערשטער טייל

Regarding the Origins of the *Shtetl* and its Community

By Joseph Cohen-Tzedek
Jerusalem

A. Economic Geography & Early History

'Black Russia' – that is what this parcel of land was called until the fourteenth century, that runs along the upper basin of the Neman River, and south of its banks; 'Black Russia' – to distinguish it from 'White Russia' that runs to the east of it. This Russia includes the cities of Novogrudok[3] Nezbodziche, Zhditov. With the development of this area, the following towns grew up and became larger: Iwje, Lopotse, Navael'nja, Karelicy, Mir, and also Belica – and around it villages sprouted up: Bondary, Liniany, Krasnaya, Butily, Tabola, and others. The sense of the name 'Black Russia' has not been made clear even to this day, but the use of the term ceased from the fourteenth century on.

In the thirteenth century, the Lithuanian Duke Mindaugas (who died in 1263) united the separated Lithuanian villages into one large holding and fiefdom, and also expanded its borders by the annexation of 'Black Russia.' In the fourteenth century, with the conquests of the Grand Duke Gedymin (who ruled 1316-1341), and his annexations to the east, 'Black Russia' because a core element if the Slavic districts in the expanded possessions of Lithuania.

By the conquests to the east, Lithuania became a country of self-sufficient independence, whose Slavic population was larger than its Lithuanian population. In those days, no significance was attached to the nationality of their populations by the feudal lords. The lands were considered to be the essential fief of the king, regarding its ownership and laws of inheritance of the kinship and of the kingdom of the land. And the rights of ownership over each parcel of land was determined by it capture and taking possession of it. When the rule of the Tatars spread in Eastern Europe, two centers arose that attempted to annex the possessions of the Slavic rulers, who were attempting to throw off the yoke of the Tatars, but were weak in their attempts to set up independent nations. Once center was – Moscow, in which the nobles of the house of Rurik ruled, and the second, in the city of Vilna, in which Gedymin resided – these two competed for the relative domination of the Slavic valleys. And until the seventeenth century, the hand of the Gedymin followers was the dominant one. However, it should be understood why Gedymin did not sense to establish his capitol first in the city of Novogrudok – – in the center of the Slavic settlement, and did not sense the need to adopt their language as a second official language in his country.

Belica was tied to two principal cities for all of its existence: as a nearby neighborhood, these being Novogrudok and the city of Lida, which can be found approximately thirty kilometers north of Belica.

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[3] In Yiddish, this name gets elided to *Novardok*. It is this latter form that is used throughout my translation of the Tomaszow-Lubelski Memorial Book.

Novogrudok, despite the fact that its name means 'new city,' was one of the most ancient of the cities in this region, in which up to the fourteenth century had no cities, and understandably, at the western end of this reach. Novogrudok was established by Yaroslav Wolodzmierowycz, the duke of 'Black Russia,' in the year 1116. It was destroyed by the Tatars in the year 1240, but was rebuilt by Gedymin in the fourteenth century, immediately after he captured that area. He constructed a strong fortification with a fortress, and established his capital here. However, because this city was located on a open plain, vulnerable to attack by the Tatars, he moved his capitol to Trakai, whose fortress was built on a island in the middle of a lake that had been widened.[4] However, this was too close to the western border, the border of the Order of Crusaders [of Eastern Prussia]. These warriors were, for the most part, from Germany, and for this reason were called the 'Teutonic Knights.' These were the knights that were driven out of the Holy Land after the failure of the crusades. Since they could find no other refuge, the popes saddled them with the objective of conquering the Lithuanian tribes, who were pagan, and to convert them to Christianity. The went up on the shores of the Baltic Sea, and captured the 'Prussians' – one of the tribes of Lithuania, and wiped it out entirely. From that time on, they adopted a policy of leaving the tribes of Lithuania and Poles together. This policy led to the unification of the Lithuanian tribes into one kingdom, and it was out of fear of the Teutonic Knights, that Gedymin sought to move his capitol city elsewhere. In the end, he found a satisfactory place that was surrounded by primeval forest, in which there were high hills, that had the appearance of a natural fortification. In the year 1330, he built his new capital city there, and its fortifications: and this was Vilna.

In the year 1507, Novogrudok became a provincial center, and the Voievode took up residence there in 1511. He was accorded the privileges of a city under the Magdeburg Laws. Only after the city was totally consumed in a fire in 1751, did it descend from its prominence, and did not return to it, and it became just another town among the remaining towns of the district.

The second city, to whose fate the fate of Belica was tied, was Lida. Lida too, was an ancient city of the western Slavic areas, and was considered the capitol city of the 'Black Russian' valley. It was established in 1180. In the year 1326, Gedymin erected its fortified tower, which stood as a guardian city during many difficult wars. It was only because of the many battles fought in its vicinity, and only because of the severity of the sieges laid to it, and to which the city was subjected, was it denied the opportunity to grow and spread out and to become one of the important urban centers of the country. It's very name bears witness to its antiquity, whose Lithuanian meaning – is a bare plain – a forest whose trees have been uprooted.

After the death of Gedymin, his two sons ruled in Lithuania: Algirdas with Kestutis. When Algirdas died, the Grand Duke Jagiello was made king, with the consent of his uncle, the oldest son of Algirdas . In 1380, Jagiello handed over the city of Lida to the Duke Vaidilas (Wojdylo) as a dowry present, who took the sister of Jagiello, Maria as his wife. The Duke Kestutis became angry at this, because he felt he had a claim to the hegemony over this city. He arrayed his forces on the north bank of the Neman River, and with them, he forded the river in the outskirts of Belica, and assaulted Lida. He captured its outlying areas, and tore them

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4 Trakai Island Castle is located in Trakai, Lithuania on an island on the shores of Lake Galvė. The castle is sometimes referred to as "Little Marienburg". The construction of the stone castle was begun in the 14th century by Kęstutis, and around 1409 major works were completed by his son Vytautas the Great, who died in this castle in 1430. Trakai was one of the main centers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the castle held great strategic importance.

down, captured the city, took Vaidilas (Wojdylo) into captivity and hung him in the city square...

Belica developed and grew from a fishing village to a blossoming town thanks to its location. It was located beside the banks of two branches of the Neman River: beside the banks of the Nemanka[5], and the Molczadka. The banks of the Neman can be found beside Belica, and between them is a valley. And there, the waters of the river flow down, and its stream does not get swept away. Because of this, the place is particularly attractive for bridges. By means of a tethered raft, it is possible to connect one side of the river to the other. For this reason, a station of a sort was established for negotiating the river. The region around it is rich in lumber, whose trees are attractive for lumber, boards that are thick and good for construction and manufacture. The boards that are tied together into rafts, go down the river until they reach the large cities of Grodno or Kovno, and are sold there. And there is a part of them that continue on, until the river empties into the Baltic Sea, to the city of Memel. From there, they reach the cities of Danzig, and the cities of the German '*Ganza*[6].,' to Denmark, and even England, who buy them for the construction of ships.

The Belica surroundings are rich in lakes that are replete with fish, that also populate the Neman River and its branches. The fisherman was a root source of sustenance to the village peasants in the nearby area. The land was fertile, and well-suited to the growing of wheat and corn, each according to its species, and there were fields of rich grass, good for pasture, and for raising sheep and cattle. Nevertheless, there were plenty of places that were covered in natural swamp and fields of clay. The peasants would also fashion cooking pots from the clay fields. However, today, such pots are made from aluminum. In the vicinity of the village of Jonzilow iron ore can be found, sulfur deposits, and sulfur springs. Iron works in the area were known from ancient times. Most of the 'Kurgans,[7]' – the monuments over graves, in memory of heroes – the graveyard products of tribes of nomads, going back as far as the days of the Scythians, testify to this. Even in the excavations of the '*Kurganu*' from the days of the Tatars, that would settle in the area, during the days of their conquests in the twelfth century, it is possible to find armaments wrought from iron that were forged from the iron works of the region.

From the accounts of the establishment of Novogrudok and Lida, it is possible to infer the time of the establishment of Belica. The appearance of a village settlement in this place is associated with the days of the establishment of the Duchy of Lithuania. It was at this time, that a station for the floating of lumber was established here, using the river current, for which the need grew greater with the need to build fortifications

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5 Also Niemenek

6 Reference to the Ganza Sea Cogh sailing ship of the 14th Century, used by the Germans in trading.

7 Kurgan (Russian: курган) is the Russian word (of Turkic origin) for a tumulus, a type of burial mound or barrow, heaped over a burial chamber, often of wood. The distribution of such tumuli in Eastern Europe corresponds closely to the area of the *Pit Grave* or *Kurgan* culture in South-Eastern Europe. Kurgans were built in the Eneolithic, Bronze, Iron, Antiquity and Middle Age, with old traditions still smoldering in Southern Siberia and Central Asia. Kurgan Cultures are divided, archeologically, into different sub-cultures, such as Timber Grave, Pit Grave, Scythian, Sarmatian, Hunnish and Kuman-Kipchak. A plethora of place names that include the word "kurgan" spread from Lake Baikal to the Black Sea.

in the cities of Lithuania, that were erected in the time of Gedymin. As evidence that the town was established in those days, one uses the ruins of a fortress and tower that once distinguished the location. There are those who associate these fortifications to the time of Gedymin, but there are others who associate them with his son, Kestutis (1297-1382). The purpose of the fort was to guard the river crossing, and to serve as a deterrent to raids by the Tatars that sought to penetrate to the interior of the country, and that this place did, indeed, serve to hold off more than one of their assaults in the past. Even in the year 1240, the Tatars penetrated into 'Black Russia' through this point. when they torched Belica, who was at that time only a village, and in destroying Novogrudok, which was already a city at that time, their fortunes grew for a period of time.

Belica possessed all of the attributes needed to develop into a large city, as a station for transportation and conveyance for all manner of goods that were manufactured in 'Black Russia,' and it is vicinity – 'White Russia,' to the outside world within the range of the Neman, such as: tanned hides of cattle, the fur of foxes and bears, that were trapped in the forests, and a variety of agricultural produce.

In the wake of the frequent wars, Tatar invasions from the south, the Russians from the east, and the Livonian Knights (these were the Order of the Sword – an affiliated crusader group that had settled along the Baltic shore) from the north, and the invasion of the Teutonic Knights from the west, these resulted in the town being destroyed over and over again. As an example, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the Teutonic Knights invaded, and in the middle of that century – again the Tatars, and this time, led by the heirs of Genghis Khan. Each, in turn, put all the villages and towns in the region to the torch. The Tatars were turned back by the duke Algirdas (1347-1377) smiting them hip and thigh in a battle in a valley along the banks of the Dnieper River (1368).

In 1342, the wearer of the nation's crown, Grand Duke Jagiello, grandson of Gedymin, was a guest in Lida, before he was called to reign over Poland as well. He was in Lida at the time, on his way to Novogrudok, where his wedding took place (the first of them) to Sophia, the duchess of the land of Kiev. On the way back, his journey included Belica with great pomp and ceremony. However, not many days went by, and this marriage was annulled, and the duchess of Kiev was compelled to return to her father's house after being divorced. The reason for this was a matter of state. In 1385, Jagiello converted to the Roman Catholic faith and married Jadwiga, the Queen of Poland as his wife, and was proclaimed King of Poland. The explicit condition of the marriage was the conversion of the Lithuanians to Christianity, and their allegiance to the Catholic Church of the Roman Pope. It was by this means that a union took place between the crown of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – a union, that it the fulness of time, brought about a national union between both countries. However, this union also brought pressure upon the Lithuanian people, and its culture, by the Poles. It also precipitated a divergence of religious sentiment in the country, because the west-Russian foundation in Lithuanian was strong (because of the Byelorussians, the White Russians), who belonged to the Byzantine Orthodox Church.

In 1392, the Teutonic Knights returned, allied with the Livonian Knights. At the head of this host stood the Graf Leinigen from Germany, with Lord Bradford from England, because their goal was to convert the remaining pagan idol worshipers among the Lithuanians, and the Russian members of the Byzantine Orthodox Church, to Roman Catholicism, by force of fire and sword. The knights reached Lida, and put it to the torch, and they did the same to all the cities around it, the large and the small, up to the banks of the

Neman, with Belica among them. However, they were unable to capture the fort at Lida, and it withstood attack for many days, until relief came from outside. The Knights, at that point, were forced to retreat. This invasion caused the battle to escalate into the great war between Poland and Lithuania united against the Knights, that culminated in the brilliant victory of the allied forces in the Battle of Grunwald (1410).

In the year 1406, the Duke of Smolensk, Yuri Swiatoslawowicz crossed the Neman near Belica on his way to Lida, in order to free his captured wife, who was imprisoned in the Lida fortress by the Duke of Lithuania. He burned the city, by and large, but could not take the strong fortress, and was compelled to retreat from it, in fear of the enemy, who had rushed to its assistance from the south. In his great anger, he torched all of the cities and villages that were in his path, Belica among them.

About a half-century after these destructions, Belica was once again tried with being destroyed. According to the terms of the 'union' – the joining of Poland and Lithuania (the conditions whose force persisted until 1569, until Lithuania switched to becoming a possession of Poland), the King of Poland stood at the head of the united kingdom, even if in Lithuania itself, a duke that was subservient to him actually ruled. And when Sbedrigailo (who died in 1452) ascended to the duchy in Lithuania he said that one must rebel against the Polish hegemony, whose nobles were oppressing the Lithuanian nation, and taking advantage of them for their own benefit. He desired a separation between the two countries and to renew the independence of Lithuania. He arrayed his army in the east, and from there he went up to 'Black Russia' and captured the fortifications of Novogrudok, at the time he forded the Neman beside Belica, whose fortress he also captured. He then attacked the fortifications of Lida, – the linchpin of the country in the east. He was able to capture the city, but not the fortress. In this way, his rebellion failed. Sbedrigailo was compelled, bitterly, to recognize King Casimir IV (Jagiellonian) and as an embellishment, he received the district of Wolhynia as a possession. In the meantime, Belica remained in a state of ruin.

B. The First Jewish Settlers

The Jews reached the cities of Lithuania and its towns from two opposite directions.

A small settlement of Jews had already arisen in Poland beginning in the eighth century, and it grew in the twelfth century as a result of the exodus of many Jews from the cities of Germany, Austria and Bohemia, because of the persecutions and slaughter of the crusaders. As early as the year 1264, the King, Boleslaw, granted the Jews of Northern Poland ('Great' Poland) his protection, as expressed in the document of privileges that he gave them. In the year 1334, the King, Casimir III 'The Great' broadened those privileges to all parts of his realm. There are those who say that he did so under the influence of his lover, – the Jewess, Esther'keh. Many Jews moved into Lithuania from Poland in the fourteenth century, at the invitation of the Grand Duke Gedymin.

The second stream came from the east. These were Jews of the Torah and Jews of the Rabbinical tradition from the conquered areas of the Lithuanians to the east. – these were the territories that at one time was encompassed by the kingdom of the Khazars, within in which many Jews dwelt, whose leaders, officials and rulers had accepted the faith of Moses and Israel. When the conquests of the Lithuanian dukes reached the shores of the Black Sea, they also found Jews in the territory of Wolhynia, and Galicia, in the duchies of

Kiev, and came into contact with Jews in the Crimea of the Tatars. Gedymin invited them to his cities anew, to take up residence there, and to conduct commerce. And his son Kestutis took prisoners from among the Crimean Jews, in the battle near the city of Azov, and led them back to his land to settle there.

The Jews of Lithuania conducted trade, the making of loans with interest, and served the kingdom as tax collectors from the peasants, the nobility that owned estates. Their legal status was equivalent to that of the lesser nobility, these being the nobles called in Polish, the 'szlachta.' Their commerce, their activities, possessions, and their religion and customs were well protected by what was documented in the privileges.

However, they did not reside this way in tranquility for long. When the treasury of the duke was depleted relative to the debts he owed to his Jews, because the debts of the nobility of the land to the Jews grew large, the Grand Duke Alexander decided – he being the brother to the King of Poland – to confiscate all the property of his Jews. In the year `495, three years after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, he followed the example of Ferdinand and Isabella, and decreed an expulsion for the Jews of Lithuania. For those few who underwent baptism and converted to Christianity, he accorded property rights and the privileges of nobility. The rest left, walking stick in hand, with their packs, to begin their wanderings; the Jews of the eastern valleys turned towards the Crimea of the Tatars, and the inhabitants of 'Black Russia,' – to the Polish borders.

The expulsion of the Lithuanian Jews silenced the country's economy, and led to an ossification of trade. In eight years time, the Duke Alexander was compelled to retract his expulsion and to invite those whom he expelled to return to their accustomed places, and also promised them a return of all their lost possessions. Most of these did return to their former places of abode, but not always were they able to get a return of those possessions that were robbed from them. For many years afterwards, court cases continued between them and those new owners of their homes and fields.

It is necessary to put down, that before the expulsion of Alexander, no Jews resided in Belica.

Mostly, there is no doubt that the Jewish settlement in Belica was established shortly after the establishment of the communities in Lida and Novogrudok.

For Novogrudok was one of the very first of the communities in this area. In the archives of the high court of the city of Lida, there were (up to the destruction of the city during the Holocaust) under care, laws that were passed by the district court, that sat in session in the city of Grodno, at the time that Grodno served as the chief city of the entire large province, that took in all of 'black Russia.' These legal documents were discovered and researched , and eventually published in the books of Professor Sergei Bershadsky (a Ukrainian-Christian) who researched the history of the Jews of Lithuania. In his books, 'The Archive of Russian Jewry,' and 'The Jews of Lithuania,' he cited laws, in which the Jews of Novogrudok are mentioned. And these laws go back to 1529! In this regard, for example, we find that in the year 1551, the Jews of Novogrudok were freed from paying a special tax to the government treasury. In a similar manner, according to the same source, it is explained that in 1563, the Jews of Novogrudok lived on only one street called 'Podliaszaska,' close to the fort. And therefore, the Jews, in that year, were ordered by the King Sigismund-August to distance themselves from the fort (as a populace whose loyalty to the country was suspect!) And

to settle behind it, on the Vyluska and Truszkowska streets, and to build their houses there.

There is yet other convincing evidence of the antiquity of the Jewish community of Novogrudok. The Jews of Novogrudok are mentioned in the book of Responsa of the *Maharshal*. The *Maharshal* is R' Shlomo Luria who lived in the years 5270-5333 (1510-1573). Her served as a Yeshiva Headmaster in the Lithuanian city of Brisk, and afterwards as the Headmaster of the Yeshiva of Lublin. In his book of Responsa, that was put together in the sixteenth century (sign 59), he relates a story about the Jews in the city of Novogrudok, in which a chaste and untouched Jewish girl was put to shame and abused, after she refused to dance a mitzvah dance with him....

Nevertheless, Novogrudok never had a very substantial Jewish population. It had days of decline. According to the Pinkas, 'The Va'ad of the Lithuanian Countries' (about which we will have more to say later), it is known to us that in 1623, the community was placed under the supervision of the Lithuanian Brisk community (this is Brest), which was the largest and most prosperous of the Lithuanian communities of that time. And this was a sign of its decline, that was caused in large by the war with Sweden, at the beginning of the 17th century. It is from this that we know that in the year 1765, there were in Novogrudok, and its environs (it appears – together with Belica) 893 Jewish heads of household, paying the head tax. In Belica proper, at that time, there were 288 Jewish heads of household paying the head tax.

Also, the Jewish community of Lida was one of the ancient ones. It is estimated that it was established after the return of the Jews from the expulsion of the Grand Duke Alexander, in the first years of the sixteenth century.

The Jews of Lida, like the Jews of Novogrudok, who traveled east to conduct their business, to the city of Minsk, would cross the Neman River using the Belica crossings. It was here that the merchants collected themselves in a group at a station by the river, to convey their merchandise to Grodno and Kovno. Many of them engaged in forest products, for purposes of cutting down trees, and sending them in rafts down the river. There were those who made use of rafts for the purpose of transporting finished furs and hides to Memel and Danzig, on the shores of the [Baltic] Sea. These Jews were compelled to spend an extensive amount of time in those areas, there were those among them who saw fit to establish an entrepot city – Belica, and inns for lodging or residence. Among them were ones who saw it useful to establish hotels for the 'nobles' (called Буракий [8] ' in the local language – the workers that pull the rafts by rope in the upper river). And similarly, it was the case for the fishermen, and like them, the farmers of the area, and especially for the workers that cut trees in the forest. The intermediaries for the purchase of lumber and the jobbers that bought the agricultural produce spent an extensive amount of time here, and saw that it would be to their benefit to build their homes here. Over time, they established themselves here permanently, and also built themselves a synagogue, and in contrast, also purchased land for a cemetery. And it was in this way that the Jewish community in Belica arose, it would appear, after the middle of the sixteenth century.

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[8] Literally, boisterous ruffians.

C. The Medieval Period

In those days, the position of Starosta was bought from the monarchy by one of the higher nobility. The payment of the price that the nobleman paid for this seat he paid out over time, deriving this from the taxes he would levy on the populace, and also hold part of it as profit for himself.

In the year 1505, there was a dispute between two sons of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility over the position of Starosta in Lida, between the house of Drozd and Ilinycz. The nobleman Drozd found himself an influential advocate with the Duke Alexander (who after the death of his brother in 1501also served as the King of Poland). This was the Duke Galinski, one of the advisors to the King, who because of his effort, the king took away the seat from Kryztof Ilinycz and handed it over to Drozd. When Alexander died, which took place in the city of Lida in the year 1506, and he was buried there as well, the Ilinycz family returned to demand the seat that had belonged to it, as a sort of 'franchise.' The dispute continued for a number of years. Only in the year 1522, when the district Sejm sat in session in Grodno, was the matter resolved, and the seat of the Starosta was given over as the property of the noble Jermy Ilinycz including also the city of Bristyczko, with the addition of Belica, and Lipniski, that were given to him as a hereditary holding. This was the same Jermy Ilinycz who in the fulness of time allocated land from his holdings in Belica to the Jews, who came there to settle in the middle of the town of Belica.

The Ilinycz family did not hold onto the office of Starosta for many years. This office passed into the hands of the szlachta, a scion of a converted Jewish family, this being Jan ben Josef Abrahamowicz; they did not change their name but rather left it in its rather prominently Jewish form. The reason for this, is Jan was the son of the renown customs official Josef Abrahamowicz who worked in the district and achieve a great deal of wealth and was welcome among the higher ranks of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility. In 1495, at the time that the expulsion order was decreed, Josef Abrahamowicz did not want to part from the substantial possessions that he had accumulated, both in land and buildings, that were being held by his as security for monies that the nobility owed to him. Because of this, he was baptized as a Christian, and received the standing of a szlachta....

Were we desirous of detailing the names of all the Starostas that served in Lida (and thereby also ruled over Belica), during all the days when Poland was independent, we would have to pinpoint all the names of the nobility in Lithuania that were famous. Among them were the families of Pac, Scipion, Radziwill, Sapieha, and others.

In the years 1520-1573 Sigismund II ruled and held sway, the last of the kings of the Jagiellonian lineage. From 1544, he served as the Grand Duke of Lithuania, and from 1548, he was King of Poland. Because of his efforts, in the year 1560, there was a full integration of the two countries that up to this time were separated by two legal systems. This enlightened king was an advocate of religious tolerance, and implemented such freedoms in 1572 throughout the length and breadth of his united realm. In 1550, the king turned over Belica as a possession, to the well-known Mikolai Radziwill, called 'The Red.' In Polish history, this Radziwill is known as an ardent disciple of Calvinism, in the Protestant Reformation movement. He turned over the Catholic church building in Belica to people of this persuasion. From that time onward, Belica became a mainstay of this religious sect, who up to this time, suffered from persecution and

harassment throughout the country. During the seventeenth century, all of the synods of the important members of this sect and the Calvinist leaders, who received a variety of issues for resolution, were held in Belica, and it its large, Calvinist church.

Seeing as we had mentioned a convert from Judaism above, who attained a high rank in the establishment in this district, it is appropriate to enumerate a number of these, who lived and worked in Belica.

One of the honorific titles that the Polish-Lithuanian aristocracy coveted was the title of 'Marszalek of the Szlachta.' This title was not connected to any specific privileges, such as honor alone, but rather it was expressed in being the [titular] 'Head of the local Nobility.' Every vicinity, and area around a town, of a suburb, or of a big city, had its own 'Marszalek of the Szlachta' that presided. In Belica, and its environs, between the years 1608-1626 four nobles served in this capacity in the following order: Samuel Wolowycz, Jan Scipion, Josef Moiszowicz, and Jakob Judka. the last two were the offspring of converts.

Sigismund III the King of Poland from the house of Vasa (the royal house of Sweden), who ruled in the years 1568-1632, returned and passed the law that every Jew who converted to Roman Catholicism was automatically granted the status of a szlachta. It was only in 1768, as a result of repeated demands of the proud Polish nobility, that the Sejm annulled this law, in order that the 'nobility who were sons of Jerusalem' not increase substantially in the country...

The issue of the increase in the number of converts among the nobility in Lithuania at the beginning of the sixteenth century became a regularly visible one because of the close contact between these two groups. In Lithuania, up to the year 1556, and in Poland until 1538, the accepted dress of the wealthy Jews was like that of the szlachta. Both groups were in the habit of dressing finely, with a sword buckled at their side, and to ride on horses in their travels, or in a decorated carriage. The Jewish tax collectors would dominate the debtors who were from the nobility, and would come to them, escorted by a cohort of soldiers that were assigned to them as part of their duty to the country treasury. The wealthy Jews were accepted in the company of the szlachta, and would participate in the festive occasions of these people and their parties. During that period, the royal court received news from the clergy about mixed marriages between Jews to the daughters of nobles without the Jewish partner undergoing a religious conversion...

It was only at the end of the century, that limitations were introduced on the social contact between Jews and Christians. among these limitations: a prohibition against interaction with gentiles, and the designation of Jews by means of a separate style of dress.

D. Autonomous Jewish Government

In accordance with a decree of the Polish crown, the '*Va'ad Arba Aratzot*' – the unified rule of all the Jewish communities in Poland and Lithuania – was established. The Va'ad was established in order to arrange and collect taxes and levies on the communities, that they were responsible for to be paid to the national treasury. This was done, because the government itself did not collect taxes on an individual basis from each and every person. It would levy a 'community tax' on the Jews, that were set to be allocated. It was up to the Jews

themselves to allocate the tax burden among the communities in accordance with its size and financial capacity. And so, it was up to the *Va'ad* to allocate these tax burdens, to collect them when they were paid, and to pay them into the national treasury. Because the *Va'ad* wielded such enormous influence in the setting of tax rates on each and every community, it naturally became highly influential and a body of support and also compulsion in all the internal issues that these communities engaged in. All arrangements regarding community life for Polish-Lithuanian Jewry, religious, cultural, legal, all were set up by the *'Va'ad Arba Aratzot.'* At first, the *Va'ad* was called a 'Three Lands' committee, (implying Poland Lithuania and Reisen, meaning southern Russia). Afterwards, it was changed to a 'Four-Lands' committee: Greater-Poland, Lesser-Poland, Lithuania and Reisen. The *Va'ad* was in the habit of having its sessions during the time of the annual fairs that would take place sometimes in Lublin, and sometime in Jaroslav, occasionally in the city of Kremenets, and in other cities as well.

A hundred years after it was founded, the communities of Lithuania separated themselves from the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot*, because of differences in opinion that surfaced among them, and they established a *'Va'ad HaMedinot,'* which was separate, that included three districts: the district of Brisk, the district of Grodno, and the district of Pinsk. In the fullness of time, when the communities of Vilna and Slutsk grew, they also became attached to the *Va'ad HaMedinot*, as distinct districts. These two committees served as the mainstay of independence (self-rule) of the Jews, and a beautiful model for independent rule of our people within an alien people, for the entire span of our history. However, it lasted under our control for only 250 years. In the year 1754, during the reign of the King Stanislaw-August and in accordance with the decision of the Sejm, the *'Va'ad Arba Aratzot'* was dispersed, and its activities brought to a halt. In accordance with the decision of the Sejm, each and every Jew would pay his taxes on an individual basis, as determined by the levy that the regime would impose on him. In a like manner, the *'Va'ad HaMedinot'* in Lithuania continued to operate for an additional two years, and was dispersed in 1766 – before a full two hundred years.

The by-laws of the *'Va'ad Arba Aratzot'* were transcribed into the formal records of the larger communities of that era. It was in this way, that we received the folios of Cracow, Lvov and Posen. and the by-laws of the *'Va'ad HaMedinot'* were written down in three copies: the Brisk copy, that of Vilna, and an encompassing copy – that being the *'Pinkas* of the countries of Lithuania.' These records serve us as a dependable source that can be trusted, in researching the legal, economic and cultural circumstances of the Jews in the unified state of Poland-Lithuania.

What was the economic power of the Belica community in its day – this too can be deduced from the entries in the previously mentioned writings, and can be deduced from the taxes were levied against it, by the Lithuanian *'Va'ad HaMedina.'* In the year 1670 [5330] the *'Va'ad HaMedina'* was obligated to provide ten thousand gulden to the treasury as a head tax. Against the communities of Brisk, and its environs – that was, at that time, the biggest and most important of the Jewish communities in the diaspora of Poland-Lithuania. a tax of 900 gulden was levied. Against Vilna, which at that time was still a small community, a tax of 180 gulden was levied. Novogrudok, based on its financial capacity, reached about half the level of Vilna, and was charged with 75 gulden. On Belica, the charge was only 20 gulden. For comparison purposes: Smarhon – 40 gulden, – about double. Also, in the year 1673, the same level of taxation was imposed without any change.

The *'Va'ad HaMedinot'* would also levy taxes on its communities for its own agenda, to cover a variety of

expenses. These taxes, also, were allocated on the basis of the economic capacity of the communities, and in accordance with the number of residents. In the year 5339, this being the year 1679, the following incomes are recorded by the treasury of the large Va'ad as follows: Brisk – 15 gulden and 26 groschen; Vilna – 4 gulden 10 groschen; Novogrudok – 1 gulden 5 groschen; and Belica – only 20½ groschen.

The picture changed markedly from end to end during the following century. In the year 1717, a tax was levied only on the Jews of Lithuania that was very high, in the amount of sixty thousand gulden (as compared with the ten thousand gulden of one hundred years beforehand), and against the Jews of Poland – 220,000 gulden. Of these, the levy against Brisk was 5, 135 gulden; Vilna – 1,100 gulden; Minks – 1,300 gulden; Belica – 600 gulden; and on Novogrudok – 400 gulden.

Here one can see the ascendance in value of the community of Vilna by contrast to Brisk, and the precipitous decline of the community of Novogrudok, and by contrast, the rise of the value of Belica. The reason for this change will be explained in what follows.

E. The Chmielnicki Pogroms

In the year 1648, the scourge, Bogdan Chmielnicki, raised the banner of rebellion, in the midst of the subordinate Cossacks, against their overlords – the Polish landed aristocracy, with the objective of liberating his country from their yoke. The forces of the Crimean Khan were seconded to him, and the united forces invaded Poland. The Cossacks hated the Jews much more than their Polish masters. This was because the Jews served as intermediaries and functionaries between the masters and the Ukrainian peasants, who were subordinated to them. And it was on them, the Jews, that the burden was placed to collect the taxes from the peasantry for the benefit of the landlords. Accordingly, all of the anger and rage was, first and foremost heaped on the Jews by the local populace, and they wreaked atrocities among them with manifest gruesomeness. During the years of this war, between the years 1648 and 1654, tens of thousands of Jews were killed at the hand of this Ukrainian scourge, who were butchered and slaughtered by the use of unspeakable tortures, as martyrs to their violence, in Sanctification of the Name. In the Ukraine alone, more than 300 communities were totally wiped out. As to the number of Jews killed in this Holocaust (referred to as the Decrees of *Ta"Kh v'T"At*) there are varied opinions. Those who give conservative estimates say on the order of 300,000 lives, while there are others who stand by a number of 600,000 people.

The result of the Chmielnicki rebellion was the partition of the Ukraine, with the part on the left side of the Dnieper River taken from Poland, and attached to Czarist Russia. From that time forward, the center of the Slavic peoples caused Moscow's position to grow stronger than that of Vilna.

The Jewish communities in Lithuania were saved from the predations of the *Ta"Kh v'T"At* years, because the Chmielnicki hordes did not reach its cities. However, in the continuation of these incidents, this Holocaust did not skip over them. In the year 1654, after a lull in battle, the Cossack forces again descended on Poland, now supported by the troops of the Czar Alexei Mikhailovich, for the purpose of annexing the Ukraine in its entirety to Russia, including that part on the other side of the Dnieper River, and with it, also the territories of White Russia, whose populace had been incited to rebellion against the Poles by the Cossacks as well. At the head of this huge host that ascended against White Russia, apart from the officers

of the Russian army, stood the bloodthirsty Hetmans Anton Nibaba, Makhanenko, and Krivoshafka. In 1655, they cut down the following White Russian cities one after another: Mogilev, Gomel, Bykhov, Vitebsk, Minsk, and afterwards the Lithuanian cities of: Lida, Vilna, Kovno and Grodno. In Mogilev, the Jews were slaughtered in accordance with the orders of the head of the Czar's army. In Vitebsk part of them were slaughtered, and the remainder were plundered, forcing them to convert their religion, and exiling them deep into Russia. A pandemonium broke out among the Jews in White Russia, as the armies of the Czar, and the Cossacks drew nearer to the remaining cities that had become something of a general refuge for the Jews streaming to the cities in the west. The Jews of Vilna, Lida, Kovno, and Grodno left their homes, and fled to Zamut. The Jews in the more distant towns, such as Novogrudok and Belica did the same. Those who fled literally had their lives in their hands, and those that remained behind, or were captured along the way, were butchered mercilessly.

Even on the front that was on the right side of the Dnieper River, the Cossacks took the advantage, and smote the Poles and slaughtered the Jews until they reached Lvov.

The retreat of Poland invited Sweden to enter into the fray of battle, in order to grab its share of the spoils. Its king, Carl-Gustave X to whom the Baltic states of Ostland and Livonia belonged (Courland – at that time belonged to Poland), invaded Poland from there in 1655, and captured it in its entirety, together with slices of Lithuania and White Russia. Many of the Polish nobility, such as the Chancellor Radziewski or the Vilna Voievode, the Duke, Janusz Radziwill, supported the Swedes... (the latter turned over Lithuania to the Swedes). Then the order of battle was revered: the Russians came to Vilna as part of an agreement with the Poles concerning an armistice between them, and they opened a joint campaign between them against the Swedes (1656-1658).

The Swedes were the only side in these wars that did not carry out pogroms and attacks against the Jews. They contented themselves with imposing a captive tax on them, that impoverished the community greatly. However, because of this, the Jews were loyal to them, and paid the Swedes without any resistance, as the tax was specified. This matter caused them a great deal of trouble subsequently, at the time that the Poles returned to liberate their cities. They took revenge for the shame of their defeat and being routed – upon the Jews: people were butchered by being dismembered limb from limb, children were slaughtered in the arms of their fathers, women were raped, and those that fled into synagogues were burned alive inside them...

Immediately after the Swedish retreat from Poland, a peace treaty was signed between these two (in the year 1660) and Poland returned to fight against Russia with the objective of reclaiming the Ukraine, this time being aided by the Crimean Khan who was a Turkish vassal. The Russians were compelled to abandon White Russia, and during their retreat, Lida (1659), Novogrudok and Belica (1660) again suffered from plunder, abuse rape and murders. This war, leaving a trail of blood came to an end in 1667 when the two sides agrees to a thirteen-year truce. The Ukraine remained divided into two parts, defined by the course of the Dnieper River, with the left side belonging to Russia, and the right to Poland.

These tribulations inflicted a Holocaust on the Jews of Poland, Lithuania and the Ukraine. The latter was wiped out in most of its territory. In the wake of the war, came hunger and disease. Many were left with no protection, many were torn away from their kin. Many were sold off as slaves by the Cossacks to the Crimean Tatars, who brought them to be sold in the markets of Kashty. There, they were redeemed by their brethren

in Turkey, who used their monies and the monies of Jewish communities in Italy and Holland. Many wandered the highways and byways, in searching for the graves of their ancestors. Many Jewish women were seized by Cossacks and taken as wives. Among them, there were those who were redeemed from the hands of their captors by decree of the Polish king, Jan-Casimir, when he liberated his lands from the conquerors.

F. The Rise of Mysticism & False Messiahs

This awesome Holocaust that befell the Jews of Eastern Europe, in the wake of the *Ta"Kh v'T"*At decrees, with the wars that ensued from it, destroyed 700 Jewish communities either in part, or totally, and engendered a sense of resignation in the heart of the people. The single refuge from this oppression of the soul was found in the strengthening of the splendor of mysticism, which stood as a last resort, in the absence of any hope for the preservation and continuity of the people. Among the Jews in the west, mysticism became a form of solace for the hopelessness that the people felt in the wake of the exigencies of the time, going back even to the days of the beginnings of the Inquisition. Among the Jews of that generation, the yearning for redemption grew strong, which found its expression in the teachings of the ק"ס[9] which includes the *Kabbala* and its various forms, which provided an answer to the reason for the sufferings of the people and its purposes, which are to be seen as nothing more than a harbinger of Messianic times. The teaching of mysticism struck deep roots in all the expanse of the Slavic Diaspora, and many chose to adhere to it for purpose of finding solace in the exigencies of the time, through thoughts of the 'end of days.' It was not only scholarly Rabbis and Yeshiva students who took it up, but also the simpler folk who drew their ideas from the secrets of the *Zohar,* and from the mouths of orators and sermon preachers.

The lore of mysticism prepared a fertile ground for the spread of Sabbatean Messianism within the Jewish community of Poland itself, both the Greater, and the Lesser, and in Wolhynia, Podolia, White Russia and in a small part, Lithuania itself. Sabbatean Messianism also found activists and skilled missionaries who did their work in the area with which we are concerned here. An example is, R' Israel son of R' Aharon Jaffa, who was the sitting Rabbi and Bet Din Senior of Shklov, who wrote many books, such as *"Or Yisrael,' 'Tiferet Yisrael,'* and others. He traveled to many cities in Poland and Lithuania, in Vilna, Lida, Grodno, Novogrudok, Slutsk, Minsk, Lublin, Posen, and gave sermons in the synagogues there based on the stories of the Kabbala. He also was active in the dissemination of the 'Ways of Mysticism.' There is no doubt that his words also reached the people of Belica. It is possible to suggest that he may have even sermonized there on the subject of Sabbatean Messianism, since it was his habit not to skip over any community that lay in the ambit of his travel itinerary, whether it was large or small, in order to prepare those desirous of The Redemption with words of solace concerning the imminent arrival of The Redeemer himself.

One of the pillars of Sabbatean Messianism in Lithuania and Reisen was R' Hesh'l Tsorayf of Vilna, who was an advocate for the movement both orally and in writing. He, too, was an itinerant preacher to the communities of the district, but in addition to this, he was prolific in the dissemination of 'revelations' and prophecies about the Messianic King that had arisen in Izmir. R' Hesh'l Tsorayf also sent forged letters,

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9 The Hebrew acronym for *Kohkhmas Nistar* (Hidden Wisdom), a Kabbalist treatise was published by Moses de León (c. 1250 - 1305), composer and redactor of The *Zohar*, in the name of Simeon bar Yohai, the founder of Kabbala.

against skeptical rabbis, to the heads of communities that were in particularly straitened circumstances. It appears certain that some of them must have reached the attention of the community leaders of Belica. In any event, there was a spirit full of messianic expectation and faith in Sabbatai Zvi, that blew through the district, and were well known in the entire breadth of area between Pinsk to Minsk, and groups of Sabbatean followers grew up in public in these two cities, as well as in Novogrudok, Belica, in Slonim and in other nearby congregations. All of this, despite the work, that in the centers of Torah study that were close by – in Vilna and Grodno, where enlightened Rabbis, who were men of influence and authority, endeavored to rein in the movement throughout the expanse of their jurisdiction, and attempted to marginalize the burgeoning boy of Sabbatean faithful.

The shameful denouement of Sabbatai Zvi, and his public conversion to Islam, caused two wings to form from the extremities of his movement: either to entirely give up on Judaism, and follow in his path, or to intensify dedication to a messianic ideal. In the ranks of the latter, the Vilna resident and Kabbalist R' Abraham Kunky lived and worked in the mid-17th century. He was an itinerant preacher, who traveled to all of the towns in the district in question, and gave sermons on the issue of faith in Sabbatai Zvi after his conversion to Islam. He would explain the change of faith of the 'Messiah' by an esoteric argument based on the Kabbala of the Ar"I, as an act of assuming a scourge of discipline, and a descent into the depths of depravity, as a prelude to an ascent to a higher plateau. The Kabbalist Chaim Mal'akh, a scion of Poland who resided for a long time in Turkey, also attempted this kind of revisionism. He returned to Poland as a fund raiser, and here also propagated faith in Sabbatai Zvi, despite the fact that he had converted away from his faith. To both of them, it is necessary to append the great influence of R' Yehuda HaHasid, who established a new sect of 'The Hasidim and Men of Action.'

The Kabbalist, R' Yehuda HaLevi (5395-5461)[1635-1701] came from the city of Siedlowca near Grodno. His oratorical skill enabled him to attract many students. Unlike the other sworn Sabbateans, who placed their faith in Sabbatai Zvi, in that a passive belief alone will hasten the redemption, R' Yehuda *HaHasid* espoused a faith that was active in bringing about the hastening redemption, that would be facilitated and brought nearer with the help of acts of contrition, accompanied by torture, fasting and suffering. And there was yet another way to hasten the redemption – making aliyah to the Holy Land. In the 'Community of Hasidim' that he established, there were many Kabbalists and outstanding scholars. The name, 'Hasidim,' was their name, and served in that capacity for a long time before the rise of the Hasidism as promulgated by the Baal Shem-Tov.

The Rabbis of Lithuania who dreaded all manner of messianic initiatives, did not understand the fundamental difference between the movement of R' Yehuda *HaHasid* and the remaining adherents of Sabbateanism, and they pursued him and his adherents. The journey made by R' Yehuda HaHasid to the Land of Israel was organized in 1701 under the direction of R' Chaim Mal'akh. The journey, and all of its difficulties and subliminal rhapsodies, is described in the book '*Sha'alu Et Shlom Yerushalayim*,' (By R' Gedalia Massimiatic). Two of the men who made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel were R' Sholom-Shakhna *Belicer* and his brother, R' Yud'l-Wolf, who apparently carried the name of their birthplace – Belica. Both of them died along the way along with many others, and details about this are not available.

In the year 1700, the 'Northern War' broke out, and the cities of Lithuania and the upper banks of the Neman River, once again, saw the forces of the Russian Czar fighting on this soil against the Swedes. The Jewish

communities, that had barely bound up their deep wounds, from the previous wars, were again terrified and further impoverished in both manpower and wealth.

In 1700, Czar Peter I [sic: The Great] entered into a tri-partite treaty with August II, the King of Saxony, and Poland, and the Kingdom of Denmark against Carl XII, King of Sweden. Peter's objective was, at that time, to establish a presence on the Baltic Sea, and by this means, to 'tear open a window for Russia onto the rest of Europe.' The adventurous cosmopolitan, Carl XII, an arrogant man, and wanting proximity to [sic: control of] the sea lanes near Copenhagen, forced Denmark to abrogate the treaty. He smote the Russians at the fortress of Narva in Estonia, and pushed on into Poland from Livonia by way of northern Lithuania. In 1702, the upper banks of the Neman were captured and the communities of Novogrudok, Belica, Lida assumed the burdens of the taxes associated with a conquered people.

From the east, the forces of the Czar Peter I drew close, to confront the Swedes, and in passing Vilna, they concentrated themselves beside Grodno, at a time when most of the Jews in the city had fled to the west. Carl XII moved to surround Grodno from the rear, and at that point the Russians retreated into the Ukraine. They went by a contorted way, by way of Brisk, and from there to the city of Kovel' to Kiev. Along the way, the Jews of Kovel' and Kiev suffered at their hands. In the meantime, Carl XII smote the Poles and their nobility, forcing them to abrogate their treaty with Russia. After this, in his hubris, he made a fateful strategic error, and decided to deepen his move into the Ukraine, in pursuit of the retreating Russians. Beside the city of Poltava, the Ukrainian Hetman [Ivan] Mazepa awaited Carl XII, who had betrayed the Russians, and allied himself with the Swedes. In heavy battle beside Poltava, Carl XII was defeated and wounded in battle, and he fled with Mazepa and escaped to Turkey.

For Russia, the results of this battle were particularly outstanding: it took possession of the Baltic states of Estonia and Livonia, it established its new capitol city, Petersburg as a city located on the sea, and in the end, it proclaimed itself to be an Empire – and its King – Peter The Great was proclaimed its Emperor in 1721.

As regarding the district of interest to us, a result of the 'Northern War' was the fact that the renown fortress of the city of Lida, that which had stood until now in the face of so many Czars that had assaulted it (even if it did not save the city itself from Russian troops in 1655, 1659 and in 1694), was torn down and destroyed completely by the soldiers of Carl XII of Sweden in the year 1702. Since that time, it has not been reconstructed, and remained in a state of ruin. The city of Lida then lost its status as a fortified city.

As to the Jews of Lida, Novogrudok and Belica, the consequences of the 'Northern War' heaped further destruction and penury upon them.

All of these tragic events, that took place in this region during the 17th century, which we have recounted in the fifth chapter here, served to reduce the number of Jews in this region, and weakened its economic power. Therefore, it will come as no surprise, that in the records of the '*Va'ad Medinot Lita*,' the following can be found recorded in the year 5424, this being the year 1664 (two years before the 'Year of Redemption,' according to Sabbatai Zvi), that the community of Belica owed the *Va'ad* an enormous debt, that had accumulated, and had reached a sum of 2,092 gulden. The community of Novogrudok was also mired in a like-sized debt to the Va'ad treasury, a debt that amounted to 2,600 gulden.

By and large, even in the 18th century, the situation of the Jews in Poland did not improve, with Lithuania included in it. So, in the years 1741-1744 once again, pogroms and slaughter were perpetrated in the eastern regions of Poland. On May 17, 1744, rebellious Ukrainians plundered and killed Jews in the town of Tshiminica, and in the year 1744, against the Jews of the cities of Amstislav[10] and Uman. In 1751, the White Russian peasants rose up against the 'Pans[11]' who oppressed them, and because of this, they slew all the Jewish families living in the village of Krasnaya beside Belica. In these riots, the entire city of Novogrudok went up in flames, which was mostly built up from wooden lumber boards, as was the case of the remainder of the towns in Poland and Lithuania. Those Jews of Novogrudok who managed to save their lives, remained in poverty without anything to their names.

During the 16th century, the Jews of Poland and Lithuania suffered both in wealth and in population, and their numbers grew only slightly. However, there were places where their number dropped precipitously. In the middle of the 18th century, the number of Jews in Belica declined, and stood at 288 souls...

G. The Clash of *Hasidim* & *Mitnagdim*

The 18th century passed over the Jews in our area, shadowed by the sharp conflict that spread in the wake of the contest between Hasidism and its opponents (the *Mitnagdim*). Belica sits midway between Grodno and Minsk, and is an equal distance to Vilna and Vitebsk; the belief and concepts reached it from these opposing extremes together.

Vilna, Grodno, with Lida, were, in those days, the centers of Talmudic scholarship in Lithuania. It was the Vilna *Gaon*, R' Eliyahu ben R' Shlomo-Zalman, (1720-1797) known by the acronym, The Gr"A, that elevated the importance of Vilna. He sought to enlarge and strengthen Torah even in the far-flung towns using his emissaries and many students who became eminent Torah scholars. Among the great scholars of the time we can count also, R' Eliezer ben R' Zvi-Hirsch, and R' Alexander Ziskind, among the Rabbis of Grodno. In Lida, counted among them, was R' Duvid'l ben R' Aryeh-Leib, called '*der Lider*' by the common folk. In Pinsk, at that time, R' Avigdor ben R' Chaim occupied the Rabbinical Chair, one of the outstanding students of the Gr"A. The influence, that these men had, shone far beyond the mere ambit of where they served in an official capacity, and their voices resonated in faraway places, even in tiny Belica.

But by contrast, R' Menachem-Mendl sat in Vitebsk, who had served the Baal Shem-Tov during his lifetime, and afterwards was both a student and colleague to the *Maggid* of Mezerich. The *Gaon*, Schneur-Zalman of Liadi was counted among his pupils. R' Menachem-Mendl, under the direction of the *Maggid* Dov-Ber [sic: of Mezerich], went as an emissary, to win hearts for Hasidism, and visited all of the towns in the district, where he spoke and sermonized on behalf of Hasidism, both to the secular and religious leaders. He spoke in the synagogues of such cities as Minsk, Vilna, and even in small out-of-the-way towns. He visited Visneva beside Volozhin, in Iwje, Navael'nja, Novogrudok, Karelicy and Asmjany. Certainly, he would not have skipped Belica when he was in Novogrudok, even if its name is not recorded in the biography of this

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10 Possible Mstislavl near Smolensk

11 The Polish Nobility, from the Polish title 'Pan,' meaning Lord, or Master.

individual. He also took license to attack the Vilna *Gaon* but was asked afterwards to beg his pardon...

The *Maggid*, R' Dov-Ber, was permanently ensconced in Rovno for a long period of time, and his teaching of Torah was heard throughout the district. R' Aharon '*The Great*' of Karlin attracted adherents in our district, and groups of '*Anshei Karlin*' were organized in many locations, even in Vilna itself. Similarly, groups of '*Hasidei Mezerich*' were organized in Minsk and Vilna, led by R' Menachem-Mendl of Vitebsk.

The town of Amdur[12], beside Grodno, was an important center of Hasidism, headed by R' Chaim-Khaika, the student of R' Aharon of Karlin; this was a center that remained in existence for the entire life of its Rabbi, R' Chaim-Khaika.

The Rabbi, R' Levi-Yitzhak, 'Israel's Defender,' was the rabbi in the cities of Pinsk and Zaluch'ye as a young man, before he accepted the post of sitting Rabbi and Bet Din Senior in Berdichev, from where he grew famous. At the direction of his teacher and Rabbi – The *Maggid* of Mezerich – he traveled to all the towns of the area where he preached on behalf of *Hasidism*. He was in Horodec, and in Radaskovicy, in Mir and Nizovtsy, in Novogrudok, and based on its proximity to these places, also in Belica.

The *Chabad* style of *Hasidism* was also active in this area. As is known, the branched-out organization of Chabad is based on 'emissaries' and 'missionaries;' the 'emissaries' – for the collection of financial resources, and the 'missionaries'– for the dissemination of the concept. Both traveled from city to city, village to village, throughout the entire district and to all towns. And it was especially in the small and most severely stricken places that they had their greatest success, because they did not encounter oratorical opponents in such places that might prove to be dangerous to them.

In the year 5550 (1790) the number of *Hasidim* in the Minsk territory grew large, and they conducted separate prayer quorums, and meetings to take counsel with one another. And a dispute ensued between them and the *Mitnagdim*. Even in Vilna, a secretly convened 'minyan' was established, in the house of the wealthy man, R' Meir ben R' Raphael. In the year 5453 (1793) the number of Hasidim in Pinsk grew large, and from there, their influence reached the outlying towns in that area, and they proceeded to set up secret *minyanim* in Novogrudok and also in Belica.

Ib a number of places in the vicinity, the hand of the Hasidim grew strong, such that there were those among them who became heads of their community. In the year 5454 they were able to remove R' Avigdor ben R' Chaim from the rabbinical seat in Pinsk, who was a very active and sharp leader of the *Mitnagdim*. All of this, despite the fact that the authority of R' Avigdor was very great, and that affairs were conducted in thirty communities in the vicinity of Pinsk according to his word; and this includes the community of Belica as well. R' Avigdor turned to the *Gaon*, R' Eliyahu in Vilna, and aroused him to a heavy-handed action against the spreading Hasidism.

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12 Called Ind(o)ura by the Christians

In the middle of the century, there were differences and disputes even in Belica on the grounds of the clash between these two conflicting influences, each of which poached on the other's followers. It is only because they were a minority among the residence of the town, that the community was saved from being overwhelmed. And even until the middle of the 19th century, there still was, on one side of the Great Synagogue in Belica, *minyanim* of *Hasidim* [sic: only]. However, we have not been able to establish what *type* of Hasidim these were, that is to say, according to which tradition and style they followed. However, over time, their work began to flicker out, in the wake of the migration of the townspeople to the big cities, and even due to emigration over the seas, and similarly in the wake of the pressure and excommunications imposed by the great Torah scholars of the Mitnagdim, who harassed them... the activity of Hasidism flickered, fell silent, and then vanished.

H. Before The Enlightenment

The consequences of the mysticism movements among Jewry differed greatly from one to the other. From the turning to the *Kabbala*, came the movement of '*Hasidim* and Men of Action,' whose guardian and spiritual leader was R' Yehuda HaHasid, a movement that engendered aliyah to the Land of Israel. And similarly, the *Hasidism* that emanated from the school of the Baal Shem-Tov, that cut a deep furrow and flowering in the spirit of Jewry. But, in contrast, even on the ground where the Kabbala grew, there also was the Sabbatean Messianic movement, whose results were so tragic to our people.

One of the offshoots of the Sabbatean movement, that manifested itself a century after Sabbatai Zvi, was the movement of Jacob Frank, that led to a mass baptism in Poland, and the adoption of the Roman Catholic faith. We have not conducted a thorough research into the Frank movement, and we do not have details of its agenda, its means, its personalities and what happened to them. What is known, is that any number of these converts were able in the middle of the 18th century, to achieve titles of nobility and landed estates in the various territories of Poland and Lithuania. The *szlachta*, extant in the Frank sect, did not separate themselves into a closed community, as for example, was the case with the Denoma of Sabbatai Zvi, but rather, they became assimilated in the second generation in their proximity to Polish society. They endeavored strenuously to be taken for Poles, trying literally, to obliterate their Jewish past.

We do not know how deep the impression of the Frankist movement was in our district. However, we do find a recognizable number of landed aristocrats between Belica and Novogrudok, whose origins can be traced to Frankist adherents and his coterie. Despite all of the subterfuges, and attempts to hide, the names of several residents of the area, known by means of reliable witnesses, at the time suspected – but without a basis – to be descendants of Frankist converts.

So, for example, on his estate beside the village of Liniany, near Belica, the owner by the name Szymanowski resided, from whom the composer Karol Szymanowski (1883[13] - 1937) – one of the great Polish composers after Chopin – was one of his descendants. It is clearly known that this landowner was the grandson of the convert Samuel Moszkiewicz who was a well-known Polish historiographer of the time, who authored

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13 Karol Maciej Szymanowski (Tymoszówka, Ukraine, 3 October 1882 — 28 March 1937, Lausanne, Switzerland) was a Polish composer and pianist.

writings on the territory around Novogrudok, was born, and lived on his estate near Belica. In his writing, he assesses the family origins of a number of the residents in the area, but not even with a single word, did he recognize his own roots, and that he was related to the family of R' Shlomo Sega"l – one of the leaders of the sect.

The roots of the philosopher-mystic Andrzej Towianski, who was born in the village of Antoszwince (1799-1878), are very obscure, whose entire teaching is oriented to see Israel in it s spiritual and national glory, and was buffeted by a sharp mystical spirit that was Sabbatean and Frankist. His thesis, 'The Thesis of Nature,' was nothing more than a 'translation' into a Polish point of view, of the Lurianic *Kabbala*, and in a very large measure, the Hasidism in the spirit of R' Yehuda HaHasid. It included the foundations for the control of the spirit over the flesh, an order of prayer based on fervor (but recited silently), immersions for purposes of purification, a life of abstinence by subordination of the self, self-effacement, and a submission to the will of God, and a directed outlook towards 'revelation' and the redemption of the people (Polish Jewry!), along with the rest of humanity. This 'Hasidism' captured a number of renown personalities in the Polish intellectual world, members of its generation, and from the members of the following generation. Among the Jews that converted, Gershon Ross, a man from Vilna was drawn to it, a member of the well-known family of publishers, who converted in 1842. The relationship of Towianski to the Jews and to Judaism attracted to him his friend – the greatest of the Slavic poets – Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855).

As is known, the members of the Mickiewicz family caused all documents, relating to his descent, to disappear after the death of the poet. In the museum named for him in Vilna (established in 1956) which is located in the house where he completed his poem '*Grazyna*' (1822) there are no documents concerning his birth, and the birth of his parents. This is what I was told after a number of different attempts to research this matter there. The researcher Shmuel Safam has a picture in his possession of the well-known Polish historian Leonard Czodźko[14], who was from the same generation as the poet. In 1834, the Polish historian wrote these lines in the year 1834: 'Mickiewicz's father was from a noble family, but without any wealth,' and he added: 'His father is descended of a Jew who converted to Christianity...' And if it is said that this matter [sic: conversion] took place approximately 35 years before the poet was born (in the year 1798), it follows then that the year in which his father converted was close to 1760, which was the year that the Frankist sect converted to Christianity (they were baptized between 1759 and 1763). Professor G(ershon) Scholem, in his book about the Frankists records a news item from the paper, '*Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*,' from the year 1838 (he says it was published while the poet was still alive!), which relates that in his childhood, Mickiewicz was in the habit of visiting his Jewish uncle (apparently – his uncle on his father's side – the evidence of .נ.ב.א and also his arrangement of the letters), his uncle who had not left his faith... (In this connection, see D. Lazar: '"Israel, the Older Brother,'; in 'Maariv' 17.9.1965).

The origins of the Mickiewicz family have been eradicated to the point that to this day, there is doubt about the place where the poet was born. By and large, this eradication, and the silencing of these sources are in themselves a loud witness and provide a strong correlation, which confirms the Jewish roots of the poet. Most of the researchers locate his birthplace in the land around the village of Osibiec, in the area of Belica on one side, and Novogrudok on the other side. Those who are concerned with fixing the name of the village

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14 Leonard Borejko Chodźko (1800-71) was a Polish historian, geographer, cartographer, publisher, archivist, and activist of Poland's post-November-1830-Uprising Great Emigration.

usually satisfy themselves with just designating the area only: beside the town of Belica, or beside the town of Novogrudok.

Regarding the name of the poet's mother, the information about her is also shot through with missing data. We are certain only, that his mother Barbara, of the Majewski family, was the daughter of a convert from the Frank camp. Regarding this, there is very reliable attestation from Polish sources. this was written by the Lord, Xavier Branicki, according to the words of his friend – the poet himself, and he made this matter known in the introduction that he prepared of his Polish translation of the book 'The Path to Return,' by R' Gabriel ben R' Yehoshua Schussberg, that appeared in Paris a hundred years ago. (Se D. Lazar: '*Bayn Shtay Neshamot*,' in '*Maariv*' 5.2.1965). As is known, in the first generation after their conversion, the people of the 'sect' were in the custom of limiting marriage only to those within their own milieu... there are those that see in the name Majewski, a relationship to the estate 'Majewka' which is near the village of Bondary, which is in the Belica area.

It is interesting to note, that also the wife of the great poet, she, by happenstance, also has roots in the Jacob Frank sect. In the Frank milieu, the senior individual was the elder, R' Elisha Schorr from the village of Rohatyn in Podolia. Upon conversion to Christianity, he and his sons took the name Wolowski, which is the Polish translation of the name Schorr.[15] The oldest son of R' Elisha Schorr – Shlomo, was called Franciszek Wolowski after his baptism; The name Franciszek – in honor of Frank himself. His daughter – Maria [Agata], married the landed aristocrat Szymanowski of the Belica district, whom we have already identified previously. As an aside, this Maria was a truly gifted pianist, to who the elder from Weimar – the great poet – J. W. Goethe, both listened to, and utilized (see the same reference: '*Maariv*' 17.9.65). Szymanowski's daughter, Celina Szymanowska, was the beloved wife of Adam Mickiewicz.

These facts explain in a measured way, both the sharpness that Adam Mickiewicz hurled at the Jews, and also from another side, his pathetic relationship to the concept of messianic redemption of the Jews and the Poles together; of two peoples whom he saw tied to one another.

And if we are discussing Mickiewicz, a man from the Belica vicinity, we are not given license to silently skip over his love of this beautiful area, in which he was born and grew up. In his writings and letters, Belica is mentioned a number of times, with feelings of affection and deep nostalgia. With the exception of his epic poem '*Pan Tadeusz*,' very few of the creations of the poet were translated into Hebrew. Because of this, we will present a couple of excerpts here.

At the time '*Pan Tadeusz*' was written, neither the great or lesser 'Kingdom of Poland' existed any longer. Its territories had been divided up among its neighbors, and to it was left only the 'Duchy of Warsaw' as a concession of Napoleon, the Emperor of France, under whose aegis the Duchy found protection. Belica itself was to be found in that part of the territory under Russian Czarist rule, and was close to the boundary with the Duchy of Warsaw. In the seventh book of the action poem '*Pan Tadeusz*,' a conversation is portrayed, that takes place among the *szlachta* of Dobrzyn, regarding the question of whether to take up the sword against their protagonists of the house of Suflic. The good and wise Jew, Yankl, holds forth in the face of

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15 *Schorr* in Hebrew is an ox. In Polish, *wolowina* is beef.

the inflamed hotheads in order to attempt to quiet the stormy tempers. He counsels to act with restraint, and to wait until spring, for the invasion of Napoleon's army, which is destined to come against the Russians, as he says:

"... I am a Jew, wars were distant from me, when I was
In Belica. And all I saw were Jews to the border;
They say, that the French are encamped at the borders of Lososna,
And a war is to break out yet by the spring of the year.
Wait a bit..."

(Translation of Y. Lichtenbaum)

In the vicinity of Belica, the widened and deep lake called Switez can be found, garlanded by a forest of thick trees, and a beautiful ambience. A village by the same name is located at its shore. They are mentioned in several places in '*Pan Tadeusz.*' Also the river, Osha, a branch of the Neman, which emptied into it near Grodno, and flows by the village of Switez, it too is mentioned in the poem. To the legend of the 'Queen of the Lake' who lives in the depths of its waters, Mickiewicz dedicates a marvelous ballad called '*Switezianka.*'

In the Belica vicinity, members of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility resided on their estates, suffused with great wealth, and enjoying the fruits of the labor of their serfs. Themselves, they were oriented to spend their time hunting, entertainment, but also involved themselves in matters of science and intellectual pursuits. Accordingly, many of them achieved prominence in Polish history. Among them were people who served in government, scholars, and men of science.

From among them, it is worth mentioning Jan Czuczut, a scion of the village of Zhafebo (1787 - 1848), who was a friend and companion to A. Mickiewicz from the days of their studies at the school in Novogrudok, and from the years they studies at the university of Vilna. It was their collection, preservation and translation into Polish of the folk songs of the peasants, that they assembled in the White Russian style. It is also worth recollecting Tomasz Zann, a scion of the village Siedlice (1791-1855), who was a writer and poet of the romantic school, composing ballads and satires, that had a recognizable impact on A. Mickiewicz. It is also appropriate to set down the names of the natural scientist, Dr. Wladyslaw Dybowski, the philosopher Florian Bukhowic (died in 1856 and was buried in the village of Darevo), of the activist Julian Kursak, the patriot Tadeusz Rejtan[16], the archaeologist – Samuel Moszkiewicz. All of them lived and worked in the area around Belica and its environs.

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16 Tadeusz Rejtan (1742 - 1780) was a Polish nobleman. He was a member of the confederation of Bar and a member of the Polish Sejm from the constituency of Nowogródek (today Navahrudak, Belarus).

I. Oppression Under Czar Nicholas I

During all of the days of Polish rule, the Jews of Belica engaged in wholesale and retail trade, in their town, and in the sale of goods in the nearby villages. They were proprietors of inns, ran saloons for the sale of hard drink, and proprietors of barbershops. They served as officials, intermediaries and collectors for the nearby landowners. As those who stood between the arrogant 'landlord' and the serfs, they became targets for the enmity of the exploited even more than the enmity of the exploiters themselves, and because of this, they became even more endangered during the times of rebellion, albeit rarely so. As skilled craftsmen, they met the needs of the peasants and the *szlachta* together. As beneficiaries from the protection of the landowners, who were stubborn by nature, they were beholden to their good will, and were compelled to tolerate all manner of dissipation and irrationality from the over-indulged nobility, who frequently abused them, and lowered them to the point of depriving them of their human dignity. Their legal, economic and social status, was never firm, and was vulnerable to being upset by the nobility that ruled them. Constraining laws would circumscribe their endeavors, sometimes more, and sometimes – less. This was the plight of the Jews of Belica until the end of the partition of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria, in the year 1772, 1793, and 1795. The final partition attached all of Lithuania and most of Poland to Czarist Russia.

As soon as the rule of Lithuania passed entirely into the hands of the Russians, the Russian lack of skill in organizational administration became immediately evident. Over time, these new rulers did not find the capacity to organize the management of the territories that were now under their jurisdiction. And Belica, which belonged to Novogrudok – its larger sister city – at first was attached to Slonim, which was announced as the provincial seat. In the fulness of time, after a while, even by 1797, the role of Slonim as the provincial capitol was cancelled and Belica (along with Novogrudok) were included in a new province, this being the province of 'Lithuania,' that encompassed the territories around Vilna and Grodno, and put them into a single, expanded province. This arrangement was quickly recognized as being flawed, and in the year 1801, the 'Lithuania' province was broken into two provinces: One for Grodno, and one for Vilna; Belica and also Novogrudok were attached to Grodno. However, in 1842, both of them became attached to Minsk, which was 151.5 km distant from them... while Lida, in the year 1801 was created as a provincial seat to the Grodno province, was attached in 1842 to the Vilna province.

The new regime did not take any initiatives on behalf of those territories that fell like ripe fruit into its hands. However, it immediately moved to implement a number of trial efforts to curtail the influence of the Jews, and to distance them from the villages, and in that way, to minimize the economic activity of the Jews. [Thus] began a period of the expulsion of Jews from villages, in which they had resided for generations. So, for example, during the reign of Czar Nicholas I (1796 - 1855) the Jews were expelled from the village of Krasno, which has already been mentioned above previously, this being the village that is beside Belica. There were several tens of [Jewish] families there, whose livelihood depended on working the various fruit orchards and vegetable gardens, and having ownership of the grain mill to produce flour. The expelled Jews were compelled to go to the cities, increasing the overcrowding there, along with the unemployment, and the village was permanently rid of its Jews.

In a similar manner, the condition of the Jews in Belica was impaired by a prohibition against working the land [leased] from the hands of the nobility. Land management also was prohibited, which afterwards, will of this, was permitted yet again. The limitations and prohibitions and permissions were interchanged among

themselves, at times in accordance with the prevailing winds that were blowing through the upper echelons of the government, and the whims of the provincial governors. The sense of well-being of the 'community' became abridged, and its aim was directed at the collection of those taxes that were uniquely levied on the Jews, like the '*korowka.*' This tax was levied on the sale of kosher meat, that was sold to Jews. The collection of the tax was first placed on the 'community,' but afterwards, it was allocated to specific Jews , who got the name 'tax-collector.' This arrangement led to the abuse of the position of tax-collector... in a similar manner, a rather large tax was imposed to enable avoidance of military service, and a high tax that permitted the conduct of commerce at a higher cost than that of people who were not citizens of the country. The 'Pale of Settlement' was introduced that limited where Jews could live, but only in the cities of Poland, Lithuania, and southern Russia (the Ukraine), that stood as a sign of land control and permission to live in the cities; however, it was completely prohibited for Jews to live throughout the expanse of Russia itself.

The Napoleonic Wars, led by Napoleon Emperor of France, who invaded Russia in 1812, were felt in the Belica vicinity, beside which, the French crossed the Neman River during their invasion (as was the case with most invasions that came for the west in previous generations), on their way to Moscow. The same was true of the battles that took place after their retreat, and their humiliating defeat, these also were felt near Belica. And the Jews of Belica suffered at the hands of both sides. especially from the fleeing French, that plundered everything they could, in their chaotic retreat.

The oppression of the Jews in Belica grew, and reached its zenith under the rule of Czar Nicholas I, who ascended the throne in 1825. Immediately following his coronation, he passes a decree that surpassed everything that had been done to Jews since the days of the Inquisition. In 1827, the tax that permitted relief from military service, that was used by Jews to avoid military conscription and the obligation of the draft which was otherwise universal, except for the Jews and their descendants, was nullified; this was done except for the sons of merchants who were in the 'First Guild' (– paying up to 1,000 rubles per year), and a boon to craftsmen with a license, attesting to their special expertise, and also excepting clergy.

The tenure of service in the military, in those years, was 25 consecutive years. The draft eligible was obligated to present himself for service at the age of 18, and would be discharged from service at the age of 43. The same also was true for the gentiles. However, the young Jewish men who were 18 years old and draftable were not found suitable for service because they lacked knowledge of the language of the land. In response to this, caused the regime to draft into service children starting at the age of 12 and up, for the purpose of 'educating them' in an institution that was called a preparatory school for the children of the 'Cantonists.' Each community was given a specific quota of how many individuals to present to the conscription office. The community leaders, its Rabbis and *Gabbaim*, were held personally responsible to see to it that the quota was filled; if even one was missing, they were obligated a multiple of that in his place, because the decree was dependent and stood on: themselves personally being conscripted in the case where the stated conditions were not met. And because parents were in the custom of hiding their children, the count was invariably short. Because of this, the people appointed by the conscripting authority would indiscriminately kidnap children, while they were still very young, say age 8, and would attest to the fact that they were draft-eligible... the objective of this decree was to tear away children from the oversight of their parents at a tender age, and also from their normal surroundings, to distance them from the customs of their faith, and to force them wether for good or bad, to convert away from their faith. The conscripts from Belica, along with the remaining conscripts from the provinces of Lithuania, were sent to the contingents that were encamped in the Prass province beside the Kama River, in the foothills of the Ural Mountains. It is not

possible to describe in words, the suffering and torture undergone by these Jewish children who were given over to the followers of the 'Дядка,' that is the Russian 'Uncle,' who had the responsibility to bring them to the point where they would consent to convert to Christianity. He would do this with the help of a whip and lash, systematic starvation, and other physical tortures, pressure and degradation. Many of those who came from Belica did not get to return to home after 35 years of living in alien places, after having been kidnaped at an age where the sense of religious and national identity had not yet established itself in the soul of the child. Most died on the way, from cold, in hunger, from diseases and from the agonies of having to 'serve one's country....' only very, very few attained the time of discharge, at an advanced age, and were given permission to live in the location where they were discharged, as Jews.

Because of this, at the time when the gentile population was growing at double or triple the size every 30 years, the number of Jews in Belica doubled only over the course of a hundred years! At the year 1765, there were 288 of them, and by the census of 1847, the number had grown to only 544 people.

In 1856, after 30 year of the inquisition imposed with the kidnaping of the Cantonists, the decree was annulled with the coronation of Czar Alexander II, along with the freeing of the serfs, and the Jews were given equal treatment along with gentiles from the standpoint of the rules of military conscription.

J. The Enlightenment, Musar, & The Modern Era

The Jews of Belica were indifferent to the Polish rebellions against the Russians, their oppressors, which erupted in 1830, and then again in the following generation – in the year 1863. However, the Polish owners of the landed estates in the area, took a very active role in both, and the Polish populace that lived in the Novogrudok area. In the two times after the suppression of the revolts, the local capture participants were sentenced to hanging, and their supporters to exile; to exile to the wilds of Siberia. The regime confiscated their estates, and sold or gave them to the nobility in the Russian security police. It was in this way that the bitter and hasty end came to the ancestral homes of many of the original Polish *szlachta,*[17] which had an hereditary presence in the local soil. Noble Polish families, that had resided for generations on these estates and in their manors in the midst of these forests, where switched out in favor of new families that came from nearby. And the imposing fortress in Belica, in which well-known ancestral Polish families resided for generations, like the Radziwills, the Scipions, the Pacs, and the scions of Sapieha, this residential complex passed into the hands of Peter Wittgenstein in the year 1880 – a Baltic Baron of German descent, that had taken up residence in Courland.

In the wake of economic initiatives by the monarchy, industrial development began to develop in Russia in this period. Centers of manufacture blossomed in Lodz, Warsaw, Odessa and Bialystok, and they attracted many from among the residents of the towns that were becoming impoverished. This phenomenon gave rise to an internal immigration within the country, from the towns to the developing industrial cities. The wave of pogroms, that grew strong during the '80's that was organized by the regime, ripened the role of most Jews, into the revolutionary movement against Czarism, and in its wake, brought an upsurge in emigration to new lands. During the same time that tens of thousands of the Jews of Russia sought their fortune on the

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17 The Polish word for 'gentry.'

shores of New York, hundreds sought to make *aliyah* to the Land of their Forefathers.

Accordingly, over the course of fifty years, the rising population which was counted in 1847, when compared to the new census of the year 1897, the number of the Jews in Belica grew very little. In that year, the count of all of the citizenry in the Novogrudok area was close to a quarter of a million people; In exact terms – 247,636. And the number of Jews among them was 34,918, apparently 14% of them. And Belica itself, which in 1847 had 544 Jews, in 1897, had only 697 Jews. In order to reduce the percentage of these, the authorities added the count of all the residents in surrounding nearby villages to the count of the town itself. Accordingly, the total count for Belica was recorded as 1,686 residents, of which 679 were Jewish, comprising 40.3% of the population; this, despite the fact, that they represented 75% of the actual residents. According to undocumented sources, but sources considered reliable, in the year 1905, the Belica population was only 1,000 citizens alone, in which the number of Jews had reached 750 men and women.

There were adherents to the *Haskalah* movement in Belica as well. Already, by the end of the 19th century, there were many in the town who knew the national language and read its literature. For purposes of disseminating knowledge among the Jewish masses, through the Jewish papers of Russia, '*HaCarmel*,' and '*HaMelitz*' the scholar, Abraham Eliyahu Harkavy, who was from Novogrudok, wrote mostly in the Hebrew of the times. After a time, he became a distinguished professor at the University of St. Petersburg. When he was still an educator at the Yeshiva of Novogrudok, a group of talented young people were attracted to him, from the cells of the Haskalah in their city and the surrounding towns, to engage in the discussions of this group, attracting also young people from the town of Belica, and they shared together in the dreams of emancipation of Jews in Russia, and of the achievement of equal rights and of an enlightened and progressive Judaism.

In contrast to them, in the middle of the 19th century, R' Israel Lipkin, known by the name Salanter, worked and preached among the Jews of Lithuania. He oversaw and gave birth to the 'Mussar' movement in Judaism, as a counterweight against *Hasidism* on one side, and Enlightenment – which precipitated assimilation – on the other. The core of his teaching was the rounding out of the traditional form of the individual (a self-segregation (within limits, however), and the improvement of the individual and the community collective. His movement sought to overcome the ossification in religious life, and to give a 'traditionalist' impetus to the raise the level of traditional commitment on the part of the Jewish masses. He organized large numbers of groups to research the 'Mussar' movement, established libraries for the purpose of this research, beside the '*shtiblakh*' used for prayer, and similarly for the Yeshiva institutions who espoused this objective. His efforts ran afoul of the rabbinate that was set in their ways, but came to overpower them, and grew strong. Among the great Yeshiva institutions that came to be considered as operating in his style, 'the style of the commentators,' can be counted Slobodka of Kovno, and the Mussar Yeshiva of Telz, Sluck, Radun, The 'Commentary' Yeshiva in Vilna, and those in Eishyshok, Mir and Zhaludok, Scucyn and Novogrudok. This latter one had a great deal of influence over the upper class youth of Belica, most of whom studies their. The better off Jewish families in Belica, would send their sons to the Novogrudok Yeshiva which was nearby, and there, they spent most of their young years in the study of the Torah and *Mussar*. There, they would hear the sayings of the founder of the movement, R' Israel Salant[er], full of his reasoning and insight. They included such sayings as: 'A man must strive to better himself; because there is nothing worse than remaining in a condition of the status quo"....or, 'Life is like a ladder, and a man is obligated to climb it, and raise himself!' or, 'There is no greater sin than to continue in the path that one is going, to do things in the way they have always been done, and to conduct one's life in the manner that it is being conducted!'

The extreme standard of the *Mussar* movement was borne aloft by the Rabbi, R' Joseph (*Yoizl*) Horowitz, the founder of the Novogrudok Yeshiva, who shone its teachings and its influence on the lives of the Jews of Belica. The 'commentary' of Mussar was in general put together in such a way that the community at large could accept its demands What one does not find almost at all in the austere commentary, is the asceticism that Rabbi Joseph-Yoizl preached. This strove not only to establish a fanatical brand of Judaism, that was totally centered on integrity and hewing to the straight and narrow entirely. It sought to try and transform the ordinary Jew into a n avatar of pure Mussar that had been cleansed. R' Joseph-Yoizl of Novogrudok taught: If you cannot overcome, you are obligated to overcome!' or: 'I never think: Is it possible? Rather: Is it necessary?" And similarly: 'If there is no way, I will pave it myself!' R' Joseph-Yoizl Horowitz had a great influence on the Jews of Belica. His teaching did much to purify the established way of life that was extant in ordinary life, in family life, and the community of his city, in Belica, and in many of the other nearby places, and even those that were distant.

Before the First World War, a distinguished Torah Scholar served as the Chief Rabbi of Belica, who was also a Jew possessed of many other virtues. This is none other than R' Joseph ben R' Meshullam-Fyvusz Rudnick. He was also a master of the *Halakha*, skilled in casuistry, and also a man possessed of highly admirable character. He was born in 5635 [1875] in the city of Traby. He was educated at Volozhin, and at the Kollel in Kovno. He was given his ordination by the Great Rabbis of his generation: R' Shlomo Cohen of Vilna, R' Zvi-Hirsch Rabinowitz, the *Bet Din* Senior of Kovno, and R' Moshe Donichevsky, the Rabbi of Slobodka in Kovno. He was raised to be an ordained rabbi, to *Halakha* in the home of the Rabbi and *Bet Din* Senior of the city of Horodok that is beside Bialystok. As a wife, he took the granddaughter of the Rabbi Gaon Abraham Avli, the *Bet Din* Senior of Dvorchany, the author of book, *'Ahavat Eitan'* (a commentary on the Mishna, that was published by the h0ouse of Ram in Vilna). R' Joseph ben Meshullam did much in Belica to advance Torah knowledge and the life of the community.

Already, in the first days of the Zionist movement, adherents could be found among the few Jews of Belica. In the list of the lottery tickets distributed by the Zionist committee in Grodno, that was under the direction of Leib Jaffa k"z, it is recorded that in the year 1901-1902, 62 lotteries were purchased by the Jews of Belica (this in accordance with the central Zionist archives in Jerusalem). And if the number of the Jews in the town numbered about 750, it says that 8.2% of the general Jewish population participated in these lotteries. And this was an *enormous* number, when you consider that in the city of Grodno itself, the seat of the Zionist committee, they were able to sell only 102 such lotteries.

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Page 58 (Top): *On the Neman River on a Summer Day*

(Bottom) *The End of Winter – On the Same Neman...*

In the year 1914, the assassination [of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary] took place that precipitated the outbreak of The First World War. By 1915, all of these territories had already been captured by the armies of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany. The Germans ruled in Belica up to 1918, and the war pauperized the populace. However, a much greater level of impoverishment came with the setting up of the Soviet regime in 1918, and the Polish-Soviet war that broke out immediately afterwards. On April 9, 1919, Belica was captured by the armies of an independent Poland that had arisen from the dust, but on July 19, 1920, the Red Army returned in its heavy attack against Poland, at which time it reached the gates of

Warsaw, at which point it suffered its defeat. On October 1, 1920, Belica was liberated by Polish troops. These wars led to the continued decline of Belica in general, and especially the Jews of Belica. Because of this, the Jewish population of Belica in 1921 stood at only 483 people, comprising 32% of the residents of the town, which counted over 1,500 residents. These – in contrast to the year 1900, in which there were 680 Jews, that comprised more that 40% according to an undocumented census.

The period of Polish independence did not bring any surcease to the Jews of Belica, as opposed to the relative relief felt by the Jews in the cities in central Poland. The town, which was proximate to the 'iron curtain' of the Russian-Soviet border, ceased, at that time, to serve as a means of transfer from Poland to the cities of White Russia. The closing of the border was one of the setbacks to the commerce in Belica, and the loss of the income from being a point of transfer caused a drop in external commerce, and a drop in its earnings. Many from the place, [especially] the young who were coming of age, left their nests, and went off to seek their fortune in other places, whether near of far, and even going off to countries across the ocean.

In September 1939, in the wake of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Agreement, Poland was partitioned anew, and Belica was attached to Soviet White Russia. This devious Agreement didn't serve Stalin for very long, and in July of 1941, Belica was captured by Hitler's armies. And when three or more years passed by, in the year 1944, Belica was again captured by the Russian Soviets, at which time not a single Jew was to be found in the town...

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R' Nachman ben Rabbi Dov-Ber Szebszinsky ז"צ

By E.M. Savitzky

In all Jewish cities in European Jewry, that lies plundered and ruined, it was possible to find great personalities and elevated types of people.

Our town of Belica could take pride in one of its sons, who was one of the greats of Jewry in the generations, and his name was R' Nachman Szebszinsky.

He was a man who stood great both in Torah, righteousness and wisdom. Accordingly, he was expert in the entire body of literature of our people, the ancient writings and all its ramifications, the medieval literature in all areas, and also the modern literature in all of its tributaries.

It began with the *Tanakh,* which he knew entirely by heart practically letter by letter. The volumes of the *Mishna*, the Talmud, Commentaries, the entire traditional literature, up to the *Shulkhan Arukh*, and its interpreters, he would dedicate hours on a daily basis to engage with them, with depth and concentration that was wondrous. From time to time, he would awaken from sleep take his 'goose quill' and make notes in the margins of a book in his clear and shining writing, documenting some explanation or insight, put down the pen by his side, and immerse himself in his study again, while a soft pleasant murmur would issue from his mouth.

From '*A Guide to the Perplexed*' by Maimonides and the rest of the research books from the golden period of the middle ages, up to '*Current Guides to the Perplexed*' of Rabbi Nachman Krochmal, from the beginning of the period of the Enlightenment. there was not an author and book that he had not engaged with, and he knew them all with a clear and deep understanding.

From the books '*Teudah b'Yisrael*' by the *Ribal*[18] and 'Songs in the Holy Tongue' by Naphtali Herz Wiesel, to the books of Slonimsky, Frischmann, Peretz and Smolensky[19], the poetry of Bialik, Tchernikhovsky, and Schneur – he read them all and enjoyed their wonderful creations with relish. Into his pure heart and holy soul, he absorbed everything good and noble from our literature from all eras, and from all generations, and in his clear eyes, saw no contradiction between the 'old' and the 'new.'

But it was not only in our literature from all generations that he was so expert, but also in the literature of the world, about which he had ideas in profusion and depth. He knew the Russian language fluently, as well as its varied and multi-branched literature. I can recall two instances when he spoke with such fervor about

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18 Acronym for R' Yitzhak Ber Levinson, father of the literature of the *Haskalah*.

19 Perhaps referring to the Russian Jewish novelist Peretz Smolenskin.

the personality and the literary talents of Tolstoy. He once said to me: 'You should know, that this 'gentile' Tolstoy, was one of the great and righteous people in the world.' He added: 'There are excerpts from his creations in which he attains heights of a sort that few of the greats in any generation achieve. When you will read his well known book – '*Воскресне*[20]' you will run into such sentences that are literally driven into your head.'

He also knew the German language and its literature. With a feeling of respect, he would recall all the great German writers, poets and philosophers, and with special emphasis, he would speak about Goethe, Nietzsche (to his great fortune, R' Nachman was privileged to leave this world at the time that The Second World War broke out, and did not live to see what the German nation wreaked upon his own Jewish people).

R' Nachman was born in the city of Lida (according to my memory) on Tisha B'Av of 5614 [1854], to his father, the Rabbi Dov-Ber ז"ל who was the *Dayan* of the Lida congregation. As a child, he studied in *Heder*, and when he left *Heder*, his father personally took a hand in his education, and from him, he derived much of his lore and wisdom. When he grew up, he went to study at the Great Synagogue in the city, but he never studied at a Yeshiva. His father who was a great Torah scholar, and outstanding in his piety, was also a *Maskil*, and in general far from being extreme, and it was from him that he inherited his love and affection for all genuine forms of literary creation. I recall how he told me the way he learned the German language: 'When I was thirteen years old, my father traveled to Prussia, and when he returned, he brought me a gift – a German-Hebrew dictionary, from which I began to learn the German language.'

He was an only son to his parents, but also had an only sister. His sister lived in Lida, and in his older years, she would occasionally come to visit him. When he was twenty years old, he married the highly praiseworthy and pure young girl, Malka, the daughter of R' Yaakov Baranchik (nicknamed Yankl Tsin'keh's) of Belica, and it was there that he spent the rest of his life, until he passed away in the year 5700 [1940]. His wife, Malka, was a 'Woman of Valor' and all the days of her life, she was engaged in business, running a large store of woven goods – and from this, she honorably supported her family (as was the custom in those years). Her husband, R' Nachman, sat day and night, occupying himself with Torah, scholarship and wisdom, being completely at peace, without having to worry about supporting his family, however, in his old age, his financial situation deteriorated. In 1918, robbers assaulted the city, and killed four of the citizens of the city. They also plundered all of the woven cloth from the store of the Szebszinsky family, and from that time on, the family remained in a state of bareness, and want of everything.

After this great calamity, his wife Malka became ill with an incurable disease, and a short time later, she passed away, and R' Nachman remained alone. His only son – Moshe Noah, and his daughters, Min'cheh, and Esther (Et'keh) were already married, and did not live in Belica, and as a result, he was left with no means of support to sustain himself. Thanks to a number of loyal women, who were concerned enough to look after his minimal needs, and especially R' Yitzhak Kirschner (Itcheh the *Shammes*) who dedicated himself to him, and saw to it that he would not lack for anything, R' Nachman was again assured (although not from the same secure sense as previously) of his modest sustenance, and he continued to dedicate himself to his great and sacred work. Despite the fact that his spiritual and physical circumstances had markedly

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20 Tolstoy's novel, '*Resurrection.*'

deteriorated, his spirit of this giant of a man was not broken. It is told of him, that the night after the attack of the robbers, he came at his usual time to the synagogue, wrapped himself in his *Tallit*, put on his *Tefillin*, and called out loud: 'just as we bless the coming of good, so do we bless the coming of the bad, and we say '*Baruch Dayan HaEmet*,.'' and he stood to recite the morning prayers with the same familiar fidelity that he was known for on a day-to-day basis.

For a short time, he was unable to live by himself in his neglected house, and he went to live in the house of R' Ben-Zion Shilovitzky. After that, he settled himself back in his own home in such a fashion, that he took in a family without charging them rent. He turned over his large house to this family and kept only a small room for himself and in return for this, the tenants would prepare his meals for him on a daily basis.

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A year after he got married, he left his young wife alone, and went to study at the famous Kollel of R' Isaac Elchanan [Spector] in Kovno. He remained in Kovno for two years, and there received his ordination to be a Rabbi by the *Gaon* R' Isaac Elchanan זצ"ל, who related to him with respect and great feeling, and wrote great things about him on the document of ordination that he gave him. However, despite the fact that his expertise in all aspects of Jewish law were profuse, and that he was ordained by one of the greatest of the scholars of his generation, never, for even a minute, did he consider serving as a Rabbi. In his very nature, he despised the rabbinate. It is interesting that I once heard the following from his lips, at the time that he had grown old, as he was sitting in the synagogue behind the oven on the warm '*lozhanka* [21].' He said: 'The winter is fierce, and when I walk from the *Bet HaMedrash* to my home, I feel a great cold in my head; I would put on a fur hat, but I fear that I might be taken as some sort of a Rabbi.' This was the degree to which he loathed the rabbinate.

A number of years after he got married, R' Nachman fell ill with Tuberculosis, and would spit blood, and a great danger was seen to his life. Afterwards, he told me, that the condition of his health was so serious and bad, that for two consecutive years he did not fast on Yom Kippur. To the synagogue, he would bring some baked potatoes, and from time to time, he would stop praying, cover himself very well with his *Tallit*, and take a little taste. (Those who prayed around him, did not sense what he was doing under his *Tallit* on this holy and awesome day). However, thanks to the famous doctor, Professor Titus from Vilna, his condition improved, to the point that he lived for [an additional] sixty years, even if, from time to time, he would still spit blood. (His expectoration was known to all the residents of the town...).

R' Nachman attempted to acquire a skill, so he would be able to support himself by his own labor. He mastered the skill of accounting completely, and worked as an accountant at the factory of the Baranchik family that had grown rich in Lodz. However, after a year, he left 'his work' in Lodz, and returned to his sacred endeavor in the Belica synagogue. While he left the 'work' of accounting to others, he did not abandon the 'skill' of accounting for all the rest of his days. At first, he accurately ran the books for the store of his esteemed wife, for two reasons: A) To assure that she does not, God Forbid, profit more than what is permitted by law (to fulfil the behest of our Sages of Blessed Memory, 'He who would get drunk shall not

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21 The bench placed near the oven, to enable worshipers to keep warm during the winter months.

imbibe more that he can drink'); B) Not to deceive the regime with regard to paying taxes to the country, in order to satisfy the Halakhic behest 'what is the law of the land, is the law.'

Even after the death of his wife, and the destruction of his store, when he was forced to support himself from charity, accountancy remained an large and important issue to him. He would always sit and 'do computations' of his financial assets, as it were, in order to know if it was permissible for him to accept charity from the alms box, or if his 'wealth' had exceeded the '200 *zuzim*' – and therefore could not enjoy the benefits of charity.

Many stories were told about his care in assuring that he would not earn more than what was permitted by law and the *Halakha.* I heard, a number of times, from Mr. Ben-Zion Stotsky, the tailor, that was taken regularly in Malka's store, and it is the story as follows: Many times, when he would send the apprentices to buy 'little things' from 'Malka,' 'Nachman' would notify him that he owed him money, because the last time he had bought him some fabric for a suit, 'Malka' made a mistake in calculation, and took more from him than she was supposed to. And R' Ben-Zion would add: And he was always watching over 'Malka' to make sure that she returned to him what was owed him, in accordance with 'his accounting.'

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The method employed by R' Nachman in the study of the Torah was 'traditional.' Just like one of the great '*Rishonim,*' he did not like the approach of casuistry and literal interpretation of the text. He would always delve deeply into the literal text at hand, until the underlying concept was explained, and clarified according the methods of the great among the '*Rishonim,*' and would come out bleached, like pure white wool. Not only once did it happen, that after several days, he would turn to me and say: 'That which we had once talked about requires that we add an additional word, and only then will the entire issue become clear.'

He would emphasize and say: 'Strive to work in the Torah,' and not to take the easy way out of the literal reading. I have met many scholars, who know how to pose difficult questions and formulate responses, and to throw '*Rishonim*' and '*Akharonim*' at you – as if to throw sand in your eyes. But all of this stems from their lack of understanding of the literal word. and he would then say: 'The essential thing is that a person is forbidden to lie to and fool himself; it is not an accident if you leave a 'sentence' or a '*Halakha*' into which you have not delved to the depth of its literal meaning – because it is not for you to finish the work.'

In order to portray the extent to which this great man would distance himself from 'self-delusion,' I will tell what I heard from his mouth. He told me: 'After my in-laws gave me the honor of leading a lesson in the *Mishna* study group in the old synagogue, on a daily basis after the morning prayers, I would expound on a chapter of the *Mishna* for them. I continued with this 'exposition of the *Mishna*' over the course of a half year, but in the end, I stopped doing it. The reason for this, is the preparation of the exposition of the Mishna took most of the day from me, and not enough time remained for me to do my other lessons. Because of this, I decided to pass up the honor and not to continue with the study of the *Mishna.* And I remember his words in Yiddish: 'Well, how is it possible to expound on the chapter of the Mishna without previously reading through the entire chapter of the Gemara with its commentaries? Doing this, took away most of the day, and no time remained for me to keep up with my agenda, and my other scheduled lessons. And for this reason, I gave up this honor, and stopped giving expositions of the *Mishna.*'

Just as he had greatness, depth and conviction in his study of Torah, the same also held true for his piety. Especially, it was a marvel to see his devotion to his 'prayer work.' Each and every prayer that he uttered during his long life, was a prayer of raising the soul, an elevated dialogue with his Maker, a delightful hymn. He would apply the full force of his concentration in the study of the Torah in the hour that he sat during the winter behind the oven (on the *lozhanka*) bent over the large *Mishna* volume, published by the Widow and brothers Ram in Vilna. Either that, or he would be standing at his window in the *Bet HaMedrash*, during the summer months, beside the 'big clock,' where he would delve deeply into some deep and difficult concept, at which time he would completely forget about his surroundings, and was not aware of any other person standing in his general vicinity.

The same was true of his praying. At the hour when he stood to pray, his great and pure soul would literally seem to separate from his gaunt and weak body. He would then engage with the words of the prayer, adhering to them, letter by letter, and through them, he would connect with high and mysterious worlds, fly and ascend to the heavenly heights, and would connect with and cleave to the Maker of all Worlds, who had created then by the use of 'speech,' 'words' and 'letters.' At that same time, R' Nachman would participate in the acts of creation that were renewed each day, at all times, and at every hour, as it is said, 'who renews, in his goodness, every day and all the acts of creation.' This miracle did not occur with R' Nachman on the Days of Awe, a time when each and every one of the Jews strived to draw near to his Maker, and to beseech Him to forgive for what has gone on in the past, for a blessed and good year in the future. Rather, this was an ordinary daily occurrence, morning in and morning out, during which he would rise, and then speedily walk to the *Bet HaMedrash*. Each and every morning, when he would enter the Bet HaMedrash, he would stand by his 'window,' wrap himself in his *'Tallit,'* and with a great and wondrous fervor, he would begin his prayer, as if this was a completely new prayer he was reciting, a prayer that he had never said, and had never heard before. After many years, at the time that I am writing these words in memory of this giant, I begin to understand and feel only the barest little part of how great this man was, the raging-soothing, angry-forgiving, lofty-simple [individual that he was]. Only very few privileged people throughout all the generations were gifted with possessing these conflicting powers, and our R' Nachman was one of them. I now stand far away in space and time, and wonder from whence did he draw such wondrous-mysterious powers? How was he able, during his long life, to return, day after day, to the same blessing, and to the same prayer? How was he able to reveal 'Genesis', new creations, and the discovery of the 'Endless' and to return and return again, God Forbid, to the fact that 'The End is in its Beginning?'

I feel that his greatness lay in his simplicity. He was simple in his learning. He was complete in his prayers, and he was simple and honest in his behavior. It was this simplicity that endowed him with all these lofty powers, these wonderful and noble ones. This simplicity of his brought him a complete harmony. His style of learning was simple – like the simple and clear words of God, without any twisting or turning. Every day, his prayers were simple, and yet new to him – like the growing of the grass, vegetables, the tree, fruit and grain, a new growth each and every day. His behavior had the simplicity of a creature that hastens to carry out the will of its Creator. He sat and studied Torah all the days of his life, because, in doing this, he felt he was connecting with the words of Him who gave the Torah, and participates in the renewal of the days to day 'acts of Genesis.' With fidelity and simplicity, he would repeat each and every prayer each and every day, as if it was a fresh discovery, because in this, he felt that he connects to that world that grows and renews itself every day, with new and wonderful growth. His conduct was simple, loyal and modest, because he took his cue from the forces of nature: the sun appears and gives light each and every day, does its work with dedication and quietly, without aggrandizement. The moon and the stars come out regularly each and every night for their predictable voyage across the skies, to illuminate the darkness without complaint or

demands. All the powerful natural forces align themselves with a precise , faithful and complete harmony, not showing any pride and asking no praise or thanks for it. So, therefore, why should he, a tiny mote of creation, that is a small spark in the creation that knows no end, not to also behave with simplicity, with faithfulness and modesty toward each and every human being?

This is the way this great man felt and thought, who graced our tiny *shtetl.* This simplicity of his, opened in him immense natural forces to be able to draw strength from all natural forces, to digest and admix them together, and from that to conjure a marvelous and delightful mixture. His dedication to his simple way in all areas, fashioned his lofty presence, and his wonderful personality into a completely harmonious unity in *'Akhaddad'*... that governed his behavior so thoroughly on a daily basis in his observance of *'Akhaddad....'*

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And it was not only, in his spirit and in his ideas, that he was connected to and adhered with every fiber of his soul to the divine words that could be found in Torah writings, in the esoteric meaning of its letters, that illuminate and ennoble in every minute, mysteriously hidden worlds. Also in his deeds, he was careful to fulfil all of the commandments of the Torah, making no distinction and not separating 'easy commandments' from 'difficult commandments' – all embodied the same sanctity. He would say: ' If a person wants to be honest and complete in spirit and body, he needs to take care that his Torah be beside him at all times, whole, complete, [faithful to] its esoteric and mysterious intentions, to all of its details, and practical deeds. All of them, the commandments that are practical, and the commandments that are conceptual, all flow from the same pure fountain, and all flow and come from one Shepherd, and there is no separating or segregating between what is 'difficult' and 'easy,' all are outgrowths of 'the simple unity' and it is not possible to discriminate among them. It is forbidden to divide them up. God Forbid, into 'seconds' and 'thirds...'

As he was always, with no surcease, given to delve deeply, research and explain, in the manner of the traditionalists, pursuing the hidden secret, and after its ulterior meaning of each and every commandment, so was he careful to comply with each Halakhic demand, as a 'Commandment of Faith' whose meanings and mysteries are not given to us to apprehend – using the limited human intellectual capacities. I can recall cutting his hair, not only once, and he would hold onto his side locks with his hands, in order that they remain at their prescribed length not less than a handbreath. Eliyahu Szeszko, the son of R' David Aryeh *HaKohen,* that he once tailored a long black jacket for R' Nachman, who said to him: 'The important thing, is you must be careful regarding two things: – A. The threads, so that you do not God Forbid, introduce *Sha'atnez* into the garment, and B. to round out one corner of the garment, so it will not be ritually required to put fringes on it.

It was in this way that R' Nachman loved and cherished all 613 commandments of the Torah, and he attempted to fulfil in his body and thought each and every commandment that is possible for us to fulfil in this day, without discriminating between those that were 'difficult' and 'easy.' It was with this same holy fervor of his, that he would carry out each and every commandment, whether he could with his enormous powers grasp its sense and secret, or whether the sense and secret of the commandment remained hidden 'vanished' and 'sealed' from the world for eternity.

Along with his painstaking care, in the performance of each commandment in all its detail and steps, his approach to the understanding of the lofty issues and the attainment of understanding of the Divine revelations of the 'unfathomable' that renewed themselves daily in a regenerating creation, and manifested

itself through a variety of different channels, was different. 'In thought' he would say: Every person is obligated to try and attain, to the extent that it is within his capacity to apprehend, that which is 'invisible and hidden' in what it is that envelopes and surrounds us. He must try to uncover and reveal, to whatever extent possible, that light which is hidden in the black letters on the surface of the white parchment. [To revels] the immense power, that is esoteric and eternal, that is revealed to us in the acts of creation that are performed before our eyes anew, each and every day. Only when you arrive at the point that is above your intellect and above your grasp, you are obligated to return to a simple and total faith, and it will serve you well. And he would also say: Know that the essence demands that you have faith in the Creator of heaven and earth, to be connected, pure and whole, but when it comes to thoughts, each person needs to be different from his fellow human being, because each individual is a world unto themselves. He is obligated, utilizing his own personal powers, to attain his own practical world, and in this way, he will be privileged to grasp some small, modest part of creation in its entirety.

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He had a great love for all genuine literary creations, from the ancient writings up to the modern ones of his own day. He praised them and derived a great deal of pleasure from all of them. As can be seen from his words: All emerged from the twenty-two sacred letters of the alphabet, the invisible... and therefore, there is no differentiating between the 'sacred' and the 'profane,' all are derived, and flow from the same single pure source. The difference between them lies only in that the 'first' were clear and revealed prophecies, while the 'latter' are hidden visions of the category 'he prophesied, but did not know what he prophesied.'

It was not only once, that I heard from his mouth, of his affection and praise for all human writing, whether it be printed or 'handwritten,' that had not had the privilege of being printed. I remember one time, as we sat on a winter night on the *lozhanka*, R' Nachman took a letter out of his pocket, and said to me: Here, read this, and you will enjoy this 'feuilleton' that my daughter Esther (Et'keh) wrote to me. He added: She is quite talents and, thank God, she knows how to wield a writer's pen. May God show her compassion, and that she be privileged to make her wisdom known in print, so that many may enjoy her pleasant and sweet words.

A number of times, I saw R' Chaim Noah Kamenetzky ז"ל go over to the long table that stood behind the *lozhanka*, and hand over Hebrew newspapers to R' Nachman that came from the Land of Israel. With a smile of a lucky father, he would say, 'Read R' Nachman, the words of my son Issachar. I promise you that you will enjoy it very much. R' Nachman happily received the newspapers from the Land of Israel, and after several days, he would give the newspapers to me, in order to return them to R' Chaim Noah. At that same time he would say to me: 'You too should read Issachar's stories, and you will see how wonderfully he writes.' Finally, he would add: 'When did he learn to write that way?'

Together with his great and complete sense of justice, together with his awe for each and every syllable of the letters of the Torah, he did not give duty to any person who sought to disparage any Hebrew writer of our own generation. I stood, and listened to, a very interesting conversation between R' Nachman and R' Joel Baranchik, the son of R' Shimon Yankl Tsin'keh's, who permanently lived in Riga, but would, from time-to-time come to Belica to visit his parents and members of his family. R' Joel was known in the religious world as an accomplished Torah scholar, and he was especially renown as a great disciple of the '*Mussar*' movement, being one of the outstanding student of R' Yoizl of Novogrudok. The conversation turned, and went over to the Hebrew writer Dr. Joseph Klausner. And then, R' Joel began to assault Dr. Joseph Klausner with very sharp words: 'Klausner the atheist, the one who rejects all belief, the one who incites and perverts;

with his writing, he has despoiled and misled hundreds of precious Torah scholars.' R' Nachman sat quietly as was his custom. Suddenly, he raised his heavy eyelids, and said, in the form of a question:'Where did you get all of this? Aren't you one of the fanatic men of 'Mussar' for whom it is forbidden to you to read 'outside books,' and it is clear to me, that you haven't read so much as a single word of Klausner's. And from whence do you arrogate the privilege of passing judgment against a fellow Jew that you don't even know, that he is a rejectionist, an inciter and perverter?' R' Joel began to defend himself, and said: 'Is it not known that Klausner says, the Book of Psalms was not composed by King David himself.' At that point, R' Nachman began to smile in his own manner and said: 'Ha, Ha, Ha; Klausner says, Klausner says, and if Klausner says this, the commentaries themselves say this.' He arose from his place, went over to the bookcase beside the large clock, and took down a commentary on 'Song of Songs' and showed him: Here, the commentary says, 'The Book of Psalms was spoken by David and ten elders.'

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At the hour when the Hebrew University in Jerusalem opened, a terrible conflict broke out between the 'religious' and the 'freethinkers,' regarding the study of 'biblical criticism' at the Hebrew University. It is understood that the religious faction were opposed to this type of study at the university. One day, I remember, I came to R' Nachman, and told him what was written in the newspapers regarding this great dispute that had erupted, and this was his sage observation: 'Nu! And what do they want, these fanatics? That study for the university student should be conducted the way one teaches a young boy in *Heder*? And there are no emendations in *Rashi*...?'

I remember yet another incident that demonstrates the breadth of view of this great man. We were still young in age, among the 'budding flowers of the *Bet HaMedrash*.' We became aware that the actress Ida Kaminska was appearing in a play in Lida on Saturday night, and having discussed this among ourselves, we decided to go on foot (God forbid, not to ride) on the Sabbath, to Lida. About ten of us young boys, from the coterie of the *Bet HaMedrash* proceeded to do this, and we saw Ida Kaminska and returned home without incident. First, the elders berated us regarding this terrible thing that we had done, but after a few days went by, the matter was forgotten, and life returned to its normal course. Once again, we sat in the *Bet HaMedrash*, and busied ourselves with the study of the Gemara as we had done previously.

However, when a few weeks went by, an incident occurred in town that reminded me of the burden of our deed, the walk that we had taken on the Sabbath to Lida.

R' Eliezer, the Ritual Slaughterer, traveled to Warsaw for the wedding of one of his daughters. Because R' Eliezer was the Torah reader in the synagogue, there was no one who was available to read the Torah on that Sabbath. My very dear friend, Michael Ratnowsky (who lives in Israel today) was among the young people in the *Bet HaMedrash*, and he had the skill to read from the Torah. Well, as is understandable, he was called upon to come up to the *Bima* and read the Torah. And here, one of the elders stood out, and began to grumble in a low voice, and afterwards raised his voice and said: ' A couple of weeks ago, he desecrated the Sabbath, by walking to Lida on the Sabbath, and now he is going to read Torah?!' A tumult arose in the synagogue, and my friend didn't know what to do – to go up to the *Bima*, or not to. At that hour, R' Nachman. as was his custom, was already standing, and leaning on the reading stand of R' Yaakov Beksht ז"ל in order that he be able to hear each and every word during the reading of the Torah. He sensed the tumult, and raised his head to see what was going on. And when he heard the words of complaint from the mouth of the elder, he turned to him 'vehemently' and said: 'What? Are you too proceeding to pass judgment? Begone, you...' and

he turned to Michael and said: 'Go, go read.' Michael went up to the *Bima,* and read from the Torah, and from that day on, no one had the nerve to ever bring up our walk on the Sabbath to Lida. From this we can see the greatness and loftiness of this giant, who for all his days, sat behind the oven of the synagogue in our *shtetl.* This incident reminds me of several discussions I had with him on the subject of sin and transgression. He would always emphasize and say: You should know that no man had the right to exclude a Jew from the community of Jewry; even if he has sinned and committed a transgression, he belongs to the body of all Jewry – as in the words of Our Sages, of Blessed Memory, 'He is a Jew, and despite the fact that he has sinned, nevertheless, he is a Jew.' And in Yiddish he would say: 'Nu, so if someone does indeed transgress, does this mean that he no longer is a decent Jew?' God forbid!

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Did the people of this town recognize and appreciate this giant, who stood beside the last window on the northwest side of the *Bet HaMedrash*? No, very few indeed recognized what he was, and his greatness. Very few knew that among them could be found a man who stood 'head and shoulders above them all.' All the people in the shtetl, men, women, and children, felt, in their lack of perception, that a wondrous, but strange persona was in their midst. In addition to being a great Torah scholar, he was equally skilled in secular matters. Righteous in his relationship to God, and dealing justly with his fellow man, was a work that occupied him for his entire life. He was complete in his integrity within his frail physique, his powerful spirit, and his pure and holy soul. Yes, everyone sensed this might oak that cast a shadow over them, and shielded them with its redolent and broad branches.

He was strange and different in his habits. He almost always went into a rage and became angry, even screaming. Because of this, most of the people in town thought he was a tyrant, as a person not at peace with the world around him. But only very few among an already small minority knew what a compassionate and forgiving man he really was. Several times, when I sat beside him in the *Bet HaMedrash*, suddenly, the door would open, and the sound of wailing would resound from the space beyond the door. Boys and girls would burst in with heartrending crying, running to the Holy Ark, coming to beg for mercy on behalf of their endangered father, or a dying mother. And when they would leave the *Bet HaMedrash*, R' Nachman the 'Tyrant' would get up and go to his corner beside the bookcase, bow his head and begin to pour out his words before God with triple tears. With a genuine outpouring from his soul, he would pray for the well-being of the imperiled man or woman, and especially for the sake of the vulnerable children, that they not, God forbid, be left as abandoned and neglected orphans.

He was considered to be a person not at harmony with his surroundings. However, only the very few knew how much this man loved to talk about the life around him. He loved to tell stories of the past, both distant and closer, and he had a strong inclination to hear pleasant stories from others. From time to time, he loved to hear a witticism or a sharp joke, and even occasionally a drawn out one. And he was always ready to hear and enjoy a good and sharp joke when it was told.

In order to describe and show R' Nachman's זצ"ל greatness, I will present two additional sayings I heard from the mouth of this holy man: A. 'You should know that if a person writes a book, and he cannot shadow what he has written, then his composition is no composition... B. Each and every person is obligated to follow the path that he is beating out, and not to follow in the footsteps of others. As the prophet says: 'The ways of The Lord are true.' The prophet does not say 'The way of The Lord is true,' rather that The way*s* of The Lord *are* true, and he emphasizes that there is not one perfect way for each and every individual, to

attain the 'infinite' the hidden and the esoteric. There are many and different ways, and every one has to follow the path suited to him, being that way that he is hewing according to his own capabilities. And he added: It would be laughable if a midget were to dress in the clothes of a giant...

I feel with all the sentiments of my soul, that these remarks of his, demonstrate more forcefully the wondrous feeling that dwelt and resided in the great soul of R' Nachman זצ"ל.

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Page 70: *Under the Bridge – On a Fall Day*

Despite the fact that he was always occupied by his beautiful and faithful prayer, and by his many daily lessons, this great man also set aside time for physical work. On a daily basis, he would sit for an hour, and copy from books that he particularly liked. He did not do this for purposes of learning, or reading, but rather in order to engage in physical work. He would say: this work has within it a double blessing, it tones the body, and provides tranquility to the soul.

A number of years before he passed away, R' Nachman fainted suddenly in the middle of his prayers beside his 'window' in the synagogue. He was brought to his home and laid in his bed, and immediately summoned the town physician. The doctor came, examined him and said: 'You all can see that this man is dying, and there is nothing that can be done for him. His dying may take several hours, or a day at most, but for him to return to his [normal] strength, is impossible.' And so, R' Nachman lay in his bed, for the final minutes in this world. A candle burned on the table, as was the Jewish custom at a time like this, and beside his bed sat a member of his family, R' Yaakov Schmuckler (ז"ל Yankl Tsin'keh's) to witness the 'giving up of the ghost.' R' Yaakov Schmuckler told afterwards: 'Suddenly, in the middle of the night, my uncle awoke, opened his eyes, and looked at me with his large and penetrating eyes. I said to him: 'Uncle, Nu? I signed to him by putting my hand to my mouth, meaning, whether he wanted a cup to drink; He answered in his usual fashion, Ho! Ho! I gave him a cup, and then a second one, and this revived him a bit, and he returned to his station. After this incident, and the doctor's 'assessment,' he lived another six years. However, during these six years he was very weak, and he could not walk to the *Bet HaMedrash*, which was so beloved by him. He returned to his full spiritual health, but not to his [normal] physical strength.

For most of his last days, R' Nachman was bedridden. From time-to-time he would exert himself, get out of bed, and walk about hither and thither in the big dining room of his house. Occasionally, on a summer's day, he would go out on the porch, spread himself out on the porch bench, and look with his sharp and penetrating gaze at everyone coming and going by, in and out of the dreamy town that is undergoing change and is passing away along with him from this world... it would appear that he was able to sense with his powerful feeling, the coming of the Holocaust that was to destroy his shtetl, along with thousands of other Jewish towns, sacred communities that had lived full and faithful Jewish lives, pure congregations, that in their simple and honest lives, embodied the persona of the 'Jewish grandfather' for generation upon generation.

In the year 5740 (1940) after the *Sukkot* holiday, R' Nachman passed away זצ"ל.

His son, Moshe Noah, who lived in the town of Rakow, came to accompany his great father to his final resting place. Despite the fact that the Soviets, at that time, ruled White Russia, and it was not easy to publicly display religious-national sentiments, all of the townspeople gathered, from the old to the young, to escort R' Nachman to his final resting place. All of us felt that it was a great privilege, that R' Nachman

passed away in his bed, as did the rest of the world, and was summoned to the Heavenly Yeshiva so that he eyes would not have to behold the destruction of his people, a destruction that could already be sensed in the outside world. I recollect the eulogy that our Rabbi, the Rabbi of the community, the Holy Rabbi *Gaon* R' Shabtai Fein, הי"ד, offered. He dwelt on the sentence from Isaiah 57:1 – ' The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.' He said: 'The *Tzaddik*, R' Nachman was summoned to the Heavenly Court, so that he would not have to witness the 'evil' that we can hear descending on the nation of Israel.'

And it was in this manner, that the townspeople escorted their great son to eternal rest, with sweet feelings and sentiments of solace, felling of sorrow, and weariness. They took comfort in the fact that R' Nachman could be given the dignity of a Jewish burial, but were saddened in the knowledge that they – themselves – were not certain if they would enjoy that same privilege, when their time came – to be laid to rest with their ancestors – in a Jewish burial place...

During the Shiva mourning period, R' Moshe Noah assembled and organized the writings of his father, the *Gaon*. After he arose from his mourning, he took this great legacy that his father had left him – a box full of a variety of handwritten items; in Halakha, Legends, Jewish thought, and even poetry, and returned with this precious treasure to his family in Rakow. Who knows, perhaps during the days of the Holocaust, R' Moshe Noah may have turned over his father's writings to a non-Jew, and after years and generations, perhaps the writings of this giant will yet be found.

In addition to all of the great, lofty and important things in which R' Nachman engaged, he also found the time to keep a diary. He kept a diary beginning in the days of his youth, to the end of his long life, without interruption. He would set down his thoughts with which he struggled, in order to reach the state of completion and integrity that he strove for, and in it, he also set down everything that happened to him, and every event that transpired in the town. At this hour, as I write these words, in order to support the publication of '*Pinkas Belica*,' to commemorate our devastated shtetl and in memory of our martyrs הי"ד, that we are preparing to have printed in our Holy Land, I especially feel the absence of this 'diary' of his. If we only had this 'diary' today, we would not have to search and dig into unfamiliar sources, sometimes unreliable ones, to find references in other sources regarding the history of our town. If we had this 'diary' we would have solid material for the publication of our '*Pinkas*' whose objective is to give us a complete, and living portrait of the ambiance of our *shtetl*, on all the types of its inhabitants, from the day it was established to the day that we left it.

At the hour in which I bring my writing to a close, I am convinced that I have written down and made visible only a small part of what it is possible, and necessary, to say about our R' Nachman. I brought up merely a small drop out of the ocean of the wisdom and righteousness of this great man, this one, who lived and worked among us in our *shtetl*, modestly and clandestinely, without the shadow of desire to derive any benefit from the publicizing of his greatness in the larger world.

I give thanks, and offer praise to The Creator of Heaven and Earth, and gave me the privilege to be able to raise a memorial to my outstanding teacher, R' Nachman זצ"ל, who was one of the great men of the Jewish people to come along in any generation. And in so doing, to make a contribution to the memory of our devastated shtetl, and to the memory of its beloved martyrs הי"ד.

The Rabbis of Belica in the Nineteenth Century

By Eliezer Meir Savitzky

A. Rabbi R' Yoss'li *Belicer*

From the elders of the *shtetl,* I heard about a great Rabbi, who was known throughout the Vilna area, by the name 'R' Yoss'li *Belicer,*' one of the first pupils of R' Chaim of Volozhin. R' Yoss'li was known as a *Gaon* in Torah and piety, and a devotee when it came to doing good deeds. He was particularly attentive in performing the commandment of tithing from his own income. It is understood, that his income, from as small a congregation as was in our town, was not great or substantial, but in spite of this, he would require that all members of his family declare and make known to him each and every penny they brought in, and if he became aware of any added income that came into his household, he would immediately set aside a tithe. He would distribute this 'tithe' among the poor of the town, in the form of 'anonymous giving.' He would do this with painstaking care, such that even his closest friends did not know to whom he had given his 'tithe.' He did all this out of his own great sense of propriety, so as not to embarrass, God forbid, those who have to receive charity.

This Gaon and righteous man, who concerned himself with all the issues of the town, lived his own life within confining limits, and in great need. He would content himself, during the days of the week with only dairy and vegetables. It was only on the Sabbath that he would deign to partake of meat, in honor of the Sabbath.

His residence was in a tiny house that was part of the old *Bet HaMedrash* (*dos polish shtibl*), where he lived with all the members of his family. He would spend most of the hours of the day in the *Bet HaMedrash*, involving himself in the pursuit of Torah study. In his day, our town was a center of Torah study. Thirty students, preparing for higher learning, sat in the old Bet HaMedrash, who came from towns both near and far, to study and learn torah from R' Yoss'li. Day and night, they would sit and sway over their large *Gemara* volumes, intoning sweet chants, and the sound of Torah learning never stopped within the walls of the *Bet HaMedrash.*

R' Yoss'li would personally look after the needs of his disciples. He would arrange lodging, and meals for them at the homes of the *balebatim* in his community. Every Jew who had a somewhat spacious abode, had the great honor of having a disciple from this group as a house guest, and to give meals for 'days,' as was the accepted custom of the times (every family would invite such a student for a set day to eat in their home). The younger students would go to eat in the houses of the town residents. However, the older 'bachelors' did not go to such houses to eat 'days' excepting on Sabbaths and Festival Holidays, because chaste women would bring them their meals in the *Bet HaMedrash.* It was in this manner that the necessary requirements were provided for these disciples, in order that they be able to dedicate themselves to Torah study, with peace of mind, and without any real world worries. As to the remaining small expenses, R' Yoss'li himself took care of these, and no one knew from whence he obtained the money for these expenses.

After many years, R' Yoss'li left our congregation and went over to a larger one. He was accepted to occupy the rabbinical chair of the city of Krynki (Krynok) which was known as a large and important Jewish congregation.

We do not know many details about his life and his sacred work in the city of Krynki It is told that all of his charitable traits were revealed there as well, and there, he also especially looked after the indigent who were too ashamed to extend a hand to receive charity. And he always did this in a self-effacing way, anonymously, in order not to embarrass them.

And in Krynki too, he did not abandon his commitment to the dissemination of Torah study, and tens of young boys and men would stream to Krynki to study Torah with R' Yoss'li. While in Krynki, he developed a substantial reputation among Jewry, and he was known throughout the entire country as a Gaon and a righteous man, by his name, 'R' Yoss'li *Belicer*.'

It was told in the town, that in his old age, R' Yoss'li left Krynki and returned to Belica, the reason being, it was said, that he loved Belica and its people, and he wanted to live out his last years in his first congregation, whose name (*Belicer*) he carried all the days of his life.

Upon his return, and in his old age, he fell ill with a paralysis and was unable to walk on his own legs. A wheel chair was made for him, and on it, he was transported each day from his house to the *Bet HaMedrash*, and back. When he was old, sick and confined to his wooden wheelchair, he called once to his near ones, and told them he wanted to marry a woman (it appears that his wife passed away before he did), and even designated the 'blushing bride' that he wanted. His near ones were astonished at his words, but they could not go against the will of their own rabbi who was so beloved and dear to them. They went and proposed the match to the 'blushing bride,' and she agreed to marry the aged and ill R' Yoss'li. A few days passed, and a wedding canopy was erected 'at a good and auspicious hour,' and R' Yoss'li sanctified the 'blushing bride' in accordances with the laws of Moses and Israel. With a modest smile, it was added that a year later, this 'chaste young woman' bor R' Yoss'li a male child.

Apart from his brilliance and righteousness, R' Yoss'li was also known as a 'miracle worker.' In connection with this, I hear from the elder R' Moshe Wolkowysky (Moshe Bezalel Leib's) the following story. When he [sic: R' Moshe] was a young boy, a great fire broke out in town, and nearly half of the Jewish houses were consumed in flames. All the men in town tried to extinguish the flames, but the matter did not work out that way. There was a danger that all of the Jewish houses would go up in flames. Suddenly, R' Yoss'li came to, and asked to be taken out to the place where the fire was. He was sat in his wheelchair, and he was brought to the point of danger. (R' Moshe used to tell that he was one of the boys who pushed R' Yoss'li's wheelchair to the location of the fire). R' Yoss'li spread out his hands towards the fire, mumbled a prayer, and the fire retreated from the houses of the Jews that remained, and went off in a different direction in the town. It was in this fashion that Jewish houses were saved by the action of R' Yoss'li the 'miracle worker.'

R' Yoss'li lived and worked in our town for a span of about fifty to sixty years, approximately, from 1800 - 1850.

B. Rabbi R' Noah Orlansky

Succeeding R' Yoss'li, in the rabbinical chair of our town, was his venerable student, R' Noah Orlansky, who honored and praised his teacher and served at his hand for many years. When R' Yoss'li left Belica, he asked of the townspeople that they nominate his dedicated student to fill his place. The townsfolk who honored and loved R' Yoss'li very much, fulfilled his wish, and accepted his student, R' Noah as the rabbi of the congregation. R' Noah occupied the rabbinical chair of our town to his last day.

R' Noah was born (c. 1825) in the village of Lozyany, close to our town. His parents were known in the area as honest, God-fearing people. they were charitable people, and excelled in extending their hospitality to guests. Every Jew that passed through the village found a place for lodging and food in their home. The peasants in the village also respected them, because they saw in them, Jews who were honest and straightforward.

The elders would tell: when R' Noah was studying during his youth at the Bet HaMedrash in Belica, he would rise each and every day, and walk on foot from the village of Lozyany to the *shtetl*, and before nightfall, he would return to the village to attend to his elderly parents, in order to discharge the commandment 'honor thy father and thy mother.' In the midst of his trip both there and back, he learned by heart the renown book '*Chayei Adam*' written by the well-known *Gaon* R' Abraham Danzig.

R' Noah, as was his teacher, R' Yoss'li, was known as a formidable Torah scholar, and as a result he was famous throughout the area, and for his great sense of charity. People came on a daily basis from a variety of places, to seek advice from R' Noah, sometimes regarding the means to get out of a difficult situation, others coming to receive a 'blessing,' to get healing of their bodily ills. R' Noah would receive each and every person graciously, and with his insightful and pleasant words, he would create an influence on his guests, and each and every one of them would leave him in a state of tranquil spirit, and with the belief that everything will come out well, to the best.

I can recall that R' Nachman Szebszinsky would say: 'R' Noah of Belica was as well known in his time as Israel Meir of Radun (The *Chafetz Chaim*) is today.'

R' Noah was a rabbi committed to each and every member of his community, and worried like a compassionate father about each and every individual in the *shtetl*, walking in the footsteps of his great teacher, and engaging himself in the dissemination of Torah. In his day, as well, there were more than ten 'disciples' in the old *Bet HaMedrash*, who were immersed in Torah study, day and night. R' Noah treated these student 'disciples' with great affection, and worried about each and every one of them the way a father worries about his own sons of tender age. Many of the students of R' Noah, who were among the attendees of the Belica *Bet HaMedrash*, afterwards went on to become famous Rabbis in large, and important, congregations in Jewry.

I heard from R' Nachman, that one of the 'disciples,' of the Belica *Bet HaMedrash* (a young man from the shtetl of Lubicz) afterwards became the Rabbi of the Jewish community in the well-known city of Suwalki.

Regarding a second young man, named R' Gabriel, he would tell that he was thoroughly trained and expert in everything, a Torah genius, and also a great *Maskil.*

After R' Gabriel left the Belica *Bet HaMedrash,* he was the rabbi in a number of important congregations. He occupied the Rabbinical Chair in the Polish city of Siemiatycze, and afterwards was he was also appointed (as the Lubicz Youth) to be the Rabbi of the Suwalki community. After spending a number of years in Suwalki, he left Europe and went to America. In the United States, he lived in New York, and was one of the most important rabbis of greater New York, and one of the leaders of Orthodox Judaism in the United States as a Whole.

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Page 75: *On the Banks of the Neman*

Page 76: *(Top):* *On the 'Old' Bridge*

(Bottom): On the 'New Bridge

R' Noah was a great lover of books, and thanks to this, the Belica *Bet HaMedrash* was known for its large collection of important books that it housed. In the old *Bet HaMedrash,* it was possible to find ancient books of considerable value. Not only once did I hear from an 'emissary' or a '*Maggid*' that visited the city: 'I have been through hundreds of synagogues, and I have yet to find a treasure trove of books like this.' (Yiddish: You cannot imagine what kind of a treasure trove you have here in your *Bet HaMedrash*).

R' Noah put an ordinance in place, that each and every person in the town had to make a weekly charitable donation to the 'book fund,' and on every Friday, they would go from house to house to gather money for the 'book fund.' R' Noah guarded these funds personally, as if they were the apple of his eye. Every time a bookseller would come to town, he knew that he had an outstanding buyer here for his merchandise. Immediately as soon as the bookseller had arranged his wares on the long table of the *Bet HaMedrash,* R' Noah would approach the table, review the books, and buy books from him with the funds that he had at hand. This was the way he always behaved, and he would not leave so much as a penny behind in the 'book fund' that was in his pocket. To his last day, R' Nachman would, with a sacred trembling, watch over these books that he had received as a legacy from R' Noah, on behalf of the *Bet HaMedrash.*

I heard from the mouth of R' Reuven the Baker (*Ruv'eh der Bekker*) about the exorcism of a 'spirit' at the hands of R' Noah. He told that a woman was brought to R' Noah that had been possessed by a 'Dybbuk' and they beseeched him to drive out this spirit from the unfortunate woman. R' Noah gathered a minyan of important Jews, to assist him in the exorcism of the 'Dybbuk' and R' Reuven himself was among this quorum.

R' Noah ordered that the shofar be blown and he began to decree that the 'spirit' emerge from the woman. At first, the 'spirit' stubbornly refused, and nervily replied that he would not leave the woman. After a long conversation between the 'spirit' and R' Noah, the 'Dybbuk' agreed to exit the woman on the condition that he be permitted to exit by way of the throat. R' Noah did not agree to this condition, and decreed to the 'spirit' that it should leave by way of the pinky finger. After a long and difficult struggle, the 'spirit' gave into R' Noah, and left the way R' Noah had ordered him to. The elderly and feeble one would continue to tell that after the 'spirit' left the woman, all those gathered saw a drop of blood on the pinky finger of the woman, and she left Belica healthy, and whole both in body and spirit.

The elders of the town would recollect the names of the three sons of R' Noah, and they are: R' Leib; R' Yaakov-Meir; R' Chaim.

It was said of R' Yaakov-Meir that he was the most accomplished of the three. While his father was still alive, he was already the Rabbi of Jasiniowka, beside Bialystok. And there, he occupied the rabbinical chair all the days of his life.

Before he passed away, R' Noah asked of the *balebatim*, that they should fulfil his desire to install his eldest son, R' Leib in the rabbinical chair of the town. The people of the town, who held R' Noah in high esteem, fulfilled his wish, and installed R' Leib in the rabbinical chair of his father.

The third son, R' Chaim, was not a rabbi. He lived his entire life in Belica, and supported himself by teaching *Gemara* to talented pupils.

R' Leib was the Rabbi of the town for many years, and he distinguished himself in his great charity. In old age, when he felt that his memory was no longer serving him properly, he was afraid that ,God forbid, he might err in some matter of law, or a 'question' on which he was asked to rule and that he would incorrectly rule on *Halakha*. He decide not to continue as rabbi any longer, and publicized the fact that he wanted to sell off his 'rabbinical franchise.' When this became general known, a young Rabbi arrived – a pupil of the נצי"ב of Volozhin – a formidable Torah scholar[22], and a marvelous orator, and purchased the chair from R' Leib. This young rabbi, afterwards, became our beloved Rabbi whom we held in high affection, the Rabbi *Gaon* R' Joseph Rudnick זצ"ל. He is described further on, his son R' Abraham Abir, and his prominent daughters, Tema, Sarah and Breineh, who are found in Israel.

An Overall Portrait of the Town

By Issachar Kamenetzky

The town of Belica sits approximately a kilometer from the banks of the Neman River. The town was small: four streets of one kilometer length, approximately, circumscribed its size. In its center was the courtyard of the synagogue, and there could be found the two *Batei Midrash* – the 'old' made of brick, and the 'new' made of wood. The latter was burned down in a large fire that broke out on a summer's night during the First World War, and in this fire, many of the homes of the Jews were also consumed. Between the two *Batei Midrash*, there was a wooden ruin (called the '*Hekdesh*'). Only the skeleton of that building remained, but for many years, it was told, that the *Hekdesh* served as a lodging place for itinerant beggars. This '*Hekdesh*'

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22 **Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Judah Berlin** (1816-1893) also known as **Reb Hirsch Leib Berlin,** commonly abbreviated as **Netziv** (lit. "pillar") was Head of the Volozhin Yeshiva and author of several works of rabbinic literature in Lithuania

still stood, in its desolation, and it was said that demons and spirits hover within. Because of this, there was a general fright about getting too close to it, when walking alone, and even when in a company, people walked by quickly, in order not to tarry at this location.

Behind the 'new' *Bet HaMedrash*, stood a stone house, a house unique of its kind, and in its appearance and style – the only one of its kind built of stone without any windows, and this was the bathhouse and the '*mikva.*'

The courtyard of the synagogue served as the center for communal life in the town. At a distance of several tens of meters from the synagogue courtyard, the market square was spread out, with its two rows of stores. There were four brick houses, and four houses with upper floors, with the water well in the center. From two ends of the market, two roads continued outward: one led to the village of Nitsa[23], and the second past the Jewish cemetery (the 'old' and the 'new'). Further on, were the areas of pasture, where the cattle of the Jews grazed, and there was the Neman River where young and old alike would bather in the summer.

'Behind the stores' – was a road for wagons to pass, and a path for pedestrians. It was there, on the grass-covered hills, that the Jewish children would play their games. The stretch of land 'behind the stores' was finished off by a large stone wall, which also surrounded the Russian Orthodox church of the past, that was changed to a Catholic church after the First World War, with the institution of Polish rule in the area. The church with its green cupolas and crosses, with its huge bell, whose peal could be heard at a long distance, with the coming of nightfall on the Sabbath, introduced something of a sad disquiet into the heart, that could not be assuaged. The church stood silent all the days of the week, closed and locked up, with no one going in or coming out. Only once in the week, on Sunday, the gate would be opened wide, to those coming from the town and all the villages that were near it, but after a few hours passed by, with the completion of prayers, the church would empty out again, and its doors and gates would be locked again. And it was in this fashion that the church stood waiting – waiting in silence for its liberation each week, but every Saturday, at nightfall, the bell would come to life, and begin to peal, and send out its call...

It would peal and send out its call... and there was something to the call and the pealing of the church's bell. Only a few hundred meters separate the church from the Jewish *Bet HaMedrash*, but how huge is this distance, and how enormous the difference: fortification opposite openness; a deathly silence opposite the living word of God; a set scheduled time on one hand, and a day-and-night activity on the other; a locked fortress on the one hand, and wide open doors on the other; two different worlds – a world of cold opposite a world of warmth...

Close to the church – the '*Gmina*' house, the office of the council of the all the villages in the area. Beside the office, on the other side of the street, the '*Szkolka*' building, that being the government school, in which only the children of the gentiles studies, and there was not a single Jewish child to be counted among their ranks (during the time of the Polish regime, a few Jewish students studied there as well).

The Jews lived in the synagogue courtyard, and beyond it – to the bordering street, in the market square, and

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[23] Possibly Netech', about six miles north and west of Belica.

along the streets that emanated out of it. There was not a street in the town that did not have Jewish residents, even the street called the 'gentile street,' had within it either by mistake, or on purpose, two Jewish houses, that were also consumed in the great fire (from that time on, the street could quietly be called the 'gentile street').

The Jews of the town, about one-third of its population, approximately one hundred families, lived beside their 'gentile' neighbors who were twice their number. And so they lived, these on their business and trade, and the other on their fields and drink, these three times a day in their *Bet HaMedrash*, and the other one time a week in their church. For how long did they live like this? – it is not known exactly. In the town itself, nobody took an interest in its history, and from what time onward the Jewish presence began. However, based on reliable sources, there is no doubt that the Jewish presence in Belica was there for at least a couple of hundred years.

The *Pinkas* of the '*Hevra Kadisha*' was found with my father ז"ל. It was a thick volume, long and narrow, in a leather binding, and light cover. When I was a boy, I glanced in it once or twice out of curiosity. In my memory are preserved the images of smooth paper pages, with only the first of the pages containing writing. On each page, there was a different handwriting, and a different color ink. The handwriting was not particularly clear, and the ink was absorbed into the paper and had faded. Accordingly, it was difficult to read the content and understand it. I paged through the Pinkas until I reached my father's clear handwriting, and I began to read and run through it. But these entries were already from recent times, our days.

The 'old' cemetery bordered on the 'new,' and stretched out over an adequately large parcel of land. The letters carved into the headstones, were almost unintelligible, being covered in layers of dust, and overgrown with moss that had covered them over the time.

At a distance of one kilometer from the town, the 'Estate' spreads out along with the 'Palace' in its center. The 'Estate' had belonged to the Lord Trubeckoy, who turned over all the matters associated with its management to his brothers. On a hill of several tens of meters [sic: in height] the 'Estate' stood beside the edge of the Neman River. Every Sabbath, the people of the town would go out, and especially the young people, to their favorite promenade beside the Neman. Only a narrow path separated the river and the 'Estate,' that was found 'up above,' which was surrounded by a sort of barrier of tall green and thick trees. No one had the nerve to cross this high and mysterious barrier and enter within. Within the 'Estate,' it was said, that day and night, the brother of the Lord walked around on guard, with a rifle in his hand. He was prepared to shoot anyone who would walk within the boundaries of the 'Estate.' It was not permitted for children to do more than throw a long, penetrating glance at the barrier of the tall thick trees. In comprehending their thickly entwined branches, perhaps they succeeded in revealing a way through that would show some tiny corner of what transpired within. Perhaps they succeeded in hearing an echo of a voice, and maybe some muted sound from whatever transpired in the inner sanctum of the 'Estate,' and the 'Palace.' Opposite this, the expanse of the Neman River spread out before them, completely revealed and open, without any constraint...

It is difficult to establish whether the children of that time were attracted more to the 'Estate' with its 'Palace,' the manicured fields, and the Neman, or to the Heder and the *Batei Midrash*, but we will return to the *Batei Midrash.*

The 'old' *Bet HaMedrash* was indeed old. The bricks from which the walls were constructed go back before our time. The passage of time left their mark on them, and their red color faded. The windows in the building were as high as a man. In order to open a window, or close it, it was necessary to get up on a bench. It is possible that the windows were put up this high intentionally, as a security consideration, so that the perpetrators of a pogrom could not burst into the interior during the time of prayer, whether while the congregation was sitting or standing. It is possible that the height, in addition to making it difficult on an attacker from the outside, also prevented those inside the premises to gaze outside and to be distracted from prayer or to disrupt their study of the *Gemara.*

For the entire length of three walls of the 'old' Bet HaMedrash (apart from the eastern wall, in the middle of which stood the Holy Ark), were very heavy wooden benches. Their appearance, and the way they were positioned against the walls, their length and thickness, were all testimony to their age. The copper candelabras for the wax candles that were lit on the evenings of the Sabbath and festivals, were decorated with petals and flowers, and their entire appearance was ancient. The large Hanukkah menorah that only appeared once a year, and immediately disappeared after Hanukkah, was made of a copper in a 'button-flower' design, and it too, as was said – gave off the appearance of great antiquity....

Even the 'new' *Bet HaMedrash* didn't look all that new. The wooden walls of the structure lost their natural light color, and became darkened with the passage of time. However, in contrast to the 'old' *Bet HaMedrash*, there were a surfeit of features inside of it, that took it out of the class of being 'old.' The windows were neither as high or as large as those of its predecessor, and the benches were not so thick, and the candelabras and menorahs continued to sparkle in sunlight and candlelight....

The light has dimmed, the sun has grown dark, and the candles have been extinguished....

Competition...

By Y. Kamoni
Jerusalem

Page 82: *(Top):* *On the 'Паом[24].'*
(Bottom): *Under the Bridge*

(An Excerpt from a Story)

In what follows, is an episode that took place in Belica during the period of the German occupation in the First World War; This episode was revealed by Issachar Kamenetzky (Y. Kamoni) in the year 1934, and it appeared in the Israeli newspaper *HaOreykh.*

The German occupiers began to improve the streets and to repair temporary roads. They demanded workers by the thousands. And the people of the town, whose other sources of livelihood had dried up, eagerly went out to do this work. The dire need even sent the scions of the important balebatim out, along with the haughty. These delicate sorts forsook the idea of clean hand out of fear of an empty mouth. However, the wage of one mark a day was derisory, but where would it be possible to obtain a slice of bread and potatoes? Mature men and women, and young boys and girls, aged 12-18 girded themselves, and went out to do battle with the hunger that knocked at the entrances to their houses. And even if this meant they needed to consort with the lower classes, and to put up with the nattering of the ignorant, this did not matter. One can't be particular at a time of danger.

And the exploitation was rife. no attention was paid to the tender age of the children who were worked hard at all manner of labor: in the digging of tunnels, uprooting stumps, collecting rocks, splitting boulders, spreading gravel, etc. And it was the overseer who possessed a particularly demanding eye. He would come up to you, measure the pile of gravel with his piecing stare, and afterwards, lift his eyes to you, and wag his finger disapprovingly:

– You are tiring, my flower!

We were three neighbors that went to work. The oldest was a Jewish man of about fifty years of age, of middling height, sprightly and cheerful, young at heart and good-humored. He had smiling eyes, as if a sort of membrane shaded them from the outside world. A playful and hearty smile flickered between the wrinkles. No man knew that despite the laugh in his eye, his soul weeps withing, and he sighs in his depths. Like this hard cold stone on the outside, and hidden within, burns a fire...

This Jewish man, was a wagon driver for his whole life. He would transport passengers to the nearby train station, and barely eked out a living. During peacetime, he would be a frequenter of the house of the 'noble'

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[24] The Ferry Boat

in the town, and loved to joke with his regular passengers. With the entrance of the German into this area, the times changed on him. Riding the trains was prohibited to the citizenry. His horse was appropriated for the war effort. What did he do? He went and traded his whip for a hammer, and smashed rocks on the road. His pay was one mark and twenty pfennig per day, or six marks a week. This is because Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath, and Sunday was the gentile day of rest.

The second, my helper, was a young man of about eighteen years of age. He was tall and lean, and muscular, a sort of filbert, whose center is empty, but whose shell is hard, and it is not easy to penetrate it. "Everything a Man Desires" was the lamp unto his feet, both in his work, and his behavior and relationship to the fairer sex. Are these not the things that stand at the top of the world. And their control is not achieved out of thought, by rather by means of girding one's trousers.

And I was the youngest of the group, a boy of about twelve years of age, who had just gotten off the student's bench. I had no idea what work was, and I had no idea of what the fairer sex was, I sat silently and watched. I paid close attention, and learned a chapter from the book of 'work.' I learned about the 'ways of women.' I learned my 'law' from the mouths of my older 'teachers...'

Here we are smashing boulders. Everyone is absorbed by their hammer and stones. Everyone throws a sideways glance over the pile of his neighbor, to see if his hasn't gotten larger than one's own. The oldest in the group, the former wagon-driver, was the dominant worker. His pile, was the largest pile of gravel, by far. Because of this, the Germans increased his pay by twenty pfennig a day. He actually earned this raise. His large and wide pile of gravel stood out among the three of us, thick and full with its belly between its teeth.... and he, with his legs spread apart, sets his eyes on the center of the pile of stones, and in the end, he raises his eyes in pride and says: I brought forth these stones, I gave birth to them...

And to his neighbors on each side, he would turn, measuring their piles by eye, and after glancing with his eyes to the left and right:

– Hey, flowers, on the contrary, try to emulate me!

And his eyes sparkle at that moment, and throw off flames. And I look and cannot tell if they are sparks of joy, or sparks of ire and anger. Suddenly the lightning changes, and on his face a light smile hovers...

And so my helper enviously looked at him and decided:

–No matter what happens to me, I am compelled to enlarge my pile.

And so the competition began. With tensed extremities and tensed muscles, the blows of the hammer fell on the stones. The blows fell stronger and more intensely, and the sounds of breaking were stronger even still. The stones were bared, and were torn apart by the force of the blows, and they broke apart and spread out beneath the rising and falling hands. And the piles grew, widened, and spread out.

And one pile said to the other:

– I am bigger than you.

And so this was the competition. Stones competed with stones. Hammer competed with hammer. Hand competed with hand. Mind competed with mind. Men competed with one another. The young competed with the old...

And the victory did not tarry in arriving. The implements rested. Dirty drops rolled down the cheeks of the older man. And I did not know if this was sweat or tears.

When the work was done, the overseeing soldier drew nigh, and with his gaze, he weighed the two piles and smiled a wicked smile. He turned to the Jew, and leaned his finger against his nose, and proclaimed:

– It looks like you've grown weak, my good man!

Memories of Times Past

By Zalman Yosselewicz

The *Shtetl* and Its Environs

The *shtetl* of Belica is made up of four parallel roads (in its length), intersected by about ten side streets, with the market between them. This is the entire settlement. Behind the *shtetl*, the Neman River flows, with its beautiful banks, overgrown with redolent hay and high oak trees. On the high side, stands the 'Palace' of the nobleman who owns the Belica estate. Under the hill, the road leads to the river. There, once can always find the '*Паром*' to convey those arrivals who wish to come across from the second side of the river. Also, the new longer bridges, goes from the *shtetl* in the direction of Zhetl.[25] On the other side of the *shtetl*, pine forests stretch out, green meadows, and fruit-bearing fields, who belong to the residents – Christians from the *shtetl*. Several villages are scattered among them, deriving their sustenance from the earth.

The *shtetl* itself is poor. The houses – low slung and the few streets are small, and are as if they are sunk into the ground. The roofs – covered in straw and on the straw, a heavy thick green moss grows. The few better and more presentable houses, among them, a few that are built of stone, stand on the marketplace.

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25 Today, called *Dzjatlava*

The Livelihoods of the *Shtetl* Jews

Page 84: *Zalman & Sarah Yosselewicz*

How did the Jews of the *shtetl* live? From whence did they derive their sustenance? Belica did not have rich people or major merchants. Even markets did not set up and stop in this place. There were a few small stores, with straw-covered roofs, and in each store, could be found a few rubles worth of merchandise. This, too, was often hidden away, lest a tax inspector show up, and one would be compelled to pay taxes. Nahum the storekeeper kept a small barrel of herring for the use of the entire *shtetl.* He, himself, would sit in the Bet HaMedrash and study. Itcheh Mereh's kept a small amount of goods, he would study the Torah while his wife would take the goods home at night, and in the morning – would carry it back to the store. The rabbi's brother sold yeast for the Sabbath and also to the bakers. Noah Koppel's had a leather store, where the plain leather was available for the peasants for '*lapchehs*' (his son Mordechai was the sole maker). Esther-Malka sold clay pots. Reiz'eh, Shlomo the Melamed's also had pots. Israel Gedalia's had an ironmongery. In this store, nothing was visible, and it was not possible to go inside, and the door was completely smeared over with tar, in order to prevent the tax inspector from even crossing the threshold... The principal 'businesses' were run by Lieb'keh Dol'keh's – only the nobility came to buy at her establishment, and an ordinary person simply didn't have the wherewithal for this privilege.

The one and only community leadership in the *shtetl* in those days, was in the hands of R' Ruv'eh (the wagon driver), the leader of the 'citizen's court.' The Jews belonged to the 'Волостное Правлея'[sic: District Administration] and the *Starosta* was elected by the Jewish residents. The Czarist regime would certify him afterwards. Passports or birth certificates would be gotten from the *Starosta,* and one would come to him in connection with other municipal issues. It is self evident that the position of *Starosta* was a high one, and he had a significant standing, and foremost, when the time came to present one's self for military service, and when the time came to make use of the so-called '*Legatas.*' It was within his power to: add years, or subtract them, as well as completely freeing a candidate from service.

In order for an individual to receive a pass, who might be under suspicion by the authorities, large sums of money were paid. In order to support the 'court,' with a permanent employee, a residence and lighting – the Jews had to pay a tax to the *Starosta,* who had the right to levy a tax of up to one ruble. But even one ruble was too great a sum of money for most of the Jewish populace, and many did not want to pay for these sorts of purposes. This always elicited dissatisfaction among the Jews.

The Jews Among Themselves

The *Starosta* had his hangers-on and supporters, who learned how to write their signature on a 'left-sided' paper. Quite often, they would get together and drink a '*L'Chaim,*' But these 'people' didn't bestir themselves to find out how they could ameliorate the poverty of the *shtetl.* It didn't occur to them. When people came to tell them that someone was dying of hunger – they expressed their sympathy.

The *Hevra Kadisha* was also under the oversight of these 'people.' Paying no mind to the fact that there was a committee with *Gabbaim*, the amount of money charged for burial was set by them, taking no mind of who it was upon whom they cast their eyes.

For sure, other people could be found that did not want to put up with this injustice, and it would often lead to conflicts. I recollect an incident with Lieb'keh Dol'keh's who had built an alley way and had not deemed it necessary to request permission in advance. This matter came to fisticuffs, and the hurling of stones by one side against the other. The issue went up to the governor, who made a personal trip to restore order in Jewish life...

Disputes would break out often, and it also came to fisticuffs being exchanged in the *Bet HaMedrash*, and the hanging lamps would fly back and forth. On several occasions, Rabbi Reines ז"צ from Lida, was called out so that he could restore tranquility to the *shtetl*.

New Times – New Decrees

The poverty in the shtetl was strongly visible. Only few individuals had enough of a living to get by. The Belica Jews contented themselves with the minimum. Everyone had their own cow, and a garden with vegetables. The manure from the cow was used as fertilizer for planting potatoes, and potatoes were stored with everyone for the entire year. The central deficiency was in clothing, footwear for the Sabbath, etc. The principal source of support for those in need, came from the Jewish settlers, and balebatim, who would send in provisions for the Sabbath to the poor and the sick. The entire area around the shtetl was populated by settlers – very warm Jewish people who would generously support and help the poor with whatever they could. During Festivals and on the Sabbath, they would come into town with their families. It was these Jews who held leases on the tracts and yards of the nobility. Others had stores, inns and saloons. This situation went on for as long as Czar Alexander III ruled in Russia, and when he died, and his son, Nicholas II was crowned, life became harder. Great hopes were placed on better times, but in the end, it only brought a shower of new decrees against the Jews.

According to the first decree of '*Novosielenya*' Jews no longer had the right to live in the villages, and had to leave them. A monopoly was placed on saloons and stores. Only the longtime residents were temporarily permitted to remain. The larger part moved to live in the towns, and a part – emigrated to America.

Institutions of Support in the *Shtetl*

At this precise time, a great fire broke out in Belica, and a larger part of the *shtetl* was consumed in flames. With the help of the merchants who did business in the area, that dealt in forest products, it was re-built. Immediately afterwards, a typhus epidemic broke out, The disease spread and we began to look for a way to deal with it. My uncle, R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky ז"ל, was the first, who, and with him, another group of prominent Jews of the shtetl, organized a '*Bikur Kholim*' Society, which set itself the objective of trying to save those who were seriously ill. Money was collected each week, which served as a fund to retain a

doctor , to provide medicines and medical equipment. The young boys and girls voluntarily presented themselves and made known their willingness to go and sleep at the homes of the ill, as well as serve them. At that time, the organization of such a society was very much needs and indeed, was very useful.

The second important undertaking was the creation of a '*Gemilut Hesed*' Bank in the *shtetl*, whose objective was to help the poor storekeepers and craftsmen. The first transaction of the *Gemilut Hesed* was given by R' Sholom Namiot, the lessor of the courtyard. After several hundred rubles were collected, each needy person received a loan that they repaid on a weekly basis. The bank was useful to many people in the *shtetl*. At the head of the *Gemilut Hesed* Bank stood: R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky, Itcheh Lejzor Kaufman, Joseph Paniemowsky[26] and others.

Zionists in Belica

The Zionist movement also found its place in Belica. After circles of the movement began to organize themselves in the area, R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky, R' Nahum Szebszinsky, Moshe Leib Konopkin, R' Yehoshua Jasinowsky and Michael Lewkowsky organized and created the first Zionist group in Belica. Many young people signed up as members. One would gather and together read the Zionist journal '*Der Yid*,' and also '*HaTzefira.*' Also debates were organized about the Land of Israel. Every Friday, we would meet together at the home of my uncle, r' Chaim-Noah, where we would discuss the issues of the day. There were also many opponents and those who stood in our way, mostly from the religious element, who abhorred Herzl's doctrine. Ignoring this, the movement grew larger, and even assisted other towns to organize themselves. Rabbi Reines ז"ל from Lida, made many strong efforts to strengthen the movement. His influence was great in the entire region.

Belica Revolutionaries

Between 1900 and 1903, war ensued between Russia and China, and Russia took control of Manchuria. It did not take long, and a war broke out between Russia and Japan. Many of the Jews in town became frightened, and many of them emigrated to America and England. The war with Japan ended swiftly with a Japanese victory. Because of this, Jews also suffered from trouble. A wave of pogroms burst over them, and also a wave of plunder by the masses, which was incited [sic: by the regime] to obscure the nature of [sic: and responsibility for] the defeat by Japan.

On the other side, this, again, engendered the rise of a revolutionary movement. Strikes broke out on the railroads and factories. However, the Czarist authorities moved quickly to choke off every resistance and a true democracy did not take form.

The Jewish revolutionaries were immediately exiled to Siberia and even shot outright. A small part of the Belica revolutionaries escaped to America.

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26 We do not know if the intent here was to write Poniemansky

Peace returned, and life once again became normal. However, the state of penury in the *shtetl* remained unaltered; [poverty] remained at a high level, and all means were sought to try and improve the difficult economic circumstances of the *shtetl* Jews.

Rabbi Rudnick ז"ל

The older rabbi of the *shtetl*, R' Leib צ"ל, turned over the Rabbinical Seat to the younger R' Joseph Rudnick, who was a great scholar, an orator, and an activist on behalf of everyone. He was very well accepted in the *shtetl*. He interested himself in the material well-being of the general community and thought was given to how additional sources of income could be created. Rabbi Rudnick ז"ל called an assembly of all breadwinners, at which time it was decided to travel and appeal to the authorities of the regime in Vilna, that substantive market days should be scheduled to be held in the town.

Two *balebatim*, my father, Abraham Yosselewicz and Moshe Shimonowicz traveled to the Governor in Vilna, and after expending a great deal of energy, and with the help of monetary gifts, they worked out that every Wednesday, markets will be held in the *shtetl*, and several times a year – full market fairs. After this, the *shtetl* came to life. It became more fecund with sources of income. More businesses opened. The one difficulty was the transporting of merchandise from Lida. The road was a very bad one, and the wagon drivers would exhaust themselves in the process of conveying goods during the entire night, summers in the rain, and winters in the snow.

The Economic Situation Improves Itself

Economic development was manifest on all fronts. Apart from the fact that storekeepers earned more income, restaurants opened for the peasantry, who would [now] come in from the villages. A gramophone was brought into the *shtetl*, and this was a great sensation. Also, a pharmacy was opened. I ran a drugstore and perfumery business. In those days, a business of this sort reeked with the possibility of making money. Also, an impulse to get an education began to grow among the young people. to obtain knowledge and round out one's understanding in worldly subjects. Part of them traveled to Lida to study, in the middle schools, gymnasiums, and trade schools.

After the nobility began to liquidate their estates in the area, this trend also came to Belica. The forests around the *shtetl* were cut down, and the wood would be shipped to Germany, by way of Lithuania, using the Neman River. Many Jewish merchants and tradespeople, who specialized in forest work, were employed in this business, and the Christians, who worked in this line, also brought in considerable revenue into the *shtetl*, and people made a living from this. On the other side, craftsmen feared that they would be left without work, because the land on the estates will be left fallow, and they will have no way to make a living, once the estates would cease to exist...

The Belica Estate is Parceled Out

The Belica estate belonged to Graf Wittgenstein and was under lease to the Jewish man, Sholom Namiot. Immediately after the forests were exploited, it came time to deal with the land, buildings and other assets. At that time, two Jewish men arrived, and made a proposal to the appointed intermediary Graf Krapynski to sell the rest of the fields, land and buildings. The Jews showed Graf Krapynski that the expenses in running these properties exceeded the income.

Krapynski made contact with Graf Wittgenstein, who was located out of the country. He obtained full authority in connection with this transaction, and it was consummated. A merchant's bureau opened in Belica, and the residents were, again, able to generate income from this as well. Tradespeople like: manufacturers, brokers and accountants concentrated themselves in the *shtetl*. When the payroll had to be disbursed to workers, monies would fall into the hands of merchants, handlers, storekeepers, and others. The *shtetl* would bustle with the simple forest workers, ferry men, wagon drivers, who brought in not only their own earnings, but also increased the traffic in people. This was a time when the Jews of the *shtetl* had an increasing standard of living, and everything progressed.

The Belica estate was divided up into parcels, and was sold to Christians from the nearby village of Krasnaya. The palace remained in the hands of a Christian from Belica. The ferry from the estate was in the hands of the philanthropist Munya Molczadsky, who in the course of the years, supported the Jews of the shtetl, especially when the export of wood to Germany – by way of the Neman – was in his hands.

The First World War

After the events of 1905, the regime strengthened its control apparatus all over. An overseer and five militiamen came to Belica, a court with a '*Ziemski Nachalnik*[27],' to settle land disputes, a 'mailman,' and a post office was opened. Understandably, these new authority figures created a certain amount of trouble in the town, but we got used to this as well.

Years went by, and when was there not a time when the press would not bring a variety of news about anti-Semitic pogroms in cities, and also [news about] underground revolutionary movements. In 1911, I presented myself for military service, and I became a Czarist soldier deep inside Russia in the city of Ryazan.

Shortly before the completion of this service, I was permitted an 'Отпуск[28].' On arriving home, the First World War broke out. I then traveled to my brother Zelig, as a guest, after spending several weeks at home. He lived in Chernigov.

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27 Local territorial overseer

28 A pass to take leave.

When I returned to Belica, it was already at the end of the war. The Germans were in the stage of occupying the captured territories. The Czarist Russian army – routed, and the Bolshevik army was moving deliberately westward. The Germans impoverished the Jewish residents of the *shtetl*. They took everything for the use of their soldiers. They took cattle, horses and wagons from the Christians. From the Jews they robbed everything in the houses, and also drove them to hard labor, such as digging trenches and the like. Commerce came to a standstill, and hunger reigned in town, along with disease and ruin. From more distant towns, Jews would come with their last bit of goods, in order to barter for a bit of bread. They would, afterwards, drag themselves over the roads, swollen with hunger. But this was not the end of the suffering.

The Russian Bandits and the Jewish Victims

Page 93: *Zelda and Abraham Yosselewicz*

Russian soldiers, who had been severely mistreated, organized themselves and escaped from prison camps. They gathered themselves into groups and concentrated themselves in the forests, close to the villages. The peasants supported them, and then they would go out on the roads, robbing and killing, especially picking on the Jewish travelers, wagon drivers, and those Christians who were employed by the Germans. The prisoners became bandits and they instilled a terror in the Jewish populace.

Zerakh Kremen, who was one of the *balebatim* of Belica, and owned a fruit orchard in the village of Holdava, used to transport the produce to Lida to be sold. In one day, when he was transporting apples to be sold, the bandits seized him, and killed him on the spot. They tied the horse to a tree in the forest, and everything on the wagon was stolen.

After several days of searching, this Belica resident was found murdered in the forest, and he was brought back and given a Jewish burial in Belica. This was the first victim of the bandits. This terrifying incident instilled a great fear on the already exhausted Jewish populace. The German authorities could do nothing. They too, trembled in fear of the bandits and did not extend any peaceful gestures towards them, when they were approached for help.

Suddenly, rumors began to spread that the bandits wanted to attack the town itself.

On one winter night, a group of Belica bandits sneaked into town, and immediately entered the home of the prominent member of the *balebatim*, R' Yehoshua Jasinowki, and demanded a colossal sum of money from him, and otherwise they would kill him. After a very difficult struggle with them, the bandits killed him in his own house. On that same night, they also robbed money and valuables from Eizh'keh Reuven's. After the second attack, fear and terror reigned in the *shtetl*. At night, one would lock one's self up very well, and remain inside the house, for fear of an attack.

The young people decided to form a self-defense organization and buy arms, as a precaution against a new attack, so that it will be possible to defend one's self. However, there was too little money, and also, there was no one from whom to buy.

Shortly after this, when the Germans began to draw back, and there was no proper authority in the area, and also no order, the Christians quietly spread rumors that the bandits are preparing to assault the Jewish residents of Belica.

In 1918 (at the end of the year), a larger group of bandits came from the second side of the Neman, and surrounded the Jewish streets. In the middle of a clear day, they opened fire on the Jewish market. The Jewish self-defense was unable to mount resistance against such a force, and the bandits broke into the houses. Robbing everything that came into their hands, they murderously beat and drove everyone from the houses outside into the street. Our family hid itself in the small side street at the home of Blind Alter. They found us there, and demanded that my father pay them ten thousand rubles and called him by his name, knowing that he was one of the wealthy *balebatim.* When he declared that he could not provide such a sum, they put him up against the wall to shoot him. As a former soldier, I begged them not to do us any harm. This, apparently, had some impact. They pulled off our boots, beat us up pretty well, and they went off to plunder some more. Frightening screams and the sounds of violence reached us from a distance, which emanated from the Jewish houses, at the time when the people in them were begging not to be killed.

The bandits, however, carried out their objective. On that day, four Jews in the shtetl were murdered, and Taib'eh Yankl Meckel's was wounded.

The victims were: R' Yankl Meckel, Chaim Dol'keh's, Mordechai-Noah Koppel's and Ber'l the shoemaker's father, who had come as a guest to his son from Lida. The bandits robbed all the Jewish valuables that were in the shtetl, which they loaded onto five wagons, also taken away from the Jews, and took it away to the villages over the Neman. The bandits also stole our wagon.

My father, ע"ה became sick from the severe beating that he got, and was confined to bed for many long weeks before he recuperated. These same bands attempted to assault Lida and Zhetl, but there, the self-defense confronted them with arms, and drove them off.. Until such time that the Bolsheviks arrived, this vicinity and also in Belica, there was no official authority. After the Bolshevik occupation, a bit of order returned to life. However, despite this, there was no particular satisfaction at that time either, because the Bolshevik army was poor, and it too was compelled to take from the already impoverished populace. The Bolshevist army went on towards Warsaw. In the year 1920, the Bolsheviks encountered the newly-formed Polish Legions, under Pilsudski's leadership.

The Poles Take Over Control

There, the Bolsheviks suffered a severe defeat, and they fled back to Russia barefoot. It did not take long, and the Polish Legions took control of substantial areas and also arrived in our vicinity. Once again, trouble and suffering befell the Jews. Polish anti-Semites killed and robbed. Many of the prominent Jews were arrested, on the basis of informers, who alleged that all the Jews were communists. Later on, when a semblance of order was restored in the shtetl, all of the Jews were, once again, driven to hard labor by the Neman River, in order to build up a ferry terminal for the army. Jews did the work, despite the fact that they didn't have the necessary materials that were required for the job, and on top of the fact that nobody had the

faintest idea how to go about doing this. The worst of the troubles were those they had to withstand from the local Christians – the resident citizenry. As Poles, they used every opportunity to incite the Polish legionnaires. On one day, they arrested my uncle, R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky, and took him off to their constabulary. Thanks to the intervention of the priest from Yel'na, who was a very liberal person, and a philo-Semite, he was released. Separately, R' Chaim-Noah's daughter, Shulamit (today in Jerusalem) put her life at risk, and fell at the feet of the Polish constabulary officials, begging for their mercy on behalf of her father, until he was sent home.

There was also an incident with David-Herschel'eh and his two business partners (Israel Meiram Kremen and Leib'keh Chaim's) whom the Poles seized while they were transporting eggs and foodstuffs to Lida. They confiscated the merchandise, beat the Jews severely, and took them off to the constabulary, which was in the village of Njacec. Once again, we ran to the priest from Yel'na who intervened, and the three Jews were released. We continued suffering a variety of troubles, from these very same Polish anti-Semites, until the order became stabilized, and life began to return to normal.

The young people in the shtetl were exhausted by these experiences, during this severe war, and a large part of them decided to emigrate to America.

The new Polish government got on its feet very quickly, and a democratic regime was established in the country. Immediately, from the first years and onward, there was a council in existence in Belica, elected by the citizens. A new bridge was built across the Neman, on the way to Zhetl, and also a paved road on the way to Lida. Also, the streets in the town were paved with stones.

Life became much easier. Commerce once again started to develop, and craftsmen opened up new facilities. There was a sense of pressure after the suffering under the legionnaires. Commerce was the source from which nearly the entire Jewish populace made its living.

The road to Lida eased the connection to that larger city. It became easier to both bring and send merchandise, as well as with simple coming and going to the higher echelons of the government.

The Belica Jew, R' Yaakov Kotliarsky, started up a bus line to Lida, which was very useful to the *shtetl.*

A *Volksbank* and the '*Khorev*' School in One Building

Page 96: *The 'Khorev' School*

A variety of institutional organizations began to organize themselves from scratch. My uncle, Chaim-Noah, along with several other respected *balebatim,* began to intervene with the Jewish people of higher financial

means about establishing a bank in the *shtetl*. The Jewish Assistance Committee, *'JeKoPo* [29]*'* in Vilna, helped with money, and each individual who subscribed as a member, paid in a 'fee' in the amount of 100 zlotys. The bank was one of the most important institutions that extended help for merchants, small businesses and manual tradespeople. At the head of the bank, stood the following: Abraham Kremen, the pharmacist, R' Shmuel Joseph Itzkowitz, R' Lejzor Yankelewsky, R' Yaakov Kotliarsky, R' Shef'teh Kaufman. The secretary was my uncle –R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky, who dedicated his entire life to this. Every week, the members of the committee would gather, and R' Chaim-Noah would present a report of the work done.

In that period of time, the [traditional] Heder system liquidated itself a little at a time, and in the new schools [that took their place] Hebrew was taught, as well as general subjects. Studies were conducted in the women's prayer court, the *'Ezrat Nashim,'* of the old *Bet HaMedrash*. The new *Bet HaMedrash* had burned down shortly after the war.

Temporarily, the bank was located in the home of Moshe Leib's. There was no suitable place available, and the committee began to think about a new building. Also, the parents of school-age children demanded that a place should be found for a school. Several balebatim traveled to see the forest merchants Messrs. Shalit and Shapiro, who donated wood. boards of lumber and workers from their factory. With their supportive help, a new, modern, well lit building was constructed for the school – across from the large *'Bet HaMedrash'* (on the *Schulhof Gasse*), which was divided in two: in the smaller part, the bank was organized, and in the larger part, the school with large, well lit rooms. As it happens this was a modern Hebrew school with the name *'Khorev.'* Teachers and administrators worked there. The plane of studies was high, and there was an effort to give the children a good education.

Our Belica children indeed did learn well, in all subjects, in Hebrew and in the Polish language. Many of them then traveled off to study in higher schools in Lida and in Vilna. Many later became Hebrew teachers and many also finished their studies successfully in other professions opened to them.

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In these years, the Zionist movement developed, and many young men from the shtetl made aliyah to the Land of Israel. Among these pioneer-immigrants were: Chay'keh Grodzinsky, and her sister Liebeh with their brother Ber'l (today in Hadera); Issachar and Shulamit Kamenetzky; Rabbi Rudnick's daughters – Sarah, Breineh and Tem'eh; Ber'l Kaufman; Michael and Meiram Ratnowsky, Max Jasinowsky and many others.

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[29] An acronym for Еврейский Комитет Помощий (***Jevreyskiy Komitet Pomoshchi,***) which is the Russian for 'Jewish Assistance Committee.'

Our Institutions and Undertakings

Page 97: The Belica Drama Circle

Once again, a *'Gemilut-Hesed'* Bank came into existence in the *shtetl*. Three balebatim were elected to the committee of the *'Gemilut-Hesed,'* and the *Gabbai* was R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz. The secretary was Ephraim Ruzhansky.

Israel Zlocowsky did a great deal for the security of the town, with the organization of the 'Fire-fighters' Brigade. He contributed energy, time and effort, until the Fire-fighters Brigade developed and was provisioned with many implements to extinguish fires – an accomplishment that was very necessary for the *shtetl*. He also created an orchestra, that brought in merriment to a town that was half asleep. At every wedding, or when any sort of parade took place, or any other sort of celebration, the orchestra of the Fire-fighters Brigade, with R' Israel Zlocowsky at its head, enlivened and amused the public. A rather large enclosure, the *'Serai'* was built, for all of the fire-fighting equipment, and this location also served as a place for theater presentations.

Young boys and girls created drama circles, and presented a variety of Yiddish 'pieces' for the pleasure of the onlookers. Also, artistic troupes would come to us from other cities. A theater presentation, in a small *shtetl* like Belica, never ceased to be a major sensation.

Life developed normally, and circumstances became stabilized. The democratic pull of the regime could be felt, which at that time was the political line of Pilsudski – the leader of the reconstituted Poland.

The condition of the Jews improved considerably, and this was evidenced with each individual, it not being important as to what specifically his livelihood was. The *shtetl* was built up a bit. Communications improved. The bus to Lida already was running twice a day. Later on, [there were busses] to Zhaludok and Scucyn. One of the *balebatim* of the transportation lines, which was called *'Lidzianka'* was Abba Gapanowicz, and in the same business, the young Belica men Yankl Kremen and Yankl Meckel also worked.

During the evenings, a chapter of Mishna was studied in the Bet HaMedrash. There was also a Tehilim study group. Older men also established other groups [of this nature].

Also, the *'Hevra Kadisha'* modernized its work. An added parcel was purchased adjacent to the existing cemetery, and it was cordoned off. This was a colossal accomplishment, after having years go by when this objective could not be attained.

The last *Gabbai* of the *Hevra Kadisha* before The *Great Catastrophe*, was R' Sheft'eh Kaufman ז"ל. It was in his house that the ancient *'Pinkas Belica'* could be found in which all the important occurrences in the town had been written down, over the course of hundreds of years, as well as a list of all the deceased.

The End Draws Nigh...

These improved circumstances came to an end with the death of Pilsudski in the year 1935. Other winds began to blow. The anti-Semites reared their heads. Anti-Semitic organizations were created, such as '*En-Da*,' and '*AZAN*.' In the universities, Jewish students were beaten. Later on, they had to sit on the left-side benches. Also, pickets were set up in front of Jewish businesses, and Christian customers were not permitted to shop at Jewish establishments. Pogroms became frequent occurrences.

There were also many enemies of the Jews in Belica, and they would often incite the mob to a pogrom aimed at the Jewish stores. They would especially do this on market days.

Hard times encroached on the Jewish populace in Poland, especially after the Hitler regime consolidated its control over Germany, and then went after the Jews in Germany.

Refugees that fled Germany also got as far as Belica, where they told of, and portrayed the terrifying incidents that the Germans were visiting upon the Jews.

New refugees would arrive on a daily basis. All bare and naked, because the Germans took everything away from them. Everything that we heard from them appeared to be so impossible, so impossible...

And so the time flew by. The situation grew worse from day to day, until the Polish-German War broke out in the year 1939, and that which seemed to be so impossible, became very close, tragic, and real...

The Bloody *Rosh Hashana* of 5679 (1918)

By Menachem Niv

(Max Jasinowsky)

Page 100: *Taib'l Jasiniowsky (on the right) and Family*

Page 102: *(Top):* *At the Entrance to the 'Paraveh Mill'*[30]

(Bottom): *In the Woods of the Neman Glass-works*

It is the year 1918, three days before *Rosh Hashana*. It is late afternoon. I, a young boy, barely nine years of age, am playing with my friends on the grass behind the stores. My father, along with Garberowicz (from

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30 The steam-driven mill

Neman) had just then arrived back from the forest. My father calls to me, and sends me to a certain gentile, to take Garberowicz to the Neman station. I do not find the gentile at his home, and so my father sends me to a second one. My mother does not understand why Garberowicz has to travel home at such a late hour, since he could spend the night with us. My father, however, stands firm on his demand: 'In these days, everyone must sleep in their own home,' he says. Did his heart foresee what was going to happen at night?

It is night. Someone brutally awakes me from sleep. I open my eyes and see two gentiles before me with guns in their hands. Shlomo and Maly'eh stand frightened beside my bed. The gentiles order us to go with them and they take us to the bedroom of our parents.

In that room, my father is standing shoved in between a bureau and a small table. A bandit is poking him with the point of his gun, and demands 'денгий' (money). Blood is running off my father. He begs for mercy from the bandit, asking that he stop hitting him. 'Take – he says – everything in the house, here are standing boxes full of fabric, I have no money, because today there was a payroll day in the forest.' The bandit does not want to hear this, and keeps on beating him.

At a specific moment, when, it would appear, that he could no longer bear the beating, he turned over the little table. The lamp that was standing on the table fell to the floor, and the flammable liquid caught fire. My mother threw pillows and blankets on it, to extinguish the blaze.

In the confusion, a shot is heard, and here, we see our father fall to the floor, with blood spurting from his heart. Our mother wants to help. but one of the bandits does not let her: 'Он притвраеця ' (He is faking), he says. Our mother challenges the bandit, and the next thing, I see my mother also lying on the floor. The bandit had given her a kick with the tip of his boot in her side. She fell, and was unable to get up.

As our mother later told us, when she came to, it was light in the house, and our father was to be found in the bedroom. Holding her hand, he died, and left a widow and three orphans.

As it later was evidenced, the bandits, while it was still day, had hidden themselves in our two-story house, where the pharmacy was later to be located. A Russian doctor lived there, who was an escaped Russian prisoner, and who was connected to the bandits. Also, other Russian escapees hid themselves out in the forests.

Several elderly German soldiers maintained order in the *shtetl*, who were semi-invalids (a stronger garrison was stationed in Njacec). In leaving their hideouts at night, the first thing the bandits did was to tear out the telephone wires, which led to Njacec. Additional bandits came to their support. Near the forge, at the end of the Netech' Street, wagons from the villages stood ready to take in the plunder.

On that night, they attacked two other houses, Eizhik's, and my aunt Faygl, where Eliyahu Yankl's also lived, with his wife. Fortunately, [the bandits] satisfied themselves with giving a severe beating, and robbing whatever it was that was available. In the Bandit group that attacked our house, was the bandit '*Otiec Andrei*' and as it was told, wherever he attacked, a victim had to fall.

Nearly fifty years have passed since that tragic night, and to this day, I can see the terrifying picture before my eyes, just as if it had taken place yesterday.

Jewish Settlers Around Belica

By Dov Kaufman

Page 104: The Train Station at Sjalec (Neman)

The Belica vicinity was one of the largest in the Lida district and encompassed close to seventy villages. In each village, at one time, 1-2 Jewish families lives, who were engaged in a variety of occupations: storekeepers, smiths, land managers and tenant farmers for fields and orchards. A large part of these Jews were knowledgeable in Torah and did many mitzvot.

These, approximately, one hundred Jewish families in the villages, were counted as an integral part of the 130 families in the shtetl, and were intimately connected to the *shtetl* in commerce, in buying and selling, and with all of the tradespeople, and especially with the '*Heders*' for the education of the children. Before the High Holy Days (*Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*) all the village Jews would come to town with their wives and children, with tens of wagons packed full with packages and food. The wagons were stood with people they knew, or around the houses of study. which were overflowing with guests for the holidays.

This is the way things went on until 1905, which brought with it, not only the revolutionary movement, but also a movement of pogroms. Indeed, this last movement, tied to blood-libel incitements, brought matters to the point that part of the Jews abandoned the villages. In the year 1912, when a well-known decree was issued by Czar Nicholas [II] about a special 'Pale of Settlement' for Jews, these settlers had to quickly liquidate their assets in the villages, and moved to the city. Only a very small number of Jews, who had [certain] privileges, remained in the villages.

During the war years 1914-1918, almost all 0of the Jews abandoned the villages because of a fear of battle operations, as well as assault by bandits. Only the Jews of Hancavicy and Vaskovicy remained as residing Jews until their final liquidation by the Nazi murderers in 1941.

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The village of Sjalec, (10 km from Belica) was always a sort of suburb to Belica. There was not a financial initiative taken in town, in which the residents of Sjalec did not take part. Most of all, it is important to stress the great goodness and open hands of the Szliapocznik-Garberowicz family.

Even the *Keren Kayemet* boxes were to be found in Sjalec, and every couple of months a couple of young people would go there to empty the *Keren Kayemet 'pushkas.'*

Because of the train station and the Neman River, there was much lumber concentrated in Sjalec to be sent by either train or the river. For this reason, many outside people could be found there, who brought in business and a great deal of activity.

The village always had its own *minyan* for prayer, even on the High Holy Days. At one time, there was a mill

and a factory in the village. In the years 1926-1929, *Halutzim* preparing for aliyah were brought there for training, prior to emigration to the Land of Israel.

In the years 1934-1936, a lumber factory was built and expanded, where hundreds of workers were engaged and employed, among them also local and Belica Jews.

The Jewish Settlers Around Belica

Compiled By: Z. Itzkowitz, Y. Baranchik, Y. Zlocowsky, Z. Yosselewicz, E.M. Savitzky, D. Kaufman & Y. Kremen)

Page 107: *The Shelyuvsky Family (From Naharodavicy)*

Page 108: *(Top)* *Yehuda Szeszko ('Der Stoker[31]') and Wife*

(Bottom, Left): The Szeszko Sisters

(Bottom, Right) David-Leib Szeszko

Orig Order	Village	Last Name	First Name	Occupation
1	Ust'ye	Novogrudsky	Abraham	Miller
2	Antonowca	Wein	Aryeh	Prominent Factor
3	Oszyc	Gryn	Abraham	Smith
4	Belica Ferry	Molczadsky	Munya	
5	Belica Estate	Namiot	Family	
6	Baraky		R' Meir-Itcheh	
7	Bondanka	Nisselevich	David & Meir	Millers
8	Boyaczky	Wilkomirsky	R' Mordechai	
9	Borowic	Families	Two Jewish	Farmers & Saloonkeepers
10	Boyary		Lejzor & Son, Fyvel	Der 'Boyarer'
11	Belevtsy	Gapanowicz	R' Lejzor	The Land Manager
12	Butily		R' moshe-David	The Land Manager
13	Bory	Iliutowicz	Hirschl	The Land Manager
13	Bory	Nisselevich	David	Pitch Merchant
14	Bondary		R' Hirsch'l	Storekeeper
15	Benevichi	Family		Combing Wool
16	Glushitse	Lushnatsky	R' Aharon & Family	Pitch Works Deep in the Forest
17	Gezgaly		R' Fyv'eh	Innkeeper
18	Drozdowa	Fyv'eh-Yosh'keh's Brother-in-Law	R' Abraham	Innkeeper

[31] Indicating he is from the village of Stoky.

19	Dzitrik	Novofrutsky	Basheh	Farmer
20	Hancary		Saul	Miller
20	Hancary		Yankl	Innkeeper
21	Holdava	Iliutovich	R' Isaac & Son	
22	Hancewicz		R' Eliyahu & Son, Leib'l	The Ferryman
22	Hancewicz	Kaplinsky	R' Yankl	
23	Waskewicz	Shmuckler	Nehemiah & Family	
23	Waskewicz	Kaplinsky	Family, et al.	
24	Zachepichi		Israel	The Smith
25	Zaymishche	Family		Farmers
26	Zareczan	Novogrudsky	Joel & Fyv'eh	Innkeepers
27	Zbljany		Jonah's Aharon	Innkeeper
28	Zbljany Estate	Krasnoselsky	Itcheh	Factor
28	Zbljany Estate	Iliutovich	Abraham	The Land Manager
29	Czertok	Zlocowsky	Yosheh	Miller
30	Tabola-Osowa		Raphael	Der Taboler
31	Yamonti		Averm'l	Der Jamenter
32	Jeremic		Leib'eh	The Factor
33	Letucy		Yankl	The Dyer
34	Lozany	(A great Scholar)	R' Itcheh-Leib	Innkeeper
35	Jukovsina	Several Jewish Families		Factoring on the Estate
36	Lubienica		R' Itcheh & Son, Yehoshua	Miller
37	Lesniki	Levin	R' Avrem'l	Cupboard Builder
38	Mostreukha	Chazan	R' Yaakov	
39	Mostowlian	Zlocowsky	R' Chaim	A Scholar
40	Mocevicy	Molczadsky	Yankl	
40	Mocevicy		Fyv'eh	Der Moszewicer
41	Mostishche		Moshe	Innkeeper
42	Mesilowka	Dworetsky	Velvel & Ber'l	Millers
43	Netech'	Rafalovich	Shakhna	A Factor
44	Nowy Sad			Innkeeper
45	Ogorodniki	Kaplinsky	Sholom & Son, Nehemiah	
46	Naharodavicy	Shelyuvsky	R' Velvel & Family	Miller
46	Naharodavicy	Urinowicz	Family	The Land Manager
47	Sjalec	Garberowicz	Family	
47	Sjalec	Gryn	Hirsch & Family	
47	Sjalec	Yellin	Yaakov & Family	
47	Sjalec	Yellin	Shlomo & Family	
47	Sjalec	Mayewsky	Lejzor-Mattess & Family	
47	Sjalec	Szliapocznyk	Abraham & Family	
48	Soroki		Family	Estate Factor
49	Solomianka	Szkliarsky	R' Abraham	Innkeeper
50	Stoky	Szeszko	R' Yehuda	Miller & Factor
51	Piasky		R' Herz'l	Innkeeper
52	Panimaniec	Odzhikhowsky	R' Baruch & Son Yankl	Pitch Works
53	Pieskowski	Odzhikhowsky	R' Aharon	Innkeeper
54	Paracany	Belicki (A Great Scholar)	R' Isser	Innkeeper
55	Pocuki	Sokolsky	Abraham'l	
56	Pistuca		Abraham'l	The Factor

57	Fal'kovichi	Schneider	Family	
58	Caplic	Odzhikhowsky	Shimon	A Dyer
59	Klyukovichi	Bussel	Zelig & Family	A Smith
60	Korshaki	Der Zachepicher	Israel	A Smith
61	Kalpinsk		Nathan	Innkeeper
62	Maloe-Konyushany	Sokolowsky	R' Chaim	Combing Wool
62	Maloe-Konyushany	Sokolowsky	R' Moshe-David	Estate Factor
62	Maloe-Konyushany	Der Drozdower	R' Yankl	Estate Factor
63	Bol'shiye-Konyushany		R' Yeshayahu	The Factor
64	Kryvicy		Yehoshua	The Factor
65	Korolinka	Baranchik	Hesh'l	The Musician
66	Ruda		Meir	Der Ruder
66	Ruda	Graznik	Family	

Part Two

חלק שני

צווייטער טייל

My Father, The Rabbi *Gaon* R' Joseph Rudnick זצ"ל

By Abraham Abir (Rudnick)

Page 112: *The Rabbi Gaon R' Joseph Rudnick and His Wife*

Page 113: *The Family of Rabbi Gaon Rabbi Joseph Rudnick*

Page 116: *Facsimile of the obituary for Rabbi Joseph Rudnick that appeared in the Vilna Orthodox Jewish paper 'Dos Vort,' May 26, 1933. (1 Sivan 5693, Rosh Hodesh).*

Page 126: *Two pictures taken on the 'Market' in Belica (1930) during the visit of the daughter of the Rabbi R' Joseph Rudnick, Mrs. Sarah Ram, who came as a citizen of the Land of Israel to visit the shtetl.*

The life and history of my father are precious and close to my heart more than my own soul, and this endeavor has enabled me to make their essence visible in writing, according to how these things were etched into my memory, and from what I heard tell by others.

While still in early childhood, my father stood out for his talent and intelligence, his good nature and his lively and faithful heart, and everyone forecast great and wonderful things for him. When he grew up, he was educated at the Yeshiva of Volozhin (he learned at the same table with the young Chaim Nachman Bialik), and afterwards continued to be educated at the '*Kollel*' in Kovno, and was given ordination, with the license to direct, by the *Gaonim* – R' Shlomo HaKohen זצ"ל of Vilna, Our Teacher, the Rabbi Zvi-Hirsch Rabinowitz זצ"ל, the *Bet-Din* Senior of Kovno, and the *Gaon*, R' Moshe Donichevsky, the *Bet-Din* Senior of Slobodka.

The father-in-law of my father זצ"ל (my grandfather) was the Rabbi Gaon Abraham Avli, the *Bet-Din* Senior of Dvorchany, author of the commentary on the *Mishna*, '*Ahavat Eytan*' that was incorporated into the printed edition of the *Mishna* by 'Ram Publications' (my grandfather is mentioned in the book, '*Ohalei-Shem*' dealing with the great Rabbis of Russia).

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My father's first steps into the rabbinate were in Horodok that is near Bialystok – a factory town for the production of woven wool goods – in the home of the local resident rabbi, R' Nissan Brody זצ"ל, a famous rabbi and a principal activist on behalf of *Hovevei Tzion*. He was greatly influenced by him in the way he conducted rabbinical affairs.

My father-in-law, Rabbi Shmuel Avinoam (Zuckerman), who lived in Horodok at the time, tells about

him from his memories: "In those days, the Rabbi Gaon R' Nissan Brody took sick with a very severe and long-lasting illness, before he was sent out of the country for treatment by the doctors – and he invited the young bachelor rabbi R' Joseph Rudnick, a man who stood out for his generous qualities and good deeds, to conduct the rabbinical affairs in his absence. In a very short time, R' Joseph managed to endear himself to all the members of the city, to earn their loyalty, whether they were rigorously observant or freethinking, rich, or poor. We, the youth among the Zionists, organized a Talmud study group on the building of the Zionist Committee, and R' Joseph volunteered to lecture us. His lessons were interesting, to the point that in a short time, the number of listeners grew large enough so that even the large hall was not adequate to hold the entirety of those wanting to participate, and many would stand and listen through the open windows. This is because his explanations were easy to grasp, full of substance, and easy to understand, and in those places where they were appropriate, they were clothed in parables and examples drawn from the day-to-day lives in our own times."

" These lessons made a unique impression of its kind on myself and my comrades, who from that time on, began to get seriously interested in the study of the *Gemara,* and left an indelible impression on their soul and character. I will never forget the looks of the many of those who listened to his explanations, and their joy at they found in the enlightenment in the Talmud, which they had for years already forgotten, and if they remembered anything, it was somewhat dray and tasteless, and were now shown some taste and meaning in these words, and could be likened to someone stumbling on a treasure chest, and were quick to remark so on their feelings in this regard."

" When R' Nissan ז"ל passed away, many in the town demanded that R' Joseph be selected as the Rabbi, but R' Joseph himself was nominated by those who proposed to find a match for the older daughter of R' Nissan ז"ל, who would be a bachelor, ordained rabbi, and would be worthy of the exalted position of rabbi in our shtetl, and with this, the question of the recently orphaned family was also resolved, and so it was done."

The connection between the family of R' Nissan and my father's family continued afterwards, after my father left Horodok. Friendly relationships continued for many years between them – between the family of R' Nissan, and my father's family, including my father's brother – R' Shlomo Mayerson (who for many years was the administrative leader in Hadera) who brought R' Nissan's daughter and her children to the Holy Land yet in the days of The Mandate, and took an interest in their fate until such time as they grew up and settled in the Land of Israel.

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At the end of his tenure in Horodok, my father received an appointment to the rabbinate in the *shtetl* of Belica, and it was here that his talent and understanding of how to direct community affairs was revealed. Under the difficult conditions of the 'Pale of Settlement' when matters of making a living were as difficult as the parting of the Red Sea, and life was not secure because of the danger of attack by a predatory and exploiting Christian populace, and the malevolent authorities sought to interdict the initiative of Jews, and oppress them – the position of the rabbi was very difficult indeed. Apart from matters of religion, he would worry about all the other community issues, issues of the shtetl, everyone down on their luck, and all of the institutions that provided support and charity, *Bikur Kholim, Linat HaTzedek, Hakhnasat Orkhim, Gemilut Hesed, Hevra Kadisha, Talmud Torah* – as similarly caring for those who studied Torah, *Shas* study groups,

Eyn Yaakov, *Mishna*, and the like. It was he who had to make the effort, and was the facilitator, because the *balebatim* were busy with the concerns of making a living for their families, and only the very few could dedicate time for public service.

And seeing that the rabbi did not have the powers of police or other physical means, it was only through the influence of his character and authority, and in his powers of reasoning and persuasion, that he was able to sway the capable in the town and direct them to the extent possible in addressing community-wide concerns. Among the prominent activists in Belica were: The pharmacist, R' Abraham Kremen, The mill operator R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz, and many others.

The Rabbi's home was the center of community life, containing a room set aside, called 'the Bet-Din Shtibl,' in which, apart from formal legal hearings that were brought for the Rabbi's disposition, all meetings of community groups, committees and commissions took place.

R' Abraham Kremen would relate:

" When the activists sat down to meet, the Rabbi would sit as their head, and would patiently hear out the ideas and opinions of each and every participant, and everyone awaited the opinion of the Rabbi and his decision. The Rabbi weighed a great deal in his mind, taking into consideration the merits of the issue and the welfare of the community, and afterwards would convey his thoughts, which were accepted by everyone, and afterwards, as the leader, he would implement the decision, even if he were thwarted along the way by difficulties."

His understanding of life was of great assistance to him, in his many endeavors, that had a variety of nuances to them, and we would run out of space to try and detail them. Despite this, e are compelled to put down a number of stories about these undertakings, as I heard them told by the people of Belica, holocaust survivors, who are found with us today in the Land of Israel, and also from the mouths of those who were not fortunate enough to get here, and perished in the Holocaust.

Dov Grodzinsky[32] (Hadera) tells:

" In the year 1918 groups of bandits organized themselves, who would hide in the surrounding villages, to rob passers by, and also to assault the smaller towns, among them Belica. Our Rabbi was active in organizing defense, with an unusual amount of dedication – and like the Patriarch Jacob, in his time, he relied on three means: buying off the predators, prayer, and battle. However, out of recognition that our inferior strength in Belica could not stand up to the many strong and armed bandit groups, he decided to personally go out alone and meet the bandits, to speak with them, and ask them to spare the lives of the townspeople. The people who stood with him tried to discourage him from doing this dangerous thing, but he did not consent

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32 There is an ambiguity in the writing that makes it difficult to tell if the names **Grodinsky** and **Grodzinsky** are the same or truly distinct.

to change his mind under any circumstances, and turned to the gate, but his neighbor Gitt'eh ran to the gate, and stoutly stood in his way, not permitting him to pass, and in this way saved his life."

And this was not the only time he took his life into his own hands, in order to save the lives of those in his town, both individuals and groups. With is force of personality and character, he obtained the release of Jews who were captives of soldiers who stood ready to execute them.

R' Joseph Baranchik tells:

" At a time, when there was no flour for the baking of matzoh, our Rabbi k"z traveled with other activists to the city of Grodno (a distance of about 100 km) along faulty roads during the melting of the snow, in a wagon hitched with horses, and returned from there with wagons loaded with flour for matzoh. And how great was the joy of the community, at the prospect of being able to celebrate the Passover according to its proper ritual custom."

When, occasionally, a sever dispute would erupt (that could not be brought under control even with the power of the police), it was sufficient for the Rabbi of knock once on the table and to announce, "Silence" and immediately silence and calm would ensue, because they loved and respected him.

And in addition, R' Joseph Baranchik tells of his sermons, especially on the eve of Yom Kippur after Kol Nidre, at a time when the entire congregation stood oppressed and pursued and the Rabbi that lived with them , and endured with them during the year, and knows the troubles of each and every individual, encourages them by example and exhortation, and with words of the redemption that is destined to come. As a great believer, he would bolster their hearts with [visions of] the good future, and nourish the souls of his listeners with words of Torah, fables, told in good taste and with a full heart, full of affection for his listeners, and these things would be received in the hearts of his listeners and become etched into their memories.

And so it was with every important event, in general, or specific, the Rabbi knew how to aim and direct his words to the point – because it was the custom in the shtetl to invite the Rabbi to all events, such as a wedding, a *Brit Milah*, and also by contrast, God Forbid, to an event of loss, and the habit of the residents was to recollect, at every opportunity, the sayings of the Rabbi in every form of conversation or discussion, and this also served as a form of justification of the words of someone trying to justify a position.

In his lessons – whether it was from the books *Chayei Adam* and *Eyn Yaakov* for the simple folk, or the Mishna or Shas, or a page of the Gemara for the scholars in the *shtetl* (who, thank God, were not missing in Belica), there were always many people around the tables.

Among the scholars, I will recall here Rabbi R' Chaim-Leib Buczkowsky (a leather merchant and manufacturer), a very substantial and sharp scholar in Torah, ordained as a Rabbi [himself] who was a loyal friend to my father, very dedicated to him, and accompanied him in all that he undertook (when my father

left Belica to accept the rabbinical seat in Dieveniskes[33], there was a debate over whether R' Chaim-Leib would take his place in Belica). Among those worthy of recollection here is also R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz (that I have already mentioned above), the father of Zerakh and Rachel Itzkowitz (Hadera), who studied Torah and *Mussar* in the great Yeshivas of Navahardok[34] with R' Joseph Zundl ז"ל and was one of his choice students.

R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz, as a young man, was a great scholar, and for those times, also possessed very modern outlooks, and was a community activist that was dedicated and loyal, knowing how to deal with issues by applying common sense, of good temper, and he knew how to achieve compromise in a peaceful way, and because of this, he was always a help to my father. And the friendship between them was a great one, and passed to their children in great measure, to the point that they felt closer to one another than relatives do. The flour mill of R' Sh. Y. Itzkowitz was run in partnership with R' Yehoshua Jasinowsky (the father of Menachem Jasinowsky, one of the workers at the electric company), and he, too, was a loyal friend to my father.

I recall, when we were already in Dieveniskes, we received an honored guest in our home, a teller of parables (– our house was always wide open to every guest and needy person; my mother, the Rebbetzin, who was a great righteous person in her own right, would receive every guest that my father brought from the synagogue with great courtesy, and if there were not enough beds, they would take the doors off their hinges, and use them for the children of the house, and turn over their beds for the use of the guests). But this guest came to Dieveniskes when my father was already fatally ill, and he did not have the strength to deal with hi, and consequently, he complained to me, and said: I cannot receive the guest in accordance with our standing customs of yore – but if R' Shmuel-Joseph of Belica were with me now, he would surely take the guest from me, without me having to tell him, because this is what he would do in order to spare me this burden in my currently stressed condition.

In general, most of the men in Belica were Torah scholars, and possessed of beautiful spirit, and they well knew how to value the character of my father k"mz. When my father passed away, the people of Belica came from great distances, and in their many numbers, to his funeral in Dieveniskes, and they remembered to tell that the *Shokhet*, R' Lejzor (who was a scholar and a righteous man) would always say, that Rabbi R' Joseph Rudnick would approach any ritual question with great expertise, and knew how to analyze the underlying question posed before him with great skill and attention, ruling, in the end, according to the *Halakha*.

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The education of Jewish children in Torah and proper conduct was the central goal of his life, and he dedicated a great deal of his energy and resources in order to send those with the capacity, to study in the Yeshivas, and for those who were not so capable, he concerned himself with seeing that they learned a trade. R' Sheft'l the Tailor from Belica told, during the funeral, that when his son, Yerakhmiel traveled to study

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33 In modern day Lithuania. Not to be confused with Dainiskes, also in Lithuania.

34 An alternate spelling for Novogrudok

in a Yeshiva, the Rabbi went to see him off, and when he extended his hand to say goodbye, the young man felt something hard roll into his hand, and the Rabbi who sensed his puzzlement said to him: 'Don't worry my precious one, take this money, which will be of assistance to you in the strange land you go to.'

My aunt, the *Rebbetzin* Rut'l (in the United States) told me, that in giving charity out of his pocket, he would give it without counting, and when he was asked: 'Rabbi, why do you do this,' he would answer 'What do I have to count, only the pauper counts!'

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My father was opposed to the method of casuistry that was the practice in the Yeshivas of Lithuania, where even in the lower Yeshivas, they inculcated the young students with *Tosafot* and involved arguments, without paying attention to the straightforward literal meaning of the *Gemara*. In his view, it was necessary to first study the *Gemara* without the *Tosafot*, and only afterwards with selected *Tosafot* that relate to the literal meaning, and only when the student has already filled his belly with many different lines of reasoning from the *Shas*, is it possible to permit the study of the *Gemara* with all the *Tosafot*.

He would say that the answer to the questions of the Tosafot on the first page could be found by the student himself, once he reached the tenth page. As to myself and the friends of my age in Dieveniskes, he did not send to learn at the lower Yeshivas, but rather brought us to the higher Yeshiva in Radun, and there, with the counsel of the overseer, R' Eliezer Kaplan, took as a teacher for each of us, one of the senior students of the Yeshiva, and they taught us each separately, only the *Gemara* without *Tosafot*. And indeed, his method of instruction proved to be right with us, because we were able to advance so that after a year of this type of study, I was accepted to the sixth form of study at the well-known Yeshiva in Baranovici, with the Gaon, R' Elchanan Wasserman, whose style of study was also via the literal text, without the twists and turns of casuistry.

My father ז"ל, supported me generously for all the time that I was in the Yeshiva, and I was not compelled to have to take my meals at the tables of the *balebatim*, eating each day at a different home of the *balebatim*, as was the custom then, and similarly, I was not compelled to draw on the Yeshiva treasury, and I did not benefit from the so-called 'stipend' (as this form of support for Yeshiva students was called) even at the time when I studied in the higher Yeshiva.

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My father was a faithful shepherd to his flock, and thanks to the spiritual leaders and guides like these, our people were able to survive for so many generations in its long and difficult state of exile. And it goes without saying that he was a good husband to his wife, and a dedicated father to his children.

My mother told me, that he was in the habit of taking out the garbage at night, and bring in pails of water, and even to split the wood for cooking and heating, in order to spare my mother the labor, because we had no household help in our home. Despite this, the entire burden of maintaining the house, and even being concerned about income, all fell on my mother ע"ה, and she knew how to run a Rabbi's home with dignity and grace. Because, apart from her righteousness, and boundless love of Torah, she was a 'Woman of Valor' and beautiful, knowing how to overcome all manner of difficulties and was a great helpmeet to my father,

even in rabbinical matters, to the point that it was said of her that she is the Rebbetzin, not only because her husband was the Rabbi, but in her own right. From the considerable extent of the experiences that she saw, and heard, she knew how to rule on many matters of *Halakha*, but she was very careful not to say, off the top of her head, how my father might rule, but she would expertly convey details of the issues that were brought into our house, to my father, at those times when my father was away from the house.

My father did not always have the free time to concern himself with his household and children, but for sure, he dedicated special attention to orphans (perhaps because he, personally, was raised as an orphan).

When my sister Bruriah was in The United States (together with her husband, Abraham Aloni), Yaakov Cohen told them that he was orphaned as a child, and that our father looked after him, caring for his education and sustenance, and was quick to bestow guidance and extra affection on him, in order to full the most important gap in his life, and he remembers this, and feels it with all the fiber of his being.

I remember, once on the evening of the *Sukkot* holiday, an orphan boy came into the synagogue, and was wearing a torn hat. When my father saw this, he called the haberdasher, and asked him to immediately bring a new hat for the child, on his account, and that is what the haberdasher did.

Also, my stepbrother Rabbi R' Aharon, told when eulogizing my father, that for all his days, my father restrained himself from showing any special affection for his sons and daughters that he sired, on the suspicion that this would adversely affect his stepson, for whom at all times, and under all circumstances, he found the time to teach him Torah and proper manners, even if there was not enough time to do this for his own biological children. When my stepbrother came to our house, he was six years old, and tied himself with his entire soul to my father, and he, also, was privileged to take over his rabbinical chair after he [sic: my father] died, fulfilling his appointment with great success, because he followed in the footsteps of our father, and in his experience, after having become renown in his youth among the Rabbis, and was marked for greatness, were it not for *The Scourge* ימ"ש, that brought him down along with six precious souls of his family (in Ponar, that was in Vilna). The efforts by myself and Rabbi Zwick (his brother-in-law) from Petakh-Tikva, to bring him to the Holy Land were in vain, however, a young sapling did remain from him that lived to be able to fulfill this legacy in peacetime, to make aliyah with his family, because he was a great lover of Zion, and in his last days, R' Kalman Farber related to me, today he is an officer of the Ramla district – he was with him in Vilna, he was saved, and reached the Holy Land – and on his great focus in the study of Torah, and his variegated understanding, I was told a great deal, in sorrow and pain, about his comrade from the Yeshiva of Radun, R' Moshe Levin, separated for long life, the Rabbi of Netanya.

It was not only orphans that my father looked after, but all the families in his community, because one of his sacred duties was to write letters to America, so that they would help their relatives who remained behind in Russia, and there was practically no instance that his requests went unanswered. He would couch his letters in a terse, clear style, so as not to burden those who received and read them, and he would incorporate a lot of emotion and warmth of heart in them. Thanks to the support of relatives, the Jews in the 'Pale of Settlement' were able to sustain themselves, and they were able to give an education to their children, and even keep up the community institutions. My father had a robust connection to the activists in America, who sent very substantial sums to the *shtetl*.

Our family, as well, was able to survive mainly because of the support we got from our relatives in America, and not from the meager salary that the community gave to the Rabbi. My aunt, Chaya-Henya dedicated herself to this goal, who undertook this endeavor, approaching other relatives to provide support to their 'relative the Rabbi,' who was held in esteem and loved by all. My uncle, R' Yaakov send emigration papers to my father several times, and entreated him to come to America, but the concern over the education of the children, and his spiritual inclination, dis not make him desire life in America, and he kept deferring the matter. Because of this, my father yearned to make aliyah for his entire life, and was greatly overjoyed by the privilege of his brother R' Shlomo Mayerson ז"ל, the Head of the Hadera Council, who was privileged to see his daughters make aliyah while he was still alive, and settle themselves in Hadera (after them, most of the people from Belica that made aliyah went, and settled in Hadera, and it was in this way, that Hadera became a center for Belica émigrés in Israel.).

My father would get upset with those of our townsfolk who had relatives in the United States, in those cases where each of them saw the other as a competitor destined to capture the funds from their common relative. There were instances where one of them would 'snitch' on the other, saying that they really were not needy of support, because he has a substantial enough income to support his home. About the same time, an incident occurred that a family relative from a nearby town asked my father to write to a common relative in he United States about his straitened circumstances, and to encourage him to send support for him. My father immediately fulfilled this request by his relative, and immediately wrote to the common relative, in which he described the hard-pressed circumstances of straitened family, with words that came directly from the heart, and entreated him to help. After a short while, an answer was received, containing a thanks to my father for his effort on behalf of the plight of affected party, with a check for [both] my father and the relative. My father used this incident in order to chastise those of mean spirit and explain to them, that it is exactly the opposite: 'All who ask (pray to) a friend, they shall be answered first.'

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May father expended tremendous effort an a great deal of energy, in his concern for the members of his community in regard to the decrees of the government, whose purpose was to rob the means of sustenance away from the Jews, which centered primarily around the Wednesday weekly market, at which time the village residents would bring their agricultural produce for sale and, who in turn, would buy in the stores and order their necessities in the various manufacturing outlets in the town. And here, the government demanded the relocation of the market outside of the town, under the pretense of a hygienic need, namely to clean the market of dirt and filth, but the real purpose was to curtail and cut off the income to the Jewish storekeepers, because it was anticipated that Christians would open stores outside of the town. My father neither rested nor did he keep still, working and encouraging the town activists to work, even appearing before the authorities to argue his case, that there is a desire to rob the Jews of their means of livelihood. In the end, the authorities agrees to leave the market in its place, and only the livestock market was moved outside of the town, to a location very near to the town.

The authorities also sought to undermine the bakeries, in their demand that bread only be baked in electric bakeries, this at a time when there was no electricity in the town. My father traveled to the Provincial Head and asked for this decree to be annulled, and the Head conveyed his surprise that an intelligent man such as him would oppose a regulation that was for the good of the populace and to help protect their health. To this my father replied: I am located here for tens of years, and I have never once heard of any instance that someone in the town, or its surroundings ever died of eating bread, and because of this remote possibility,

you want to bring a certain death to tens of people. In the end, the Head was persuaded to set this decree aside, until such time that there would be electricity in the town, and there would be a possibility of installing electric ovens in the bakeries.

And it is of interest to look at a story of a Jewish baker, at the time the communists invaded Poland. At the end of The First World War, the Jewish baker was accused by the communist army, that he had baked bread for sale without permission to bake, and because of this, he stood to receive a death sentence. Despite the fact that my father knew that the communists did not pay attention to Rabbis, for the sake of saving a life, he decided to go and try to persuade them otherwise. They dug in, and questioned him as to how long he knew the accused, and my father replied that he always knew him, as an honest and respected individual, and that this was the first time he had every been accused of a transgression, whose full implications he probably did not even understand, and accordingly, deserves to be forgiven this time.

When the trial was ready, the prosecutor said to my father, that everything that they do, is open to the public, and therefore they would all go outside, where he would give his reply and decision. Outside stood a unit of soldiers. My father with the prosecuting officer stood opposite them, who announced the recording in the formal record of the hearing, and when he finished, he turned to my father and said: 'From what you have said, it appears that you are a friend of the accused, and there is one sentence for the transgressor and his friends.' My father wanted to reply, but one soldier from the rank, a Jew, put his hand to his mouth, hinting to him that he should keep still, and in this, he saved his life. When my father would tell about this incident afterwards, in which he explained what he had known in advance, that in the eyes of the communists the Rabbi was seen as a guilty party, he would add and say, that peace is pleasant even to those who are not observant, and it appears that 'I am a Rabbi also to the communists, because they need a Rabbi more than all of the townsfolk...'

In this connection, they would tell about an incident that took place in the days of the Czar, when they also hated Jews, but they would listen to the religious representatives of the community. In that time, the Patriarch came to visit Belica, and the entire population turned out to receive him, among them the Jews, with the Rabbi at their head, meeting him according to custom – with bread and salt, and he blessed him in Hebrew, with the priestly blessing, and the Patriarch replied to him in fluent Hebrew. This mad a very strong impression on the Christian populace, and the esteem of the Jews rose in their eyes.

My father was also welcome among the gentiles, and their intelligentsia were friends of his, including the Russian 'Pope' who was considered his friend. When the Poles captured the area, they confiscated the Russian Orthodox Church, and installed a Roman Catholic clergy, and the 'Pope' was driven out, despite the fact that the populace was largely of the Russian Orthodox faith. At that time, the 'Pope' came to my father to pour out his heart, and to lament the injustice done to the members of his community, and he cried before him bitterly. My father comforted him, as is the custom, and when he left, my father said: 'I am astonished at how he learned to complain so well about his bitter fate, and to weep, literally, like a Jewish Rabbi...."

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Despite the fact that Belica was small, there were many troubles in it, and a great deal of involvement, and these issues robbed him of all his time, to the point that the only time he had left for Torah study was in the

night hours. If, in the dead of night, you were to walk through the streets of town, you would see a light shining in one of the houses, and a sad sing-song melody would be heard, and this was the sitting Rabbi who sat and engaged in Torah study.

Frequently, one could encounter the Rabbi on the ways of the town, going to visit the sick, or to a house where there were orphans. There are no words adequate to describe his love for the members of his community, and their love for him, and the degree to which they held him in esteem. Despite all of his immersion in community matters, he found time to fulfill his mission and participation in additional needs.

The *Chafetz Chaim* זצ"ל issued a by-law, that every sitting Rabbi should visit three communities for purposes of delivering sermons, and that each and every Jew should donate no less than two dollars a year for the benefit of the Yeshivas. Among those communities that my father visited were the community of Goniadz beside Bialystok, where there was no Rabbi, and when my father finished his last sermon, he was given an offer of the Rabbinical seat and was asked to come to Goniadz. After this, a delegation of the respected people of Gunic came to Belica, in order to convince my father to take the offer of the Rabbinical chair. However, when the townspeople sensed this, they became very angry with them. On one of the Sabbaths, an important emissary arrived from Goniadz, and as it happened, my father was not in town, and on this occasion, the members of the community reneged on offering the visitor an aliyah to the Torah, and as it happened this was a prominent man, and this was the emissary coming to 'steal' their Rabbi – and consequently refused to extend him an honor. The guest, who was a learned man, reacted to this in saying: 'The *aliyah* to the Torah is not as important as *aliyah* into the Torah – to study it, and to know it,' and as a result I forgive you for the slight that you intended for me.

And it was not only for the Yeshivas that my father worked, but he also volunteered for an entire month (in the month of Tishri) to spend time with the Gaon R' Elchanan Wasserman, in the country of Latvia, and did work their for the Yeshiva *Ohel Torah* in the city of Baranovici (that is where he sent me afterwards, as I have said, to study Torah, because he held the Rabbi's teaching methods in high regard).

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When questions regarding Kashrut arose, it was the custom to come to the house of the Rabbi. And here, on one Friday, as I passed through the market with my father, a woman approached us with a chicken in her hand, and took advantage of the fact that she was able to intercept my father on his way, indicating she had a 'question.' 'You did well, mt father replied, 'Why should you exert yourself to go on Friday all the way to my house,' and in the midst of talking, entered a nearby house, he was handed a knife, and he opened up the chicken. He examined it, and gave the ruling that he gave.

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From my childhood on, I loved helping my father build the *sukkah* that he built himself (he would walk with me to gather the *skhakh*). The *sukkah* was large, because during the holiday, the house of the Rabbi was visited to perform the mitzvah of visiting a *sukkah*, and the entire community would come into the *sukkah*, to taste a bit of food, and to celebrate after the recitation of *Shir HaMa'alot* in the synagogue.

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On every Friday, my father would personally go around to inspect the *eruvs*, in order to assure that no one

would, God forbid, violate the Sabbath, in the movement of anything from one property to another on the Sabbath. There was a season, when the *eruv* was torn every Friday, and my father would make the effort to repair it, and they even attempted to turn to the constabulary, because they suspected that the gentiles were doing this to upset the Jews, but in the end it became clear that the police themselves were doing it for their amusement, in order to anger the Jews.

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Israel Zlocowsky (Netanya) would tell:

'In the year 1919, the Poles came into the town, and at their head was a detachment of cavalry, and they demanded of the Jews that they bring a huge amount of oats, and if it turned out to be insufficient – they will be punished severely. The Rabbi, accompanied by one of the prominent gentiles, went to request a removal of the order, but did manage to reduce the demand considerably. The Rabbi personally went through town, and gathered the grain, and the better people among the gentiles helped my father in obtaining the grain.'

This was after The First World War, and I remember that my father sat in his courtroom and studied the Gemara, and because of the heat, had taken off his jacket, and remained sitting only in his *Tallit-kattan.* Suddenly the head officer of the police (the son of the Russian Orthodox priest) entered, and when he saw the officer, he rose to put on his jacket, but the officer, who apparently was impressed by his dignity said: 'Why do you have to put on your jacket, it is much nicer this way!'

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As to every little thing, sometimes a dispute over a single small golden coin (worth 15 *agorot*), Jews would customarily come to the courtroom to undergo a judgment, as our sages taught: we infer that the children of Israel were litigious, etc. (Rashi, Deuteronomy 1:12). It was customary, that after the arguments of the sides was presented, each side would pay the Rabbi a judge's fee, but in most cases, my father would not take such a fee. In those instances that he would request a judge's fee in advance, he would pay the one who demands money, the sum that was demanded, and in this way eliminated a biased judgment. In cases where the complainants were poor, he would pay the demand out of his pocket and say: 'see, I have been privileged with a boon, for a minuscule amount of time, I have earned so much time, and from you, judging and dispute, rage and anger.'

If it happened that someone recollected a financial promise that he himself did not remember, or if there was a misunderstanding at the time of a negotiation, or a slip of the tongue, my father would immediately take out his wallet and pay, without getting into any discussion, even if the details were not recollected, or even if the demand was very faulty, because if he were to initiate questioning or clarification, and explanation, it would be an insult to the dignity of the person making the demand.

My Sister Tema (in Hadera) Tells:

'During The First World War, when I was a little girl, our father took me in hand, and gave me a pitcher of milk, and went with me to a poor family encumbered with many children, and told me to take the milk in there. On walking home, he said: 'How can we drink milk and they have none?'

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I do not remember the details concerning my father's change of position, or the negotiations, and my father's agreement to accept the appointment as the Rabbi of Dieveniskes, however I do remember the time when we made the move to a new location.

When the news spread through Belica, that my father was going to go to a different Rabbinical seat, the town was like a boiling pot. People began to plot means to prevent him from leaving. They decided to double his pay, and people came to beg him to stay on in his current position, emphasizing that this was everyone's will, even from those who do not value the Rabbi's role in leading the community.

When the wagons sent from Dieveniskes arrived to take our belongings and furniture, all the residents of Belica assembled with the single mind of preventing this, even if by force, but my father explained to them that the parting from Belica and its people was just as hard for him, but in view of the fact that he had accepted the contract of being Rabbi from the people of Dieveniskes, and seeing as they also had invested energies into the arrangement of a residence for a Rabbi, he could not take back his acceptance.

Under guard, so that nothing would interfere with the work of the wagon drivers, they began to load and tie everything, and when they finished this loading, they left for the road, and we all traveled by train. The townsfolk all came to escort the Rabbi on his way, and the entire community went to the synagogue, and the Rabbi took his leave with a heartwarming sermon, in which he cited the words of the prophet Samuel when he crowned King Saul: 'Whose ox have I taken, and whose ass, etc. (I Samuel 12:4) and added to this the words of Rashi 'I would ride on an ass to deal with the work of attending to their needs' (and I did not take from them). As always, and in this case as well, the words were appropriate to the occasion, because they all knew that he served his community with total dedication and his salary was minuscule.

The entire community – men, women, and children – escorted the Rabbi and our family from the synagogue to the outskirts of town, and hear the march halted, and R' Eliyahu Sokolowsky spoke and said: 'For lo, the Rabbi was like a gold braid that united us all, and bound us one link to the next link, and now that he is leaving us, let all of us guard this unity, and let us walk in the way that he has taught us.' And in tears, all took leave of one another, with wishes for success in the new location.

In the confusion, we had forgotten about R' Itcheh the *Shames*, who was tied body and soul to the Rabbi and his family, and now as we were moving away, we sensed his absence from the crown, and my father was worried that something may have happened to him. When we arrived at the Neman train station, and were getting ready to board the train, being very worried, suddenly R' Itcheh appeared, crying and wailing like an infant, unable to utter a word, not even 'good-bye.' He attempted to enter the train with us, to travel with us, but we persuaded him to return home with the wagon driver that had brought us.

We traveled for about three hours until we reached the station at Benjakoni, and it was here that the dignitaries of the Dieveniskes community were waiting for us, and we all went into a house full of light that had been arranged for our use in the station, in our honor, and wine and refreshments were put out, and we sat with everyone around a set table in an atmosphere of friendship and with pleasant conversation. At this

party, I remember the tailor, R' Shmuel Kherson, the *Gabbai* of the synagogue, who also led prayer services, and he entertained the guests with his sweet voice. Also, Zush'i-Yankl the owner of the pitch works, and Aryeh-Leib Rogel, the owner of the pharmacy appeared, as did many others. My father got into a discussion with R' Aryeh-Leib regarding the house that was being built from scratch after the fire, and he was happy to hear that it was already built up to the ceiling, and the remainder of the construction would be completed shortly.

On the following morning, we continued on our way – and the distance from Benjakoni to Dieveniskes (about 30 km) we covered in a wagon hitched with horses. The road passed through pine forests and gentile villages, and only one small village with twenty Jewish families, named Kolilszuk was halfway along the road. We were told that at one time they had their own Rabbi, but in recent times, the village appended itself to Dieveniskes.

Here we encountered Jews who had come on foot from Dieveniskes in order to receive the Rabbi, and among them, etched in my memory is R' Pesach the Shames, a Jew who was possessed of humor and light of foot. He told us that a few kilometers from Dieveniskes, the entire community was waiting for us, and they had erected an honor gate for the arrivals, and my father was very moved, and said: 'Jews who live in a sea of rural gentiles, raise themselves from their daily routine, and give up a day of work, in order to take part in offering their respect to an officer of the Torah by which they live their lives, and who from their own good will have selected him as their spiritual leader, is this not independence and freedom in the midst of bondage?!'

We arrived at the rendezvous point, and the entire town – from the very young to the very old, children and women – everyone stood at attention. I remember that my sister Bruriah – at that time a student at the Hebrew Gymnasium named Epstein, in Vilna – stood up in the wagon, and spoke in Hebrew.

From there, the entire retinue continued to the synagogue, which was all lit up by the light of the day, and this added a special festive air. My father, wrapped in his *Tallit,* went up to the lectern beside the Holy Ark, and gave his sermon in front of the townsfolk who filled the premises to its capacity. I do not remember the details, but before my eyes, the spirits of those who stood there, are standing now, and the pleasure on the faces of the listeners, and the nodding of their heads as a sign of agreement with his words.

When my father descended from the *Bima,* the entire congregation surrounded him to shake his hand. My father led this community for nearly ten years up to his last day.

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My father ז"ל was a great lover of Zion, and dedicated part of his time to Zionist activities, participating in get-togethers for purposes of developing the Land, and he did a great deal for the Zionist ideal in his community. I remember, in one of his exhortations, he said to the members of '*HeHalutz HaDati*' in Belica: 'And here the sons of Gad and Reuven said to Moses, we will be among the first to go among the children of Israel... but Moses, our Teacher amended their words and said to them: – you will gird yourselves to go before the Lord to battle; from this we learn that the pioneer is first to go before the camp in the name of the Lord, that is how Moses taught us, and so it is for us to act accordingly in our day.'

In Belica, all of the young people were Zionists, and committed to the concept of building the land, and many of them participated in such training, and subsequently made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

I recall an instance, when I stood to pray the morning service privately in one of the corners of the synagogue in Dieveniskes, and the voice of my father, choked from crying, reached my ears. I went over to see what had happened, and I found him sitting and teaching his neighbors the *Mishna* in the tractate of *Bikurim*, which described how her forefathers brought the first pickings of the fruit to the Holy Temple with great pomp, and the *Mishna* concludes with when they arrived at the Temple Mount, 'Even Agrippa the King carried a basket on his shoulder and entered.' Out of a surfeit of emotion and longing, my father cried, along with his students, who were *balebatim*, and to this day, that image stands before my eyes – mature men, sunk in the concerns of their daily lives, crying from a surfeit of longing for the glory days in the Land of Israel.

May father always underscored his satisfaction that he was privileged to have some of his children in the Land of Israel, and he would add: 'People say that whatever a person does not achieve in his life, he achieves through his children; I myself did not make aliyah to the Land of Israel, but I was privileged to see that my children did.' And so, while he was still in good health and well-being, he planned to visit the Land of Israel, going to his brother R' Shlomo who was very much beloved by him, and he said: After I return from my visit, let us all make aliyah and settle in the Land, all the members of our family. He received a visitor's visa to enter the Land of Israel, and everything was ready for him to make the trip, but in the meantime, he suddenly felt not well, and decided to turn to Dr. Shabad in Vilna, to give him an examination. During this examination, the doctor discovered that he had an incurable cancer.

My brother Aharon and sister Bruriah traveled with our father to Vienna (Austria), where there were great experts in medical science, and they were followed by my uncle R' Shlomo and my sister Sarah, and everyone did whatever was possible to save his life. Despite taking him into an operating room, and putting him under anesthesia, the doctors declined to operate after they conferred on the type of disease and the condition of the patient. He did not know that they had not operated, and said afterward that he doesn't feel that it did him any good, and that he was getting better.

Towards Passover of 5693 [1933] my father returned to Dieveniskes from Vienna, and for the night of the Seder, he even got out of bed, and with great difficulty, he consumed the requisite amount of matzo and said that he could not taste it. Despite the great suffering that grew stronger with each passing day, he did not lose his hope that he would regain his health. and he would repeat: How pleasant and beautiful the world is.

He kept on from day-to-day, and on 23 Sivan 5693 [June 17.1933] Friday[35] in the afternoon, he returned his soul to his creator. ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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35 Friday of that week was 22 Sivan, or June 16.

The *Rebbetzin* and Rabbi Amongst the Community

By Bruriah Aloni (Rudnick)

The home of the Rabbi blended beautifully into the life of the shtetl, and it accelerated the pace of the needy working people. Because of this, he was respected and held in high esteem.

The income of the Rabbi was based on the sale of certain specific necessities. given the acronym '*Gezela*'[36] for *Gazeh* (Kerosine), *Zaltz* (Salt), *Licht* (Candles), and *Hayvn* (Yeast). That is to say, the Rabbi had a 'concession for the sale of these items, only in honor of the Sabbath.

Out of his own good will, my father passed over the right to sell some of these items mentioned above, and we would sell only the candles and yeast (sales of the necessities were set by the Rabbi with the consent of the community). There was not a house in the *shtetl* where *Challah* was not baked in honor of the Sabbath, and therefore, every Thursday, all the citizens of the town would come to by yeast (and candles).

Our mother ז"ל, the righteous *Rebbetzin,* a pretty woman, a scion of a family of prominent great Rabbis going back in a chain for 36 generations, would engage in the sale of these previously mentioned necessities. As previously mentioned, each Thursday, after a hard day's work in the house, she would take out her merchandise, and put it on a special table, in the room used for the *Bet-Din,* and engage in her sales. She did not depend on family members who wanted to take her place in this labor, and not, God forbid, from a suspicion of shorting the customers, but rather, because during the sale, she would engage in conversation with everyone, asking about their business and undertakings, and everyone would pour our the troubles they had on their hearts in front of her – and because of this, my mother did not want to pass up the process. Many in the *shtetl* would wait until Thursday, for a face-to-face meeting with the *Rebbetzin*, so they could come into her house and to hear words of encouragement and succor from her mouth. Because of this, she knew all the people in the shtetl, and set her price in accordance with their socio-economic status, and only the very few paid the full price that was set. From the poor, she received either a small, or only symbolic payment (in order that they not be embarrassed), and for many, she would add flour, or other necessities in honor of the Sabbath, for no charge, and she would do this discreetly, with grace and tact, so that the recipient would not know about it, and not be exposed because of their need.

Our mother was noted for her fine memory, and if one of her needy customers would not appear on a Thursday, to receive the necessities, on the following day, she would send one of the children to bring the goods to the needy person, in order to avoid, God forbid, denying them for the Sabbath – and leaving them without meat, fish, and all sorts of good things to eat.... and it was in this spirit, that my mother organized a group of activists who would help her with the assembly of donations on behalf of the needy. If a misfortune befell a family, such as a merchant losing his assets, or a horse of a wagon driver falling, my mother would personally get on her own two feet and approach the well-to-do in the town, and collect the

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36 A play on the Hebrew word for robbery.

required funds, in order to get the family back on an even keel. It was in this way that our mother was a helpmeet to our father in all community affairs that he supported, aid, education, in which he was appointed as a head, and would encourage others to engage, faithfully, in community service, as, for example, in *Bikur Kholim, Linat Tzedek*, The *Gemilut Hasadim* Bank, and the Elementary Hebrew School.

This latter institution was, in my mind, was the crowning item in my father's effort in the *shtetl,* for the sake of study and education. He opened the doors of the school to all groups and movements in the shtetl, in order that they conduct – after school hours – their activities there, and in this way, he drew them close to the issue of the school itself. In the vision of his spirit, he saw that the school could cause the realization of his own world view, to educate the young generation of his community in accordance with his own personal spiritual values, and in accordance with his unshakeable core beliefs. He applied his entire energy and efforts to getting the school opened, whose expenses were large: educational materials, and books for everyone who needed them (and who in the *shtetl* was not needy?) Teacher salaries, maintenance of the building, and like items.

All the concerns of the school were on his head. and he demonstrated his capacity – he knew how to do the work, and engage others in the work, writing to the emigrants of the *shtetl* in America, to get them enthusiastic about his ideas, and his views, and he got their support.

All factions, even the communists, tried to get their officers elected to the school committee, in order that they have an influence over the education of the children, and it was not only once that there were very sharp differences of opinion. But my father always found the way to work out a compromise among the antagonists, and to cause the decision to conform with his point of view.

It is necessary to point out that the school stood at a high pedagogic level and a high level in its studies, and he always knew how to find the appropriate teachers. Nevertheless, each faction sought teachers that were sympathetic to its own spirit, and it was necessary to find teachers that knew how to keep all satisfied, that would be satisfactory to the observant as well as the more secular, and the Rabbi would carry the day out of his emphasis on the traditional and pedagogical character of the candidate. He would preside over periodic discussions with the teachers, and his eye was open and alert to all that went on in the school. His work on behalf of the school earned him respect and affection among all the residents of Belica, from all walks of life and persuasion, most of whom were exterminated, and are today no more.

Episodes from the House of the Resident Rabbi

By Tema Bakhamotsky (Rudnick)

Page 130: *Facsimile of a page from 'Oholei Shem' about 'Belica' and Rabbi Joseph Rudnick*

Page 131: *Tzila Rudnick*

My father, The Rabbi *Gaon* R' Joseph Rudnick, when he was 28 years old, was appointed as the Rabbi of Belica. I was a little girl, but I was impressed by the reception that the *shtetl* organized in honor of its Rabbi, and this impression has not left my mind.

We arrived at the Neman railroad station towards evening (about 10 km from the *shtetl*), and from there, we were required to travel by wagon. All the people of the shtetl, from the young to the old, came out on foot to welcome us, and each one carried a candle in their hand. My mother ז"ל , my sister Sarah, and I, traveled in an ordinary wagon, and my father ז"ל was taken in a 'carriage.' It was an entourage that was a sight to the eye: At its head was the carriage, and after it, the wagon, and after them, and around them – the entire community walking on foot.

When we reached the *shtetl*, we were taken into one of the 'beautiful, spacious' houses by the standards of that day (the rooms were lit with large kerosine lamps) and a large congregation pressed itself into the house and outside of it. The windows were wide open, and everyone was craning to 'catch a glimpse' beside a window (we stayed to live in this house for a set time).

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All community life, and the details of town affairs centered on the Rabbi's house, and whatever he said – was the law, since he ruled accordingly, was the judge, advisor, arbitrator, teacher and educator.

Each Yom Kippur Eve, the notables of the *shtetl* would come to the Rabbi's home for a discussion and to taste the interpretation of law that had been previously prepared in a unique way for this day. Between *Mincha* and *Maariv* on *Simchat Torah* the *balebatim* would be seated around the table in our home, to partake in sweet words and to hear Torah matters. Song would burst out of our house, and would echo in all corners of the town, after which, my father ז"ל would be escorted in a parade, with dancing, to the synagogue to rejoice with the *Hakafot.* This same picture would be repeated after the *Maariv* service – this time, from the synagogue back to our house, each person with a lit candle in hand, a heart full of joy and a song on their lips.

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There were no kitchens in the shtetl, and cattle were largely slaughtered at night, close to midnight, and if a 'defect' would be revealed in the lungs, they would immediately come to the Rabbi with the '*shyleh.*[37]' We children, had been asleep for some time already, and suddenly a tumult was heard in the house – here comes the ritual slaughterer and the butchers, bringing the lung, putting it on the table, and waiting for the Rabbi's word. My father ז"ל would look at the lung, palpate it, look in the volume '*Yoreh Deya*' and issue a ruling.

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[37] From the Hebrew word for a 'question,' indicating an issue requiring Rabbinical disposition.

I recall the incident of the 'kerchief' – a 'kerchief' had been stolen from one of the women, this being on a summer night, when windows were kept wide open. What to do? In the ensuing Sabbath, they held up the reading of the Torah in the synagogue, and announced an 'excommunication,' so that the thief, or anyone who knows about the theft, should return or give information about the stolen item. And lo, in the following week, on one evening, at a time when my father was busy with a *Bet-Din* case, I spied something through the window, and a scream escaped from my throat: Here is the 'kerchief!' – what happened? After the announcement of the 'excommunication,' the person who had possession of the stolen item must have become frightened, and what was he to do – to return it to the woman directly, well his name would then become publicly revealed, and so, he chose rather to simply put the 'kerchief' beside the Rabbi's house, assured that it would be returned to the woman without the matter receiving any publicity.

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During the First World War, when the German invader reached us, they grabbed a townsman with regard to a matter that caused them to convene a military tribunal. The military command was at some distance from us, in the city of Bialystok, and it was in the middle of winter, and who knew what the outcome of the military court would be, he could end up being sentenced to death. My father decided he would put himself in harm's way personally, and along with one of the other prominent members of the town, (Itzkowitz or Kamenetzky?) traveled to Bialystok, to enter a plea on behalf of the accused – to free him an save him – and indeed, succeeded in his journey.

After the First World War, when the Poles seized power, the pillaging of the 'Poznan cadres' exceeded all bounds, and they assaulted the Jews, tearing out their beards, and throwing them from the trains. On one of those days, my father was traveling by train to Vilna to meet with teachers for the town school, and the 'Poznan cadres' fell upon him as well, in the Lida station. Hinde Beksht was traveling with him, who was a Woman of Valor, and she debarked in the station, and reported this to the commandant, and he provided my father with a military guard until he reached Vilna.

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My father was an ardent Zionist as far back as his childhood. He participated in a variety of meetings of the 'Mizrahi,' and afforded his children a Zionist Torah education. His desire to reach The Holy Land was not consummated because of his illness and untimely death, but this desire was achieved by his children. To his satisfaction, we made *aliyah,* and he would publicly express his satisfaction about this. Members of our family were exterminated in the Diaspora Holocaust of our people, and we did not have the privilege of realizing our father's dream of having us gather our entire family in the Land of Israel.

May the souls of those who were killed in the Holocaust be guarded with us for eternity.

The Rabbi *Gaon* R' Aharon Teitz זצוק"ל

By Rabbi Moshe Levin

Rabbi of Netanya

Page 133: *The Rabbi Gaon R' Aharon Teitz*

Page 134: *From Among the Townsfolk in the Twenties*

I studied together with the famous Rabbi *Gaon* R' Aharon Teitz זי"ל of Belica. However, in the Yeshiva, he was called R' Aharon '*Dvenishker*' after the place where his parents lived, Dieveniskes, where his father זצ"ל served as the resident Rabbi.

I studied together with him at the renown Radun Yeshiva, run by the *Chafetz Chaim* זצוק"ל who stood at its head. At that time, the Yeshiva was at its peak splendor, both in numbers and quality: Approximately three hundred students learned there, among them *Gaonim*, and great scholars, whose being was suffused with *Shas* and *Poskim*, and the fear of God was their treasure, such that if they were privileged, so would be we, to have them today grace the reputation of our people with their erudition, wisdom, and charitable actions. The very few of them that survived the Holocaust, who were saved from the polluted talons of the Nazi beast of prey and its accomplices ימ"ש, today occupy the premier positions in the rabbinical and Torah world, like the *Gaon*, R' Mordechai Savitzky שליט"א, the Rabbi of Boston in the United States, and others like him who studied at this previously mentioned Yeshiva.

And in this period of zenith, the young R' Aharon זי"ל carved out a special place for himself in this Yeshiva – he challenged the ability to focus, and everyone looked upon him as someone who stood head and shoulders above everyone, and saw in him one of the leaders in the future. It was because everything about him spoke of grace and glory, both in external appearance and internally – he was pleasant in his disposition, quiet and confident. I cannot recall a single instance when I saw him get angry, without an ability to control himself, everything that he had to say was done so in a pleasant manner, carefully weighed, and with understanding. He was a person of impressive appearance, nobility and fine temperament, all of this carved into an athletic physique, and his physical stature reflected his inner spirituality. His expertise in *Shas* and *Poskim* stood on a firm foundation, and didn't just float around in the air, he was organized and paid attention to detail, and he was on the mark with everything that he did.

And here, apart from his great, substantial and encompassing knowledge of *Shas* and its commentaries, in all Talmudic subject matter, he developed a broad and orderly understanding as well. How greatly was I impressed when on one occasion, I saw his graduation diploma in which it all spoke of honor, with unusually high marks adorning it. Learning and wisdom amalgamated themselves in him, and became a single unit, his character being a manifestation of the words of our Sages in *Pirkei Avot*: 'If you have studied the Torah, do not keep it to yourself as a favor, because it was for this purpose that you were created.' The wisdom, Torah, and Enlightenment, that he carried with himself, were sunken deep in his soul. body and demeanor, as if they were created together with him, and that this was the way he was born coming from his mother's womb. However, he had a fine pedigree, being the scion of Rabbis of considerable scholarly stature and piety, however, the great spiritual legacy that he inherited came as a result of his own personal effort in scholarship, because he was one who was diligent to apply himself, and did not know how to remain idle.

We studied together in a group, learning '*Yoreh Deya*, and we put so much of ourselves into this, that we practically never thought to ask one another any personal questions. Apart from the R' Aharon the scholar, the expert, and the wise man, I do not know any other R' Aharon – how he grew up to that point, and where he obtained his wisdom and knowledge, and in what way, I do not know.

Of him, I will say the words of Bar Kipok about Rav Ashi (Tractate *Moed Katan*, 25B). Rav Ashi said to Bar

Kipok, 'And on this day, what do you say?' He said, I believe, 'If a flame falls among the cedars, what is the vine along the wall to do?' This statement requires some study to understand it: If it was Bar Kipok's intention to simply point out the difference between that which is high and that which is low, he would have only had to mention the vine, without appending it to the wall. It would appear that Bar Kipok essentially meant to find the difference not only between what is high and what is low, but also the difference between what is high and what is higher, because sometime it is difficult to distinguish between the cedar and the vine as to which is higher, because the vine might by happenstance grow along a high wall that reaches to the sky, and it is possible that the vine will attain a length higher than the cedar. However, there is a fundamental difference between them: the height of the cedar comes from itself alone, from its own independent characteristics, but not so the vine, who of its own character, is low, and only by chance that a high wall is nearby, is it able to raise itself. And it was in this way, that Bar Kipok wanted to circumscribe the impact of Rav Ashi in contrast to the remainder of the great scholars, who succeeded in raising themselves only by virtue of *the wall*, that is to say, by virtue of the place, and the key of life that happened to fall their way.

These words really do fit the Rabbi *Gaon* R' Aharon Teitz ז"צ. He was likened to a cedar that grew from within himself, his persona radiated from his own light, and also because of his immense learning focus, and his effort in Torah and wisdom, under all conditions and circumstances. Because of this, his short life are carved into me with an eternal stamp, and about him, we will be able to cite the words of R' Joseph son of R' Yehoshua who heard from heaven 'Fortunate is he who comes here, and his Talmud is in his hand.' That is to say, that whatever Talmud he has mastered, he did so at the cost of his own personal effort.

This was the type of person R' Aharon was. And therefore, it is no wonder that in the rabbinical world, he earned a respected place, when he personally took the rabbinical chair in Dieveniskes and its environs, and was one of the principal spokespersons, because he possessed all of the virtues required for leadership. What a pity it is regarding those swallowed up by the earth.

A Candle of the Soul to Dear Parents

By Zerakh Kremen

Page 136: *Abraham & Malka Kremen*

Page 137: *Left: Shlomit Kamenetzky, during her visit to Belica (1938) as a citizen of the Holy Land; The Pharmacist Abraham Wismonsky; Malka Kremen.*

My father, R' Abraham ben R' Yaakov-Shmuel Kremen ז"ל, was born in the year 1884.He was orphaned from his father (a baker) at a young age, and then the entire burden of his education ans the support of the family fell on his mother and oldest sister Dvora.

Already at '*Heder*' age, my father, as a boy, demonstrated that he was a very intelligent child, and for this reason, his Rabbis and teachers advised that he continue with his studies. By dint of his own effort, without any special help, he continued his secular studies and thanks to his dedication and talent, he became a pharmacist.

The old, established pharmacist in Belica, at that time, was Mr. Wismonsky ל"ז, and he sold his pharmacy to my father ל"ז in partnership with R' Yehoshua Jasinowsky ל"ז, who was wealthy, and afterwards left Belica. In this way, my father remained the sole pharmacist in the town, and in those days, when there was not a physician in the entire surrounding area, and only in the city of Lida, the town pharmacist was not only a pharmacist, but also a physician, veterinarian, and even a faithful family advisor.

I can recall that my father k"z would tell how he rescued people and cattle from certain death, by means of first-aid that he devised on the spot, following common sense...

During the time of The First World War, when most of the residents of the town left Belica and went off to the east, my father ל"ז remained in the town, and was transformed into the head of all concerns for everyone. Especially, he stood out in the administration of help during the typhus and cholera epidemics, that penetrated the entire area, and he worked day-and-night to save lives, without any form of compensation.

After the capture by the Germans in the year 1915, he was appointed by them as the '*amtsforshteher*' meaning – an official responsible for the area, and on the strength of his position, he became the ombudsman, on behalf of the Jews, with the occupying regime.

The gentile populace also respected and loved him. At every occasion, when the bandits would attack the town, his family was never assaulted in a harmful way, despite the fact that his medicinal inventory was pillaged in the pharmacy. Also, during the time of transition between regimes, in 1918-1920, the local gentiles protected him and his family.

In the year 1916, my father married my mother, Mrs. Malka, who was also from the Kremen family – from Zhaludok (they were distant relatives). My maternal grandfather, R' David Kremen (*Der Holdover*) ז"צ ל, was known as a formidable scholar, and as a successful merchant in the entire area. Before she got married, my mother completed a course in being a pharmacist's assistant, in Odessa, and carried the title of 'Pharmacist's Assistant,' and as a consequence, was of great help to my father in the pharmacy.

My older brother Yaakov was born in the year 1917.

After the end of The First World War, when the Polish government was established, my father dedicated himself during this entire period to community work, in all aspects of life in the shtetl, especially in the school committee and in the *Bikur Kholim* (he would provide medicines to those who required them either free or at half-price). When the fire-fighters brigade was founded, he was its first president, and accordingly, he was appointed by the authorities as the Public Guardian for all the people in the region *(Opiekun-Spoleczny)* and was one of the members of the local council (*'Gmina'*). When the order went out from the government to organize the Jewish communities, the community of the Lida district organized itself, and our town was added to that of the Lida community. The official representative of Belica in the district community was R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz ל"ז, but a local committee was organized in the town, in which the following were active: My father ל"ז, Shlomo Jasinowsky ל"ז, Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky ל"ז, Ephraim Ruzhansky ל"ז, Israel Zlocowsky ל"ז, Zalman Yosselewicz ל"ז.

Despite the fact that he was a pharmacist (an occupation thought to be 'free-thinking'), my father was an observant Jew who took care to observe the traditional customs in our house. He, personally, prayed three times daily, and loved to lead services in front of the Ark (he had a sweet voice, and even led services on the High Holy Days).

On Wednesday 9 Sivan 5693 (April 4, 1933) at the end of the local market day in town, he felt badly, and got sharp pains in his chest. The doctor who was summoned tried to save him, but his strenuous efforts were of no avail – and he passed away in a half hour. A heavy pall of mourning settled over his family and over all the people in town. In escorting him to his final resting place, the Rabbi of the town, and a number of the *balebatim* eulogized him, and he was laid to his eternal rest with great respect.

My mother continued to run the pharmacy (hiring a qualified pharmacist to help her), and similarly continued to dedicate herself to me and my brother with all her soul, and concerned herself with the continuing of our education.

During The Second World War, our house was burned down, along with most of the houses in the town. (My mother was left without a roof, and she moved to live with my aunt Dvora). When the Germans levied an inordinate tax on the Jews of the town, and took 25 hostages with the threat of killing them, my mother brought her precious valuables, and turned it over to Israel Zlocowsky, in order to redeem the hostages.

When the decree to drive all the Jews out of Belica was promulgated, my mother went to her place of birth in Zhaludok, to her sister Sonia, and it was there that she was killed along with all of the Jews of Zhaludok on 22 Iyyar 5702 (September 5, 1942).

May the souls of my precious and beloved parents be bound up in the bond of life.

To the Memory of My Father's Family R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz ז"ל

By Zerakh Itzkowitz

Page 139: R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz

Page 140: *(Top):* *The Itzkowitz Family*

(Bottom): *The Three Itzkowitz Brothers: Zalman, Eliezer & Zerakh, and their cousin Leib'l Shaftinsky (second from the left)*

Page 141: *Eliezer Itzkowitz*

Page 142: Pictures of Boys and Girls from Belica before the Holocaust (Untitled)

One of the personalities that undoubtedly stood out most of all in our town, was that of my father R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz. He was born in the year 1887 in Slonim, into a family of scholars, and Yeshiva headmasters. He received an education in the spirit and tradition of his family, studying in the Yeshivas of Slobodka, Navahardok, and received rabbinical ordination but did not practice accordingly.

He married a woman from Slonim, Mrs. Gitt'l Alpert, in the year 1910, and after they married, they raised their family in Belica. Mrs. Gitt'l was a vary intelligent woman, active, and a gentle soul. She was allied with, loyal to and dedicated to all of the widely branched community endeavors to which her husband dedicated himself.

My father, Shmuel-Joseph established a flour mill in Belica, which was originally steam-driven, but later was driven by a motor generator. This mill introduced life into the town, and contributed a great deal to its economic development, and provided its owner with the status of one of the few well-to-do people in the town.

My father was a very busy man, the mill and attendant business occupied him day and night, but despite this, he found time of individual study of a page of the *Gemara* on a daily basis, and even gave lessons at the *Shas* study group of the synagogue. In the same way, he dedicated himself with all his might and energy to the issues of education, and to the establishment of the community institutions of the town, and nothing was done in the town without his concurrence and advice. Every dispute and difference was brought to him, and in his great insight, he would find a compromise between the sides to their mutual satisfaction.

He was a progressive man, and he knew how to bridge the conservative tradition with the spirit of the times, and he gave his children both a religious and secular education, and even send them to study at secondary schools. When the children grew up and matured, their house was transformed into a meeting place for the youth of the town, who would come to this house thanks to its pleasant atmosphere with which its residents suffused it.

All the residents of Belica were imbued with the Zionist spirit, and the aspiration of many of its sons was to make aliyah to the Land of Israel. My father, Shmuel-Joseph was alert to the issues of these, and it was also his will to make aliyah and to live in the Land of Israel.

Many tribulations stalked him during the time of The First World War, at which time the mill was confiscated by the conquering regime, and he was forced to find [other] sources of livelihood to support the family, and also to offer help to the needy that were left without anything. Much later, two consecutive fires burned down the mill, and he was forced to build everything from scratch. Because of his boundless energy, my father Shmuel-Joseph managed to overcome all of these difficulties.

During The Second World War, his family was torn away from his family, and went off into Russia, and in this way, he lost his wife, daughter and two sons in the Holocaust.

In the year 1947, he reached the Holy Land, driven and sick, with the desire of his soul to live in the Holy Land finally realized, but not for very long. While he was here, the hope continued to flicker in his heart that, his firstborn son, Eliezer was still alive, and the news of his death hit him very hard, and had a profound impact on his already deteriorated state of health.

He resided in Hadera where he derived much nachas from his son and daughter who raised families there. The announcement of the independence of the State of Israel brought him additional happiness. In the short time that he was in Hadera, many came to know him, he was respected and loved, and he was elected to the religious council of that locality.

He passed away in March 1954.

May his memory remain preserved with us, together with the memory of all our townsfolk who were martyred innocents, from the community of Belica, among whom he raised his family, and spent the best years of his life – with dedication and esteem.

*

And I would like to add an additional item about my brother Eliezer ז"ל, because he was not only a brother to me, but also a soul mate.

He was just a year older than I, but we studied together at the local school in Belica, and also in the secondary school outside the house.

He was accomplished, knowing how to express himself in writing and in speech. He was an ardent Zionist, and the desire of his soul was The Holy Land, and his love for that Land could be read in his essays and many writings that were published in newspapers. He was saved from the talons of the Nazis, but death caught up with him in Russia, in the field of battle with the Japanese.

His death hit me hard, as well as my sister and father, who loved him fiercely, and invested him with all their pride. His death was a loss to the nation, because there were not many among the young like him, who by nature possessed that special fundamental spark of nationalism. I am certain, that had my brother Eliezer been granted the privilege of continuing his life in the Land of Israel, he would most certainly have made visible the fire in his soul for the Zionist cause, and the love that he had for, and was rooted in the land of his forefathers, just as he had shown this with such national pride, while he was still a youth in our town of Belica.

May the memory of my brother Eliezer also be guarded, and bound up as one, with the sacred memory of the youth of Belica who dreamt of the Jewish State of Israel, but were not privilege to live in it.

Our Town in its Period of Bloom

By Chaim Yosselewicz

Page 144: Ziss'l Kalmanowicz's Windmill

Belica, the little Jewish *shtetl* that sat beside the Neman River, appears to have vanished forever. It no longer exists. However, its appearance and configuration is etched into my memory – its few streets, and the houses on them. Its residents are also remembered by me, the institutions and the unique appearances. It is the *shtetl* in which I was born and raised, until Bar Mitzvah age, and it will remain in my memory forever, because I was a witness to the great Jewish tragedy of my generation, and this was – the Great Holocaust!! I was a witness to the destruction of my *shtetl.*

From whence doe the name 'Belica' come? This matter is not clear to this day. No historical sources remain [at our disposal] that would shed light on the origin of the name. With this, I do recall one lesson that I had in the history of the shtetl, in the Polish school, and the principal told us that the name is – of a Lithuanian noblewoman, Belica, who founded the *shtetl* hundreds of years ago, during the time that the Lithuanian nobles ruled this area, during the days of the ruler Gedymin. There were other theories as well, and as a result there were differences of opinion among the historians.

Belica sits on the banks of the great Neman River, whose clear waters have been flowing for thousands of years. This river is magnificent, and its banks are wondrous in their physical beauty. The rich growth, the rows of grass for the entire length of its extensive banks, and the living world, hidden in its stand of massive pine trees, the green fields – all of this turns the place into a paradise on earth.

During the hot summer days, the banks would attract swimmers and other people who would come to enjoy the beauty of the ambience, and the wondrous nature.

The *shtetl* itself was at a distance of about two kilometers from the Neman, and the suspicion was that this

was the reason for its establishment, since the river was a source of income to the residents, and also served as a communication link to the villages of the area.

Just like all the small towns in this area, the houses of Belica were constructed of wood, and its roofs were thatched from straw. There were very few stone houses in the town. The center of the town was the market street, and the stores, as was the street on which the synagogue stood.

Both commercial and life and entertainment centered about the market street, while cultural life – on the synagogue street (*Schulhof Gasse*). The central streets were populated by Jews. while the outlying streets were occupied by the resident Christians (*mieszczany*).

The nature of things was, that the occupations of the Jews were: commerce or crafts. The Christians, by contrast, engaged in agriculture, fishing, and other occupations.

The market street was wider than the others. On both of its sides, were stores and restaurants, and places of manufacture. There was also a place to tie up wagons for the villagers, who would arrive on Wednesday of each week, in order to sell their agricultural produce, in order to purchase their necessities, in the Jewish-run stores. The market streets would attract large crowds of villagers that would give it its external appearance. The farmers would arrive in their distinct garments, and on their loaded wagons could be found their agricultural produce. The relationship between the Christian farmers and the Jews was adequately normal.

The majority of the cultural institutions of the Jews were found on the synagogue street. There, was the location of the Old Synagogue, the Hebrew School '*Khorev*', the Library, the Jewish Bank, the offices of Gemilut Hesed, the station of the Fire-Fighters that also served as the place where local theater productions were put on. On the second side of the street could be found: The Polish Public School, the Catholic Church, with the priest's manse at its side; the police station, and in the same location – the city council (*Gmina*). There was also a Polish Hose, a Farmer's Bank a General Store, and Post Office.

In Belica, there was also a complex of working small businesses and most of it belonged to Jews: a automated flour mill that stood at the service of the surrounding farmers, a windmill, a factory for combing of sheep's wool, a wool dyeing operation, carpenter shops, small shops, and others. The livelihood of the Jewish populace was not profuse, but each family was able to support itself without support from the outside. Understandably, there were families whose economic circumstances were very bad, and the community concerned itself with helping them in all manner of ways.

Community life was organized by the local community council. The community would preserve the services in support of the lives of the Jewish populace. Under its aegis were: the synagogue, the Hebrew School, the Rabbinate, Ritual Slaughter, the *Gemilut Hesed* Bank, and the [ordinary] bank.

The synagogue building was one of the oldest in the area.

Its architectural style was unique, and followed an ancient style. Its furniture – simple and spare. The Holy Ark, and the Bima – ancient. In the synagogue there was a Hanukkah Menorah that was ancient, about 200 years old. A large assembly would gather for prayer during the holidays, festivals and Sabbaths. The Rabbi, R' Shabtai Fein ז"ל had a wondrous appearance, he was a scholar and a brilliant speaker. His sermons would have a strong influence on the entire assembly of his listeners.

During the High Holy Days, the elderly R' Sheft'eh Kaufman would lead services, whose voice was sweet and his intricate melodies would bring the worshipers to an high degree of faithfulness.

The elderly R' Nachman was a righteous Jew. He was also a very capable scholar. The man was retiring, and miraculous stories circulated in the *shtetl* about his righteousness, and also about his knowledge of foreign languages. In his final years he was left living alone and bereaved. It was considered an honor to be in his presence.

On the east side of the synagogue, beside the Rabbi, was the row of the prominent people of the *shtetl*. Their presence during the holidays, and on the Sabbaths, would imbue everyone with a air of elevated spirits, and this spirit had a special influence on the young boys.

On a holiday, or the Sabbath, a very pleasant and heartfelt mood permeated the *shtetl*. everyone would appear in synagogue with their children to attend prayer, while being attired in their holiday best. Family visits, and Saturday strolls to the estate of the noble, beside the Neman, constituted a very special experience.

On the eve of *Simchat Torah*, a large crowd would come to pay homage to the Rabbi of the *shtetl*, and escort him on a traditional walk, with dance and song, from his house to the synagogue. The traditional *Hakafot* in the *shtetl* were a sight that brought pride to the eye.

Purim, as well, was a very festive day in the *shtetl*. The children would run all over the streets with 'Purim gifts,' and the *Purim-shpielers*, knocking on the doors of the residents, in order to collect money for some worthy cause.

On the evenings of Purim and Hanukkah, by and large, there were parties, and plays, whose incomes were dedicated to one institution or another or – for charitable purposes.

The cultural life of the shtetl developed extensively in the years prior to The Second World War. The demand on the resources of the cultural institutions was great.

Young people were thirsty for knowledge, and the desire to learn was instilled in them. Dram circles were organized, as well as sports. Zionist youth groups developed, and a library was opened. These activities engendered an atmosphere of culture and community among the townsfolk.

Belica was blessed with a very talented group of young people, of pleasant disposition. I harbor no doubt in my heart, that had no terrifying Holocaust descended upon us, distinguished sons of our people would have grown out of them, loyal to their people, who were cut down by one third.

May the memory of all those who were good among our townsfolk be forever preserved.

Predation Against the Jews and Jewish Activities

By Dov Grodinsky

Page 147: *Etta & Chaim Grodinsky (In the center is the tombstone of Etta in the Belica cemetery)*

Page 148: *(L to R): R' Yaakov Meckel, R' Mordechai Kaufman*

With the Outbreak of the First World War

For a boy o eleven years of age, the impression it made was great: the conscription of an army of draftees, the scenes of leave-taking from parents, wives, children, brothers and sisters. To this day I remember the tragic parting of Moshe ben Yaakov Meckel and his wife, as if he sensed that he would never see them again. She clutched the wagon with her fingernails, as it began to move from its place, and it was impossible to get her to let go of the wagon. And, indeed, her husband was among the first of the casualties that fell in that war.

After this, I remember lining up beside the post office, at evening time, for the distribution of letters that had arrived from the front. Even people who didn't have anyone in the army, would gather, including those who were not even waiting for a letter from anyone. Similarly, every Monday and Thursday, the wives and mothers of those who had been drafted into the army came and walked together to the cemetery, crying bitterly, and prostrating themselves on the graves to ask for compassion on behalf of their husbands and sons.

The German Conquest and Local *Pogromshchiki*

The German conquest began in 1915. During three years (1915-1918) everyone suffered from a lack of food, shoes and clothing. We would eat a very austere form of bread, wear shoes carved from wood, and put on trousers made of tarpaulin, and jackets made from sacks.

In 1917, the fear of murderous banditry fell upon us, who organized themselves in the forests and villages. Despite the presence of German guards, and a gendarmerie in the town, these murderers were audacious

enough to attack one of the ho9uses at the center of the town, at night, and murdered Yehoshua Jasinowsky ז"ל, one of the prominent people in town, and then plundered the homes of the Abraham-Isaac Baranchik. and Eliyahu Meckel.

On the Wednesday after the German left the area, and before we had the chance to organize our own self-defense (we had a total of four pistols), about 200 well-armed people (each one had a modern rifle with plenty of bullets, a pistol and 1-2 hand grenades), assaulted the town. There was a Christian in the town at that time by the name of Ludowicki, who was a sort of ally in our security system, but he also served the murderers, giving them information about our arms (that there was no machine gun in the town, but just a few pistols) and also pointed out to them, the homes of the wealthy.

The Murder of My Father הו"ד

The murdering bandits came into our house before three o'clock in the afternoon. First of all, they demanded 200,000 golden rubles, and when all the money in the house was given to them, they began to rain down murderous blows on everyone present (there were 13 people in the house). They hit my father ז"ל with their rifle butts, and with a spiked whip that had a lead ball on its end. They broke all of the fingers on his hands, and they beat him all over his body, until one of them shot him in the back, and killed him on the spot.

My mother was not in the House. At that particular hour, my sister was with her teacher, Aharon Dykhowsky, and hen the shooting started, she ran home, but on the way, she went into a stable of a neighbor, and hid herself there. The murderers searched this stable several times, but they did not notice her. My oldest brother Aryeh was beaten by one of the murderers who came from the village of Zachepichi, and when he recognized him, he called him by name and begged for mercy. But the murderer knocked him to the ground, and began to garotte him, and it was only when my brother feigned death from the choking, that the murderer left him.

The murderers took off my new boots that I was wearing, and ordered me to walk barefoot with them (it was an intense cold and deep snow), to show them the homes of the wealthy. In the end, they took me into the house of Joseph Sokolowsky, where everyone had already been beaten to the point of blood running, by a different group that had gotten to this house earlier. In the bloodbath of this assault, there were four victims killed: My father, R' Chaim Grodinsky, R' Mordechai Kaufman, R' Yaakov Meckel, and R' Leib Radominer. The wounded were: My brother Aryeh, and Tuvia Meckel (today Zlocowsky), when a bullet went through her cheek.

During the Polish - Russian War

Pogroms and tribulation were also our portion in the year 1919, during the Polish-Russian War, when the Bolsheviks got to the outskirts of Grodno. From Belica to Lida, the way was open, without any military rule, but Lida itself was surrounded by Poles and there was a shortage of meat, fish, eggs, and the like. The situation was such that my brother agreed with David-Zvi Meckel and Israel Meiram Kremen, to buy a number of horses and wagons in partnership, and they loaded them up with a variety of products (they even

tied a live cow to a wagon), and they set out on the road from Belica to Lida. But even before they managed to reach the village of Drozdowa, they were surrounded by scouts from Polish cavalry, who arrested them on the complaint that they were communist spies. They were brought to the village of Netech', where they were sentenced to death by firing squad by a military tribunal.

When this matter became known in Belica, my mother ran immediately to the priest, and began to plead with him to rescue the sole breadwinner of the family, because it was known to the priest that there were no communists in Belica. Accordingly, the priest saved them, when he appeared before the Poles and said that the prisoners were well-known to him, and he addressed the issue from his perspective. However, from the beating that he received while under arrest, my brother only lived for another year and half, and in the end, fell in from cerebral meningitis and died. Another victim of this trip was Leah'keh Wolkowysky, who because of excessive weeping and emotional stress brought on by the sentence of the Poles, a blood vessel was torn internally, and she bled constantly from the throat until she expired.

Much later, when the Poles inflicted a defeat on the Bolsheviks beside Warsaw (1921), and pursued them as far as Minsk, R' Zerakh Kremen ז"ל was murdered by bandits, on his way from Lida to the fields that he leased near Zhaludok. At the same time, the brother of Pesach Novogrudsky was found murdered (on his way from the village of Lozany) – Fyv'eh, and the same with a young Jewish girl from the village of Ruda.

Another murder took place in 1922. At night, the murderers entered one of the older houses in the town, the house of Shmuel-Nahum the Smith, and in the same place killed him, his wife Lieb'eh and their young daughter Leah.

The Establishment of the Library

Before The First World War, there was a sort of library in Belica, and when the war broke out, the books were dispersed among the readership. After the war, a number of young men and women organized themselves, in order to gather the books as a start towards the establishment of a library that would be worthy of such a name. Also, they searched for the means to do this. These individuals were: Dov Kaufman, Ziss'l Kalmanowicz, Baranchik, Cherna-Baylah Zwick (Shimonowicz), Shlomo Zwick, Malka and Shlomo Jasinowsky, Eliyahu Yankelewsky, Shmuel Kaplan. The also decided to establish a Drama Circle, and succeeded in putting on productions, whose income was dedicated to the creation of the library.

I was studying in Lida at that time, at the Yeshiva of R' Aharon, and after the death of my brother, I was compelled to return home, in order to help support the family. When I returned home, I decided to take books from the library and read them. The activists added me as a member of the library committee, and also appointed me to act as a deputy to the librarian Dov Kaufman. It was in this way, that I was admitted to the 'Holy of Holies,' the Drama Circle, first as a prompter, and then as a player.

The Fire Fighters and The Drama Circle

Out of my involvement with the library, I was afterwards thrown into activity with a different area – the fire-

fighters. Up until that time, there were no fire-fighters in Belica, and the Christians not once took any interest in this matter, and the Jews were poorly equipped to create this sort of capability. Yet, suddenly, "fanatics" were revealed: Dov Kaufman, Yekhezkiel Grodinsky, Noah-Abba Gapanowicz, Meir Zwick, Chaim Wiszniewsky, and the writer of these lines. The beginning was: old-fashioned bucket brigade, which was done manually, along with three barrels of water conveyed on wooden wheels that were crooked and broken. Once again, questions of money arose, and we decided that for a while, we would stop buying books for the library, and invest the income from the drama circle in acquiring the necessary equipment for putting out fires. From the productions that we put on in the barn of Pela Tsitowsky, we allocated all of the money to fire-fighting, and when this proved to be insufficient, we decided to explain the importance of the matter to the people of the town. However, not one was prepared to make a voluntary donation, and for this reason we joined up with our first leader, Chaim Lejzorowicz, and levied a tax on every house according to the capacity of the ability of the resident *balebatim*.

The desire to build up the fire-fighters gave us no rest, and the only way to get there was by way of the drama circle. I was nominated as the director, for the preparation of a production and I was extremely zealous in my role here. In the evenings, we would get together in the house of Ber'l Radominer, and on Sabbaths we would go out in the fields, and there we carried out rehearsals of the plays. We learned and practiced each part, every hand or foot movement. I took the principal role for myself, and the I left the comic role to Chaim Baranchik, who was naturally a comic fellow. I was afraid that he would not agree to this, and accordingly, I did not tell him about the production until six weeks of rehearsal were completed. I persuaded him that he should come and listen, and if it becomes clear that this was a mistake, we would stop, but the reaction of the young men and women influenced him to agree, and he joined us to carry on.

After two months of strenuous rehearsals, we had the temerity to present our first serious production on the stage, '*The Yeshiva Bokher*,' by A. Zlotrowsky (the success was beyond good fortune, and after a short time, we put on the same play again). The following took part in the play: Shlomit Kamenetzky, Lieb'ehchkeh Zwick, Bayl'keh Radominer (Baran), Ethel Gapanowicz, Ziss'l Kalmanowicz, Mendl Kaplan, Dov Grodinsky, and Chaim Baranchik.

We put on productions several times a year, and it was in this way that we were able to build up the fire-fighters (from time-to-time, we would allocate some of the funds to fill out the book collection in the library). When we finally had adequate fire-fighting equipment, we turned to the forest product merchants, and they gave us blocks of wood and boards to erect a building for the fire-fighters. We built the building with our own hands, and within it, we constructed a stage for play productions, and in the process, we co-opted the young people to come after us, in order that they not be drawn into idleness.

The Orchestra of Musical Instruments

Page 151: The Fire-fighters' Orchestra (The conductor: Dov Grodinsky, third from the right)

At first, the idea of being a member of the fire-fighters appealed to every young person, but in time, the ardor began to fade. So we began to cast about for another way to attract the young people and we began to think about an orchestra of instruments. We got together with the head of the fire-fighters, Israel Zlocowsky, and

with the Chairman, Abraham Kremen, and we decided that all of us would contribute the first payment towards the establishment of an orchestra in the sum of 50 zlotys (we were shore 100 zlotys for the purchase of the instruments, and at that point I. Zlocowsky admitted his two brothers, and paid the sum on their behalf). At that time, we bought the instruments (in the year 1927) but we did not have the money to engage a conductor, so here is what we did: we began to organize dance parties for Saturday nights, with admission by ticket, and from this income, we covered the salary of the conductor.

After thirteen months, the conductor took me out of the orchestra and gave me personal lessons, so that I would be able to assume the position of conductor, and after a short while, I became the conductor of the orchestra. In the meantime, a number of the original players were drafted into the army, and I added new pupils in their place, among them, Leib'eleh ben Yehoshua-Peretz Halperin, who was a skilled and outstanding player.

Here is the list of the orchestra members, who were there at the beginning, and who donated their own money for the purchase of instruments (a total of 14 people): Chaim Wiszniewsky, Zvi Baran, Shlomo Mayewsky, Eliyahu Milikowsky, Asher Gurwicz, Yitzhak Kamenetzky, Yaakov Galinsky, Joseph Zlocowsky, Yehuda Zlocowsky, Joseph Fleischer, Sholom Garnicki, Sholom Mayewsky, Moshe Wiszniewsky, Dov Grodinsky. Afterwards the following were added (a total of seven people): Shlomo Kaplan, Nathan-Moshe Szeszko, Aryeh Halperin, Baruch Wysmanowsky, Jonah Odzhikhowsky, Joseph Mayewsky.

In many cases, the fire-fighters prevented serious losses of property, especially that of the Jews. The heads of the government related with deference to the 'President' of the Fire-fighters, and even reduced taxes in concert with their requests, and they helped out the town in a variety of ways.

During the *Hol HaMoed* period of Passover, the orchestra would take up residence in the middle of the town, beside the stores, and play. On *Lag B'Omer*, the school children would go out into the forest accompanied by the orchestra. On the Third of May, the orchestra would assemble beside the home of its 'President' in order to receive the flag. All of this made a strong impression on the Jewish residents who took pride in the Fire-Fighters' orchestra. The Christians looked on with envy on the one hand, and with pride on the other, that a good orchestra was to be found in their town.

The passing of the 'President' Abraham Kremen (in 1933) was a severe blow to the Fire-fighters, and a heavy loss to the town as a whole. He was very committed both to the town and the Fire-Fighters, and did not stint in giving his time to help with all his might. After he passed away, the position of 'President' went to a Christian named Jozef Radowicz (Poldybnik) and as his secretary, an anti-Semite was appointed by the name of Antak Balabanski, who afterwards became the head of the city under the Nazi occupation. Upon entering the town (in 1941), the Germans burned the Fire-Fighters' building along with all of its equipment, although they confiscated all of th musical instruments for the use of their own army.

Self-Defense: Protecting Possessions & Lives

By Chaim Lejzorowicz

Page 154: *(Top):* *Chaim Lejzorowicz and His Family*

(Bottom): *The Fire-Fighter's Orchestra (in the Thirties)*

I reached Belica in 1924 and there I married Bluma Odzhikhowsky. Because I was active in the Fire-Fighters in Zhetl, I joined the Fire-Fighters organization in Belica. A committee was established, and its head was Abraham Kremen (the pharmacist). The members of the committee were: Noah-Abba Gapanowicz, Meir Zwick, Ziss'l Kalmanowicz, Dov Kaufman, Dov Grodinsky.

In 1924, we built the '*Serai*,' a large wooden enclosure, the place where the Fire-Fighters were located in town. At the same time, I traveled to Warsaw to work, and Israel Zlocowsky was appointed as the officer in charge of the Fire-Fighters.

Afterwards, the orchestra of Fire-Fighters was organized, and the conductor was the brother of Yaakov Beksht from Iwje. After he departed, Dov Grodinsky was appointed as the conductor of the orchestra, and after a short time – Yitzhak Kamenetzky. the members of the orchestra were: Eliyahu Milikowsky, Baruch Wysmanowsky, Joseph Zlocowsky, Chaim Lejzorowicz, Jonah Odzhikhowsky. Chaim Stotsky, Ber'eleh Odzhikhowsky, Chaim Wiszniewsky, Sholom Mayewsky, Leib'eh Halperin, Nathan-Moshe Szeszko. The orchestra injected a spirit of life and joy into the hearts of the residents.

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Even before this, in the year 1918, with the conclusion of The First World War, I participated in self-defense for the protection of Jewish possessions and Jewish lives, against the bands of predatory thieves and robbers. Through the exertion of Rabbi Sorokin[38] זצ"ל, a 'Jewish *Haganah*' was organized in Zhetl[39] that numbered approximately 80 men.

Once, on a Wednesday, the market day in Belica, Bandits fell upon the town, sealed off the entrances into town, and began to murder Jews. Running on foot, the news was communicated to Zhetl and help was requested. Immediately 40 men left Zhetl, but when they arrived to the Neman River, they found out that the robbers had already fled with their spoils.

About two weeks later, we were notified that, a branch of the group that committed murder in Belica was located in the village of Gezgaly. We surrounded the village, and after a short battle, five of the murderers surrendered, and we took them into custody. We began to look for the loot they had taken from Belica, and we found many things, among them the white horse of Joseph Yosselewicz. We notified the people of Belica about this, who came to retrieve their possessions.

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38 Also given as Sorotzkin.

39 Called Zdzieciol in Polish, subsequently re-named Dzjatlava; approximately 12 miles from Belica.

Education and the Hebrew School

By Dov Kaufman

Page 156: *Both Pictures are of the School During the German Occupation (1917)*

Page 158: *Two pictures of the School in the Early Twenties*

Page 160: *(Top):* *The School in the Academic Year (1927)*
(Bottom): *The School at the Beginning of the Academic Year (1928)*

Page 161: *(Top):* *A Lag B'Omer Outing of the Schoolchildren (1930)*
(Bottom): *A Lag B'Omer Outing of the Schoolchildren (1931)*

As was the case in all the towns, we too, had *Rebbes* and teachers who taught the children Pentateuch and the Prophets. Among them were also those who would teach a bit of penmanship and arithmetic, that is, the 'four skills.' Most of the *Rebbes* were cruel to the children, and they saw this as quite natural, from the standpoint of the 'means' of study and education. The *Rebbe* would explain in accordance with his understanding, but the child would not understand the explanations, and accordingly, the *Rebbe* sought to literally 'beat' his lesson into the head of the child by means of blows, pinches, and a variety of bizarre punishments.

Among the last of the *Rebbes*, R' Benjamin Stotsky, and the ritual slaughterer Eliezer Pisecner, and R' Alter Shmulewicz were well-known. R' Alter was a more 'reformed' *Rebbe*, and he also taught secular subjects. understandably as a peripheral consideration.

From the time that R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky came to our town to settle there, a strong change began in the education of young boys. The convention was, that when a boy completed his *Heder* studies, his parents would send him to study in one of the Yeshivas, or he remained at home and studies the Gemara under the direction of one of the 'young men' who occupied a bench at the synagogue. Part of these boys would continue by themselves in the study of secular subjects, would be 'affected' and leave as 'apostates,' according to the perception of that generation. However, from the time that the 'Modern' School opened up, parents began to perceive the issues surrounding education differently, and their thoughts became further changed towards matters of the faith as well. In that period, the socialist movement also got started, which also had an influence on the direction of thinking among a well-recognized part of the residents of our town.

The school of R' Ch. N. Kamenetzky was full of boy and girl students from end-to-end. The subjects included were: Literature, geography, history, *Tanakh*, and arithmetic. Literature was suffused with Zionism, and a young man who came out of this school hoped and dreamt about the return to Zion, and a homeland re-established. A 'new world' was opened up in front of the children, but there were those who treated this 'new world' derisively. I remember an episode in connection with this: We were sitting in a lesson of

arithmetic (in the house of R' Leib ben Ber'keh Odzhikhowsky); Suddenly, the image of a carriage drawn by two horses was reflected on the window, from the village of Tomaszowska; one of the students leaped up from his place, and asked with something less than seriousness – *Rebbe*, do you know how much these two horses are worth together?.. The *Rebbe*, Ch. N. Kamenetzky did not get angry, and answered calmly: I do not know, but for sure there are people who know how to think about such things as well....

The 'Modern' School of Ch. N. Kamenetzky was opened in the year 1901/2; in the year 1903/4 R' Yaakov Beksht opened a 'Modern' School, who attracted the elementary students to him; in the year 1912/13 'Modern' schools of this sort were opened by Aharon Dykhowsky, and also R' Alter Shmulewicz, who had few students, and also Eliyahu Sokolowsky.

In the year 1913/14, Ch. N. Kamenetzky ceased running his school. I was among the last of the students to complete their studies (under private lessons) with him. For a time afterwards, I was just wandering about, and I didn't know where to turn, or what to go on to do. In the end, I decided to study Talmud in a group, and also to continue with secular studies at home.

During the war years (1914-1918) children studied with the presence of the war and its potential disruptions. The Germans declared compulsory study in government public schools, but the question of Jewish national education remained standing. The town began to grapple with the establishment of a school, supported by the parents, in the place of a private *Heder* system. In the German school (in the afternoon) there were also Hebrew studies (by the teacher Weiss and one other). These studies were the foundation for an independent school, that was directed under the aegis of R' Joseph Rudnick, Ch. N. Kamenetzky and a number of other prominent townsfolk.

In the year 1919/20 (in the period of the war between the Poles and the Bolsheviks) learning continued. Among the teachers of that time were also teachers from Lida (Cygelnicki and others).

In the year 1921/22, a teacher was gotten from Zhetl (Epstein), a successful and skilled teacher who captured the hearts of parents and students. In the year 1923, the Poles began to introduce changes into the curriculum, and demanded that the school be placed on a government level. From that time, we went over from the public school, and they were re-organized from anew in the general school (in the women's section of the synagogue). I took on the direction of the school. Eliyahu Sokolowsky was retained for religious studies, and a graduate woman teacher was retained to teach Polish and arithmetic. The school was under government supervision, and in general, stood at a high level. However, the economic conditions were catastrophic, and there were simply no sources of public funds for the sustenance of the school. The burden on the parents was very great. The local teacher especially suffered from this, because the entire burden fell on them. There were months at a time, when the teachers did not receive their salary at all. It was only the will to keep the school going that made it possible to continue under such difficult circumstances.

In the year 1926/27 the situation got slightly better, thanks to the drama circle. Despite the fact that all its income was dedicated to the opening of a Fire-fighters brigade, from time-to-time they also covered joint expenses of the school. The school became affiliated with the *Tarbut* network of the Vilna district, and we learned in accordance with the curriculum of this network. The local Rabbi, R' Shabtai Fein, did not get

involved with our internal issues. He would occasionally come to visit and test the students in Pentateuch and Prophets. In the school leadership were the Rabbi, and the representatives of the parents and teachers.

We favorably recall the teachers Esther and Hinde who gave much to create the good name of the school.

I continued to direct this school until 1931. Because of my desire to make *aliyah*, I received a work offer in a town beside Slonim (at three times the salary in Belica), in order to cover the costs associated with the making of my *aliyah*.

In the year 1930.31, a group of young activists organized itself with the help of Ch. N. Kamenetzky (who was at that time the head of the bank) and they undertook to build a building to be jointly occupied by the school and the bank. The money to do this was obtained by taking a loan from the bank, a levy placed on the residents of the town, support from America, and also support from the local '*Hevra Kadisha.*' I no longer served as a teacher in the new school building, because at the same time, I got my paperwork in order, and made aliyah to the Land of Israel. The teachers were: Hirsch-Eliezer Shimonowicz and his wife, Yaakov Beksht and Eliyahu Sokolowsky.

The scions of Belica did not have the privilege of continuing their studies and education in the new school. With the entry of the Germans into the town (1941), the school was destroyed and afterwards, the dear children were exterminated.

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Finally, I will underscore the teacher-educators, and the *Rebbes-Melamdim* that we had in Belica. itself, and those that served in the direction of the teaching of little children in those houses in other locations – all of them gave much to the teaching and education of children, and to the sustenance of the position of culture and Torah in our *shtetl* and in that of other towns in which they served.

Teacher-educators: Eliezer Itzkowitz, Rachel Itzkowitz, Shimon Buczkowsky, Baylah Belicki, Luba Belicki, Eliyahu-Nahum Belicki, Yaakov Beksht, Aharon Dykhowsky, Leah Halperin, Gershon Wismonsky, Eliyahu Yankelewsky, Aharon-David Mayewsky, Eliezer-Meir Savitzky, Eliyahu Sokolowsky, Dov Stotsky, Leib Poniemansky, Dov Kaufman, Abraham-Hirsch Kaufman, Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky, Issachar Kamenetzky, Zerakh Kremen, Rachel-Luba Shilovitzky, Hirsch-Eliezer Shimonowicz, Isaac Szeszko.

Rebbes-Melamdim: Moshe Belicki, Hirsch'l Baranchik, Eliezer Yankelewsky, Herzl Novogrudsky, Shimon Novogrudsky, Joseph Sokolowsky, Benjamin Stotsky, Mordechai Stotsky, Ozer Poniemansky, Eliezer Pisecner, Alter Shmulewicz, Yaakov Shmuckler, R' Shmeryl.

This Was, and Is No Longer...

By Menachem Niv (Max Jasinowsky)

Page 163: *A Sleep Over of the Older Scouts*

Page 164: *(Top):* *The Scout Organization at an Activity Beside the Neman*
(Bottom): *The Scout Organization at Holiday Assembly*

Who will erect a memorial monument to my beloved *shtetl*, tiny and poor, in which I was born, and in which I spent (with interruptions) the best of my years?

My *shtetl*, I have attempted to the best of my ability, to impart this feeling that I have, for the way of life within you, to convey it to the generation younger than I, the yearning to change the way of life, but together with this, I remain astonished to this day at the experiences of this tiny little town, numbering approximately 170 families, whose existence (oh, what an existence!) Depended on the 'market day' on Wednesday. The daily life brought with it, the establishment of institutions to the pride and utility of the residents of the town, institutions who, not only once, were the product of the work of few individuals 'fanatic to the issue' in question exclusively.

Here is a Savings & Loan bank, the life's handiwork of R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky and Yaakov Kotliarsky, who established it, nursed it, and led it to their last bitter day. This bank began to function in a side room (rented) for only 2-3 days a week, where in the evenings, they allocated the loans and received payments, and its continuation – a serious banking institution, from which all the residents of the town enjoyed the benefits of its blessed undertakings. It also encompassed the function of a *Gemilut-Hasadim*, the work of Ephraim Ruzhansky, and in this manner the Bikur Kholim group functioned, whose income was derived from anonymous contributions, and from the appearances of 'Purim Plays' on Purim.

The Fire-Fighters Brigade, with their instrumental orchestra beside them, was the handiwork of a clutch of young men, who did not stint on money or time to buy these expensive instruments. And the salary of the director, and for a while also the conductor, all of this was secured by individual effort.

And the youth groups, who can count them all?: "*HeHalutz, HeHalutz HaTza'ir*, and finally, *Freiheit*, and the *Scout Organization* on whom I, especially want to focus my memory, because I stood beside their cradle, and was one of the 'midwives' that saw to their birth.

A. *Freiheit* and *Scout Organization* in their Work

Previous to these, the *HeHalutz* and for a while, also *HeHalutz HaTza'ir* existed first. Despite the fact that their educational activities were very important, and most of the young people in the town belonged to them, yet only a very small number of them made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel. An important change took place in the year 1931, the time when the *Freiheit* institution (a.k.a. *Dror*) was established, for those age 18 and up, who also belonged to *HeHalutz*, and many of them enrolled in training and made *aliyah. Freiheit*, and the *Scout Organization* (as a feeder group) for the ages of 8-10, and while the activities of the *Freiheit* did not encounter any special difficulties (the members already were on their own recognizance), the work in '*Scout*' was not easy. Who does not recall the mocking calls of : '*Friendship*,' '*Be Young*' (our mottoes), '*Red Bands*' (because of the red thread in the shirts of the movement). The fear of the parents was disturbing, who, as it happens had nothing to fear, but were afraid that their children would become '*Reds*,' God-forbid. Nevertheless, the children and young people were drawn to us, because the activities and outings enchanted them, as did the uniting uniform, the dances, the singing of national songs, and in the more distant future, the going out to training and *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

We were totally without experience in the guidance of children and young people, who needed as part of their education an introduction of the elements of vision. Who, in those days knew anything about seminaries for leadership or study days? The emissary from the central office would come at infrequent intervals, and he had little experience.

In our vicinity, there were only two branches of Freiheit (in Lida and with us), and as a result the relationship between the two of us was very intense: meetings, and assemblies, walking trips, and sleep overs for the older members (from Lida to Belica) and the crowning activity – a summer camp at Yud'keh's beside Lida, in a village house. It seems to me that this was one of the most enjoyable summers for the participants in the camp, and for us, the leaders, despite all of the difficulties involved.

And who will not recall the blowing of the trumpets by Jonah Odzhikhowsky (then only 11 years old) calling us to rise, to eat, to work, to take a hike, and then go to bed. What joy we got from the community meals that we took together at a table under the tree, the song and the games that Moshe'leh Novoprucky from Lida led with such skill, and the hikes in the surrounding forests, the visits with the '*Yishuvniks*' etc. The summer residence captured the hearts of all who participated, and when we returned to Belica, we were not oriented to forget those wonderful days, and we were compelled, as a result, to get out into the forest from time-to-time, for at least a day.

The activities of these two institutions, previously mentioned, opened up widely and deeply, and left its stamp on the entire life of the town. In 1933, I was compelled to terminate my strong connection [with them] because of my own departure for training. I returned for some months in 1934, and then made *aliyah*. I knew that these institutions continued to develop in the coming years, and a small part of the older Scouts moved on to Freiheit, went on to training, and was also privileged to make aliyah, but the larger portion did not accomplish this.

The forests in the area no longer served as a 'summer camp,' or for hiking, but rather as camouflage in the

face of that terrifying enemy, the beast in human form, against which the partisans fought, and, in part, died. I am certain that their strength of spirit in standing against this prowling beast, was suckled from the disciplines of their association with *Freiheit* and *HeHalutz*.

B. The 'Theater' of Those Times

Page 166: *Participants in the Play 'Ukrainian Pogrom Martyrs' that was Put On in 29Nov1930*

Page 167: *From the Youth of the Town*

I remember the 'Theater' in the *shtetl*. I was a little boy, but I nevertheless went after it from its inception, until I got older, and took part in the productions, as an actor, and also in the organization of productions.

The living spirit and the driving force to start up favored plays in Belica was a young man who worked for a time in the town with leather tanning. He was called '*Der Shishlevitzer*' after the *shtetl* of Svisloch from which he came (he was a relative of the family of Abraham Khlavneh's). They started with a presentation of '*Die Gebrokhene Hertzer*,' that took place on the second floor of the building that belonged to Ben-Zion Stotsky. A stage was erected, a curtain was put up, and all manner of benches and chairs were assembled, and they put on the play. This was a very unusual occurrence in the town.

Along with *Der Shishlevitzer*, the following took part in the play: Chaim Lieb'keh's Dob'keh Lejzor's, Ziss'l Dash'keh's, Leib'eh *der Minsker*, Mul'yeh, Chay'keh-Shakhna's (*der 'Gubernator'*), Dov Kaufman, and others. Makeup was whatever *Der Shishlevitzer* could improvise, however, there was no special material for this, so he used his smarts, and made the beards from flax. When the makeup caught fire, and the beard of Chaim Golda's started to burn, and his face was singed, this did not stop the production from going on, with considerable success.

I do not know if the need to put on plays came from some inner drive of 'talented' people, or from the need for resources to establish and open the library, and after that, the Fire-fighters Brigade, and orchestra. Who can count all of the [sizeable] needs that always stood in reverse relationship to the small and impoverished town.

In due course, we put on the plays *'Herschel'eh the Relative, The Slaughter, The Seven Who Were Hung,' The Dybbuk'*. Most times the shows were put on in the '*stodala*' next to the cows and chickens, who took no notice of the onlookers and went about their own affairs... As you can understand, there were no lack of 'critics,' for example, on the evening when they put on the short play, '*A Rebbe had 10 Little Daughters,*' the crowd reacted by throwing wet towels at the 'artists.'

A special event was: obtaining police permission for the plays, an event that was dependent on the good will of th policemen. It was not only once that R' Lejzor '*Der Jeremicer*' – the *Gabbai* of the synagogue – save the day who would buy off the sentiment of the police with a few bottles of strong drink.

The desire of the young generation, that succeeded in seeing real theater in the big cities, grew in wanting to give the town something more 'modern.' At that time they had erected the '*Serai*' of the Fire-Fighters Brigade, that also served as an auditorium for presenting plays, with a wide stage, cupboards for costumes and a pit for the prompter (the commitment to get this addition had no bounds). On the evening of a presentation, the fire engines would be taken outside, the water barrels, etc., arrange all of the benches, and put out the large candelabras, which we would take from the synagogue.

Of the younger generation, who partook in presentations at the side of the 'veterans,' I will recall Dvora'keh Dash'keh's, Rachel'eh Itzkowitz, Rachel'eh '*Die Mameh's*', Alinka Chaya-Dvor'keh's, Bash'keh '*Die Mameh's*,' Dov Grodinsky, Dov Kaufman, Ziss'l Dash'keh's, Chaya-Baylah Shimonowicz, Mendl Chay'keh's, Feiga-Et'keh Chaim-Reuven's, Malka Zerakh's, Yankl Zerakh's, the teacher Motkow, Abraham Maggid, and others. As prompters, the following served: Itchkeh Chaim-Noah's, and Gershon Wismonsky.

We were our own players, stage hands, makeup artists, and set-builders (with a lot of help from *Der Kayser*), with whatever good hand, and all of this with boundless commitment, a serious relationship and from the desire to give the audience a genuine presentation, according to our understanding. I remember, that in the play, '*Gott, Mensch und Tyvel*' Dov Grodinsky played the part of the '*Tyvel*' (The Devil), who was supposed to be entirely black, with long fingers and with the horns and ears of a cow. Dov wanted to be 'genuine,' and so he sewed a sort of headdress to which he added a pair of horns, and the ears of a cow, which he had procured from a meat store. Despite the considerable salt that he shook over them, he could not eliminate the bad smell that forcefully emanated from them, and it was difficult to stand next to him on stage. For many days, Dov could not get the color of the coal off of himself, and the stink from his body, all in order to appear as a genuine devil...

As a supplement to our plays, every year at Purim time, we would put on the play 'The Selling of Joseph,' whose income was dedicated to the *Bikur Kholim*. Excerpts from this play would be presented in ordinary homes, and the full production in the synagogue. With the erection of the '*Serai*,' it became a coveted location, and the 'Joseph Play' was put on there, despite the intense cold. The cold did not prevent the community from filling the 'Serai,' to the point of no room left, with the men dressed in their fur coats, and the women all tied up in kerchiefs. At the time that the brothers threw Joseph (Fyv'eh Lip'keh's) into the pit, wearing only his coat of many colors, apparently the Patriarch Jacob (Shef'teh '*Der Shtepper*') was afraid that; 'his dear son' would catch cold, and he put half of his body into the stage, and threw a fur coat down into the pit. This pleased Feiga Liebeh's, who sat in the first row, and she added: 'He is a father, after all....'

Yes, all of this was and has passed into history, that was so cruel to our people, and did not pass over my beloved townsfolk. this was, and is no longer...

As If In One Family

By Michael Ratnowsky

In the year 1929, I left the Volozhin yeshiva, and transferred to the large yeshiva at Mir. On one of those days, an emissary from *HaPoel HaMizrahi* came to town (Mr. Y. Bernstein, today, one of the editors of *HaTzofeh*) – and he lectured on the events in the Land of Israel and about the various parties. Influenced by what he had to say, I was drawn to him, as if by some higher force, and my comrades and I set a meeting up with him. As a result of our conversation with him, I left Mir, and went to study in Bialystok, and their I received partisan training.

After this, I received an appointment from the central office of *HaPoel HaMizrahi* to run the center of all the training camps, with broad discretion. I did not tarry a lot, and went to place designated for me, and I was very successful in my position. Many certificates were issued, and many of the comrades in these training camps, over whom I presided, made *aliyah*. In the end, I was required to remain in Poland as part of the argument that active members are required to remain in the Diaspora in order to recruit more members, and to establish training camps.

I returned to Belica, and established a branch of *HaPoel HaMizrahi* there. T threw myself into my position with all my might, and as a result, of this, many of our comrades made *aliyah* to the Land.

In the year 1930, on the even of *Lag B'Omer*, all of the Zionists parties in Belica came together under the aegis of R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky, and decided to conduct a joint *Lag B'Omer* parade in the streets of the city. I was appointed to head the parade, and I was to procure the permission from the police (I recall that this was on a Sunday, and all the stores were closed). The Fire-Fighters orchestra participated in the parade. We were very proud, and we all had the feeling that we were in the Land of Israel. Speeches were given beside the school: R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky, my uncle, Eliyahu Sokolowsky, Eliezer-Meir Savitzky, R' Shmuel Joseph Itzkowitz, and his son, Lejzor, myself and my brother Meiram. The parade made a big impression on the Jews of the city.

*

It is appropriate here, to mention R' Nachman, who wrote in his diary: He nicknamed me in his diary 'To my right is Michael, grandson of R' Yossi of the Galilee' (Joseph Sokolowsky). R' Nachman gave the appearance of a miser, but the truth of the matter was that he was a man much at peace with his environment, a conversationalist, and we would talk for hours on end about a variety of subjects. He very much loved new books, and I would obtain books and pamphlets of the movement for him, along with newspapers from the Land of Israel. I once received a letter from Dov Grodzinsky[40] (who was already in the Land of Israel) with a number of '*Dobek*' cigarettes. I immediately went to R' Nachman, and gave him a cigarette, he rolled it in his palm, and very much enjoyed the product of the Holy Land. At that time, he also offered me his blessing for success in my journey to the Land of Israel.

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40 We do not know if the writer meant Dov Grodinsky, or not.

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It is pleasing for me to recollect yet another episode: after The First World War, when in Belica, study was conducted only in a *Heder*, they began to establish a Hebrew School. My grandfather, R' Joseph ז"ל, was hired as a teacher of Russian and Yiddish, not in order to get a prize. His pupils were Isser Kamenetzky, Eliezer-Meir Savitzky, Aharon-David Mayewsky, me, and others. My grandfather had a cane with a silver head, and he would hit his students. I was the first to be hit, until one time, when we decided to steal away his cane. He poured out his entire wrath on me, because he demanded that I reveal the name of the thief who stole the cane. At home, I said to mt grandfather, that there are those plotting to assault him, if he continues in this way. This 'penetrated his skull,' because on the following day, when he came to school, he had changed his attitude, and treated us very nicely. He even hinted to us, that if we were not pleased with him – he would resign. We only asked him to treat us with dignity, and we returned his cane to him, and the matter was over.

In general, life in the town went on as if we were in one large family. If someone came to grief, people would rush to assist and relieve the problem. The job of the '*Linat Tzedek*' was – to discharge the obligation of staying up on watch during the night for sick people (who were not family members), and similarly, '*Gemilut-Hasadim*' served this purpose for the economically distressed.

I left Belica in 1932 and made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

It Is for These that My Soul Weeps

By Meiram Ratnowsky

The Sabbath Queen...

When the sun slid away from the treetops... the Shammes R' Itcheh would appear in the middle of the market and call out loud: 'To – synagogue – let's go.' It was the sign of the impending arrival of the Sabbath. It was at that point that the Sabbath candles were lit in Jewish homes, and everyone began to stream to the *Bet HaMedrash* to engage in the prayer of welcoming the Sabbath Queen...

On Saturday afternoon (in the summer) we would go on foot to the courtyard beside the Neman. There we would spend time on the grass, in the shade of the trees, wiling away the Sabbath, young and old alike, some reading, others singing.

We observed the Sabbath scrupulously. Once a rumor got started that the tailor had, God forbid, surely lost his mind, when he was seen riding a bicycle on the Sabbath. In my day, this was the first violation of the Sabbath, and the incident made a great impression on the town.

A Few Personalities

In Belica, the town of my birth, there were few people, but they were substantive types. Every person – was a world unto himself.

R' Nachman would study, and lead prayers from the stand, articulating each word several times out of a concern that he had not pronounced it correctly. Every day, after the evening prayer, he would read a chapter of the *Tanakh*. He would record every occurrence in the town in his diary, and he would hide it in his bookcase under the books. He was alert to everything that went on. As for the children that annoyed him, he would chase after them with his cane and yell 'insects' at them, and also '*shkotzim*.[41]' As to the Itzkowitz sons – Zerakh and Zhameh – he nicknamed them with the scriptural names '*Aluf Zerakh* and *Aluf Shama*[42] because he had a play on words of the type where one expression overlaps the other.

There were beloved Jewish people in our town like: R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky, a gentle person, if warm of spirit, and an ardent Zionist, the leader of the bank; R' Yaakov Kotliarsky, the *Gabbai* of the synagogue, and an activist with *Gemilut Hasadim*; R' Lejzor *Jeremicer*, a formidable scholar, who taught Mishna to a group of *balebatim*. On the night of *Hoshana Rabah* when we would gather to recite a chapter from the Psalms, R' Lejzor had a franchise for distributing large Antonov apples among the congregants.

R' Lejzor the ritual slaughterer (*Shokhet*) was a faithful man and the Torah reader at the Bet HaMedrash. R' Sheft'eh the Tailor would bring the congregation to tears with his prayers on the High Holy Days. R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz was of pleasant disposition, a great Torah scholar, and a community activist. R' Shimon the Baker would rise early for the first minyan, and would recite the chapters of the 'song at the sea' with such flavor that I will never forget.

Many in our town were like them, to the point that one would run out of space in trying to portray them all. Belica, from its midst, produced teachers, Yeshiva students, *Halutzim*, and the like. My soul weeps for all of these, who were taken by scheming hands, and brought to slaughter. ה"ד

The Family of my Father and Teacher

Page 170: *The Children of R' Joseph Sokolowsky at the Family Burial Plot*

Page 171: *Young People of the Town*

Page 172: *Two pictures of young people from the town, during a joint get-together in a nearby grove.*

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41 The plural of the Hebrew *sheketz* (elided in Yiddish to *shaygetz*) meaning an abomination. An epithet adopted by Yiddish-speaking Jews towards all gentiles, especially those of whom they did not approve.

42 See Genesis 36:17

The origin of the family of my father-teacher, Yaakov Ratnowsky ז"ל is from Sucza beside Pinsk. My grandfather was a well-to-do person, but all his assets were destroyed in The First World War, at which time my father went to live in Belica, close to the parents of my mother Tzivia, of the Sokolowsky family.

My grandfather and grandmother Joseph and Esther-Malka Sokolowsky had a big house in Belica that had two stories, in the row of houses around the perimeter of the marketplace. My father made his living in trade, and my uncle Eliyahu was a teacher in the public school, and my uncle Mott'l had a market store and paraphernalia shop.

My grandfather was known throughout the vicinity as a great scholar, and a speaker at synagogues and houses of study. He was a merchant that dealt in religious articles: prayer shawls, phylacteries, regular prayer books, and for the High Holy Days.

Golda, our oldest sister, married Yaakov Nakhumowsky from Novogrudok, and they had 5 children (Esther, Mamie, Gitt'leh, Herschel'eh, Moshe'leh). Our sister Bracha, went to the United States in 1933. My brother Michael made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel in 1934, and a year later, so did I. Three sisters – Marie, Masha and Hasia – remained with my parents, and during the Holocaust they were killed in the Scucyn ghetto. The entire family of my uncle Eliyahu met their death in this way as well. My uncle Mott'l was killed in the slaughter of 'Group 36' in Belica, among whom was Rabbi Fein.

This was the tragic end of one family out of tens of thousands, and we mourn those whom we lost, and will not forget them.

The Town from an Economic and Social Perspective

By Moshe Yosselewicz

(Worked up on the basis of the memories of Dov Kaufman and Israel Zlocowsky)

According to the entries in the old *Pinkas* of the *Hevra-Kadisha* of Belica, the Jewish settlement in the town started in the 15th century, and this settlement continued for 450 years, until Jewish life in it was destroyed completely in the year 1942.

The town was built approximately a kilometer from the banks of the Neman River, with a marketplace in its center, and a number of streets around it, bounded the town. There were a few brick buildings in the marketplace square, with the rest being constructed of wood. all of them occupied by Jews, and even in the nearby streets, where there were wooden houses exclusively, mostly occupied by Jews with a minority of Christians.

Surrounding the town, fields and meadows of grass spread out, and after them, forests, among which were scattered small and large villages. On the high bank of the Neman, was a large ancient building, surrounded by very old trees – this was the palace that at one time belonged to the noted landowner Graf Trubeckoy. Indeed, the entire town once belonged to him, and the residents of that time paid him taxes, until in the fulness of time, the land was sold off to the citizenry.

There were three principal paved roads that connected Belica with the cities of Lida, Zhaludok and Zhetl. Until after The First World War, the two bridges over the Neman were the only means of crossing between the two banks of the river. Afterwards, the Polish regime built a large wooden bridge, that remained in place until 1936. The bridge deteriorated over time, and was considered dangerous because of the large floes of ice that floated down the river during the melting of the snows at the beginning of spring. In 1936, a [second] larger and stronger wooden bridge was built closer to the town. The building work was done by a regular detachment from the Corps of Engineers of the Polish Army, and with the presence of the soldiers in the area, a bit of life was introduced into the area, and it added to the income of the residents. The new bridge (a length of 375 meters, and about twenty meters high above the water) remained in service until the summer of 1942, at which time it was burned by the partisans of the youth of Belica in order that it not be of use to the Nazi enemy.

A well-known movement of lumber was floated down the Neman as early as the previous century, until they reached Kovno, the capitol city in rafts, and Memel, the port city in Lithuania. The banks of Belica served as a sort of way-station for the rafts that were built on the spot, and a transfer point to those who guided the rafts down from the upper river, and as a place for rest and refreshment, provisioning of food and drink, as well as the purchase of other products (ropes, nails, iron, clothing, etc.), these being things that generated a bit of income for the Jews of the town. While they were in town, the raft sailors would spend their time carousing, drinking to excess, and not only once did fights break out among the drunkards, among themselves, and between them and the Jews of the town.

However, the most dependable and continuous income for the Jews of the town came from the farmers of the area, who would come to the town in droves on market days (every Wednesday of the week). On the market day, there were hundreds of villagers who would come to Belica in their wagons, to market their agricultural produce – grain, chickens, eggs, fruit, sheep, horses, and the like. In exchange for this, they would acquire those items that they needed for their domestic and agricultural needs, such as: bolts of textile and hides, sugar, salt, miscellany, spices, ironware, household appliances, farming implements, medicines, etc.

*

Medical services at the end of the prior century, and the beginning of this century, was also in our town, rendered by *Feldschers*, and in the surrounding villages there were also 'experts' and 'elderly women' that healed with the use of various herbs and 'secret remedies.' It was only after The First World War, that one doctor appeared in the town, who served all of its residents, as well as all the residents of the villages in the area.

There was a 'big' pharmacy and a 'small' pharmacy in Belica, that not only provided medicines and cosmetics. The *balebatim* who ran the pharmacies were consulted on matters pertaining to illness, whether Jews or Christians, whether from town, or the surrounding villages, even before they decided to call the

doctor or visit him. In general, those asking for advice would receive both the advice and medication from the pharmacist, thereby saving the expensive fee for the advice of the doctor.

There were two (Christian) midwives in the town, and it is important to remember that most births in those times took place in ordinary homes.

*

Most of the breadwinners were storekeepers, and people who sold food, as well as general goods, textiles, leather goods, and ironmongers. There were also merchants who dealt in cattle, horses and other livestock, even for export out of the country. From five to six families were involved in butchering and meat for local consumption. The cattle for this purpose was acquired from the nearby villages, and were slaughtered in the town abattoir. the meat was sold both to the Jews and Christians (those hindquarter parts not kosher for Jewish consumption).

A number of inns, boardinghouses and saloons, and places to get light meals, could also be found in town. to the extent that the owners of these businesses made a living, it too was tied mainly to the market days, when the peasants would gladden their hearts with a bottle of whiskey and a good meal, after selling their produce.

An extended trade in grains, flax and flax seed and furs, went on during the winter months – when entire families were engaged in this. In connection with flax, it was necessary to visit villages and buy up the seeds locally, from the peasants, and afterwards, re-sell them to merchants operating on a larger scale, back in town, and these would then transport and sell the merchandise in the city of Lida.

A number of families engaged in tenant farming fruit orchards. The Neman River, and surrounding lakes, provided fish of varied species. This sort of merchandise was supplied by fishermen from the nearby villages, and were partly marketed in the town and part was sent to Lida.

A large part of the breadwinners were in the following occupations: tailors, shoemakers, seamstresses, hat makers and carpenters, saddle makers, smiths, and the like. There were several who made a living from transporting goods and traveled especially to the district capitol in Lida. In the thirties, the formal connection to Lida was strengthened bu means of a bus service that 'stole' passengers from the wagon-drivers.

Until after The First World War, there were teachers in Belica who ran *Heders*, in which they taught the children of the town. There were also teachers who provided Torah education to the isolated Jews that lived in the surrounding villages. Between the two world wars, there were a number of known teachers, drawn from the youth of Belica proper, that taught in the local school.

There were a number of bakeries in the town, and they served as a source of income for a number of families. The bakeries provided black and white bread, Challahs, and other baked goods for the town residents, as well as for the demands generated by the market day. In the final years, the smaller bakeries closed down, and only two or three large bakeries remained, which had the capacity to meet the needs of the town by using automated machinery. About two months before Passover, part of the bakeries, and also some of the *balebatim* in the town, would organize themselves for the baking of matzo for the town residents. However,

the matzo from Belica earned a good reputation in their form and taste also outside of the town, and they were sent for sale in Lida and other cities.

Belica served as a center for an area that encompassed several tens of villages. The local council of the *Gmina* stood at the head of general administration. For this reason, the town had a police station, with a permanent detachment of between five and six policemen. The Jews had to take care that they enjoyed good relations with the police, so that they would not cause them any trouble.

*

The community council stood at the head of Jewish community life, which was elected by the Jewish residents. The community took care of community issues, and its officers were tasked to find solutions to related issues that were not in short supply: the community provided assistance to the needy, supported a *Gemilut Hesed*, and a Cooperative Bank, a Jewish school, synagogue, and represented the town to the authorities of the *Powiat* in Lida.

There were two synagogues in Belica: the 'old' synagogue, built of brick several centuries ago, and a 'new' synagogue that was built of wood (this latter one was in existence for about seventy years, and was burned down in the Great Fire of 1915, and never rebuilt). The 'old' synagogue was burned down after that, in 1941 by the Germans, who upon their invasion of Belica, burned down all the Jewish houses, and also the synagogue.

While it stood on its hillock, the 'old' synagogue served as the spiritual center of the town. Volumes of the *Gemara, Mishna*, and other sacred texts, filled its bookcases and armoires for the entire length of the western wall of the building, and in the Holy Ark, there were Torah scrolls that had been written by prominent scribes of centuries ago. All of these texts were completely incinerated in the fire that was previously mentioned.

During weekdays, as on the Sabbath, Jews gathered in the synagogue for morning, afternoon, and evening prayers. Between prayer sessions, the youth and older men would study a page of Gemara, look into a book, one looking in to a Maimonides text, another into *Makor Chaim*, or just recite a chapter of Psalms.

The community retained Rabbis who were men of the Torah, possessed knowledge, and were dedicated to the spiritual and community issues of the town. The last two rabbis were: Rabbi R' Joseph Rudnick ז"ל, and Rabbi R' Shabtai Fein ז"ל, the latter expiring after being tortured by the Germans, who despoiled a known group of the thirty-six first Belica martyrs, that were shot in the summer of 1941.

There were members of the community who led services and were cantors, and would enrich the prayer of the congregation of worshipers. Among the last of these that are recollected were: R' Meir Shimonowicz, R' Shfatya Kaufman, and R' Chaim Baranchik. Also, R' Shabtai Fein was an accomplished and excellent leader of prayer, and he had a franchise for leading the *Ne'ila* service at the conclusion of *Yom Kippur*.

The community also oversaw the *Hekdesh*, for the poor, who would transit through the town and would come within its boundaries for the purpose of collecting alms (this building was burned down along with the 'new'

synagogue). There was no lack of a communal bath and a mikva in the town, to bathe, and to observe ritual purity.

*

For many years, there was no building available for a Jewish school. During the transition period, when the era of the Heder and Melamdim was being replaced, the students of the school would learn in the *shtibl* – a side room in the synagogue building, that served as a sort of 'small' synagogue when needed. Similarly, students would also attend class in the two parts of the women's section, in which the women prayed only during the Sabbath and on Festivals.

The erection of the school building is a story unto itself. At one of the sessions of the municipal council, that were held at the home of R' Abraham Kremen, R' Ziss'l Kalmanowicz told that in the little village of Toszynow there is a building for sale that could serve as a school, and also as a bank. It was decided to buy the building, and to build it anew on the parcel beside the synagogue for the above mentioned purpose (R' Zalman Yosselewicz was at that time, the Chairman of the parent's committee of the school, and R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky – the Chairman of the bank.)

The required funds were raised from a variety of sources: part was given by '*JeKoPo*,' part from *landsleit* in America, and a part was collected in the town itself. A. Shalit donated the lumber boards for the erection of the interior walls, and so, with a joint effort, the building was put up that included four classes. Even the construction itself was not achieved easily, because the Christian residents were opposed to the establishment of a Jewish school in so central a location. However, thanks to the efforts of Shlomo Jasinowsky, who represented the Jews in the *Gmina*, this opposition was interdicted.

The parents committee looked after the fact that all the children should attend school, and study religious and secular subjects. The language of instruction was Hebrew, and after that – Polish. The tuition was set in accordance with the means of the parents of the children, and there were those who paid nothing at all. The members of the parents committee of the school were: A. Odzhikhowsky, Aharon Bussel, Israel Zlocowsky, Zalman Yosselewicz, Israel-Meiram Kremen, and Shlomo Kaplan.

At the beginning of the year 1939, the school was transformed into a government institution, with the language of instruction being Yiddish. It was burned by the Germans immediately when they captured the town in 1941.

*

Financial assistance within the Jewish community was carried out through a cooperative bank and a *Gemilut Hesed* organization. The bank was organized in 1918 (with the ending of The First World War), and was initially found, after being established, in the home of Chaya-Esther Meckel, and afterwards – in the home of Jonah Odzhikhowsky, and finally – in the new building that was built exclusively for the school and the bank.

In the first leadership of the bank were: Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky (Chairman); Abraham Yosselewicz (Treasurer); Abraham Kremen, Yaakov Kotliarsky, and Shlomo Jasinowsky.

The bank granted loans to merchants, tradespeople, and also to ordinary citizens who were pressed to take loans for reasons of business, or other important matters. After the Soviets entered, all the papers of the bank was sequestered in its iron safe, which in turn, was buried in a hidden location in the ground, and it would seem that it is still there to this day...

The second financial intermediating institution in town – the Gemilut Hesed – was established before The First World War, in he year 1914. Yehoshua Jasinowsky served as its first Chairman, and its members were: Rabbi Joseph Rudnick, Eliezer Yankelewsky, Abraham Yosselewicz, and Moshe Dziencelsky.

In the year 1926, a new committee was elected, that brought in 'new blood:' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz (Chairman); Zalman Yosselewicz, Israel Zlocowsky, Joseph Lozowsky, Jonah Odzhikhowsky, Israel-Meiram Kremen, Eliezer Yankelewsky, Meir Zelikowsky; Ephraim Ruzhansky served as a salaried secretary.

The organization first conducted its business in the store of Eliezer Yankelewsky, but after the community building was constructed, that we previously mentioned, in which the bank was lodged, the *Gemilut Hesed* was also moved there. This Gemilut Hesed gave out small loans, and assistance to the needy, and for the purchase of merchandise, the payment of onerous debts, the purchase of clothing and shoes for the holidays, and the like.

Among the social institutions that provided help, we also include: '*Bikur Kholim*,' which extended medical help to those in need; '*Linat Tzedek*,' to assure bedside care to the ill who had no family.

The activists of '*Kemkha D'Paskha*' looked after providing matzo for Passover to those in need. The members of '*Hakhnasat Kallah*' would volunteer themselves to donate and assure that a bride without means could be brought under her wedding canopy.

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Page 179: From Among the Young Women of Town, on a Winter's Day

Page 180: (Top): R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky and son, Isser (with wife and child)
(Bottom): R' Shimon Odzhikhowsky ('der Tchaplicher') and Wife, with their Grandchildren

The Fire Fighters Brigade occupied a very prominent and important part in the community life of the town, under the leadership of Israel Zlocowsky. The Chairman was Abraham Kremen, and the secretary – Dov Kaufman.

The fire fighters would organize drills and exercises in extinguishing fires from time-to-time. To indicate the seriousness of the emergency, when the alarm was given, the members of the brigade would assemble with great speed, dressed in their uniforms, and equipped with their tools, in the gathering place for the fire fighters, that was beside the synagogue. With lightning speed, the ladders were taken out, barrels for water,

and fire-extinguishing equipment, hoses and pumps. At the same time, several wagons would be commandeered to bring all the fire-fighting equipment to the place where the fire was burning, generally, through the center of the marketplace. Such drills always would generate excitement among the children, who would come from all parts of the town to look with awe and admiration at the fire fighters, who climbed up the tall ladders, and would spray streams of water on the roofs, and 'inadvertently' on the children themselves....

Needless to say, at too frequent intervals, the fire fighters (all of whom were Jews) would have to gather to put out real fires that broke out in town, or in the nearby villages. Those who come from the town no doubt remember very well the two great fires that broke out in 1936, in which more than half of the town was turned into islands of ruin, even if only few of the Jewish homes burned down at that time.

The pride of the town was in the instrumental orchestra of the fire fighters, which played in the streets during festive occasions, be they Jewish or Polish, as well as events that were dedicated to public purposes. The leader of the orchestra was Dov Grodinsky, and after he made *aliyah*, his place was taken by Yitzhak Kamenetzky.

Among the community cultural activities, it is worth mentioning the Drama Circle, whose performances were put on in the premises of the fire fighters (within which a stage was built for the orchestra to play, and for dram circle presentations). It is also worth mentioning the sports activities of the Jewish youth: Soccer teams, basketball and handball, in which skill was developed, and competitions held with the Christian youth of the town, and with mixed teams from the nearby towns.

In the end: let us recall with favor those various 'groups' that occupied themselves in the synagogue with the study of Mishna, Gemara, recitation of the Psalms, and other things: At their head – the Rabbi, R' Shabtai Fein, R' Chaim-Leib Buczkowsky, and R' Yaakov Shmuckler. And let note also be take of the *Hevra Kadisha*, who dealt with bringing the deceased to their final resting place. This *Hevra* kept a *Pinkas*, in which a record was made of all those who died, and all those who were born, and the important events in the life of the Jewish community. The *Hevra Kadisha* looked after the ancient and modern cemeteries, in which many of the headstones had sunk into the ground, and whose ends were obscured by the grass that grew on the parcel, while the town that was here, still occupied its place.

Today, there is no trace of Jewish Belica. The houses of its Jews were burned during the Holocaust period, and those that survived the sword have left the killing fields, and who is to know if these headstones still peer out in these cemeteries....

(Note: pp 180 - 188 is the Yiddish equivalent of this chapter)

A Document Concerning Economic Conditions (1929)

By Sholom Cohen

The following material about Belica is an excerpt from the *JeKoPo Pinkas*, 'Regarding the Ruins of War and Predation,' published by the area-committee of *JeKoPo* in Vilna, in the year 1930. There is a special section in this Pinkas, called, 'The Economic Condition of the Towns in the years 1928-1929,' which consists of about 70 short summaries about such a number of towns, in the Vilna and Grodno Voievodes, in which the special investigator from '*JeKoPo*,' Sholom Cohen, investigated in those years, researching the economic situation in a fundamental manner.

We reproduce here, the verbatim text regarding Belica, as well as supplemental details, about towns from other sections in the referenced Pinkas, where Belica is mentioned.

Page 191: *Young People from the Town During an Outing to a Nearby Forest*

Page 192: *(Top):* *Beside the Polish Volksschule (1935)*
(Bottom): *Beside the Hebrew Volksschule (1935)*

Belica (Lida Environs) the general level of the population id over 300 families and of these, 130 are Jewish.

The principal businesses – store keeping and small business; both of these livelihoods are in a bad state. There is an excess of stores, and apart from this, there are Christian stores in all of the villages. In the town proper, a large and wealthy Christian cooperative operates, which constitutes formidable competition for the Jewish storekeepers. Under one and the same management, a lending bank (*kasa stepczyko*) functions, with sizeable resources. The peasants are 'threatened,' indicating that they will not receive loans from the *kasa*, if they do not buy from the cooperative.

Now, the cooperative is forming a dairy operation with help from the lending bank. Loans are distributed to the Christian populace in order to raise cattle, and they will have to bring the milk to the cooperative, and in this manner, they will pay off their loans.

The plight of the Jewish storekeepers has become worse since the management of the cooperative erected a large building in the middle of the marketplace, paying no heed to the protests of the Jewish populace, where the cooperative is housed. Now, a second building is being erected, for the same purpose, on the place where the horse and cattle market is located, which for some time had been moved out of the center to the outside of the town.

On the market day (which takes place on Wednesday) outside storekeepers travel in (mostly Christian) with

all sorts of merchandise, and they bring a baker from Lida and baked goods and bread from the surrounding villages (also mostly Christian).

Small business is also carried out on a very small scale, and also suffers from a surplus of small businessmen, and also from outside competition.

The tradespeople, especially shoemakers and tailors, are therefore under pressure. There are tailors and shoemakers in each village. The Christian populace is tending more and more to utilize ready-to-wear things.

All five of the bakeries in the town are closed. Great demands were placed on the bakers, which they did not have the means to meet.

Before the war, a larger part of the Jewish populace in the town lived on the floating of lumber using the Neman to reach Germany. There were many contractors who worked this rafting trade, from whom many people would make a living. Others would earn something from day labor at the shore, etc. Today, all of this has disappeared.

Appendix Data in the *Pinkas*:

Income	zl.	Expense	zl.
Loans from '*JeKoPo*'	2,400.00	792 Distributed Loans	98,971.00
Internal Resources	2,227.96	Paid Obligations	5,507.25
Obligations	5,727.95	Repayments: '*JeKoPo*'	400.00
Repaid Loans	94,599.00	Admin & Other	25.09
Total	104,954.91	Total	104,903.34
Increase/(Decrease):	51.57		

The area '*JeKoPo*' committee helped construct a house in Belica for a family of four from the fund for those houses and buildings that were destroyed during the war.

In the years 1919-1921, '*JeKoPo*' took part in the renovation of the bath house in Belica.

In the first regional '*JeKoPo*' conference, held in Vilna, which took place on the 8-9-10 of September 1919, Rabbi J. Rudnick of Belica participated as a delegate. Also, Rabbi J. Rudnick participated as a delegate at the second regional conference in Vilna, that took place on 5-6-7 December 1921.

In the table of the number of Jewish children in the schools of the Vilna area, in the school year 1929-1930, we find that in Belica there were:

In religious schools:	50 students
In various Heders	25 students
The Polish public (*Powszecna)* school	15 students
Total	90 students

The Belica *Volksbank* is found among the 19 such banks, founded by '*JeKoPo*' after The First World War.

One Tear in the Sea of Tears

By Benjamin Makowsky

Page 193: *The Family of Shimon Novogrudsky*

Page 194: *The Family of Herzl Novogrudsky*

The little *shtetl* of Belica produced beautiful personalities, shining Jewish faces, that don't let you forget them. I always look back at those years (1920/21), when I was a guest in Belica and had a chance to observe the Jewish residents, the spiritual striving of the Jewish youth there, the *Bet HaMedrash*, where my uncle, R' Hertz'l Novogrudsky ז"ל, studied day and night, and other such personalities. To this day, I can feel the spiritual atmosphere that I felt at that time there, the sanctity of their beautiful young people, which hoped for a better world, and had Zionist ambitions.

I participated with a group of town amateur theater players, strolled together on the Sabbath, towards evening, near the Neman, discussed the world and Jewish situations. And at that time I thought: what beautiful young people our little town had produced. Now, after the great Jewish Calamity, I ask: Was this all a dream? Has everything – everything – truly been cut down and erased?...

An Arm from a 'Tough' Grandfather

By Sholom Garnicki

Page 195: *Fruma Garnicki*

Page 196: *Young People from Town*

My mother, Chay'keh Esther's was born in Belica. Her father (my grandfather) Zechariah, was considered a 'tough guy' in Belica. I barely remember him, but I heard many stories about him, while I was still studying in Heder, with R' Lejzor the *Shokhet*. R' Lejzor personally would tell me, that my grandfather had three scars around his girth (as a sign of toughness). In the *Bet HaMedrash*, he would always stand, and never got tired. His livelihood was: baking, and in addition to this he ran a tavern. Not once, during a market day, when drunken peasants would attempt to create a scene, and bother the Jews, my grandfather Zechariah would go out carrying a leg of lamb in his hand, and the entire marketplace would fall still.

My father, Pesach, was born in Razanka. He was a grandson of the *Dayan* of Scucyn, whose name I bear. He married my mother in 1908, and up to the beginning of The First World War, they managed a nobleman's estate, not far from Scucyn.

When the front got near to them, the Russian soldiers requisitioned the cows from the estate, and my parents were evacuated to Russia.

In the year 1918, we came back, and we settled in Belica. Our situation at the beginning was very difficult, because we came back without any means to make a living.

My father began to deal with Christians, and our situation became much better. My father would buy up grain, and transport it to Lida. In loading up the wagon with sacks, my mother would work alongside my father and me. I would then say, laughingly, to my mother, 'you have an arm from my grandfather Zechariah.'

I then went off for training, and later made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

Several Personalities from the *Shtetl*

By Eliezer-Meir Savitzky

Page 197: *From the Right: R' Yaakov Shmuckler (יע"ץ)[43]; R' Yaakov Kotliarsky; R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky; Shlomo Jasinowsky*

Page 199: *Grandmother Faygl Meckel with her five Grandchildren*

Page 200: *Top, right:* *R' Yaakov Beksht*
Bottom, Left: *Rabbi R' Yerakhmiel Kaufman*

Yaakov Kotliarsky

He was a boiler maker by trade, a talented and smart man. Later, he abandoned his trade, and built a pitch works. When buses began to run from Belica to Vilna, he became one of the owners of the buses.

He was active in the community in a;; of the town institutions. He was a philanthropist, and always responded generously. For years, he was also the *Gabbai* in the Bet *HaMedrash*, and also the treasurer of the town *Gemilut-Hesed.*

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43 This appears to be the acronym Yaa"tz, which may stand for the name Yaakov Zvi.

Shlomo Dziencelsky

He was a butcher, among the butchers. who would slaughter either a calf or a lamb. There were many children in his family, almost all of them sickly, and Shlomo, indeed, was a bitterly poor man, but at the same time, he was a 'natural' comic. He would always fancy himself as a big-time merchant, who does business on a large scale over long distances. He used this as a way to sweeten up his otherwise bitter existence...

Shmuel-Nahum Stotsky

He was a smith, a decent Jew. In former times, he could always be found in the *Bet HaMedrash*, sitting at a table, where the congregants gathered to study, or with a copy of the Psalms.

This entire family (he, his wife, Lieb'eh, their daughter) were slaughtered in 1921 by Polish workers who were building a bridge over the Neman.

Alta Milikowsky

She was a quiet, decent woman. She was one of those dear Jewish women, who quietly look for those who need help. Wherever there was someone who was sick, she would come to help.

She would also get herself involved in marrying off poor orphan girls.

In 1920, when the fist of the Poles took control of the town, they cut off her father's beard along with half of his face....

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We only described a few of the types in the *shtetl*, who etched themselves into memory with their good deeds and simple Jewishness. Apart from those we mentioned above, there were most certainly tens of other such simple working people in Belica, and skillful, concerned women who bore the stamp of the good attributes of this small *shtetl.*

Sports Events and Gatherings

By Zerakh Kremen

Page 202: *On the Ferry*

Page 203: *With a Kayak on the Neman*

Water-Sport

From its first years, from the time the *shtetl* existed, water-sport most certainly developed. It is clear, that the proximity of the Neman had an influence on this, so that in the summer (and the winter too) Jews would go to swim in the river.

In my memory often stand R' Lejzor the *Shokhet* (*Pisecner*) and י"ע (R' Yaakov Shmuckler), who would swim across the Neman and enchant us children with 'making strokes.' In later years, all the young people knew how to swim, and with the arrival of summer, everyone would go lay around the river.

Until the beginning of the thirties, in this century, the women would swim separately (near the ferry), and the men separately (on the Wigan) – without bathing suits, as God created us... however, in later years, especially after the construction of the new bridge, swimming was initiated near the bridge, as well as in the 'estate,' and, as you can surmise, now with bathing suits.

We would jump from the hills into the water, or from ferries riding by. Often we would borrow a boat from a peasant, and row on the river. In the final years, there were already several kayaks. The principal kayak belonged to Nachman Baranchik, and on this very kayak, he trained a whole generation of kayak enthusiasts...

Also, the majority of the girls, in these last years, learned to kayak, and knew how to swim.

Light Athletics

Sports competition took place between the Polish and Jewish school, and this would stimulate participation in a variety of light-athletic sports (running, jumping, etc.), but there were no special memberships or sports groups in this area.

Young people were attracted mainly to free play in ball.

Net-Ball and Football [44]

Every summer, before nightfall, we would play net-ball behind the stores. Most of the time there was competition between Christians and Jews. In the last years before the war, the Jews had quite a good team.

I recall two football teams in Belica: one at the beginning of the thirties; the second in the last years before the war. On the first team the following took part: Yaakov Galinsky, Eliyahu Milikowsky, and others. In the second – Leib'eh, Jonah and Ber'leh Odzhikhowsky, Peretz Zelikowsky, Nahum Stotsky, Chaim Zelikowsky, Asher Mayewsky, Yaakov Kremen, Zerakh Kremen, and others.

I remember our meets in Zhetl (we won 2-1), in Zhaludok (we won 2-0) and in Vasiliski (we lost 0-5).

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[44] Basketball and Soccer in American parlance

Winter-Sport

A really long time ago, the children in town would coast on primitive sleds, and skate on [primitive] skates (mostly wood, with the iron handles of a pail nailed to the bottoms).

Later on, there were store-bought sport sleighs, and 'real' iron skates (the brothers Yaakov and Zerakh Kremen stood out in this sport).

Cycling

Page 204: *A 'Troika' of Cyclists (from the left): P. Savitzky, M. Shimonowicz, M. Jasinowsky*

Page 205: *A Group of Young People in the 'Atelier' of the Town Photographer*

Page 206: *Young People on a Winter Sabbath...*

Asher Gurwicz was among the first cyclists in Belica. He had gotten so good at riding a bike, that he would go down to the brook with a pail, and fill it with water, while not getting off his bike, and in this way, he would bring the pail full of water back home. Later on, he started riding backwards, meaning with his back to the handles and he would perform the same feat with the pail while riding backwards, and bring the pail full of water home. He would also hold onto an automobile and ride this way practically all the way to Lida. Once, on such a ride, he really banged himself up, but once again resumed doing his tricks on the bike.

Dov Grodzhensky was also one of the first of the cyclists, and he also taught others to ride on his bike. After he made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, more young people purchased bicycles. In the last years before the war, the entire shtetl was 'motorized' – there almost was no Jewish home that didn't have a bicycle... On the rods to Lida, Zhetl and Zhaludok, you could run into young people from Belica as a daily occurrence, riding their own bikes.

And in the end, it is appropriate to recollect the fire fighters here, whose activities and competitions were in a certain measure considered to be sports events. These events would attract young people and thereby also help to develop their physical strength.

Part Three

חלק שלישי

דריטער טייל

To Remember !

To remember. To the end of generations, to the end of days.

To remember the fall of justice and the death of compassion.

The darkening of the years, in which malevolence and slaughter celebrated victorious bloodletting.

The complacent indifference of a world with a pitiless heart.

Every sob and every drop of sweat; every tear and interrupted scream.

Every mass grave of the murdered and every train of poison; every camp of despair and every oven for consuming human flesh.

All the masses and hordes that were rounded up, imprisoned and driven to the end of their existence and the cessation of life.

Every heart that was frightened and every hair that was made to stand on end; every throat that gave out a groan, every fist that was clenched.

To remember that terror that is indescribable, the deep resignation and hopelessness from the deep.

The heroism that grew in those killing fields, and the sacred anger that was ignited in those hearts.

The despair that was transformed into a keen sword, and the teeth of enmity of those sentenced to die, that were sunk into the throats of the murderers.

The '*Shema Yisrael*' of those who had to surrender their souls who were without blemish.

And the longing ache of those who say *Kaddish* over the death of a nation.

(A. Shlonsky)

My Father-Teacher The Rabbi *Gaon* R' Shabtai Fein זצללה"ה

By Rabbi Reuven Fein

Page 212: *Three Generations of Rabbis*

Top: *The Rabbi-Gaon R' Yehuda-Leib Fein זצללה"ה(Rabbi of Slonim)*

Bottom: (Right): *The Rabbi-Gaon R' Shabtai Fein זצללה"ה*

(Left): *Rabbi R' Reuven Fein יבלח"א*

My Father-Teacher, The Gaon and Righteous Man זצללה"ה, הי"ד was born in Slobodka, a suburb of the city of Kovno that is on the second side of the Wyly River.[45]

The year in which he was born is not known to me, however, I do know that he presented himself for military service in the year 5675 (1915), that is in the last summer before the retreat of the Russians from the territories of Lithuania, and western Byelorussia. It is possible that he presented himself for military service at that time, for the second time.

My father זצ"ל was the firstborn son of his father, the true *Gaon*, the Rabbi of Slonim, who had previously served there as the Rabbi. My grandfather studied in the city of Minsk, and he was a product and entered with the 'great' *Gaon* of Minsk. This *Gaon* proposed to the people of the *shtetl* of Pesochno, adjacent to Sluck (beside the headwaters of the Neman River), that they should retain my grandfather as the Rabbi of their congregation. And so, at an early age, my father and his parents went to the *shtetl* of Pesochno, and from there – after a short while – to the city of Kupiskis, that was an important city in the Kovno district of Lithuania. My father traveled to study at the Yeshiva in Volozhin at the age of fifteen, (it had re-opened anew after it had been closed, by decree of the Czarist regime, during that well-known period when they were informed on, by *Maskilim* who favored assimilation, that the Russian language was not being taught in *Heders* or in Yeshivas).

After some time, my father transferred to study at the Yeshiva in Slobodka. From there, he went to study with the true Gaon, and one of the exponents of his generation, R' Yitzhak Yaakov Rubinowicz, nicknamed by all as: *R' Itz'l miPonevicz* (because he had served as the Rabbi of the city of Panevezys). This Gaon was also the teacher of my grandfather in his youth, in the Yeshiva at Slobodka, where the select students from the Yeshivas studies, supported by Baron Ginzburg.[46] It was with R' Itz'l that my father obtained his direction

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45 This body of water is not readily identifiable, viz: Kaunas (Kovno) is located at the confluence of the two largest Lithuanian rivers, the Nemunas and the Neris, and near the Kaunas Reservoir, the largest body of water entirely in Lithuania.

46 Baron Horace Ginzburg. He was a resident of St. Petersburg in Russia and a person of significant influence in Jewish Russia in the latter part of the nineteenth century. His bent was towards assimilating the Jewish population into the general Russian population. He believed that with

in study, and it was from there that he emerged as a great scholar, *par excellence.*

After my father presented himself to the military, he was compelled to hide himself within the boundaries of the city of Vilna until the Russians retreated from the city. Because of this, my father was prevented from joining up with the hordes of yeshiva students that went off with their Rabbi-Teachers into the interior of Russia, and for a long enough time, he studied by himself in Vilna or Asmjany (in which he served as the Rabbi).

In our house, I saw the diminutive kerosine lamp – called at that time a '*kupchik*' – by whose light he studied for an extended period of time.

This situation persisted until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. At that time, many of the yeshiva students from Russia began to come back, and places for Torah study were established anew in various cities, or as they were called 'kibbutzim.' A 'kibbutz' of this kind was also established in the city of Bialystok, and my father went there to study.

It was in Bialystok that, a short time after the war, a marriage was proposed to him with my Mother-Teacher Sir'l-Yenta ע"ה, הי"ד, and the franchise of the rabbinate for the town of Narew beside Bialystok went over to him. after four years of serving in this capacity, as the Rabbi of this town, the place where I, and my older sister Dvora-Henna ע"ה הי"ד, were born, my father assumed the rabbinate in Belica, and afterwards, my younger brother Yaakov-Eli' ע"ה הי"ד, was born there.

As all know, my Father and Teacher, the *Gaon* and *Tzaddik* זצללה"ה carried the obligation of Rabbi and spiritual leader, on his shoulders with the greatest responsibility, and was a catalyst in community life. He established study groups for *Shas* and *Mishna*, and concerned himself with strengthening the school, and would appear before the authorities in various representations for the general good.

A short time before the war, my father k"mz conveyed part of his writings and innovative thoughts on the *Shas,* and Maimonides to be published in Bilgoraj near Lublin, and as the book was being readied for publication, the terrifying war broke out and destroyed everything. The name of the book was to be : *'Oneg-Shabbat.'* I was privileged and succeeded in saving everything that was supposed to have been published, and with God's help, I published the book a few years ago, in our own Holy Land.

I, personally, left Belica immediately after *Simchat Torah* of 5700 (1940) and got to Vilna. The fate of the *shtetl* of Belica and the fate of its Jews are known to me only by hearsay. ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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secular education, the modification of Jewish dress, the acceptance of Russian language and culture by the Jews of Russia, the "Jewish problem" would be solved. He was one of the prime movers in the building of the great synagogue building in St. Petersburg, a synagogue that the more observant Jews there shunned.

An Elder Whose Vision-Dream Became Reality

By E.M. Savitzky

Page 215: *R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky*

Page 218: *A Passover Seder at the home of R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky (Two years before the Holocaust)*

Page 219: *The Son, Azriel Kamenetzky, and the Daughter Shlomit Kamenetzky at her mother's grave (in the year 1938)*

R' Chaim-Noah ל"ז was an elder in every sense: He was of advanced age, and at his death in the Lida ghetto, he was 75 years old; he was 'sage' in his years – because, in this sense, R' Chaim-Noah was 'old' all of his full, and interesting long life – in his thoughts, deeds, and his daily conduct, especially in his love and deeds for '*Hibat Tzion*,' and for Zionism.

As a student of the *Kabbalah* in those years, he was one of the regulars at the *Bet HaMedrash* (he was born in Lida). However, while even still a youth, he felt a special love for the books of the prophets, and each day, he began to study a couple of chapters in the Tanakh, and he especially read , with great feeling, the words of solace offered by the Greater Prophets. He drew his faith and hope from their words, that a day would arrive and even his people would return to its Land, and once again build up its homeland anew, in our Land, in security.

When he was a young lad, R' Chaim-Noah was brought by R' Shmuel Schechtman ל"ז (Munya Karpel's) to his home in Niteca[47], to study, and to educate his sons and daughters. After several years, R' Chaim-Noah married the distinguished young lady, Mrs. Rachel, the daughter of R' Moshe Yenta's (Kaplan) of Belica. Here, he opened a 'modern' *Heder*, and in a short time, he garnered a reputation as an effective teacher, received students from 'the better homes,' and was able to make a respectable living from these educational pursuits, while also finding spiritual and intellectual satisfaction.

R' Chaim-Noah introduced a new and pleasant atmosphere into the 'modern' *Heder*. First, he positioned himself to his students in a pleasant manner, with affection and love, and not with yelling and beating, as was the more normal habit with most students at that time, and with this, he won the hearts of the students who loved him and respected him all the days of their lives. Second, he added the study of the Hebrew language to the conventional curriculum of study, and he not only taught it, he inculcated in his students a loyalty to the traditions, to national identity, and especially to the desolated homeland that was being brought back to life.

R' Chaim-Noah was not content with the 'modern' *Heder* that he had established in his town, and he visited other cities in order to organize a 'modern' *Heder*, using his own as a model. He reached as far as the city

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47 Possibly Netech' about five miles from Belica, but could also be Njacec.

of Siedlice in Poland, and spent a number of years there in education and the organization of 'modern' *Heders*. In the free time that he had, from his hard work, he would direct an effort on behalf of the concept of '*Hibat Tzion*,' a concept beloved and dear to him, and wherever he went, he would excite his listeners with his words, directed especially at the young, to work on behalf of the Land of Israel and Zionism, leaving behind an organized group in every place he went.

Understandably, there were no lack of protagonists in those days, who opposed the idea of a return to Zion, among who the argument was that this was contrary to the faith and its tradition, and it was forbidden to attempt to accelerate the coming of the 'End of Days,' but rather to wait in absolute faith for the coming of the Messiah, and only he [the Messiah] will redeem us from this bitter exile, and return us to the land that God promised to our forefathers. But R' Chaim-Noah neither feared nor was he dismayed by them – in his complete faith that the Divine Spirit had been aroused to return its dispersed sons to their borders, and with his stormy fervor, he would disassemble their arguments, and continue with his sacred work in 'Initiating the Redemption,' until the coming of the Messiah, our Just One.

Even earlier than sixty years ago, there was already a 'Hibat Tzion' group in our town. Three of the prominent people of the town stood at its head: R' Nahum Shebshinsky ז"צ – the Chairman of the committee; R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky ז"ל – Secretary; R' Michael Lefkowsky ז"ל – Treasurer. The effort on behalf of the concept of '*Hibat Tzion*' in the town was realized through lessons and speeches at the *Bet HaMedrash*, and it was R' Chaim-Noah who was the living spirit behind this effort. He also engaged in the 'black' work: he would convince the members to purchase lottery tickets and stamps that the central *Agudat Hibat Tzion* put out, for the purpose of supporting settlement in the Land of Israel. From his own mouth, I heard several times, that he would even organize dinner-dances for this purpose on Hanukkah in the barbershop of R' Yaakov Baranchik ז"ל (Yankl Tzin'keh's) and that even R' Nachman would attend the celebration (and he would add: 'It is understood that R' Nachman sat in a separate room.').

Apart from his educational work, and his endeavors on behalf of Zionism, he engaged in dealing with all of the town needs, and it is possible to say of him, that he was one of those who faithfully dedicated himself to looking after community affairs. He organized the institutions of '*Bikur Kholim*,' and '*Linat Tzedek*,' arranged for a municipal '*Gemilut Hesed*' that would look after the needs of those that required a loans, without interest. After The First World War, he organized and ran the Volksbank that functioned with the help of '*JeKoPo*' in Vilna (he led the bank until the Soviets arrived in 1939, and closed it).

With the outbreak of the war between the Nazis and the Soviets (1941), R' Chaim-Noah was plunged into a massive quandary. He would pace back-and-forth in his house, sunk in his thoughts, and from time-to-time would start to talk in a saddened tone: 'What will happen now? What will the day bring? To the God of Israel, how can the sons of your people stand against the evil decrees and the terrifying troubles that lurk to befall them? But after a number of hours, when many of the townsfolk came to ask his advice, whether it was worth fleeing their location together with the Soviet military, into the center of vast and broad Russia, his spirit revived, and his eyes began to sparkle as they usually sis, and he decisively said: ' I think that it is better that everyone remain in his place: from the experience of The First World War, I learned that whoever did not leave their place was in better condition than those who fled to Russia; they were tossed about in alien lands, and were among the first to contract diseases that erupted from the terrible hunger that reigned there.'

Yes, he was an elder with integrity of character, and he was unable to even conceive that an enemy so terrible could arise against his people, that would destroy it right down to the root, from the young to the old, women and children alike, with a cruelty that has no peer in the annals of human history.

Indeed, from the first day that these malevolent ones entered the town with fire and blood, this aging man saw the error in his judgment. With his own eyes, he saw how savage German soldiers put one house after the other to the torch, many of them houses that had been built with the toil of generations, and had passed as an inheritance from father to son, without any fault or wrongdoing on the part of the builders. Only very few days after this, yet another type of pillage and predation came into being: suddenly, a cohort of Nazis burst into the center of the town, charging through the streets with shouting and abusive threats. In the end, they seized two innocent and righteous men (R' Chaim-Yitzhak Kremen and Fyv'eh the son of Moshe-David Stotsky ה"ד), gave them a large basket, and ordered them to go to the 'accursèd' Jews to gather eggs, and if they could not fulfil the order – they will be killed like dogs. I remember, at that hour, that the old man summoned his strength, and went out into the only road that had escaped arson, where all the people of the town had gathered. He trod on the street, here and there, and called out: – Fellow Jews, turn over whatever eggs you have in your homes; do not think now about yourselves or your children; we are standing as if we were in the place of our forefathers of yesteryear, poised to perform the mitzvah of redeeming hostages; give whatever eggs you have at home; permit our dear two brethren to be released by these murderers.' It is understood that, in the wake of this exhortation on his part, everyone turned over all the eggs they had at home, for purposes of getting the hostages released, and it was in this way, that the order for the eggs was fulfilled.

However, the bitter end of this incident oppressed the old man even further. Because when the two brought the basket of eggs to the murderers, the eggs were taken from them, and afterwards they were ordered to get on a freight truck, and they were taken outside of town. At the beginning, not one person knew where they had disappeared to, but after several days, some peasants came from the village of Misilowiec[48] , and related that the bandits had killed them and buried them close to the village. When R' Chaim-Noah heard about this travesty, he bent his head as if he was a mourner, and let out a broken groan that broke the heart and said: – We are lost, all of us are lost.'

After a brief respite, the Nazis again fell upon the town, surrounding the Jewish quarter and began seizing people to do [forced] labor. On that same 'black day' they gathered up thirty-six Jews, among them the Rabbi of the community, the Rabbi *Gaon* R' Shabtai Fein ה"ד, bringing them to a station close to the Russian Orthodox cemetery, and they tortured them there with a variety of severe and bizarre tortures, and afterwards, forced them to dig a grave for themselves, and shot them at the edge of the pit. This incident broke R' Chaim-Noah completely, because among the thirty-six was also his youngest son – Yitzhak. And so, R' Chaim-Noah, and his wife, Gitt'l remained bereaved of their youngest son for days. His sorrow was beyond bearable, because the murderers continued to prey upon their victims for several weeks, and they did not permit the martyrs to be given a proper Jewish burial.

At the same time, on Rosh Hashanah, prayer quorums were arranged at the home of my father, and the home of R' Joseph Wolkowysky, and the services of 'the Days of Awe' were especially 'Awesome' that year.

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48 Possibly Nesilovtsky, about two miles from Belica

Everyone felt in his heart that the prayers were talking about themselves personally, addressing their personal fate, and the fate of their family. When the *'U'Nesaneh Tokef'* prayer was recited: – 'Whom for life, and whom to death, who os at his end, and who is not at his end, who by fire, who by water – the letters of these words were like needles that stabbed the bodies of those reciting them. Fore each, the question was carved into their minds: Who knows by what sort of death I will have to Sanctify the Name?

The young man, R' Lipman, the son of R' Dov Radominer the Kohen, told me: R' Chaim-Noah lead the services in front of the ark at the minyan in the house of R' Joseph Wolkowysky, and in my entire life I never heard such a pouring out of the soul. He enunciated every word of prayer with the clarity of his tongue, and in a number of them, he stretched out his arms above, and registered his plea to the heavens. When he arrived to the point in the familiar morning prayer, 'do not wipe out the remnant of the sons of the king,' he fervently began to plead: 'Merciful Father, if you indeed are Our Father, how are you able to rest silently on your throne of glory and look down upon the deeds of these unclean ones, that they perpetrate against the children of your people? Do you, God-forbid, really wish to see the extermination of what remains of your people? And if you are Our King, what sort of King will you appear to be to all the peoples of your world, if you will permit those who are malevolent to exterminate what is left of the sons of the King? When he reached the phrase: 'Spare them *today* from judgment, and desist from holding them guilty,' he called out in a strong voice and continued his plea: 'Master of the Universe – *Today*! *Today*! And only *Today*! Know that tomorrow may be too late...

On the second day of *Rosh Hashanah* 5722 (1942) after the noon hour, news spread through the Jewish quarter that the evil ones granted permission to transfer the bodies of the thirty-six martyrs to be given a Jewish burial. All of us, with digging tools, went to the cemetery, to dig out a common grave for our beloved ones. I recollect that when I arrived, R' Chaim-Noah was there already, and when he saw me, he opened his palms toward me, saying: 'come, help me dig a grave for my little Itchik"....

We began to dig the common grave, and someone arrived to inform us that the murderers are not giving permission to transfer the martyrs to the cemetery, and we were obliged to immediately leave the cemetery. With lowered heads and an ache in our hearts we returned despondent to the Jewish quarter.

On the Eve of Yom Kippur, I went by way of the gardens to visit R' Chaim-Noah, who was in the home of R' Israel Halperin. I found him broken and exhausted. An old man, bent over and without hope. At first, he spoke in a sorrowful voice, softly, regarding his personal troubles, and about the terrifying decrees that cascaded over all of his people. But, suddenly, he stopped what he was saying, and after a number of seconds, ne bestirred himself, and even straightened himself out to his full stature, and with a powerful fervor he said: 'You need to know, that despite this horrible and terrifying situation, I do not give up. Even on a day like this, I believe, with a complete faith, in the maxim, *'Am Yisrael Chai v'Kayam*[49].' Yes, they can kill me and my wife, but my daughter Shlomit and my son Issachar are in the Land f Israel, and they will not get to them. I do not know if I will be privileged to see the downfall of these enemies of my people, but I see with clarity, that, in the end, this Holocaust will run its course, the fury will pass, and a remnant of us will see the denouement of our enemies and the establishment of a Jewish nation in the Land of our Forefathers. – This is how that wise old sage spoke, even at the time that a sharp sword had been placed at the throat of our expiring people.

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[49] The Nation of Israel Lives and Exists

With the writing of these lines, in a sovereign and free nation of Israel, in memory of this sage Jewish elder, I hear the ring of his voice in my ear: 'Yes, they can kill me and my wife, but they will not reach my daughter Shlomit and son Issachar in the Land of Israel,' and by personal eye witness, I see how the prophetic words of R' Chaim-Noah ז"ל have come to pass.

When, today, I see his prominent descendants here in Israel, all of them active in the life of a reborn country, especially his grandson the young Azriel, beloved, and pleasant, in Kibbutz Magal, who stands guard over the border of our sacred Israel, about which his grandfather R' Chaim-Noah foresaw and prophesied, I feel a joy in my heart, that the sacred chain, that had weakened the heart of his noble grandfather, in blood and fire, was not broken or stopped.

Yes, we today are witnesses, that the prophecy and vision of R' Chaim-Noah has been realized.

May the memory of this sage old man – be for a blessing.

The Legacy of the Home of My Forefathers

By Shlomo Shilovitzky

Page 221: The Family of R' Shlomo Szlomowicz (Shlomo der Melamed)

My father-teacher the *Gaon* and *Tzaddik* R' Ben-Zion Shilovitzky זצוק"ל was born in the year 5645 (1885) in the city of Slonim, to his father, R' Eliezer and his mother, Mrs. Hasia. His father was one of the prominent balebatim of the city, an honest man of integrity, who made his living from his own handiwork, a God-fearing man, who dedicated set times for Torah study.

From earliest childhood, my father ז"ל stood out because of his gifts and in his great diligence in the study of Torah. He stood head and shoulders above all the boys of his age, and at the age of fifteen, he fulfilled in his person the maxim 'take yourself off to a place of Torah study' and traveled to the famous yeshiva at Slobodka, which was under the spiritual oversight of the Reverend *Gaon Tzaddik*, R' Nathan-Zvi Finkel זצ"ל, nicknamed 'The Slobodka Grandfather.'

When he reached the age of twenty, after having filled himself with the study of *Shas* and *Poskim*, my father went over to the 'Great Talmud' in the city of Kelme in Lithuania, founded by the 'Kelem Grandfather' the Reverend R' Simcha-Ziss'l Brody זצ"ל. The 'House of Talmud' in Kelem, where my father studied in which my father studied until me married, was the place where his personality unfolded, apart from the fact that students there exerted themselves to acquire mastery of the concepts from *Shas* and *Poskim*, a central objective of this yeshiva was to result in the maturity of the person's character. To achieve such maturation, there was individual attention given by the leading thinkers in *Musar* and Judaism (at the head of which stood the 'Kelem Grandfather'), and everything that was done there was oriented to this goal, and as a result, the institution was transformed into a Higher *Bet HaMedrash* for elevated spirituality. To this end, care was taken in the selection of level of *Musar* of the students. Anyone who knocked at the doors of the yeshiva, was required to undergo probing and fundamental examinations, and pointed interrogation, and only the very few were privileged to be accepted.

My father ז"ל passed these examinations with distinction. He was accepted to this 'House of Talmud' and was greatly influenced by the spirit of this yeshiva, rose and was elevated in aspects of Torah study, and the faith, and was thought of as one of the excellent exponents of that place. It is interesting to note, that in the book 'The Musar Movement' (Volume 20) that Rabbi Dov K"atz prepared, there is a letter from the year 5668 (1908) written by a group of senior students of the 'House of Talmud' and sent to the Land of Israel to R' Leib Brody ז"ל, for him to persuade his son, R' Zvi Brody, who was the son-in-law of R' Simcha Ziss'l, to return to Kelem, and to continue in providing the spiritual leadership of the House of Talmud in place of his father-in-law (after he would pass on); my father ז"ל was one of those who signed that letter.

In the year 5669 (1909) my father entered into marriage with the daughter of R' Shlomo Shmulewicz from the town of Belica, this being my mother the righteous *Rebbetzin*, Mrs. Batya Gala הי"ד. This grandfather of

mine was a wonder in Torah study and piety, his Torah was his faith, his home was a way station and a permanent *Bet HaMedrash*, a genial and modest man, in harmony with his environment, a man of compassion a doer of good deeds, and one who cherished the sages of old. He was extraordinarily careful in guarding the dignity of every person, dispense the Torah to the many, and would study the Torah for its own sake, and not for purposes of getting any pecuniary reward. Never did he stint on his own person, from his effort, or his money, to provide help and assistance for the general good, to the fullest extend of his capability. His wife, Shayna-Reizl ז"ל, my grandmother, was a *Woman of Valor*, God-fearing, and gave all of her effort to assuring that her husband would not be taken away from his Torah study, and his engagement in the pursuit of sacred matters, and to this end, she assumed the entire burden of supporting the family. They had two sons and two daughters: the sons – R' Dov-Zvi, the eldest, was the ritual slaughterer in the town of Dieveniskes, in the Vilna district, and after The First World War, he emigrated to the United States, and in his place, his younger brother was retained, R' Abraham-Noah k"z in the capacity of ritual slaughterer in Dieveniskes; the daughters – my mother, and her sister Sarah-Faygl – whom my grandfather and grandmother tried with all their might to marry off to scholars.

To the heartfelt sorrow of the family, my grandfather was not privileged to be present at the weddings of his children, he passed away, leaving a good name, on 4 Menachem-Ab of the year 5667 (July 15, 1907) and was eulogized by the Rabbis, *Gaonim*, of the town and its vicinity. Our mother told us about the commitment that our grandfather, R' Shlomo, had to the education of the children, and he would pay heed to their activities even while they were still quite young, worrying over their spiritual state even while they were still at a very young age, using all of his pedagogical talents to sent them on a straight course. And it is, therefore, no wonder, that all his progeny followed in his footsteps, and became people of accomplishment: [Regarding] my uncle, Rabbi Dov-Zvi Shmuelwicz שליט"א in the United States, everyone who knows him would testify that he is a person of wondrously noble spirit, who is a model of what heights a human being can achieve.

My grandmother, who was a great-granddaughter and granddaughter of the '*Chayei-Adam*' passed away, leaving a good name, on the Saturday of *Erev Rosh Hodesh* Iyyar 5677 (April 21, 1917) after she had lit the Sabbath candles in her home in Belica – and her soul took flight.

My mother ז"ל stood out because of her pleasant demeanor, while still young, and she had a special talent of endearing herself to everyone. Her insight, and substantial knowledge in world experience would attract the neighbors into our house, whether there were, or were not of our faith, to get her advice and help, and she would delve into their issues, and offer them advice that was well-directed at the objective. In this way, she excelled in matters of good, helping everyone who was in distress that day, and provided support to the hapless and the poor.

After getting married, my father decided not to support himself through his religious study, but rather to earn a living from the work of his hands. In the first period, he made a living as a grain merchant, and after not realizing much from this line of work, he attempted to produce strong drink together with R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz ז"ל, and R' Yaakov Kotliarsky and his son Moshe El'keh from Lida. He did not succeed at this either, and opened a factory for the manufacture of soap, and in time, fortune did not smile on him, and he lost all of his money. There were times when there was not a penny in the house, and our mother fell sick, suffering from a variety of ailments and was unable to help in supporting the household, and were it not for the financial support that was extended to our family by my mother's brother, R' Dov-Zvi Shmulewicz

שליט"א in the United States, during these difficult times, the plight in our household would be sevenfold more dire. Over time, all of this did not impair my father's tranquility or his faith in God – his peace of mind and patience are worth underscoring, and in the most acute of circumstances, one could not see any show of emotion or panic, being always tranquil in spirit, and at peace within a clarity of thought and a full self-cognizance. And my father told me, that during The First World War, when he was traveling with one of the prominent *balebatim* to the city of Slonim, and they were seized in transit by the Germans and accused of smuggling, they were thrown into jail in Slonim, and they were informed that they were to be taken to stand trial in a military court, and a date for the trail was even set (a death sentence awaited them). His companion broke down very quickly, but my father placed his trust in God, as his support, seeing in Divine salvation, a means to avoid falling, God forbid, into a state of despair. The following morning, he heard a sort of 'voice from heaven' repeating itself and calling: 'R' Ben-Zion, I have come to advise you, that in the name of the Rabbi of Slonim, who asked me to convey to you and your companion, that, with God's help we have been able to redeem you, and you will be released yet on this day.' And that is how it was.

My father never so much as let out a groan from his heart, even in the days of his illness and suffering, because he wanted to spare the members of his household any grief, and he made an extra effort so that they could not detect anything the matter with him. My father always participated in the travails of the community, and helped and encourages as best as he could in the spirit of 'I am with him in his time of need.' The central core of his personality was his faith, and it was on its many facets that all of his endeavors and life's behaviors proceeded. In faith, he saw the bedrock foundation whose lips each man must kiss, and he would take note to always understand all the aspects of nature and how the world operated, imbibing from them a fervor that came from the recognition of God's handiwork, and attempting to see in all the events of life, in general, and in specific, the ways of guidance that came from above, and look among them for their spiritual *raison d'être*.

Endowed with a sensitive and fervent soul, his emotions would become manifest especially in the songs of the Sabbath and Festivals, when we were all seated around the table at home. His emotions would also receive expression in prayer, even if his prayer was very subdued, and mainly based on thought. He would deeply immerse himself in prayer, and found it a powerful wellspring of ideas, and would extend his praying that was performed while standing, and even on Yom Kippur, he would stand from morning until the evening. In his prayer, one could see a literal work of the heart, and the residents of Belica, who created a nickname for everyone, gave my father the name of '*Baal Shem*[50],' and accordingly, they called him R' Ben-Zion *Baal Shem*.'

Te commitment of my parents to educating the children in the path of Torah and *Musar* – was remarkable. They deprived themselves of food, and noting was considered to be a difficult obstacle that stood in their way, in their fulfilment of this powerful urge, so that their sons be able to study in prominent yeshivas, and their daughter in the Beth Jacob Seminary in Cracow.

My parents lived to see their sons make *aliyah* to the Holy Land.

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50 Perhaps a reference to the *Baal Shem Tov*, the founder of *Hasidim*, and considered a holy man.

In the year 5694 (1934) my father ז"ל, was invited by Out Teacher, Rabbi R' Yerucham Leibowitz זצ"ל, the great spiritual leader of the Yeshiva of Mir, and was given the task of directing the study of Torah and *Musar* in the Junior Yeshiva at Mir. My father accepted the appointment, and we left Belica and went to Mir.

On 19 MarHeshvan 5702 (November 19, 1941) – that bitter and rash day, in which the Germans, may their name and memory be erased, organized the great slaughter among the Jews of Mir, my sainted father, R' Ben-Zion Shilovitzky זצק"ל and my righteous mother Batya-Gala née Szlomowicz ז"ל were martyred, together with the sacred community of Mir, הו"ד.

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In conclusion, a few lines about my mother's sister, Sarah-Faygl ז"ל, whom we children loved very much, and related to her as if she were a sister. We remember only too well those times, when our mother was sick, and suffered from many symptoms, and our father was very occupied with his business, so that our aunt Sarah took care of our mother and us with tremendous dedication. Fate was cruel to her, in that she did not have children of her own, and accordingly, she put all of her love and dedication into us. No one ever sensed any bitterness in her heart, she was at harmony with her environment, having a good humor, and a good heart. In the last years, before The Second World War, our uncle, Abraham-Noah, who was the ritual slaughterer in Dieveniskes, requested her husband, R' Israel k"z to come from their location, and he retained him as his assistant in his capacity as ritual slaughterer. Our aunt Sarah, together with her husband, R' Israel Rowinowsky were martyred together with their brother R' Abraham-Noah and his family, at the time The *Abrogator*[51] fell upon the Jews of Dieveniskes. הו"ד

HaMelech...

By E.M. Savitzky

R' Joseph son of R' Eliezer Gapanowicz *HaKohen*, was a Jew of integrity and honesty. Up to when he got married, he was a frequenter of the *Bet HaMedrash* for study, and was also a village teacher in the village of Pogiry. In this village, he proposed to his intended, Mrs. Mir'l, and took her to wife. After their marriage, he experienced difficulty in getting established in life, and decided to learn a trade, in order to make a living from his labor. He learned shoemaking, and was able to make a good living from this for all his life.

From time-to-time, he would stop his work, go over to the bookshelf that he had in his house, pick himself a book, and take a short hour to look into it, return the book to its place, and once again take his seat on the footstool by his work.

It was only on the Sabbath, that he would set aside his worries and concerns, and dedicate himself to the sanctity and tranquility of the Holy Day [of Rest]. After the Sabbath eve meal, he would be quick to lie down and rest, and after several hours of rest, he would be early to rise. His first task was to do the traditional review of the weekly Torah portion, twice in the original text, and once in Aramaic *Targum*, along with the

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51 An allusion to the Hebrew word '*Koret*' referring to the act of cutting short. One of the biblical punishments, for a serious transgression, is to have one's life cut short.

Rashi commentary for the entire portion. After this, he would recite the Psalms in a sweet, pleasant voice, and when the dawn broke, he would speed to the synagogue to pray with the quorum of the 'older men.' Upon his return from the synagogue, he would bless the day [over a ceremonial cup of wine], eat his midday Sabbath meal, rest a bit, and once again get involved with a book. So it was, in this way, that he would pass the Sabbath, in the study of Torah and in serving The Creator.

R' Joseph also could sing, and from time-to-time, he would lighten his work with a traditional melody drawn from the prayers of the High Holy Days. His intense desire was, that he will have the privilege of leading the services of the community on the High Holy Days. This desire came to pass, and year after year, he was the '*Baal Shakharit*[52]' in the 'Old' *Bet HaMedrash*.

After *Shabbat Nachamu*[53], the neighbors would already begin to hear R' Joseph practicing his melodies and rehearsing all the prayers of *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*. He was fortunate, in those days, to be the man who stood before the Holy Ark on the Day of Judgment, to beseech The Almighty for His compassion, and for a good year for all the members of his congregation.

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Ten days after the German regiments burst into the town with blood and fire, the murderers befell the town early on one Sunday morning, and began to drive those remaining men out of their houses with beating and violent force. The sight was terrifying, and I can remember how they drove myself and my father ז"ל out of our house, and hounded us with batons and staves, so that we would run faster, to the area in front of the Catholic church. A terrifying picture then passed before my eyes, and to this day, it sends a shudder through my entire body and soul. People ran about holding their clothing, and the malefactors did not permit them to get dressed. In front of me, the young boy Lipa Radominer ran by, with his trousers in his hands, and every time he stopped to put the trousers on, the bandits started to hit him with cruel force, and did not permit him to put them on. In this way, he ran about half-naked, and they amused themselves in a savage laughter, taking pleasure and feeling good from the suffering of the Jew, until along with his trousers, he came to the place where they had gathered us together.

On the lot in front of the Catholic church, they arranged us in several rows. We stood that way for about two hours, without knowing what was to become of us, and in the meantime, the Germans ran about, here and there, shouting and cursing. Also, the Polish police were riding back and forth on bicycles, and from time-to-time, they would pass something along to the Germans. Suddenly, a rumor passed among the rows, that they had already prepared grave pits for us beside the village of Yel'na.

Beside me stood R' Joseph Gapanowicz, and when he heard this news, he shut his eyes, and began to rock back and forth, and to intone, *Ah-hai, Ah-ahai...* when I heard the sound of his melody, I began to beg of him:

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52 The cantor who led the first part of the morning service. Because the service was so long and arduous, the work was usually divided among at least two men. The *Baal Shacharit* led the service from inception to the end of the Torah reading, and then the service was taken over by the *Baal Musaf*.

53 The first Sabbath after *Tisha B'Av*

'R' Joseph, stop singing, because you will bring a great misfortune upon the entire community.' But he paid no attention to me, and with his eyes shut tight, he continued with his sorrowful and awesome melody, until he culminated it with the enunciation of : *HaMelech*....

For year upon year, I heard R' Joseph, and how he would sing this tune in the *Bet HaMedrash*, and I have heard this tune used also by others who lead services. But R' Joseph's voice was different, that voice of his, *Ah-hai, Ah-ahai*... accompanies me, and takes me back over all the ways and paths that I traversed since that day. And always, when I, once again, hear the voice of R' Joseph behind me, I feel in my heart. that this sound, *HaMelech*... is a reincarnation derived from those voices, that is heard from one end of the world to the other...

Thirty-Five Years of Life and Struggle (1914-1949)

By Israel Zlocowsky[54]

A. During The First World War

In the year 1914, with the outbreak of The First World War, my father was drafted into the Russian army. I was still a young boy, and together with my brother, we supported the family. As early as then, I knew what it meant to suffer.

During the first winter of the war, heavy snows fell and a typhus epidemic broke out in town. There was no doctor in this location, and the only person capable of administering any help was the pharmacist, Abraham Kremen ל"ז. In our house too, there were typhus casualties, and I had to assist my mother in caring for them. At the same time, one of my friends in Belica, Shayna Galinsky ל"ז died, and this event affected me greatly.

The schools were all closed, and the severe winter caused the children to be concentrated in the old synagogue around the oven.

How I Became a Fire-Fighter

After Passover, a fire broke out in town. I awoke to the ringing of church bells, and I ran to the point of the blaze. The new synagogue was already engulfed in flames, and the fire had spread over to the old synagogue. My uncle, Yaakov Meckel, asked of people that they ascend with soaked sacks, and spread them on the roof of the old synagogue, in order to save it from being burned down. However, no one responded to him. Seeing this, I leapt onto the roof of the building, which I loved very dearly, and when the rest of the people saw a boy climbing, even they began to go up. This is how the old synagogue was saved. From that time on, I became a fire fighter.

The Retreat of the Russian Army

After a bit of time, the Russians suffered a defeat by Prussia, and they began to retreat eastward, in the face of the stronger German forces.

The retreat, from the vicinity of Grodno, passed through Belica, and in a number of days, the retreating army appeared, with my drafted father among them. He advised us, along with others, not to leave the town, for purposes of traveling into Russia, because the plight of the refugees on the roads is very bad, and they are

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54 Israel Zlocowsky has also provided testimony in the Scucyn Yizkor Book, which is reflected in this memoir as well.

dying by the thousands because of the extreme conditions to which they are being exposed.

Despite this, not many took my father's advice, bought horses and wagons, and began to abandon the town, moving eastward.

The town was practically emptied of its residents. Very few remained behind. I can remember one time that Aryeh, the son of Yaakov Kotliarsky, and I, were wandering about the streets of the town, and we ran into the Rabbi Ozer Poniemansky, who occupied the position of being Head of the Jewish community. He detained us, and turned us over into the hands of two Russian soldiers in order to help them move a flock of cows to Russia. Having no choice, we continued to move with the flock, under the watch of the soldiers, up to the bridge at the Neman train station, and there, at our first opportunity, we fled and returned to Belica.

The principal reason for why the residents abandoned the town – was due to an incident that took place: the retreating Russian soldiers began to plunder the stores, and the officer of the city shot and killed a soldier on the spot. The fear of revenge by the soldiers caused almost all of the residents to decide to leave the town.

On Yom Kippur of 1915, the Russians confiscated the synagogue, and set up a hospital for those ill with typhus, and cholera, that had spread among the retreating soldiers. Lacking the use of a synagogue, we prayed in the home of Chaya the daughter of Moshe-David Stotsky.

A detachment of Cossacks was stationed in our yard, who were getting ready to leave behind a scorched earth. They told us that they had received an order to torch the entire town.

In the meantime, they had set fire to the bridge over the Neman. When we saw the fire, we all began to weep intensely. The officer in charge of the Cossacks, with the rank of a colonel, approached my mother and asked what had caused the crying. My mother told him her circumstances, that her husband was at the front, and we have no possibility of retreating with the army, seeing as we were counted among those poor who were going to stay, at the hour when the wealthy left the town in a timely fashion. When we heard – my mother said – from the mouths of the soldiers that they are preparing to burn down our house, we began to cry. The colonel was moved by what my mother had to say, and promised her that the town would not be burned down.

The Germans Arrive

Two days after Yom Kippur, the Germans 'fortunately' entered Belica. Those Jews, who awaited them as if they expected the Messiah, were rapidly disillusioned bitterly. Immediately after they arrived in the town, they began to conduct searches through the houses, looking for foodstuffs, and confiscating everything that they found.

The Jewish residents – had their eyes opened, and began to concern themselves with preparing food for the

pending winter. Everyone desired those parcels of land that belonged to those who had left the town, and were planted with potatoes and grain, and began to harvest them and transfer them to their homes.

The Years of German Occupation

The years of the German occupation from 1915-1918 were difficult ones. We suffered the pangs of hunger. A part of the Jews engaged in commerce, but most of the residents, especially the young people, were commandeered into cutting sown trees, and the clearing of roads. Despite the fact that I was of a young age, the Germans appointed me as the head of a group. I was paid three marks a day, and from this, I supported the entire family.

I received my appointment as head of a group, thanks to the intercession of Yitzhak-Moshe Gapanowicz , who was the head of the managers in the office of the chief engineer.

In the year 1917, after the October Revolution, my father returned, lightly wounded, from Russia.

'Bandits' Who Escaped Imprisonment

After the German occupation, Russian soldiers remained in the vicinity, who had escaped German imprisonment, and hid out in the forests. At the beginning they would come to the villages at night, asking for food and clothing. However, with the passage of time, they organized themselves, obtained arms, and forcefully took the food from the villagers. They also murdered many of the peasants who resisted them in their endeavors. Periodically, they would fall upon travelers, and occasionally – even upon small units of the occupying German army, that was dispersed among the villages.

At the end of 1917, when the Germans were still in town, the 'Bandits' organized an attack against a number of houses. the first victim of this attack was Yehoshua Jasinowsky ז"ל, whom they killed. The 'Bandits' plundered the houses of Eliyahu Meckel and that of the family of Eizik Baranchik. The latter received very severe beatings and they tortured them very hard.

The Assault of Robbers on the Town

On a Saturday in 1918, the Germans left town, and the Jews were not able to organize adequate self-defense quickly enough. In their possession they had: a number of pistols, and one hunting rifle.

On Saturday night, the robbers attempted to capture the town, but the local protective forces began to fire in volley using the pistols and the one rifle, creating loud noise. The attackers shot a few rounds, and by their light, we saw them pulling back in the direction of the Neman.

On the Thursday afterwards, there was a market day. I recall that somebody came and said that a number of the robbers, that took part in the prior assault on the Baranchik household, were in town. A discussion ensued among the men in the self-defense force, as to whether they should be detained or not. In the end, it was decided not to detain them, and this was a fatal mistake, because the objective of these infiltrators was to spy and discover how much arms the Jews had. They observed that the security force walked about with pistols, and not even a single rifle.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, approximately, the villagers began to quickly leave the town, and at that time, gunfire began to fall on the town, coming from several directions. Immediately afterwards, the robbers appeared. They advanced in military formation under the command of a Cossack, 'Andrzejusza.' The local self-defense could not withstand against their force, and dispersed. The robbers, that numbered about 250 men, well-armed with new rifles with much ammunition, pistols and hand grenades, plundered the entire town, and killed four people:

Chaim Grodinsky ז"ל

Yaakov Meckel ז"ל

Mordechai Kaufman ז"ל

Yehuda-Leib Radominer ז"ל

The Entry of the Soviets

A few days later, the Soviets entered our town. They remained with us for a short time, because they were retreating from the Polish army. During the Soviet occupation, we caught two of the murderers from the village of Zachepichi: Bobrowski and Walyuk. The Soviets conducted a trial for them in Belica, and sentenced them to death by hanging.

However, the Soviets did not carry out the sentence, and were compelled to abandon the area. The sentenced defendants escaped from jail, but during the escape, Walyuk was shot and killed on the railroad tracks, on *Ulica* Kamenka in Lida, while Bobrowski managed to get away and disappear.

The Entrance of the Poles

With the entrance of the Poles, the Jews, yet again, suffered from being trod upon, beaten and abused.

Some short time before they entered, when the Soviet-Polish front was around the line between Belica - Lida, some of the Belica residents decided to transport foodstuffs to Lida. Among these were: David-Zvi Meckel,

Israel-Meiram Kremen, Aryeh Grodinsky, Leah, the daughter of Min'keh Wolkowysky, and a number of Jews from Zhetl. About eleven kilometers from Belica, beside the village of Drozdowa, the Jews were taken into custody by a Polish guard that accused them of spying on behalf of the Soviets, took them off the road, and brought them to the village of Savichi, where they were lashed. Aryeh Grodinsky received 25 lashes, Israel-Meiram Kremen 40 lashes, and one of the men from Zhetl – 30 lashes. Afterwards, they were taken to the village of Netech', and there, they were sentenced to death. The sentence was scheduled to be carried out on that same day, at eight o'clock in the evening. When the matter became known in the town, they immediately ran to the Catholic priest, to plead for their lives. Thanks to the immediate intervention of the latter, they were set free.

The only one who did not receive lashes was Leah Wolkowysky, however, out of great fear and weeping, a blood vessel in her heart was affected, and a short while later, she died, this despite the fact that up to that time she had been a very healthy young woman.

The Soldiers Return to Their Routine

In the year 1920, after the end of the war, the economic circumstances of my family were totally bad. I began to think of how I could help out at home, and decided to engage in commerce in Vilna. I would bring foodstuffs to Vilna, and from there on my return – all manner of knick-knacks. Thanks to this, our circumstances improved.

In those days, the trip to Vilna took a long time, seeing as we did the trip by wagon. In time, I began to make the trip by train, and I would send only the merchandise by wagon.

My trips and experiences in Vilna taught me that life in the city were different from life in the town. In the meantime, I was drafted into the Polish army, and even during my military service, I would travel to cities and see different kinds of life. All this pushed me to do something of a community nature for our town, among which one of the more important endeavors, was the organization of a fire-fighting brigade.

B. The History of the Organization of the Belica Fire-Fighters Brigade

Page 232: *Top:* *The Fire-Fighters Orchestra*

Bottom: *The Fire-Fighters During a Fire Drill Exercise*

Page 233: *The Members of the Fire-Fighters Brigade at a Festive Gathering*

After the burning of the New Synagogue in the year 1915, the *Pristav*[55] bought the fire-fighters a hand pump.

When the Germans entered the town, they established a fire-fighting group and promised its members that they would be excused from forced labor.

With the arrival of the Poles, the hand pump was kept in the bath house, and there was no organization worthy of that name.

In the year 1923, when I returned from my service in the military, I found a group of fire-fighters, at whose head stood the principal of the national school, the Pole, Rogowski. But there was no headquarters, and the organization was defunct.

I was selected to serve as Rogowski's deputy. I began to organize the institution along military lines, and thanks to the active members such as: Noah-Abba Gapanowicz ז"ל, Meir Zwick ז"ל, Ziss'l Kalmanowicz ז"ל, Chaim-Yitzhak Kremen ז"ל; and to be counted separately for long life – Ch. Lejzorowicz, Shmuel Shimonowicz, Dov Grodinsky, and others, we succeeded in transforming it into a living organization.

The pharmacist, Abraham Kremen ז"ל was selected to be the Chairman, and as secretary, separately mentioned for long life – the teacher, Mr. Dov Kaufman.

At the same time, in the year 1924, there was a bakery for matzos (*podrat*) set up in the home of Chaya-Esther Meckel ע"ה. Her husband who was a merchant of agricultural produce, stored a large amount of flax on his roof. From the excess heat, the flax once overheated, and burst into flame. The fire-fighter went to work, and thanks to the good organization, the fire was swiftly put out, such that no damage was done to the house itself. I set up a chain of people from the location of the fire to the two water wells nearby, and the people passed pails of water from the well directly to the fire.

After this incident, we called for a joint meeting between the committee of the fire-fighters with the heads of the *Gmina*, and we requested that we be provisioned with fire-fighting equipment, otherwise, we would be forced to disband.

And truly, with the passage of a bit of time, we received a new fire engine, and other fire-fighting equipment that we needed, from the '*Starosta*' in Lida.

About a year after this, a fire broke out in the home of the priest, and again, we succeeded in putting it out quickly.

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55 A municipal official, perhaps a police inspector, or the like.

On the Sunday after this event, the priest gave a sermon in church, where he described the work of the Jewish fire-fighters as a miracle.

As a prize for this successful undertaking, we received steel drums on wheels, for conveying water, from the central fire-fighters command in Warsaw.

In those days, the organization already numbered about fifty people.

At the same time, a huge fire broke out in the Parsal Forest beside the village of Zbljany.

Together with the police, we enlisted the entire population in order to interdict the blaze. The fire was so intense, that the wild animals fled the forest, showing no fear of human beings. In the middle of the fire-fighting, we cut down hundreds of trees around it, in order not to give it the opportunity to spread. For a whole day of intense work, we managed to succeed in putting out the fire.

The local authorities began to take note of us, and in every instance, we had free access to all the offices of the regime. In a pending meeting of this branch of the fire-fighters, we decided to request a central location of all the fire-fighting equipment in our possession.

And here is an appropriate place to tell about the erection of that location (*Remiza-Serai*[56]): During The First World War, the synagogue served as a hospital for those who fell sick with cholera. The dead would be taken out of that building, and they were buried in a nearby location, in a pit that was covered in lime.[57]

During this entire time, a fear lurked in the hearts of the Jews, that on one fine day, the Christians will hasten to erect a cross on this grave, which will rise exactly opposite the windows of the Synagogue.

It is clear, that the Rabbi and the residents of the town sought all manner of ways, and stratagems, in order to put something on this parcel, and here came the chance. We decided to build the premises for the fire-fighters on this previously mentioned grave.

We turned to the *Starosta* for his permission to use the lumber from the old bridge over the Neman, that remained unused since the time of The War, which we would transport using our own resources, and we will build the premises.

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56 The fire-station

57 This was a minimal precaution against potential spread of the disease.

Not only did the Starosta agree to this, but on his part, he turned to the '*Wójt*[58]' and the highway engineer, and requested that they help us in our undertaking.

On one Sunday, all the Jewish wagon drivers were enlisted, together with the fire-fighters, and they voluntarily transferred all the lumber required for the construction. The beams for the roof and the benches, we received from the Jewish lumber mill in the village of Sjalc (the Neman Station), from Mr. Shalit.

After this, we began to concern ourselves with the purchase of a siren.

At the time of the wedding of Rachel Wolkowysky (the daughter of R' Joseph son of Moshe), I went with Noah-Abba Gapanowicz ז"ל and we organized a levy to raise the funds for purchasing a siren. We gathered so much money, that we even had some left over after the purchase. This was a hand-operated siren, and its sound could be heard for a distance of several kilometers.

The sound of the siren would communicate a fire. If the tocsin was short and intermittent, it was a signal that the fire was outside the town, and if it was continuous – everyone knew that the fire was in the town itself.

There was no lack of fires, and one of the reasons for this was the 'land allocation[59]' statute, for the transfer of peasants to 'villages[60]' that the Polish government had constructed. The peasants were interested in burning their old dwellings instead of dealing with them, and to get insurance money. Needless to say, there was an interest in having us protect their valuables.

At the same time, we decided to organize an orchestra, that might breathe a bit of life into the town. A meeting was organized, with the Chairman, Abraham Kremen ז"ל, and it was decided to organize a Drama Circle, whose income will be dedicated to the purchase of instruments for the orchestra.

The writer of these lines, along with Shmuel Shimonowicz, traveled to Vilna, and there we picked out the instruments at a wholesaler of musical instruments.

We collected 1000 zlotys from donations and levies among the members, and we took an additional 1000 zlotys as a loan from the bank, for which all the members signed, with the pharmacist A. Kremen ז"ל providing the guarantee.

This was the way the instruments got to the town. We brought in an orchestra leader from the nearby town

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58 The elected mayor of a rural commune (*Gmina*)

59 Called '*parcelacja*' in Polish.

60 Called '*chutory*' in Polish.

of Iwje – Joseph Beksht – who began to teach the 'group' how to play.

On May 3, 1932, we gathered all of the residents of the town, and a host of peasants from the surrounding villages, beside the house of the pharmacist A. Kremen ז"ל, in order to observe the presentation of the flag of the fire-fighters that had been guarded in the house of the pharmacist. Suddenly, the sound of music was heard, and everyone was awed by the fact that a group of Jews succeeded in a short time, to organize an orchestra that performed at a high level of quality.

The orchestra participated annually in the parades of the Independence Day of Poland on November 11, and similarly – in parades of the Hebrew school to the forest on *Lag B'Omer* Day. At that time, the orchestra would accompany the Jewish children, to the Riuszt Forest, who were outfitted in blue and white stripes, and armed with wooden swords.

From time-to-time, dances were organized, whose revenues were earmarked for the organization of the fire-fighters, and for charitable institutions such as: *Bikur Kholim*, and others.

I remember, that on the Purim of 1939, a marvelous party was organized at the home of Chaim Baranchik. Half of the income was dedicated to the fire-fighters, and the other half – to *Bikur Kholim.*

The party was organized because of the effort of the local sitting Rabbi, The Rabbi *Gaon* R' Shabtai Fein זצ"ל, and the organizers were: Vikhn'eh Fleischer ז"ל, Baylah Baron ז"ל, Sarah Yosselewicz ז"ל; and mentioned apart for long life, Charna-Baylah Shimonowicz, and Tova Zlocowsky.

The party was very successful, and a lot of money was collected.

For whatever reason, this seemed like a going-away party for a life of peace. Truly, this was the last party before the outbreak of The Second World War.

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Page 235: During a Mustering at the 'Serai' (1933)

At the tenth anniversary of the establishment of independent Poland, the fire-fighters of Belica participated in a regional fire-fighters competition, and took first place.

Thanks to the organization of the fire-fighters, the government began to take notice of us, and the chairman and his deputy became spokesmen, and helped the Jews in this way, to get taxes lowered and fines set aside, etc.

In 1936, we obtained a mechanical pump with which to fight fires, and we dug an Artesian Well with a hand pump. After the sudden death of our chairman – A. Kremen ז"ל in April 1933, I felt, as the deputy, that the

support for the organization began to decline from what it once was. On May 3, when there was a need to take out the flag of the fire-fighters from the home of the deceased, there were tears in my eyes. After that, we returned the flag to the fire-station of the fire-fighters.

From that time on, the organization began to go over into Christian hands. J. Rodziewiec was selected as the Chairman, and as the Secretary – Balabanski. Despite this, we tried, with all or might, to keep the organization in Jewish hands.

As was usual, fires broke out from time-to-time.

On one Friday in 1936, a huge fire broke out on the street of the Christians, in which nearly half the town burned down, even as not a single Jewish house was affected. To help our fire-fighters, the fire-fighters from Sjalec and Lida came, who worked under my command. On that Sabbath, some pleasure circulated in Jewish homes.

After the conflagration, the Christian residents accused me, as the officer in charge of the fire-fighters, that I only looked after the homes of the Jews, and because of this they were not burned down.

With the help of the police, I succeeded in proving that I acted properly, and after an investigation, I received a citation of merit, and a bronze medal from the '*Voievode.*'

Our comrade, Dov Grodinsky led the orchestra after Joseph Beksht. After he made aliyah to The Land – our comrade, Yitzhak Kamenetzky ז"ל led it.

During the time of Soviet rule, in the years 1939 - 41, the organization continued to function, until the Germans entered in 1941. As is known, that upon their entry, the Germans burned down the entire town, and with it, the *Remiza* along with all of the fire-fighting equipment. And this is how our work of many years came to an end.

C. During The Second World War

A short time before the outbreak of the war in 1939, a specific part of the young Jewish men in the town were drafted, among them my brother Joseph, Aryeh Halperin, Eliyahu Milikowsky, Eliezer Mayewsky, Shlomo Mayewsky, and others.

On the eve of the outbreak of the war, I took my leave of the draftees at the train station in Lida, and I saw how they boarded the train cars. I sensed that the era of peace had been exchanged for a period of war and chaos. Before dawn, the war broke out (September 1, 1939).

Approximately two weeks later, the Polish authorities and police left town, and we were again left without

protection. Noah-Abba Gapanowicz, myself, and the Polish teacher Nowicki, received arms from the fleeing Polish police, for purposes of guarding the town. The Christian residents immediately ran to plunder the Christian cooperative store, but we warned them, that whoever began to plunder – will be killed. This is the way we continued for a number of days, until the Soviets arrived. We were very happy at their arrival, considering what we had heard the Germans were doing to the Jews [elsewhere] in Poland.

During the period of Soviet rule, the Jews of the town experienced a lot of trouble. Regarding their private property, informers appeared, and especially – the cessation of their source of income – commerce. Everyone began to look for work, but it was difficult to come by, because there was no manufacturing in the town.

A little bit at a time, everyone got accustomed to this way of life. In place of private stores, a cooperative store was organized and established. For leadership, three Jews were selected: Baron Hirsch, Eliezer (Lejzor) Shmulewicz, and myself, and the rest – were non-Jews. The secretary was Miriam (Mer'eh) Ratnowsky, and her assistant – a Christian. Being on the audit committee of the cooperative store, I tried to set up the selling so everyone, regardless of whether he was a Jew or a Christian, would receive a fair share of the required necessities, even when there was a shortage. My thought process was, that the war was going to end soon, and there is value in living in peace with one another.

When a year went by, there were again elections for the leadership of the store, and this time they did not choose Baron Shmulewicz. As for me, the commissar opined that despite the fact that I had previously been a storekeeper, he saw in me an honest person.

Despite all of this, in order to support my family, I became a bicycle repairman.

Organization of the School

Immediately upon their entrance, the Soviets opened two schools: one was Byelorussian, in place of the Polish public school (die *szkola*), and one – Jewish, in place of the Hebrew school that was there previously. As the principal of the Jewish school, they appointed a Jewish refugee from Lodz, and old-time communist named Frankel.

The following were selected for the school committee: Aharon Bussel, Eliezer Shmulewicz, Baron Hirsch, Aryeh Baranchik (Leib'keh Ber'keh's), and myself. We dedicated ourselves to the school to assure that it which developed very beautifully.

At the same time, the workers organized, and set up cooperatives. In this way, cooperatives were set up for tailors, shoemakers, etc. The secretaries of the cooperatives were R' Shmuel Joseph Itzkowitz ל"ז.

The Exile of the *Osadniki* [61]

In 1940, the Soviets began to arrest and exile all the local Poles (*Osadniki*) in the area. Most of them were volunteers in the ranks of the Polish army in the period 1918-20, and after the end of the war, they received land in Byelorussia and Polish Ukraine, in order that they provide a counterweight to the local non-Polish populace, and also to dilute it.

Regarding the issue of the exile, the Poles accused the Jews in collaborating with the Soviets. In order to undercut this idea, and also to give substance to the saying 'cast thy bread upon the waters,' I greatly helped out those among these residents that remained behind, and especially the families of those who were imprisoned. These latter, organized themselves into an underground committee, that gathered up donations and clothing for the prisoners.

At the same time, I received an invitation to come to Lida, in order to take on the leadership of all the fire-fighters in the district.

Slowly, and little-by-little, everyone settled into this new life, even though now, there also was no lack of anti-Semitic incidents.

And here is a representative example:

One time, there was a general gathering, whose purpose was to select a representative to the district Soviet in Lida. Everyone selected the wife of Elazar Savitzky. The commissar himself offered his verbal support as a person committed to order. When two days had gone by, a general assembly was called again, and the same commissar this time requested not to permit the candidacy of Mrs. Savitzky, because her father was a big-time merchant in Vilna, this despite the fact that all of us knew very well that her father was no prosperous person. The commissar then spoke to facilitate the candidacy of the son of Elyuk the Drunkard.

This incident worried us very much, and was a disappointment to the Jews, who saw that even from the 'East' justice gets bent...

The Outbreak of the War in 1941

On June 22, 1941, on Sunday morning, the war between Germany and Russia broke out. The Jews – their desire was to flee, but only few succeeded in doing so.

At six o'clock in the morning, the Germans bombed the railroad bridge over the Neman, the Neman station, and the airfield in Lida.

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61 The residents of the *Osad* – a term applied to the local Polish citizenry.

On that same day, a draft was announced for everyone up to the age of 38, and the draftees had to go in the direction of Lida. In fact, it was no longer possible to get in there, since Lida was in flames, and the entire city burned. A week later, the first of the Germans arrived in the vicinity.

In that same week, R' Meir Shimonowicz died. Afterwards, we all envied him, and his death by natural causes...

On Saturday morning, on June 28, it was already difficult to assemble a *minyan* of Jews for prayer in the synagogue, because many were afraid to leave their homes. When worship was concluded, we each wished one another 'may we live and be privileged to see one another again on the coming Sabbath,' in synagogue.

On that same Sabbath, I invited my entire family, and my parents to the main Sabbath meal. During the meal, my father said: 'Master of the Universe, who knows if we will ever again be able to sit at this table for a Sabbath meal,' As he foresaw, so it came to pass, this was truly the final Sabbath of 'brethren sitting together' on the Sabbath.

At four o'clock, the Germans entered in armored vehicles, and when we saw them in their steel helmets, we sensed that the Angel of Death was drawing nigh. At that same time, there were still Russian soldiers at the airfield in the Riuszt Forest.

When it became known to the Soviets that Germans were to be found in the town, they came in a transport vehicle, and attacked the Germans beside the house of Chaim-Reuven Baranchik. The Germans came out and shot at every citizen they met on the street. Nathan Baranchik was killed in this shooting. The Germans seized Shmuel Shimonowicz, and Eliezer Gapanowicz, and a number of other Jews from Lida, and stood them against the wall of the house of Ze'ev Shelyuvsky (*Der Nahardavicher*) and shot at them. Shmuel Shimonowicz fell to the ground before the bullets reached him, and he was not hit. Eliezer Gapanowicz was wounded in his hand. The feigned death, and when the murderers left, they fled the place. After that, the Germans went from house to house, and set them on fire. All of the Jews fled to Stoky. I don't know why they specifically chose Stoky, but this was the place everyone turned to. We spent the whole night in Stoky.

From what is worth noting, we were told by Dworian's house, who always would join the Jewish girls, she said: 'Enough already that you are behaving like nobles, today you can go already to work for the Germans.' The gentiles of Stoky drove the Jews out, and lacking any alternative, all returned to Belica. When we returned, we found the town completely burned down.

As to the Germans, who were the arsonists, we didn't find them in Belica any longer, and we immediately began to occupy ourselves with giving the dead a proper Jewish burial.

Apart from Nathan Baranchik ע"ה, there were a number of Jews from Lida for whom we arranged a funeral.

When a day had passed, the Germans picked Balabanski, who was an assistant to the deputy in the town council, to be the Burgomaster. On his end, he selected ten '*shkotzim*[62]' from the town, and appointed them as the local police. the latter took advantage of their position to exact revenge from the Jews of Belica, for 'accounts' from the past.

The Beginning of the Assaults

All the people in the town went to live on the Netech' Street and on part of the Lida Street.

Everyone gathered together in those of the houses, those that had escaped the fire. A day later, an S. S. unit reached the town, gathered all the men beside the house of Reuven Baranchik, and there they announced that Jews stood outside of the law. Every non-Jew has permission to do whatever he likes to, to the Jews, because they are worse than dogs. The chose ten Jews, and among them – Rabbi Fein ז"צ, Meir Baranchik, and a few others, tied them into a wagon, and sent them to Porech'ye, which is where their headquarters were. Along the way, they assaulted them, and gave them a beating.

A week after this, beside the Catholic church, they organized a 'sporting of the Jews' (*Judenspiel*). Once again, this time, they gathered the men, and ordered them to pass through two ranks of Germans armed with staves and boards that had been torn out of fences that surrounded houses, and everyone that went by was 'given the honor' of a murderous paddling. Many Jews were severely wounded in this 'sporting.'

And the assaults did not stop. Each and every day, the Germans and Balabanski issued new decrees.

One day, the Germans seized Chaim-Yitzhak Kremen and Schraga Stotsky, who limped, and ordered them to gather eggs for them. When the eggs were gathered by them, the Germans took them in the direction of Zhetl, and close to the village of Nesilovtsy, they killed them.

The Slaughter of the Thirty-Six

After the 'sporting' beside the church, we sensed the onset of bad times, and the young people began to hide.

In those same days, word began to reach us about the slaughter being perpetrated in the vicinity, and in particular, we hear about the murder of a Rabbi among the Jews of Razanka, where similar to Belica, there was a battle between the Russians and the Germans, and a number of Germans fell. It is clear that the blame was placed on the Jews.

We heard that the S. S. wanted to carry out a slaughter in Belica as well. We gathered, most of the young

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62 An epithet of distaste for a male gentile.

people and the older ones, and we decided to flee into the Riuszt Forest. Together with me, came Yitzhak Kamenetzky, Zvi Baran, and one person from Lida. We lay down in Riuszt, and at that point Kamenetzky stood up and said: 'Nothing can be heard, come, let us return to the town.' When we returned, my mother ע"ה came to me and implored me to flee yet again from home, since it was dangerous to remain at home at this time.

On my way to the forest, I again entered the house of Baran and Kamenetzky, and asked them to come with me, but they labeled me a 'scaredy-cat' and remained in their home. In the meantime, night fell. I did not want to go alone, and I went into Herzl Fleischer. We took along sacks with which to cover ourselves, and we headed in the direction of the forest. Seeing that silence reigned in the area, before dawn, we returned to town. On the way, we bumped into a wagon in which two Germans were sitting, and with them – Yaakov Kotliarsky, Abraham Novogrudsky, and a few other people from Lida. We froze and made ourselves look like a stand of grass for cows to graze, and we were able to get by them peacefully. Only R' Yaakov Kotliarsky raised an eye towards us. Beside the town, I parted from Herzl Fleischer, and I planned to enter the town from a different direction. As I got closer to the houses, I went off into a field, and remained between mounds of potatoes. I lay this way until three o'clock in the afternoon, approximately, at which time, I suddenly heard gunfire. I could no longer lay there, and I walked to town. On the way, I met up with a Christian woman who said to me: 'Where are you going? They are killing every Jew that is caught at the hands of the Germans.' I did not know what to do: I stood behind Zelig Bussel's smithy, and then espied the peasant farmer Wytoczko from Kriwiec, and he said to me: 'Why are you standing here? Flee! – the Germans have killed twenty Jews.' I fled back to the Riutsz Forest, and hid there until night. I approached one of the little huts, and the peasant to whom I turned, drove me away from him, saying that he did not want a dead body beside his house. And in this way I wandered about in the forest, until I met one of the townspeople, a Christian named Szendryk. He received me cordially, and invited me into his home, and said that I did not have to fear him. I lodged with him for the night, and on the following day, he went into town to learn what is going on there. He entered to my wife, Taib'eh and told her about me. My wife returned with him, and she brought me warm clothing. She told me, that on that day, the Germans had killed thirty-six Jews, among them the Rabbi, R' Shabtai Fein ז"ל. We wept bitterly about their fate, and ours, and my wife returned to town, while, for the time being, I remained with Szendryk.

The Selection of the *Judenrat*

At that same time, the representatives of the Jews appeared before Balabanski and he promised them, that going forward, there will be tranquility. He also told them to select a committee so that he could have someone with whom to communicate. We organized a gathering in the home of Dvora Galinsky, and the committee was selected there. I refused to participate, but as soon as Balabanski saw that my name did not appear among those selected, he added me personally, saying that Zlocowsky is compelled to be on the committee.

On the same day, two policemen came and invited me to see Balabanski. When I arrived, I asked him: 'What did I do that was bad, that you are arresting me?' He replied that he was not arresting me, but that he is interested that we establish communication and that no harm will befall me. As a sign of his good will, he took out four packs of tobacco (which was at the time very expensive) and gave them to me as a present.

Life Settles Down

Life began to follow a regular routine. The Jews went to work each day. The leader of the work contingent was Noah-Abba Gapanowicz. The Jews, once again, began to go to the villages and engage in commerce with the peasants. In general this trade was of the barter variety.

I was the '*Soltis*' and Eliyahu Sokolowsky was my deputy. These circumstances persisted until the *Sukkot* holidays. We had a regular prayer quorum during the holidays, and everyone worshiped.

I circulated between the houses day and night, and kept watch over them. If by chance, the police entered one of the houses, in order to assault or to plunder Jewish assets, I would immediately come, and threaten them with informing Balabanski, and then they would leave the house.

Expulsion and The 'Contribution'

During *Sukkot*, Balabanski secretly informed me, that he had received an order to transfer all the Jews of Belica to the ghetto in Lida after the *Sukkot* holiday.

Seeing that we had heard, from other towns, that Jews were abused and beaten murderously during the transfer, I told the Jews not to wait for the previously mentioned order to come, and that each individual should vacate the town with all deliberate speed. When it became known to the Germans that part of the Jews had gone to other ghettoes not in accordance with their orders, they levied a punitive tax ('contribution') on the Jews. They took 24 hostages, and announced that if the tax was not paid on a specifically designated day, all the hostages will be shot to death.

We collected whatever we could, but the amount was insufficient. I went to Balabanski, and began to plead for mercy, and he lowered the sum that was being demanded. The remainder of the amount we brought from nearby Zhetl.

The committee to collect the funds was composed of the following: Zalman Yosselewicz, Israel-Meiram Kremen, Shmuel Shimonowicz, Abraham Maggid and myself. Malka Kremen, the wife of the pharmacist Abraham Kremen ל"ז, brought a clutch of gold coins and said: 'Take the gold that I have, and save the people!' Ziss'l Kalmanowicz was our contact with the Judenrat in Lida. After the sum was collected, the people taken hostage were let go, and freed from a certain death.

All of the citizenry traveled to wherever they wanted to go. Most traveled to Zhetl, and a part – to Lida. I took care to observe that during all this time, the police would not abuse those who were leaving.

Two days before we left the town, all of us gathered in the house of Eliezer Kreinowicz. There, each of us

took leave of one another, and all of us wept, not knowing if we would ever see each other alive again. On that same day, I went to say goodbye to Mr. Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky, who afterwards left to go to Lida. He said to me: 'You, perhaps, will survive the war, and you will have a home, but Hitler will not have a home.'

I was among the last to leave the town. I took out Esther-Baylah Koppelman and her crippled daughter, and sent them to Zhetl. I then went through all of the abandoned houses in the town, went to the fresh grave of the thirty-six martyrs, took my leave of them, and left Zhetl, on my way to the ghetto in Scucyn.

In the Scucyn Ghetto

Page 242: *Faygl Meckel*

Upon reaching Scucyn with my family, I was immediately arrested by the Germans, together with my brother Tanhum. However, thanks to a letter from Balabanski, in which it was written that I was joining my wife and children, I was released. In the ghetto, I met up with others from Belica – about seventy souls in total, among them R' Eliyahu Sokolowsky ל"ז and others. We worked at cutting down trees.

This situation continued until 6 Shevat 5702 (1942). On that day, the first slaughter in the ghetto of Scucyn took place. In this German slaughter, my aunt Faygl Meckel and my son David were killed.[63] Earth-shattering days ensued in the ghetto. People suffered from hunger, and especially those who had arrived in Scucyn as refugees from the towns of Belica, Razanka, and Orlowa. On the eve of Passover of 5702 (1942) R' Eliyahu Sokolowsky came to me along with a few other Jews, and proposed that I organize a community kitchen.[64] With the help of the *Judenrat,* a kitchen was organized, and I stood at its head. On the imminent Passover holiday, the people from the above-mentioned towns were given three meals.

On May 9, 1942, 22 Iyyar 5742, the Germans, and their local accomplices, surrounded the ghetto. They took all the Jews out to the marketplace, and began to implement a *Selektion*, some to the right ,m and some – to the left. Nobody knew which side was for the living, and which – to death, despite the fact that we knew the separation implied this. I was listed as a locksmith, and was therefore saved, and sent with other Jews to Lida, most of these being craftsmen also, whom the Germans needed.

More than 2000 Jewish lives were taken in that massive slaughter in the Scucyn ghetto. In this slaughter,

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63 This is confirmed in the Scucyn Yizkor Book as follows:

On that very same Sabbath, approximately 20 people were murdered – men, women and children (among them also Bezalel Koppelman, the second son of Chaim Yoss'l and similarly Faygl Meckel and David Zlocowsky, who were in the same residence). That Saturday night, the bodies of those who were murdered, were collected by the Jewish police, and taken to the cemetery, but because of the extreme cold, and the snow that fell all night, these martyrs were not buried properly until the next day.

64 This endeavor is also cited in the *Scucyn Yizkor Book.*

most of the people from Belica were killed, including: My brother Tanhum and his family, my brother Moshe and his family, my parents, etc. From my immediately family, only my sister Chaya-Sarah and her husband, Yaakov Poniemansky remained alive, and Eliyahu Sokolowsky.[65]

In Lida, they quartered us in the jail, but we were not part of '*Organisation Tot.*[66]' During the day, we would go out to work on the train, and at night -- return to the jail.

Thanks to the connections of my brother-in-law David-Zvi Meckel, and Yaakov Kremen with the highway overseer (*'Drożnik'*), I was able to receive letters while in the jail.

The Departure for the Forest

One day, Rachel Itzkowitz, Eliezer Meir Savitzky, and Michael Gruznik (from Ruda) came to the ghetto in Lida from the forest, and passed me a note with directions to follow in order to get out into the forest with them. That same night, I fled into the forest, and with me – my son Yaakov.

Apart from us, they extracted [an additional] fourteen people. The way from Lida to Belica was difficult and burdensome, but in the forests on the other side of the Neman, we met up with Belica townsfolk that had lived there for some time already. In this way, a new life started for me, in the heart of the forest, in the ambit of the partisans.

The Successful Subterfuge

One day, the scout, Nathan from Lida met me, and proposed that we quickly flee, seeing that on the other side of the Neman, in the village of Zbljany a large force of White Poles[67] had assembled, who were planning to cross the river and to organize an assault against those Jewish families that had found their refuge in the forest. He immediately mounted a horse, and with an intense gallop, hurried off to notify all the partisans that they should flee for their lives in the direction of the Lipczanka forests.

For us, who remained in the family camp, no time remained for us to flee, and for this reason we came together to discuss what we should do. I conceived of a subterfuge: let us dress two of our group very nicely,

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65 From the Scucyn Yizkor Book:

It was in this way that the Hell of annihilation was consummated in Scucyn, with 2,060 bodies of martyrs, of men, women, and children – people from the communities of Scucyn, and Razanka (and the nearby villages), and Belica, who were sacrificed on a defiled altar on that 'Sacred Sabbath,' of 22 Iyyar 5702.

66 The name given by the Germans to this labor camp.

67 An alternative reference to the *Armia Krajowa* (AK), the Polish national resistance army.

and send them to the bank of the Neman. At that point, the women peasants would come three times a day to milk their cows that pastured on our side. Our messengers were to notify the women of the village, that two units of Russian paratroopers had landed the previous night, and their plan was to cross the river and attack the Germans. And seeing that their intention was to destroy the village, that was why they had come to alert all the men of the village to flee for their lives at the earliest possible opportunity. And that is the way it happened. The women crossed the rive and with crying and screaming, they told the men of the village what was about to happen. When the matter became known to the enemy, they opened fire from all points on the opposite side of the rive, and we lay down without firing a shot, because we were afraid that our subterfuge would be revealed, besides which, we only had 23 rifles in our possession. The murderers continued with their fire until it began to get dark, and then fled, under cover of darkness, fearing that, we would surround them and attack them. in this way we were saved, and remained alive.

On the following morning, when the women came to milk their cows, our two messengers went out again, and explained that we had not returned the enemy's fire, because we were concerned that the village would be set fire and be destroyed. The peasant women thanked them in the name of the village, and they said that they deserved this, because the members of the village behaved well towards the Jews that lived in the area, and this type of attractive relationship will be expressed in the assistance they will continue to provide.

Up to *Rosh Hodesh* of Elul, there were no attacks against us. From time to time, there were attacks by the Germans, and in one of these, the following were killed: Masha, the daughter of Eliezer Kreinowicz, and Tul'yeh Maliniak (from Bialystok), the husband of Chaya Kreinowicz.

During this period, we suffered greatly at the hands of the 'White Poles" (A.K.). these forces organized themselves in Belica, in the vicinity of the village of Nieciecz[68], and the core target of their fighting was aimed at the family camps of the Jews on the opposite side of the Neman, and we would attack them occasionally.

On the day of the Fast of Gedalia 5703 (1943), the White Poles organized an attack on the place where we were camped, seized Schraga Savitzky ז"ל, and beat him with staves until he expired. In this manner, they also killed my brother-in-law David-Zvi Meckel. When we went to bury David-Zvi Meckel, they opened fire on us, and we were forced to retreat. Only after they left, did we return and cover the grave.

The death of David-Zvi Meckel worsened our situation.

In the role as the quartermaster of the '*Burba*' brigade, he would take advantage of his position to help us out with food and clothing. He looked after us like a father.

The winter of 1942-43 was very hard on us. We were in constant fear of the Germans, and especially – the 'White Poles,' who increased their level of attacks, and every time we were compelled to change our place of domicile, and dig bunkers when the ground was frozen solid and hard.

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68 Variant Polish spelling of Njacec.

How I Became a Doctor

In the winter of 1943- 44, they brought me Batya Stotsky, the daughter of Chaim Yitzhak, with an enormous wound in her chest. As I understood it, she already had blood poisoning, or something like it. I was entreated to try and save her. There was not a doctor in the entire vicinity, and to look for one was impossible. The roads were impassable, and the snows – heavy. Seeing as I had some knowledge of first aid, which I had learned while being in the ranks of the fire-fighters, I took a razor, sterilized it with fire, and made two cuts in her chest in the form of a cross. A large amount of pus spilled out of the wound. Afterwards, I put a bandage soaked in hot water on it, and spread a bit of soda I had in my possession, beside the wound for it to absorb. Thanks to this cutting, she stayed alive.

One day, Aryeh (Leib'keh) Zhukhovicky came to me with his little son, Bezalel, he too – with blood poisoning in a finger. The hand was badly swollen and black. I did the same procedure on his finger with success. From that time on, I became the 'doctor' of the camp.

One time, Yaakov Molchadsky (*Der Mocevcyer*) came to me, with one cheek swollen from the inflammation of a tooth. He asked me to extract the tooth. I took a dentist's tongs from R' Zalman Yosselewicz that he had, and I pulled Yaakov's tooth. This matter became known in the nearby villages, and the peasants began to come to me for tooth extractions. As payment for this, I would take tobacco from them.

Here, it is worth telling about something that could be construed as a joke.

On one occasion, they brought me a Russian partisan with very severe abdominal pains. He was suffering from constipation, and his cries reached the heart of the heavens. It was clear that he had to be given an enema, but I did not have a rubber tube in my possession. So what did I do? I took an electric cable, and carefully removed the wiring from the sheath, heated up some water with soap, and then created a reservoir frm heavy paper, and this is how I administered the enema.

But the Russian partisans were hardly grateful to us, for the medical help that we provided to them. One night, they fell upon us, and confiscated all of our rifles, and in this way, we were left without rifles and because of this – without any possibility to defend our lives.

The Sortie of the Vlasovites

At the end of 1943, as the front drew closer to us, the partisans were transformed into a significant factor in the disruption of all means of transportation used by the Germans, and so these latter decided to bring down the traitorous general from the front, along with his troops, to implement a huge sortie against the partisans in the forest.

These latter troops took up stations in the villages of our vicinity, and would conduct assaults on the forest.

Because of this, our freedom of movement in 'our' forest was constrained, because the Vlasovites occupied Zachepichi, and from that vantage point, dominated the area.

The Young Spy

At that same time, we had with us a young boy from Zhaludok, approximately fourteen years of age, who had been left with no one in the world, without a relative or a guardian. My son, Schraga, who was his age, befriended him. One day, we noticed with surprise, that the young boy was not with us. My Schraga started to look for him, and found him in a bunker, sick with spotted typhus. All night (since during the day we stayed hidden) Schraga would bring him food and water, and once, upon his return from the bunker, Schraga told us that, in the forest, he had met up with a Christian boy. We understood that this boy had been sent by the Vlasovites to spy on us, and to reveal the place where we could be found. We immediately went to seize the boy. We ambushed him, and seized him. He admitted that he had been sent to spy on us.

We decided to kill the spy by drowning in the Neman, since even one shot will attract the enemy. We brought him to the river, and I, along with Niss'l Baranchik were supposed to drown him. Niss'l did not have the patience to tie his hands, and pushed him into the river. Since the boy knew how to swim well, quietly forded the Neman and fled. After the liberation, I ran into him, healthy and unharmed.

Wanderings and Tribulations

After the incident with the boy-spay, we were afraid to remain in the Zachepichi Forest, and we decided to transfer ourselves over to the forests beside Lipiczanka. This was in the beginning of 1944, when the winter was at its fiercest.

In these forests, we found many Jews that were known to us from surrounding towns, many of them sick with the spotted typhus (many people died in this epidemic). Apart from this, we suffered from hunger. It was impossible to come out of the forests, because the area swarmed with Germans. Apart from this, the young German pilots in this area would bomb every suspected area in the forest and its vicinity.

I located myself with my family close to the camp of the division of partisans named 'Suborov.' I worked with them in a variety of black market activities, in order to obtain for them and my family.

After Passover, the typhus epidemic reached our bunker as well. My entire family was sickened, and I had no means with which to save them. I met the doctor, Dr. Miasnik from Lida, and I entreated him to give me medicines for my sick ones, but he answered me: 'I have heard that you too are a doctor, so beg for healing from The Master of the Universe, seeing as I too have no medicines.'

The only one who came to us to help us, with a good piece of advice, and a good word, was Rachel Itzkowitz. I will always remember her for good. I would have to run for kilometers to procure a bit of milk, and when

I didn't have any – I would give the members of my family a sort of herbal brew from all manner of leaves (such as from strawberries and other plants) steeped in water, like a tea.

One day, I sensed that I was running a high fever. This was the thing I was afraid of the entire time, thinking in my heart, that were I to come down with typhus, then all of us will die in the bunker, because there will be no one to come and deal with us. I felt like I was burning up with fever. I decided to immerse my head in the well that was beside our bunker. The well was not deep, seeing that the bunker was in the area of a swamp. I held my head under the water for about five seconds, until I felt some relief. Immediately afterwards, I ran off to get food for my sick ones.

After a time, I, once again, ran into Dr. Miasnik, and told him about this incident. He said to me, that this succeeds maybe one time in ten thousand, because at the very least, it could bring on a heart attack...

The Last Sortie

In the meantime, the Germans, and their allies, began to organize assaults against us on a daily basis. Every day, we would flee deep into the swamps, and towards nightfall – return to the bunker. Those of my family who were sick, were weak, and I was compelled to leave them several kilometers in the swamp.

This situation continued for several weeks, until news reached us one day, that the Germans began their retreat, and had decided to 'clean out' the partisans of the Lipczanka Forest. To accomplish this, they enlisted the entire host of General Vlasov and sent them to comb the entire area. All the fighting units of the partisans immediately left their places, and retreated in a different direction, and we, the 'family men' lacked any means of escape, and we remained without food, and without protection.

Potatoes in the Pit

One time, I saw a peasant putting potatoes into a pit in the ground not far from us. I arose in the night, and I took a burlap sack with me, and went down into the pit. The pit was very deep, and the potatoes were about two meters beneath the surface. I filled the sack with potatoes, but when I attempted to raise the sack by means of a rope, that I had previously attached to a tree, it tore, and I was stuck in the pit, without any means of getting out. I knew that if I was delayed to morning – this meant certain death. I began to think about what to do. I did not see any alternative, so I began to dig out steps with my hands, on one side of the pit, and this way, I got out. So the question remained before me: how to get the potatoes out: I tore my shirt into strips, and tied them to the torn rope. In this manner, I was able to get the sack of potatoes out.

One day, the reverberation of noise reached me from the forest. I very carefully approached it, and saw the 'Orlansky' Brigade approaching. I encountered Hasia Baranchik (daughter of Chaim Reuven) from our town there, and she related that the camp of Vlasov is drawing near to our forests, and tomorrow they are going to launch a sortie, and because of this the partisans are leaving their bases in this forest.

The Great Flight

In the forest, we had a well-camouflaged bunker inside a hillock. We gathered a number of families together, approximately – 25 souls, and in the middle of the night, we went into the bunker that was built in the form of three sides of a rectangle. I entered last, and closed the cover over me, that was camouflaged with a large amount of brush. Before dawn, the shelling of the forest began. Apparently, we left a trail behind us, because we heard two of Vlasov's men getting close to the entrance of the bunker, and one said to the other: 'There are partisans here. ' They opened the cover, and one of them glanced inside. When the Vlasovites got close to the bunker, we fell back to the second corridor. In my haste, I had left a pair of sandals that belonged to my son, and a slice of bread. When the Vlasov soldier saw the sandals and the bread, he said to the other: 'Come, let us go, there is not a living soul here,' and they left.

We sat silently in the bunker, and after a stretch of some time, I came out together with Yaakov Fleischer (son of R' Zalman). Upon observing that there was nobody in the vicinity, we quickly exited the bunker and fled to a nearby swamp. Rain fell throughout the entire night, and we lay down in the swamp, literally in the water. Before nightfall, we came out of there, and returned to our bunker, and dried ourselves out, washed ourselves, and left the forest in order to find another place that would be more secure.

On the following morning, we again hid in a swamp, that was in the middle of a immature forest, but close by. Part of the families got separated from me, and went a different way. They argued that since they were younger, they didn't want to remain with me, since I was tied down with the elderly and the young. I remained with Yehuda Baranchik and his family (absent his son), and Eliyahu Szeszko, with the son of his brother Eliezer-Chaim, who today is located in Degania, and with his sister Yehudit, who [at the time] was a little girl, and today is located in Israel.

These were days of very heavy rainfall. I took everyone into the swamp and piled leaves and branches on them, so that the Vlasov troops, who were crawling through the swamps, looking for partisans, won't notice them.

I spread apart the people with me, at a distance of 10-15 meters from one another. Szeszko had a rifle. I took it from him, and went to the edge of the swamp, lay down under a bush, and kept watch over everyone.

To this day, I have difficulty understanding the purpose of why I stood guard? With what was I going to be able to help them, were the Vlasov troops to arrive? As I lay on watch, I heard steps coming close. I arose, and went towards those who were coming toward us, with the thought that if they catch me first, they won't be able to search for the rest. 'In this manner,' – I thought in my heart – 'by sacrificing my life, I will be able to save the rest of the members of my family.' However, in the end, as I drew nigh, I saw there were a few solitary peasant women: one of them recognized me and told me the Vlasovites had already passed their village, and now they were heading in a different direction. Despite this, she advised me to be on guard. She gave me bread.

I returned to my people, and I took off the camouflage cover. I helped get them out of the swamp, and distributed the bread among them.

At night, I decided to prepare a small bunker for the children of about 1x2 meters. My son Schraga helped me with moving the sand, and spreading it out at some distance away. In the morning, I put my son and daughter in the bunker, and camouflaged it. Despite the fact that my wife and I went off a distance of about 200 meters, the children reached us. They opened the bunker, and ran after us crying, arguing that they did not want to be left alone. At that instant, we heard horsemen drawing close.

I ordered everyone to run for their lives. We had enough time to jump through the side step and scatter among the underbrush, and we saw the Vlasov cavalry passing by nearly beside us. They did not take note of us, and we established that this was one of the pursuers looking for us during these terrible times.

Many Jews who hid in that same forest were caught and killed.

This sortie went on for about a week. One time, I met up with Shmuel Shimonowicz and his family. We were all hungry. I had several potatoes in my possession, we boiled them, divided them amongst us, and we ate them as if they were a feast fit for kings...

The Liberation Has Arrived

One day, I heard a rider approaching. I hid, and saw that it was the scout, B. Baran from Lida, that at one time warned us about the enemy, when he found us beside Zbljany. He said to me, 'Zlocowsky, in another day or two, the Russians will be here. There is nothing to fear any longer, but despite this, be careful.' We came out of the bunkers, and that night, we slept under the open skies. When a couple of days had passed, the Red Army arrived. This was in June 1944. We assembled our belongings and turned towards our town of Belica.

The first thing that every one of us did spontaneously, upon our return to Belica was – to prostrate ourselves on the graves of the 36 martyrs, interred beside the Christian cemetery, and unite ourselves with their memory.

We began to look for something to do. We had no work, and the transition to routine life was difficult. The first to get work in Belica were: Rachel Itzkowitz, and Chaya Kremen, that began to work at the flour mill that had not been damaged in the war. They convinced me that I too should work at the mill. The remainder went on to Lida to look for work. After a while, they let Rachel and Chaya go from the mill, and they also went off to live in Lida. Only solitary families remained in Belica.

Along with us, the following arrived from the forests: My older son Yaakov, and the son of my wife's sister, Yaakov Kremen, They were immediately drafted into the Red Army.

Poland – Austria – Israel

In the summer of 1945, we heard that an *aliyah* from Poland to Israel was in existence. In a like manner, we heard about the repatriation agreement from Russia to Poland, for all Polish citizens (Poles and Jews) that lived in the territories of Poland, defined by its 1939 borders.

Even I made plans to travel to Poland, but I did not want to be separated from my son, and from the son of my wife's sister, who were now serving in the Red Army, and accordingly, I waited for them, out of the hope that I would see them returning healthy and whole. In the meantime, the sone of my wife's sister, Yaakov Kremen, was wounded, and was hospitalized in Russia.

A short time after that, the bitter news reached me, that my son Yaakov fell in the battle to take Berlin.

After receiving this news, and after Yaakov Kremen returned from the hospital, we went over to Lida, and from there – we got to Poland by means of repatriation.

We were in Poland for the sum total of about two weeks time, and there, we fled (by way of Czechoslovakia) to Austria. In Austria, the Partisan Organization פח"ח was organized, and I was among its founders. There, I was also active in the Zionist Federation. At the time of the visit of the Anglo-American Committee for Israel in Vienna, I was nominated with the delegation – together with the lawyer Wiesenthal and Dr. Teller – who appeared before the committee to explain why the Jewish refugees specifically wanted to make *aliyah* to Israel, and not to emigrate to other countries.

In the year 1949, I, along with my family, made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

The Last Four Months in Belica

By Zalman Yosselewicz

The War Breaks Out

On June 23, 1941, the day after the war broke out, the first of the refugees arrived in Belica from Grodno and its environs. We took all of them into our homes, and gave them food. It was still calm in our area, however, we learned from the mouths of the refugees about the disaster that was drawing near. The government was in disarray, and shooting was heard. Lida was bombed from the air, and burned in fire when the firing of the German planes rained down on it (many fled Lida and came to us).

Only very few o our townsfolk succeeded in escaping by wagon in the direction of Mogilev and reached Russia.

The Town Burns

The Germans shot in the street and dropped their first eleven dead, among them, Not'keh Azriel's. The resident gentiles lied that they saw the Rabbi, pharmacist and doctor (the son-in-law of Faygl Banchi's) shooting at the Germans with machine guns... the Germans immediately spread out throughout the town, going from house to house, they poured kerosine on them, and ignited them. The town was engulfed in flames along all of its streets, and everyone fled the houses into the fields, and to the adjacent villages.

My brother and I, together with our families fled to Kriwiec, where we found lodging for the night, and saw the extent to which the town burned. On the following day, the gentile woman, who was the proprietress of the granary where we had found refuge, and said that we were obliged to leave the place, because the Germans had ordered a prohibition against taking in any Jews into homes. We returned to the town in obvious penury, my house no longer existed, and only the houses of a few Jews and the flour mill, remained intact.

Even the old *Bet HaMedrash*, that had stood for hundreds of years, was burned down. There was a wooden sign put up, not far from the *Bet HaMedrash*, that had the writing on it that 'the town was burned down because of shooting against the Germans,' on the main road connecting Lida to Zhaludok, beside the brick works of Herzl Fleischer.

The Local Gentiles Assault Us

All local authority was turned over to the local gentile citizenry. One of them, a ne'er-do-well and drunkard – Balabanski, was designated as the head of the town, and the members of the militia were drawn from the worst of the element of the town. They began to rule over us, giving us beatings, and conducting searches.

Anyone who had even the most minor complaint against a Jew, would now take his revenge, demanding hides or woven goods, bringing the Jew before the Germans. The local gentiles took away all of the horses and wagons from the Jews, and only very few of them behaved like human beings who partook in the bitterness of our fate.

They would purposely come to spread bad news, especially to engender chaos. Many of them in general 'did not recognize us.' In previous times, when they needed the Jews, they would come with sweetness on their lips, but now, were it not for them, the Germans could not have done us so much in the way of evil.

The Rabbi and Pharmacist are Tied to the Wagon

An order was given that all of the Jews had to assemble at the outskirts of the town, beside the Polish cemetery. A fear fell on everyone, they came, and were ready for everything. Anyone who was late, earned blows from rifle butts. Those that were so gathered were detained for several hours, surrounded by an armed guard, whose weapons were aimed at us.

A German officer unsheathed a pistol and told us: 'From this day forward, it is your duty to fulfil all the orders given by the head of the town; there will be no complaints for what is done to you; it is upon you to expedite all work; you are considered to be dogs.' He passed by us, taking out those from the line who did not please him, and sent the others off to their homes. Among those he selected were the Rabbi and the pharmacist. The murderers tied them to a wagon, loaded it with a load, after which the officer took a seat in the wagon, and those tied to the wagon were ordered to pull the wagon to the village of Paracany (about eight km), which was the place where the Gestapo headquarters were located. There, they were held in a granary, beaten murderously, and after several days were let go, and returned to Belica.

Decrees and Frights

Every day, it was compulsory to gather beside the office of the head of the town, Balabanski the drunkard, to receive orders. Bread was sold in the amount of 200 grams per person per day. A few got help from the peasants who came to use the flour mill, getting a bit of flour from them and baking for themselves in the bakery of Shlomo Kremen, but many suffered from hunger. A few would steal out and 'jump' the line to a village, but the militia would intercept and seize them, giving them a beating, and abusing them.

Every day, new orders were cut. Jews were required to surrender their cows and sheep. The elderly were sent out to work, At intervals, Germans would come from Lida and Zhaludok, burst into houses, plunder food and other things, and deliver beatings.

On The Day of *Rosh Hashanah*

Before Rosh Hashanah, a young boy came through, who had fled from Eisiskes, and told how he had escaped the slaughter. This was the first mass murder in the area, that was carried out by the Germans and the Lithuanians.

During Rosh Hashanah, prayers were conducted in two homes (that of Moshe Stotsky, and that of Lejzor Moshe'keh's). In the middle of services, we got the news that the Germans had reached Zhetl, and that gentile thugs were directing them and showing them where the Jews were. Everyone immediately scattered and hid themselves. While we lay in the bushes in the potato fields, we hear screams.

Murderous Beatings Beside the Church

The Germans arrived before dawn, and posted guards beside each house. The were looking for the men, and drove them across from the Catholic Church (that has one time been a Russian Orthodox Church). They found me in the rafters, hit me with rifle butts, and threw me down from the rafters. I ran till I was out of breath, and found my lads in that place among others, everyone standing and trembling.

Across from the Jews stood several hundred Germans, with their machine guns trained on us. An officer appeared and began to read from a prepared text, saying that we were akin to dogs, with no rights, and that all the Jews were communists and it was permissible to do with them whatever one thinks of. After this, they read out a list of 14 Jews, who were accused of contact with the Soviets. They were immediately taken out of the ranks, and driven to the Paracany (they were detained there for several days, beaten, and in the end, let go). All of the Jews that were assembled that day beside the church, were beaten murderously with wooden boards that the murderers had taken out of the gate surrounding the church.

Murder Beside the Bridge

One morning, a car full of Germans arrived, and stopped beside the house of Shmuel-Shimon the Tailor. Chaim-Itchkeh Kremen was called to that place, and he was immediately ordered to gather eggs. After he brought them the eggs, that did not let him go, but rather they took him along with them.

As they rode, they met up with Fyvel, the young son of Moshe-David. They took him into the car as well. Several days later, it became known that the Germans had shot them beside the bridge over the Neman.

The Murder of the Thirty-Six

We would arise before dawn, sneak out and go through the streets, to a place with ruins, and spend the day there. The Germans would be looking for men to do work. We transformed a cellar in our house into a place

of concealment for those who had ti hide. Jews from other houses would come to us to hide in the cellar.

One day, a large number of Germans arrived, mounted on horses, and also on bicycles. We saw them from the cellar, through the small windows we had. They immediately spread out in the street and into the houses, to look for men, Many did not manage to hide themselves, and many were found in their hiding places. They gathered thirty-six men, among them lads aged 13-14 years, and elderly men. All of them were taken to the outskirts of the town,. Beside the Russian cemetery. They ordered the Rabbi to clean the horses and bathe them, beat him, and broke his fingers, they tortured him, until he died. Afterwards, we heard machine-gun fire. All thirty-six of those people were killed.

The Ransom for Twenty-Four Hostages

Israel Zlocowsky is worthy of respect, because he was a committed representative of the community, who in times of trouble, carried out his mission faithfully. The process of going out to work was conducted in an orderly fashion. He had access to the head of the town, and did everything in his power to extract relief from him, and to forestall trouble.

Talk began that we were to be sent away from Belica. Many did not wait until they were sent, but themselves left, some to Lida, and others to Zhetl.

In the meanwhile, those who were left were burdened with a demand for ransom in the sum of 150 thousand rubles. Twenty-four people were immediately arrested as hostages. The well-to-do people had already left town, and all that remained were the impoverished. Israel Zlocowsky did not lose his composure, and sent three men to Lida, to the higher authorities, and they were able to reduce the demand to 90 thousand rubles. But even this sum was impossible to raise. They wanted to seel off the last pillow, the last undershirt, if only to save the people. But the Polish populace simply waited for the moment when they would be able to seize all of this for nothing. Israel Zlocowsky turned to the Belica residents that had gotten to Zhetl, to provide help in this time of trial. The Judenrat in Zhetl moved to help, resorting to herculean efforts, and raised the money. Everyone gave whatever they had in hand, and in this way, the demanded sum was raised, and the hostages were released.

The Expulsion to Zhetl

An order arrived, that by November 10, 1941, everyone must leave and go to Lida. I rented a number of wagons, and I took the few things that remained to us to Lida, and the potatoes. Suddenly, a rumor spread that things in Lida were going to be even worse, the city being big, and thieves abounded. We had people in Zhetl already, and they informed us that the gendarmes there were better. Again, somehow, I rented wagons, and brought back all of our things from Lida (I left the potatoes in Lida). But here, a new trouble started: the order dictated that we were to travel to the ghetto in Lida, and we wanted to go to Zhetl.

After a tiring negotiation, Israel Zlocowsky obtained permission from the head of the town to take the

remainder of those left to Zhetl. And so our departure began, from the home in which we were born and in which we had lived for generations on end. There was crying and wailing, and our enemies rejoiced. We were still in town when they grabbed everything from the houses that the Jews could not take along with them.

I took potatoes and flour with me (enough for a couple of loves of bread) and we headed out on the road. Beside the wagons, men, women and children walked, all with glum faces, and heads hung low. Adding to this great calamity was the shame, that we had been driven from our own homes. Along the way, my wife ע"ה wept, and said to me as if her heart prophesied on her behalf: Not to worry, if we remain alive, we will be able to regain everything, but only God knows who it is that will remain alive...

Terror, Fear and Revenge

By Aryeh (Leib'l) Stotsky

The Wanderings Have Begun

With the expulsion of the Jews of Belica, it did not matter to the Germans if we travel to Scucyn, to Lida, or to Zhetl. They were certain that we will not be able to escape their talons. They were only concerned to be sure that all of the Jews would be concentrated in ghettoes, and this was to ease the implementation of the plan, that they had set down, in the fateful Wannsee conference, regarding the Final Solution to the Jewish Problem.

As did most of the natives of Belica, we went over to live in Zhetl before it suffered so much. Maybe we did this because we had many relatives there, and possibly because Zhetl, like Belica, was close to a forest. In Zhetl, we lived with Moshe Aharon Razvesky. He was called 'Aharon the Slow.' He, his wife, and only son, were dear people with good hearts. They loved helping those in need. Their house was not partitioned: one large room – with an oven in the middle. In this room lived: My mother – Yehudit, myself and my sister Batya (Nahum was fighting in the ranks of the Red Army at the Leningrad front against the invading Germans), my sister Penina, and her husband, Lejzor Mayewsky, with their infant daughter aged six months, Lejzor's father 'The Breadwinner' with his wife, their little daughter, and their daughter Rud'keh, Yehudit's family from the village of Pogiry, beside Zhetl, and two young boys saved from Dereczin – there, the Germans had already managed to exterminate their families.

Already, on the day that we arrived, my brother-in-law Lejzor didn't sit on his hands. Immediately, he wanted to dig out a refuge under the wooden floor of the house, that could serve us as a hideout from the Germans, but it was difficult for him to convince 'Aharon the Slow' the owner of the house, who stood fast on his feeling that the things that happened in the other cities of the vicinity would not happen in Zhetl.

In the meantime, the ranks of the enemy drew closer... In Slonim, the Germans fell upon the ghetto using the excuse that the partisans shot at the Germans from within it. As a sort of response to this, they killed about nine thousand Jews. Operations of slaughter were conducted by the Germans in Novogrudok, in Dereczin, in Kazlouscyna, in Bialystok, and Grodno. A huge slaughter was organized and implemented in Vilna and other cities.

Zhetl is a city which had a patriarchal oversight. A *Gaon* was born there once, and he will protect it – that is how the owner of the house, in which we lived, argued, as did other residents of Zhetl. But my brother-in-law had the power of persuasion, and he began the work. I would secretly take out the earth, and spread it in the garden in a way that it would not attract attention. After the work was finished, we put an armoire over the entrance, which served us as the entry way into the refuge. We had barely finished the work when the troubles started in Zhetl also.

The natives of Zhetl complained that we, from Belica, brought down the trouble on them. The Germans saw

that the Jews were living too well in Zhetl, and began to drive them into a ghetto. We moved to live in a new residence. We lived together with the family of Meir Baranchik, and with a few other families. After a number of days, we were again driven out, and we went to live in the home of the Rabbi. My brother-in-law Lejzor built a refuge place in this house as well.

The Camp in Navael'nja

In Zhetl, they sought workers who would go to work in Navael'nja. There were ten of us from Belica who volunteered for this: Myself, Abraham'l Wolkowysky, his brother Israel, Eli Chaim Baranchik, Shai'keh Baranchik (son of Joseph), Ber'l Stotsky, the Yosselewicz brothers, Yankl Kremen (Dvora Kass), Lipa Radominer (Ber'l the Shammes's), Moshe Shimonowicz, and 'Tzal'eh Zhukhowisky (afterwards, he changed places with his brother Zalman, who during the time of the extermination of the Jews of Navael'nja, was killed with them).Together with the Zhetl natives, a few Jews from Navael'nja, and Jewish refugees from Poland, we came to 420 men and women. We were engaged in different sorts of work: in the hospital of wounded Germans, in the station where the spoils from the Red Army were collected, etc. During the nights, we would load sacks, whose weight reached 100-150 kg, onto the trains.

The Germans saw to it that we worked day and night, and they gave us nothing to eat. Once a day, we got a bowl with soup and a 200 gram portion of bread. Despite this, they did not stint on lashing us with a whip. Once, while I was working in the hospital, and I was searching in the ashtray for cigarette butts discarded by the wounded soldiers, a German drew near to me, and when he saw there was no one else about, he shoved a piece of bread, wrapped in newspaper, into my hand.

In Zhetl, I met a young lady named Chay'keh Novogrudsky, who was a good-hearted young lady and also pretty. Despite the fact that death peered out at us from every angle, and our lives hung in the balance before us, this young woman fell in love with me. Her brother, Shlomo'leh, who worked together with me, would always bring me a half a loaf of bread from her. My mother would also give me a half a loaf of bread. I could finish the loaf in one sitting, but I divided it up to last for all the days of the week. Every time I cut a slice of bread from the loaf, I would put a mark in it, so that no one would touch my bread. However, there were experts, who knew how to take a slice from a loaf in a way that was not detectable. We, the people from Belica, lived in Navael'nja in one room, and we were like a family. We began to plan an escape, but the alert surveillance of the Germans frightened us. They notified us early in the morning and at night, that if anyone had the nerve to try and escape from the camp, that person's entire family would be wiped out .immediately. At the same time, I learned that I had a maternal cousin in Navael'nja who was the owner of the pharmacy, and who lived outside the camp. As understood, the Germans had confiscated his pharmacy, but they permitted him to work in it, and to live there. Together with him were his wife, and his aged mother. They would come to visit me at frequent intervals, and bring along a bit of food. On one Sunday, we went in the company of an S.S. soldier to Zhetl, in order to change clothing and to take some food from the house. When I arrived home, my mother wept very bitterly. The day before, the Germans had murdered Ber'l Odzhikhowsky (It'keh's), Moshe Shimonowicz, and Jonah Chana's (Shy'eh's).

Towards nightfall, we gathered at the ghetto gate in order to return to the camp. When a woman who was eight months pregnant was killed, my mother came out to escort me, and with her, Rachel'eh Shilovitzky.

My mother kissed me and quietly wept and said to me that she felt that our end was drawing nigh, and all of us were going to be killed. 'Try,' she said, 'to escape from their clutches.' Then both of us cried, and I gave my mother a final kiss, and similarly I kissed my niece Rachel'eh, and we parted. Before we left the ghetto gate, I threw a glance back once more, looking at my mother and relative, and then went off. On the way to Navael'nja, I ruminated over the things that my mother said to me. They rang in my ears: 'out end draws nigh,' 'they will kill us all,' 'try to escape their clutches.' My mother, who was so good and dedicated to us, my mother who knew how to suffer, saw that our end was getting closer. For the entire way I saw my mother, and my niece Rachel'eh, in front of my eyes, as if we had not parted from one another at all... This went on, until I was aroused by the savage scream of the S.S. man, who escorted us by riding on his bicycle, and put us back into the labor camp at Navael'nja.

We continued to work under the terror of the S.S. 'We captured Stalingrad, and Moscow' – they would yell at us – 'and we will wipe out all of the Jews.'

The *Selektion*: Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die

One morning, knocking at the door awakened me. I opened my eyes to see a Latvian soldier before me in battle dress, with a rifle cocked, shouting: 'Hurry up and get dressed.' Initially, I did not apprehend what was going on, and I said to my comrades that we had certainly overslept and were late for work, and we are going to 'pay' for this. And here, I go out into the courtyard, and see that all the Jews in the camp are standing outside, and S.S. men surrounded them with heavy trucks. One Jew, from Zhetl, named Minsky, was separated from his little daughter, and wept like a child. In less than an hour, they arranged us in rows. We, the people from Belica, stood ourselves beside our own, and discussed possibly escaping from this trap. However, we were unable to take advantage of the time that we had, and we were loaded onto the trucks. During the ride, I called out to my comrades: 'Chevre, come, here it is possible to jump off and hide among the tree foliage, and what difference does it make, since they are going to kill us anyway. ' 'A little longer' – came the reply – 'Maybe they are not going to kill us...'

I was no hero, quite the opposite, I was afraid to get into the pit. I wanted them to kill me while I was fleeing, preferring to take a bullet in the back and not to see how they were taking us like sheep to the slaughter. We arrived at the designated place. We were still whispering among ourselves, when they ordered us out of the trucks. I apprehended that this was a tract where soldiers practice shooting. We lay down, side by side. We were certain that shortly the order would be given, and our lives would be over... We lay down below, and the murderers that surrounded us were above us. There were many Germans there, and we understood that part of them had come to see the 'show.' The leader of this 'performance' was an S.S. officer named Reuter, who walked about with a thick stave in his hand. He took a list out of his pocket and announced that all those whose names were called out should get up and stand to the side. And in this way, he began to call out the names of carpenters, shoemakers, and other tradespeople. In instances where a name was called and the person did not appear, someone else would take his place. Ber'l Stotsky was saved in this manner. During this time, I said that even if they call my name, I will not get up. I felt this way, despite the fact that I thought they would not succeed in killing me, because at least one person has to remain alive to tell the story of what happened to our brethren during the Holocaust. I lay and waited for the order to be given to shoot the remaining ones, at which point I would raise my head, in order that the bullet hit me and cause a speedy, easy death. In the meantime, the officer began to read the names of those in the building trades. The last one on

the list was me, 'Leon Stotsky.' Not expecting this, I was slow in getting up. I did not want to step on the heads of people. Another person got out in my place. After a few seconds, some inner force drove me, and I got up and showed the officer my identity card. The officer raised a shout: 'Which shitty bastard got out in his place?' He then began to lash out left and right with is stave. I saw that he was assaulting the young man who went out in my place. I was terribly saddened that I had got up at all, and responded to the call. Afterwards, the officer called out an additional two names. One was my mother's nephew, the pharmacist Isaac Yellin, and the second, the head of the *Judenrat*: Poblonsky. These last two refused to join us without their families.

In the Synagogue, the News of My Dear Mother's Death

We were taken to the synagogue in the city. After several seconds, we heard gunshots, and we knew that these were not the shots of soldiers practicing, but – killing fire, by which our brother Jews were being murdered. We were forty-four people in the synagogue. From Belica, the following remained: Myself, Abraham'l Wolkowysky, and Ber'l Stotsky. I sat beside the Holy Ark, I did not cry, but I shook. I trembled in my heart, and laughed inside my heart. I did not laugh because I thought myself to be lucky that I had remained alive. No, no. This was the laugh of the contemptible Germans that was reverberating within me. Therefore, I said in my heart, they, they are the ones who brought us to this synagogue, so we could search for Our God. I was reminded of a line from Job[3:3]: *'Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived.'* I bent over to the Holy Ark, and whispered into it" 'Master of the Universe, you, who chose us from amongst all the nations, and elevated us, now you throw us alive into the pit? You, who can do everything, You, who do miracles and wonders, how can You stand by and see what they are doing to us and remain silent?'

Even my mother would ask: 'How can this be? How is it that they don't have their hands paralyzed at the time that they are shooting Your Jewish people? And how is it, that You can permit them, these murderers, to tie our Rabbi's beard to the tail of a horse, and then make sport of him?'... At that time, I hid myself amid the brush in the potato field, and I heard the screams of the Rabbi and all of the dignitaries of the city. At that moment, the gentile woman Kacnicza went by, and noticed me, and whispered: 'Aryeh'leh hide yourself, they are killing the Jews, there is no God in Heaven.'

Now, in Zhetl, the door to the synagogue was opened, and the last of the Jews from the town were taken inside. Even here, they organized a pretty 'performance,' on the same day that they wiped out all of the Jews in the vicinity. I searched for some member of my family among those that were saved, and I found my uncle Meir Zelikowsky and his son Chaim. My uncle Meir fell into my arms and burst out into bitter weeping. It was from him that I found out that the Germans had thrown a grenade into the house of the Rabbi, the place where we had lives. My dear mother, and all those who were in the refuge were killed.

In the Prison in Novogrudok

We were up to 160 people in the synagogue already. I said to myself: Now there is nothing to fear. they have already killed everyone, and it is necessary to flee. They didn't give us much time to think, and they began

to count the people. According to the rumors, they were prepared to send part of us to Smolensk, and part to Novogrudok. I said to my uncle: Let us go to Smolensk, the place closest to the front, and it is possible we will be able to cross the lines. However, my uncle argued that it would be better to travel to Novogrudok, in our area, with 'our gentiles.' He still had faith in 'our gentiles.'

In the courthouse in Novogrudok, about twelve hundred men were assembled from the entire district. Apparently, even this number of Jews was too large for the Germans. And so, once again, they began to count, selecting tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, doctors and the like. The remainder were sent back to the ghetto in which they had liquidated most of the Jews only minutes before. I said to my uncle that it made no sense to remain in the labor camp, from which there is no possibility of escape, because it is closed in on all sides and it has a wall with barbed-wire on it, and guards in watchtowers with illuminating searchlights that rotate. My uncle persuaded me to remain, arguing that now, after all this, perhaps we will be permitted to stay alive. My answer was that I was astonished that he could believe what *Amalek* has to say, after all that he has done to us. In the end, he said to me: 'What is there to do? After all, there is no place to go. Everyone hates us, everybody.' These wee the last words I heard from his mouth. The right words were: 'Everyone hates us.'

My uncle Meir, and his son Chaim (who afterwards fled to the forest) remained in the labor camp. The two sons of David-Hirsch'l Meckel – Yaakov and Ber'l, and the doctor – the son-in-law of Faygl Sotsky, were killed on the barbed wire at the time they attempted an escape. In the ghetto there were myself, Abraham'l Wolkowysky, Ber'l Stotsky, and his brother-in-law (Lejzor *der Kayder*)and the son-in-law of Yosh'keh Leib'keh's Lejzor. They concentrated us into several buildings in the ghetto. We began to settle down. At night, we secretly broke through the fence, and began to look through the houses for food. The stench of the corpses that were tossed about here and there, went up our nostrils. These were the corpses of the Jews who tried to escape, and perhaps even offer resistance.

I thought to myself: Up till a few hours ago, people still lived here, and now the place has been transformed into a cemetery whose dead are scattered all over the ground. I have to admit, and not be ashamed, that at that moment, my heart was so hardened, that the death I saw before my eyes did not affect me, and all my thoughts were focused on escape.

Prior to escaping, we went out of the camp grounds to get bread, butter and pork; boots, a shirt and trousers. However, on our way back, the guards of the camp sensed our presence and they shot in our direction. Lejzor Gapanowicz was wounded, and his screams were heard all over the city. A policeman that reached him, expended a string of bullets into him and Lejzor was dead.

After Lejzor was killed, we said to ourselves that we are compelled to flee, otherwise they will kill us all.

The Escape from the Camp

Abraham'l and I began to talk to Ber'l Stotsky about escaping. He replied that he and Shy'eh are going to gentiles who know them, and they cannot take us along with them. In the morning, he was given permission

to leave the ghetto to bring water. Ber'l Shy'eh my brother, his brother-in-law Reuven, Abraham'l and I left together. On the way, we parted from Ber'l and Shy'eh and we wished them success. The two of them fled into the forest, and Abraham'l and I quickly returned to the ghetto and began to prepare for the journey. During this preparation, I thought to myself: 'Good, we will flee from this place, but to where? Ber'l went to 'his gentiles' but where are we to go? I have no gentiles that I know, I don't have a single soul that would want to have me.' It was decided between us to flee into the forest, and we ill build ourselves a shelter for refuge in the ground. At night, we will come out and steal food from the fields, and during the day, we will lie still in the ground. At that time we did not know about the existence of the partisans. We thought we would be the only ones, among the animals of the forest. We began to search for partners in this escape undertaking, in order that we not be alone in the forest. We spoke about this with two young men and several young women. We told them about our plan, and asked them if they were prepared to join us, because if not, we were prepared to act immediately before it is too late. Not'keh and Shlomo'leh, who were our age, agreed immediately. We were elated, because they were local people and knew their way to the forest. We invited the girls to a '*kumzitz.*[69]' Someone from the group brought a bottle of vodka that he had found in the ghetto. We fried *latkes*, under the open sky, we toasted each other '*L'Chaim.*' The young women wished us success. We asked that they go and 'distract' the police that were guarding the ghetto, in order that they not pay attention to the fences on that night.

Silently, we approached the fence with knapsacks. We made a small hole in it, Abraham'l being the first one out, and me after him. We lay down in a section of wheat, and signaled to our other two companions. However, these two became frightened, apparently, and did not follow after us. Abraham'l went to see what had happened to them, and came back with them, it becoming clear that they were afraid to cross the fence. We crawled for several hundred meters on our bellies. After that, we rose, and began to run with no knowledge of what lay in front of us. I do not remember for how long we ran, but what I do recall is that we inadvertently ran into a gentile of about 14 years of age, tying up his horse, who understood the purpose of why we were running. He warned us of the Germans who were found about two kilometers away, in a settlement called Szlyb. We asked the boy for the way to the forest, and he explained to us how to reach it. We continued our journey for the entire night, and before dawn, we found ourselves in the forest.

Thoughts in the Heart of the Forest

Upon reaching the forest, each of us took up a hiding place behind a tree, and we were each out of the line of sight of the other. For the entire day, we lay, without uttering a sound, and without moving. This was in the month of August 1942. The summer was at its peak. The day was hot and suffocating. I was very tired, but despite this, I could not sleep. All manner of thoughts ricocheted around in my mind. In this regard, I was reminded of the day we were expelled to Zhetl, at which time I walked with Hirsch Shimonowicz to Belica. On the way, an automobile with S.S. troops passed us from Novogrudok. After it had gone about 50 meters past us, it stopped. The fascist wild beasts of prey perceived that we seemed to be Jews, even though we were dressed as gentiles. I said to Hirsch then: 'Come, let us flee into the forest that is before us, the Germans are afraid to go into it.' But my companion was afraid, and I did not want to flee alone, and leave him in the hands of the murderers by himself.

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69 An informal social gathering. From the Yiddish *kum zitz*, meaning 'come, sit.'

As we drew near the auto, the Germans stopped us, and asked us for our permits to leave the ghetto. Seeing as we had no such permits, we were ordered to get into the auto which continued towards Belica. This was during the *Sukkot* holiday period. The Germans were cold, and they ran off to get somewhat warmed up. Beside the village of Nesilovtsy, a flock of sheep went by. The shepherd rode on a horse with a number of people beside him. The murderers saw that these people were Jews, among them a young girl wearing a fur.

The Germans stopped the auto, jumped out of it, and only one remained to keep watch over us. At a distance of a few meters from us, the Germans killed the girl, and a few more of the men who were with her. Afterwards, I found out that this girl was in the company of her brother and father-in-law, and they had fled from the Vilna ghetto together. If I am not mistaken, they also killed my uncle Fyv'keh there, and Chaim-Yitzhak Kremen. After seeing the murderers, warmed up, climbing into the auto, it occurred to me that they may be planning to throw us off the bridge over the Neman. But we crossed the bridge without incident, and they took us to the 'Gmina' where they related to the police officer, Kaczin (Ziruk) in German, that they had apprehended these Jews outside without permission and there is grounds to execute them. To this Kaczin curtly replied: '*Ja, ja,*' The police began to assault us and drive us outside. We began to cry and plead for mercy. The officer Kaczyn said he would call the burgomaster Balabanski who understood German. Balabanski, who was a fried of Mul'yeh, and with the help of Israel Zlocowsky, who gave Balabanski 500 rubles, pleaded, upon arriving at the police station, to have us released. At the police station, the Germans turned over the pictures they had found on the persons of the Jews they had killed, and they were afterwards turned over to Israel Zlocowsky who went out with several additional Jews, in order to bring the bodies to a proper Jewish burial. When they got there, they found the murdered people already stripped naked, 'our gentiles' having succeeded to strip them of their clothing.

Freedom and Fear

When I was pulled away from my thoughts, it was already after sunset. And so, our first day of freedom went by. But woe unto those who fear even a tiny bird in the forest, where every slight sound terrifies, and you think you are being pursued. In the main, such a fear brings along an emotion that regardless of what will happen to us, it will not pe4rmit us to remain alive, but end up in the pit of death. And despite the fact that we as yet did not know what awaited us in the forest of thick trees, the sense of being free was pleasant, and we breathed more easily.

Night fell. We sat, and rolled some cigarettes. We waited until it got darker, and then continued to walk. After walking for two nights, we reached a place where we encountered our first partisans, among them Jews who had saved themselves from Zhetl. We grasped that we were not the only ones in the forest. The people from Zhetl began to organize a brigade of partisans that afterwards was called by the name 'Orlansky,' and they did not want to take us into the brigade. While we were there, we heard from a woman, that beside Dereczin there was a Jewish doctor that is also organizing a brigade, and he would most certainly take us, because we were young. We did not wait a long time, and went to locate him. Without fear, we walked through the forest, day and night, to find the doctor (Atlas) and his Jewish warriors. We met up with a band of young people from Zhetl who were returning from him, because he did not want them. Despite this, we continues on our way, and we were certain he would accept us. According to what the youths from Zhetl told us, we had to reach the village of Wola, and find a house there with red shingles, and to let the master of the house know we seek to meet with Dr. Atlas. When we arrived there, the woman of the house refused

to reveal the place where Dr. Atlas could be found, out of fear that we were spies. Despite this, she gave each of us a pancake and asked that we leave. We began to speak among ourselves in Yiddish, and this, in order to convince her that we were Jewish and there was no need to be afraid of us. This step really helped. She said to us that we should go near the Szczara River and if we go there on a Sunday, we will encounter partisans that come there to bathe in its waters.

The first person we met there was Israel Kwiat from Dereczin – a young lad who was armed with a rifle. We asked him if he is from the Atlas group, and when he responded affirmatively, we went with him to the group. Before our entry into their base, a young woman stopped us who was standing guard, with a rifle in her hand. she did not permit us to enter within. When we explained to her that we had come from a distance, and our purpose was to see Dr. Atlas. To this she replied that Dr. Atlas had gone off on a mission, and he was expected to return to the base that evening. Until that time, we went to sit outside and wait. They brought us a container of honey, which we ate without bread. At night, Dr. Atlas and the officer Kulko returned, exhausted from the journey. They told us that they had blown up a bridge beside Grodno. (Dr. Atlas, born in Poland, who studied medicine in Milan, Italy, did not want to serve as a doctor in the forest, but rather to be a fighting partisan. He fulfilled his desire, up to the very minute when he fell in an operation against the enemy, from a bullet that penetrated his heart).

In the Brigade of Dr. Atlas

Dr. Atlas organized a Jewish brigade worthy of its name. He gathered to himself selected young men and women. The Russian partisans and also the gentiles of the area accorded him, and his brigade respect.

On a Sunday soon after, beside the Szczara river, we had a conversation with Dr. Atlas. After he came out of the river, he came over to us and asked us what it was we wanted. We told he that we wanted to fight the Germans and to avenge the blood of the Jews they had spilled. Dr. Atlas asked if we had rifles. Our reply was one of emptiness. Kulko asked us if we had boots, We sho9wed him that all of us had boots. In the end, he asked whether we were members of *Komsomol*.[70] I replied that I was a member of this organization. When Kulko asked for my membership credentials, I replied that I had burned them, in order that it not fall, by chance, into the hands of the Germans, and then they might kill me.

'Bravo, – you did the right thing!' To his question as to whether we were craftsmen, we responded by saying we were still young, and had not yet had a chance to learn a trade.

The result of this conversation was that the partisans accepted us. Dr. Atlas held a short talk in front of us, and I can still remember the things he said as a prelude to having us accepted into the brigade. He said: 'Comrades, bitter destiny has brought us here, not in order to hide in the forest and wait for salvation that is to come, and we are to remain alive. We have come to the forest in order to fight the Germans, in order to avenge the Jewish blood that has been spilled, to remove the shame of not having fought against the aggressor until now.' And at the end of his remarks he said: 'In any event, not one of us will remain alive,

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[70] The Communist Youth Organization

so let us, by whatever means, kill as many of our murderers as we can.'

On the first night, I received the order to stand the night watch. I was given a pistol, and a watch, and I was ordered to remain awake for the entire night.

I was lucky. I walked about the entire night, around the tent of the deputy. The deputy emerged and said to me that I was not required to be on my feet all the time, because it was permissible for me to sit as well. I responded to his intent, and sat down at the side.

The partisans of the Dr. Atlas brigade did not sit on their hands. Each and every night, they would go out on missions: some to bring back food, some to derail trains, ambushes, or to cut down telephone poles. We burned the bridge in Belica. In a like manner, we participated in the attack on Kazlouscyna. We killed them all. There were not few 'German heroes' that we found cowering under beds, and we shot them.

The Germans wanted to reach the heart of the Ruda-Jaworskaja Forest. But before they had time to dig themselves in and build themselves stands, we launched an attack against them, in which the 'Bulak' and 'Orlansky' brigades participated. We fought in the forest where a battle lasted for six hours of face-to-fact combat with the murderers.

The brigade of Dr. Atlas belonged to the Division of Bulat[71] (there were four brigades in this Division). In total, we had 600 partisans of which ten percent were Jews.

In December 1942, the Germans launched a massive attack against the forest. They brought 40,000 armed soldiers from the front, tanks and airplanes.

In one of the battles for Velikaya Volya, Dr. Atlas was wounded in the side of his hip, and he died in a half hour. His last words were: 'I have not taken sufficient revenge.'

Dr. Atlas fought like a hero and died like a hero. The Jews in the forest lost a great leader. At the same time, the deputy of the Orlansky brigade was killed, by the name – Kaplinsky. A short time before that, my cousin Jonah Odzhikhowsky was killed. A few days later, Henokh Baranchik (Chaim-Rubin's) was killed. The Germans burned all the homes of the gentiles surrounding the forest, and killed its owners. After this, it was published in the papers that 10,000 Jewish partisans had been killed.

An order was received from the central command of the partisans, to disperse into small groups, and that everyone should save themselves. This large *aktion* against the partisans lasted for several weeks.

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71 It is important that the reader understand that there were two different partisan commanders: one named Bulak, and one named Bulat.

Wen the massive *aktion* came to an end, we began to organize anew. In walking towards Belica, I met Eli Kovensky from the Dr. Atlas Brigade. Eli told me that my two sisters and my brother-in-law are hiding in the forest beside the Neman, in the Belica vicinity.

Along the way, I met Lej'szka Fleischer, and I walked with him, going to search for the remnants of my family. Therefore, you can imagine how great was my joy, when I found them, and their joy also knew no bounds.

After a while, I joined the 'Orlansky' Brigade, and much later on, to the Paratroopers Brigade of Captain Sabarny. I was active in this Brigade up to the liberation.

The Entrance of the Germans and the Expulsion of the Jews

By Moshe Yosselewicz

A. The Sabbath on Which The Holocaust Began

Saturday June 28, 1941. It was already the seventh day since the Nazi German army invaded the Soviet Union.

The ranks of the Nazis moved eastward with lightning speed. To every place they came, they brought destruction and ruin. Cities were bombed and burned. Many of the residents were left with nothing. the roads were full of refugees: men, women and children. Many of them were Jews whose homes and possessions went up in flames. Here and there, one could still see groups of Russian soldiers that remained, without any command. German planes relentless pursued the remnants of the retreating Russian army. The sounds of bomb explosions and gunfire could be heard nearby.

On the morning of that very Sabbath day, the last of the Soviet soldiers, from the division that was stationed in the same place, were still milling about town. At noon, two German scouts on bicycles appeared. At their appearance, the fear and trembling in the hearts of the Jews of the town intensified. All of the predations of Hitler's minions, against the Jews of captured Poland since 1939, were known to us, and we personally saw that their fate was now going to be visited upon us.

A tightening of the heart gripped everyone in our family.

We found no place for rest, and crestfallen, we went from one corner to another.

My father picked up his prayer book, prayed the afternoon prayer, and read from *The Ethics of the Fathers*. I lay down on my bed, when disturbing thoughts began to dominate my thinking. What will be our fate now? Rumors reached us about the cruelty of the Germans towards their Russian captives. Will they behave this way towards us as well? All manner of bizarre thoughts occupied my mind. I wanted to sleep, and I shut my eyes. However suddenly, I got up, as if someone had pushed me out of bed. I walked over to the window.

At the edge of the marketplace street, I saw a detachment of German soldiers riding on bicycles, drawing near to the Catholic cemetery, at the intersection of the roads to Zhaludok and Zhetl. It was late afternoon already. The silence surrounded me and oppressed me. From time to time, it was broken by the hoarse cries of the Germans.

Suddenly, a loud explosion was heard, and immediately afterwards – machine gun fire and exploding grenades. The voices were coming from the direction towards which the Germans were heading. After a few seconds, tongues of fire and columns of smoke appeared from that direction. The shooting continued for about another hour.

As was later made clear, a short but intense battle had ensued between a group of Russian soldiers that remained behind, and the advancing German army.

In this battle, a number of Germans were killed, but almost the entire Russian unit had been wiped out.

After the battle, the murdering soldiers spread through the streets of the town, and anyone who happened to be in their way was shot to death. In this manner, about 15 people were killed in that same hour. But their anger was not quenched by this.

Bands of Germans went out to avenge themselves on the Jews, and this based on the excuse that they had, so-to-speak, shot at them from the synagogue. They went from house-to-house, putting them to the torch.

Three soldiers also came into the yard in front of our house. Calmly, they poured gasoline on the straw roof of the stable that abutted our yard, and set it on fire. A panic seized us, and we thought for sure that the murderers were going to come into the house and shoot us. To our fortune, they left the yard, in the knowledge that the fire would spread by itself and engulf the house.

As quickly as we could, we let ourselves down into the cellar that had been made of bricks, with everything we could lay our hands on: bedding, clothing, whatever food could be found in the house, utensils, and we blocked the entrance with a large iron bar.

We loaded a loaf of bread and several of life's necessities on bicycles and fled the house. Almost all of the houses on the street were engulfed in flames. No living thing could be seen, except for us. We crossed the street running and fled in the direction of the fields, westwards.

The day wore on. Dumb and terrified, we stood in the middle of the field that was lit by the flames of our burning town.

The Holocaust had just begun.

B. The Expulsion Decree and the Night of Departure for Zhetl

Page 267: *The Children of H. Baran and Y. Kamenetzky*

Four months had passed since the incursion of the German soldiers into the town. Four long months passed from the time it was burned down, and the persecutions, harassments and murders began. There was not a single tranquil day. There was not a minute of surcease. Moaning accompanied every discussion, and terror enveloped the heart, there was moaning for those who were prematurely taken from this world, and a terror regarding those who were still alive. For there was not a single house in which there was not someone dead, because the sword of the murderer rested against the throat.

As a result of an inhuman effort, twenty-five hostages were redeemed, whose lives hung by a hair, and here came a new decree: all the Jews in the Lida district had to leave the place of their domicile, and all were to go to the city, and as is understood, the Jews of Belica were among these. This news fell like a clear clap of thunder from the skies. People wrung their hands and their hearts raced. Are we to leave the place where generations upon generation had lived, and then gone to their eternal rest? Are we to leave the place where fathers and sons grew up and spent their lives, rejoicing during good times and worrying during times of trouble? Are we to leave these piles of ruin, on which just a short time ago, there stood the houses that were sustained by the sweat of our brows, and the cemetery in which our dearly beloved remain? Are we to pack up our meager belongings and leave? Is this possible?

But was does our *Tormentor* care about this? Within ten days, not a single Jew is to remain in the town. It is a decree and it cannot be changed.

The town comes together to take counsel, and try to figure out how to sweeten this decree, and to find whatever means may be available to ease this departure without, God forbid, causing any loss of life. For, it is evident, that the life of the Jew and his possessions are considered to be expendable. But so long as the heart beats, there is hope in it, and it is imperative to do whatever is possible in order to get through this crisis as well.

A number of women were sent as a delegation to Lida, the district center city, to see and hear what was going on there. In two days time they returned, with the news on their lips, that all the Jews from the city and its environs are ordered to enter a ghetto. Many of the Belica residents, who did not wait for the return of the delegates, went to Lida with the rest of their belongings, and when they learned of the situation there, they returned with deliberate speed. Despite this, a number of them remained there, having relatives, and not willing to incur the dangers of a return trip.

Once again, the town came together to seek counsel, time being of the essence, and there was a need to act. The Novogrudok district was identified, before the expulsion decree was issued, but it was forbidden to Jews from the Lida district to cross over to a second district. Israel Zlocowsky put his life at risk and went knocking on all doors, in order to get something going for the good of the community. He did not stint on himself, ignoring his own personal issues, in order to do what was best for everyone. In the end, he succeeded, by using gold coins, to obtain permissions from the head of the town to leave for a city in any district of their choice. The date of the expulsion was set as November 10, 1941 which was drawing nigh.

Autumn entered its last phase. A cold, soaking rain fell from morning until night. The street was full of mud and refuse from the rainwater. The last of the leaves fall from the trees, and a north wind blows through the bare branches. The black-gray ravens soar above them, cawing monotonously. The church, which in the summertime, was hidden behind the tall green trees, now stands unadorned, the two bells in its belfry tolling from time to time, and their clang rings out like the blow of a hammer, a harbinger of bad things to come.

Time flies, and everyone is getting ready to leave. In order to cover the large expenses of the freight, the 'remainder of one's pittance' is sold off, because the 'good' gentiles who agreed to convey these belongings demanded inflated prices. After redeeming the hostages, there was practically nothing left of value, and everyone sold off the last of their meager possessions. The gentiles in the vicinity began to swarm toward the town, in order to be able to buy a 'bargain' from the Jews: clothing, bedding, copper vessels, that had been handed down from generation to generation as an inheritance, junk that was left after the fire, everything that had any value. The Jews were selling and the gentiles were buying, at half the value. When there was no possibility of a sale, the item was simply given away, on condition that half would be returned after the war, and they take it willingly, because in any event, these possessions are going to remain with them....

And so the last day arrives. It is now necessary to part from the town and leave it. Starting on that morning, a light rain began to fall, and upon hitting the ground, turned immediately to ice. A damp cold reigned outside. The entire ground, the roofs and the trees were covered in a thick sheath of ice. The more fragile branches of the trees broke off under this great weight, and on snapping, they sounded like explosions that came one after another, from different places. The elderly gentiles recounted that they recalled an autumn of this kind many years past, and said that it was an ill omen, that blood would be spilled, that many people would die, because the wrath of God had been poured out on humanity.

The state of mind in this cold air – was depressing, darkening our mood, making us full of fear in this damp cold, at a time when legs fail to provide support on the icy, slippery ground, and we go to the cemetery to bid farewell to those that will not be leaving this place, going to pour out one's heart before them, and to beseech them to plead before the Master of the Universe to take pity on His oppressed and suffering children, and to send them salvation soon.

With an aching heart, everyone returned home, in order to do the final preparations. It had been 'arranged' with the police that there would be no difficulties with the departure. With the 'generosity' of the head of the town, it became possible to go off to other cities than Lida. Permissions were given to groups of ten families. While these permissions were granted, no guarantees were given as to what might happen along the way.

On the night of November 9, 1941, the exodus began.

Quietly, the wagons began to leave, one after another. A long line of wagons slowly stretches on in the darkness of the night, in the direction of Zhetl. The town of Belica remains to the rear. The lights from the houses of the peasants can still be seen, and here, they too disappear, after the first turn. We cross the long bridge over the Neman River. The high bank with the old 'palace' surrounded by ancient trees, is indistinct in the darkness. Oh, the lovely Neman, how many memories we have of the beautiful places along its banks, like a dream that has passed, never to return. The summer Sabbath days beside the banks of the river, under the trees and branches, couples sat and whispered to one another, while the older folks took a Sabbath nap, while children sat beside them, chewing on a tasty bit of baked goods. Athletic young men swim in the river, diving into the water, swimming, or rowing boats, far, far away... even now the river silently flows, lazily, just as it has for hundreds upon hundreds of years, and it appears that it will continue to do so, without change, without ever stopping...

And here, now the long bridge is also behind us. We still can hear the sound of the last of the wagon wheels on its roadbed, and now this too falls silent. A light snow begins to fall, its flakes falling silently on the ground, covering it in a white sheet.

We draw close to the village of Nesilovtsy, and here we can already discern the silhouettes of its impoverished houses. In the summer mornings, the children of this village would come to the town, wake up the women of the houses, and sell them pickled vegetables, from which a tasty vinegar was prepared, as well as cut flowers that had a wondrous perfume...yes, this was just a short time ago.

The caravan moves on slowly, for the entire length of the white road. Women, with heavy hearts, sit on the bundles, with children at their side. The men walk on foot beside the wagons. From time to time, the cry of a child, is heard, or the wail of a mother. The wagons are proceeding on the side of the road that is not paved, in order not to make noise. Only now and then, does a wheel encounter a rock by happenstance, causing a bump and the sound of squeaking.

Another village off to the left is swaddled in the peace of the night. The peasants are fast in their quiet sleep in their small dwellings. In one small hut, a dog barks, as it senses movement out on the road. A calf lows in the barn. A rooster crows, and is answered by a second one. At this hour, the roosters most certainly crowed yesterday also, and the day before, and certainly will resume their routine tomorrow and the day after...

And again, silence falls from both sides of the road. But how great is the chasm between that silence and the terror that fills the heart. There, with a safe and secure sleep in a warm house, and here the wanderings of the expelled, at the sufferance of murderers. A great pain afflicts the heart, were it only possible to burst out into tears, to pour out the bitterness that is pent up in an aching heart. But the heart has turned to stone, and not even a single tear will appear in the eye.

The snow has stopped falling. Isolated settlements are seen in the distance. White stands of trees and white

fields are on both sides of the road. We pass the villages of Naharodavicy, Joukovsina, Kargli, and even Zaset' are near. There, is a police station with Byelorussian police of bad reputation. They are capable of causing trouble. But, with good luck, we get by them as well.

The night of expulsion and the wandering goes on and draws to its close. The light of a new day begins to break in the east. From the darkness of the morning, it is now possible to spy the belfries of the church in Zhetl. Just another bit of way, and we enter the town. With resignation, and a diminished hope, we begin a new day in a new place —

What will the day bring?....

The Chain of Events in My Flight from Death

By Abraham Maggid

Page 269: From the Left: Hirsch Baran, His Wife, Baylah (Radominer), Her Sister Hasia (Kamenetzky) and their Children.

We sat in a darkened shack behind the house of Israel the Dyer, a shack with no windows. No light, no air, and without the will to live. With us were Yaakov Kotliarsky (Yankl the Coppersmith) with his daughter Henya, and her husband Yankl Molczadsky from Lida. With me, were my wife Bracha, and my two sons, Yekhezkiel and Elchanan ה"יד (they were later killed in the slaughters).

Our spacious home was burned down immediately as the Nazi murderers entered our tranquil town of Belica. The gentiles who worked for me in the tar and pitch works, and whom I provided for their bread, now were the ones who provided my bread. I was very happy when they responded to me, even if my request was not a substantial one, a slice of bread and a bit of milk for the small children. Many times I felt that they give only because it was not suitable to them not to give. Occasionally they would say: today we have nothing – tomorrow, but it was not possible to go out of this house on every 'tomorrow.'

Ber'l the Shoemaker lived as a neighbor to Israel the Dyer, who had a large stable, and also his cows and those of Israel the Shoemaker[72]. Bedside one of the walls, three wooden bed stands had been laid, and between the wall and the bed stands the width was about a meter. The entrance to the stable was through the attic, and one used to slide down from top to bottom, and we would sit in this stable for days on end. At a time of need, in order to get out of there, an escape way was dug under the foundation that led out to the garden of Faygl Stotsky.

Once, when I was sitting in the stable hideout, I sensed that someone was rummaging about our neighbor's shack, and my heart began to race, since I felt something was afoot. As I started to come out of the stable, I saw the barber, Hirsch'l Baran from Lida, the son-in-law of Ber'l the Shoemaker, and Yitzhak Kamenetzky, both of them running toward the garden to hide. They dragged me after them, and only after we had laid down and spread ourselves on the ground in the middle of the garden did they tell me that my son-in-law, Yankl the Coppersmith was taken away by the Germans, and they don't know where he is.

The Germans knew that the Jews were hiding in the gardens, and because of this, they were searching and probing through the undergrowth. I managed to signal somehow to Hirsch'l Baran and to Yitzhak Kamenetzky that we should move over from the garden into the stable, be they didn't hear me. I left them, and jumped into our shack to find out what was going on with my family. I immediately retreated in my own footsteps, and I saw two Germans leading Hirsch Baran and Yitzhak Kamenetzky in the direction of the

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72 This seems to be an erroneous designation, having already identified the individual as Israel the Dyer.

police headquarters that was beside the Christian cemetery. One German went into our house, but I passed him, and grabbed my two little children in my arms. Then he called out to me: leave the children, and you come with me. I kissed the two children, Yekhezkiel aged 6, and Elchanan age 4, exchanged glances with my wife Bracha, and with all the other people in the house, taking my leave of all of them by a glimpse of the eye and without words, and I went...

Beside the house of Shlomo the Baker, a German stood guard over Mul'yeh Shimonowicz, the son of Fish'keh (Sholom) and another young girl. The two Germans led us off to the horse market, where there was another German who stood guard over us for sawing wood for the kitchen, and to wash the baskets. After we finished the work, the German gave us food to eat, and afterwards ordered us to wash the wheels of the wagons beside the kitchen, and this was how the time passed until four o'clock in the afternoon.

Before nightfall, a policeman arrived on a bicycle (a gentile thug from Belica, whom we shot at into his house at night, when we were in the partisans) and conveyed to the German that the division is demanding the turnover of the four Jews. Suddenly, shouting was heard, and the sounds of rifle and machine gun fire. The voices subsided, but we became very noisy and nervous. The German responded to the policeman that we will be let go in another half hour, but we perceived that the face of the German began to change colors. Our nervousness grew from minute to minute, and he held onto us for about another ten minutes, and he said to us: 'you are free to go, go home quickly.'

We went, but not by a direct route, but rather through the gardens, crossing the street on the run, and getting as far as a side street beside the house of 'Niom'keh the Wagon Driver, and Avru'chkeh (their houses were burned down). There, one by one we pushed our way through, again crossing a street on the run, beside Michal Stotsky the Tailor, and through the gardens, we reached the house of the father-in-law of Mul'yeh Shimonowicz, beside Yosh'keh the Shoemaker. Mul'yeh's wife and the other women, burst out with a shout when they saw us: You are alive, hide yourself, all the men have been shot!

We fled to the attic in Mul'yeh's house, a small house whose roof was thatched with straw. Each of us grabbed a corner, digging deeply into the dirt that was in the eaves, and covered ourselves in rags. We heard the reverberating voices of the murderers bursting through our small house, asking where the men were, and were told that the men had already been taken.

With the arrival of night, the women told us what had happened: 36 men were shot, among them – my son-in-law Yaakov Kotliarsky, his son, Yehoshua Kotliarsky, and his son-in-law Yehoshua'keh Peretz's, the Rabbi, the pharmacist Wismonsky, Yitzhak Kamenetzky, and his brother-in-law Hirsch Baran. With the last two, was I not just with them during the morning hours, in the middle of the garden, and I pleaded with them to come with me. Fate caused us to part, and it was decreed that they be put to death that day at the hands of the bloodthirsty murderers. With the handsome and accomplished Yitzhak Kamenetzky, we were like kin, with the feelings of comradeship and fondness tying us together. I swore at that time, that if it were only possible, I will avenge the blood of my family and his blood, because he had no one left behind him.(His wife, Hasia, and his handsome and accomplished son were killed afterwards in Zhetl). ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Before morning, I decided to jump over to the shack of my house, which was a distance of two houses away. When I was seen in my house, everyone began to weep with joy, because they thought I was among the

murdered. I could not stay for any length of time in my house, because the morning began to get light. I put on an old, torn, half-length jacket, and put on a large hat that covered my eyes, girded up my trousers, put a knapsack on my back with a long walking stick, and le the cows out of the stable of Israel the Dyer into the street. Just like a shepherd, I led the cows through the marketplace, and the street in which the Germans were milling about in that area. The truth of the matter was, that every time a German passed beside me, my heart would stop, and my soul dangled on a strand of hair, and in this way I continued to proceed with my head held up. In this manner, I succeeded in transferring the cows through the entire town, to the roads leading to the pasture, and when I got there, I thanked God for getting me their in one piece.

A Christian drew closer to me, and I recognized him from the Netzana Street, because he also worked for me at the tar & pitch works. I greeted him with a 'Good Morning,' and he responded in kind, recognizing me, and he said, that there were a lot of Germans to be found beside the Neman, and therefore it would be better if I returned to the town. After a short time to weigh my options, I decided not to return to town, but rather to continue forward. In the distance, beside the crossing points, three people appeared, and then vanished into a stand of trees beside the Neman. The closer I drew to the Neman, I see people dressed as civilians without insignias, but in spite of this, I think that perhaps the Germans have disguised themselves as local citizenry. As I got to within 150 meters of the stand of trees, I was able to distinguish three grown men and a boy. They looked about them and vanished quickly, and I understood them to be Jews from Belica. I entered the woods, and found Shlomo the Tailor there, Chaim Hanger, Herzl Fleischer and others, all of whom hugged me, and asked what was going on in the town. I told them the 'news' and what had happened to me, and how I rescued myself and came here.

In the evening, women arrived to convey the news that the unit of murderers had left Belica, and then each of us returned to their respective houses. However, the days of our being able to reside peacefully did not last very long, because the issue of levying ransoms on the town began. They deceived us into being led into a 'meeting' in the Gmina, and we were immediately imprisoned on the spot. The doors were locked, and a police guard was placed around it, with no possibility to exit. After this, they notified us that if we will not come up with 150,000 gold pieces within three days, they will murder us all. We began to plead that they let Ziss'l the Miller and myself out, in order that we might raise the money. After a great deal of effort, they let Ziss'l go, and he, together with Israel Zlocowsky began the task of raising the money immediately. They ran between Lida and Zhetl, asking for help. Because of this, the Jewish elder, R' Israel-Lejzor from Zhetl who was renown, and did not fear for his life, and brought a large amount of money, and this is how we were set free.

Then began the period of providing pairs of boots for the police, but the matter didn't last very long, because, in the meantime, the order came to evacuate the town and to transfer to either Lida or Zhetl. Accordingly, those Jews from Belica who were remained, left and went in a number of directions, so to Lida, some to Zhetl, and some to Scucyn. Ultimately, they were all trapped into the mass graves of these three cities: head to head, heart to heart , body to body, for all eternity. ה"ד

The Tribulations of a Fighting Partisan

By Joseph ben-Isaac

Page 272: Joseph Baranchik and His Family

My family and I lived in Zhaludok for the last years. On the first days of the war, the Germans dropped a bomb on the town. When I went out into the street afterwards, I heard two Christians saying, that when the Germans arrived, I would be the first one they would hang. The following day, I left Zhaludok, with the objective of fleeing into Russia, but when I arrived in Belica, my mother stopped me, and did not permit me to continue on my way. After several days, the Germans entered Belica.

Three weeks later, the staff of the Gestapo arrived in the town.

In Belica, I went through all of the trials, abuse and slaughter that was heaped upon us. I absorbed murderous beatings for myself and on behalf of others. One time, we were sitting in the house of Chaim Wiszneyewsky, where my sister Chaya-El'keh was living after the burning down of the town. Christian police entered, who were local townspeople, and they wanted to take my brother-in-law, Shlomo Kaplan out to work. He was sick, and I said that I would go in his place. The police beat me murderously, and only in return for 'gifts' did they release my brother-in-law from going to work.

There was a decree: anyone who owned a cow had to pay a tax of 15 rubles. After the tax was paid, an order arrived to bring the cows to the city of Lida. The Jews were afraid to show their faces to the Germans, and therefore turned over the cows to Christians and paid them to transport the cows to Lida at 2 pood of rye grain per cow.

After this decree was made public, the one to transfer all of the Jews from Belica to the ghetto at Lida, the fleeing began. Everyone sought a place of refuge in one of the settlements: Lida, Zhetl, Dvarec, Scucyn, Novogrudok, and Sjalec. The larger part went to Zhetl, and from there they were sent to work in the town of Dvarec. When it became known to us, that all of the Jews of the town of Horodec beside Baranovici had been taken out to be killed, myself and Herzl Fleischer fled from Dvarec back to Zhetl.

On April 30, 1942 (13 Iyyar), all the adult men were taken out of Zhetl, more than two thousand men, and they shot them all. We were hidden in a 'bunker' because otherwise, we would have been shot as well.

It became clear to us, that we had no other option to flee, but into the forests, and organize groups of partisans. We began to search for weapons. Alter Dworecky from Zhetl was the first to go to the forest, along with nine other men, but when they reached the forest, they were killed by the Russian partisans. Were it not for this incident, many more Jews from Zhetl, would have remained alive. After this incident, many gave up, and did not attempt to get out into the forest.

During the second slaughter in Zhetl, we again hid in the 'bunkers.' I waited for the chance that I might find my wife [who with] my daughter who was nursing, had went out to find a refuge and did not return. I came out of the 'bunker' with the daughter of Alter the Teacher, her husband, two young girls from Zhetl, and Eliyahu ben David-Leib Szeszko. We walked to Dvarec and along the way, entered a village. The people of the village indicated to us, "There is were Stalin's people are going.'...

Beside the village of Beksht we seized a Gestapo man and in this way, we killed the head of a village council. The Gestapo person was first investigated, and afterwards taken out and killed. Twice we organized an assault on the town of Horodok beside Molodechno, but we did not succeed in killing any Germans. We organized an attack on the village of Rodina, and killed 25 people there, we burned the village and took spoils.

At the end of the month of March 1943, an assault was launched against us. We received an order to leave the forest and move to a different location. We passed through the forests beside Novogrudok, and we milled about there for about a week, and then returned to the Lipczanka Forests.

In the month of August 1943, the Germans attacked us again. We had one tank in the forest, and with its assistance, we were able to mount a defense. We crossed the Szczara River, and entered the forests surrounding the city of Slonim. We had barely stopped to get some rest, when a reconnaissance aircraft suddenly appeared and took pictures of our position from above. We immediately left that location and reached a small city beside Baranovici, and there we had a battle with the police, where we killed five of them, and the remainder fled. From there, after a while, we returned to the Lipiczansky Forests.

The situation in 1944 was very difficult, because the White Poles were fighting against us, who were well-acquainted with the lay of the land, and stood watch to prevent us from entering the villages in order to obtain food for ourselves. Our commander issued an order that three divisions were to move in the direction of Zhaludok to bring food from there. But when we crossed the Neman near Orlowa, the White Poles met us with gunfire. We directed machine gun fire at the Poles, who were armed only with rifles. We received an order to take control of the village that was nearby, and to do with it what we saw fit. The people of this village had previously turned over about 40 Jews to the Germans, that had hidden themselves in the vicinity. At this time, we took our vengeance for this incident...

In June of 1944, we were besieged by a unit of Cossacks from the army of General Vlasov. Many partisans were killed in that battle, of which a significant number were Jews. We fought the Cossacks until July 14, 1944, at which time, units of the Red Army arrived in our area, and liberated us.

Bereaved and Isolated Among The Russian Partisans

By Chaya bat Chaim-Yitzhak

I was born in Belica to my parents, Chaim-Yitzhak and Faygl (my father engaged in small business, and we lived beside the synagogue and the school).

When the war broke out and the Germans entered Belica, they put our house to the torch, and all of the houses in the vicinity. We went to live with my uncle, Shlomo Kremen, the Baker. All day long, we suffered assaults from the Poles who lived in the town, along with the Germans, and we suffered difficulties. My father was among those who were seized and brought to the sports field beside the Catholic church, and there, they were forced to go between two rows of German soldiers, who held staves in their hands, and who administered murderous blows. It was only by a miracle that my father returned home.

A short interval after this, the Germans seized a number of grown men, and brought them to the village of Paracany[73], and tortured them until they drew blood. When they returned home, it was difficult to recognize them from the beatings they received there.

The Germans had a list of people (myself among them) who were thought to be communists, because they had previously worked for the Russians. Having previously been an official under the Russians, they saw me as a communist, and the 'gentile thugs' who were prison staff searched for me in the house, up on the roof and in the yard. To my luck, they did not enter the house itself, to look for me, and in this way, was saved from their hands. From that time on, I was afraid to remain in Belica, and I fled to Novogrudok.

Again they assaulted my father. The Germans cut the hair on his head in the shape of a crucifix, and afterwards ordered him to gather eggs for them. After a strenuous effort, he gathered the eggs and turned them over to the Germans, at which point they took him into an auto, and took him to the village of Nesilovtsy beside the Neman, and there they ordered him to dig a pit for himself, and they shot him....

My mother and I did not know what had happened to our father, and we searched for him throughout the town and its surroundings, until it became known to us, as related by a gentile, that he had been killed. We wanted to give him a proper Jewish burial, but we did not know where his body was. I turned to the health department in Lida, and from there, they sent a Polish official to escort me to Nesilovtsy. We arrived there, but for some reason, all the gentiles had fled, and we did not know where he had been interred. After the war, the Belica residents left Nesilovtsy, and then the gentiles showed us his burial place, and we gave my father a proper Jewish burial.

After the expulsion of the Belica residents, my mother and I went to the ghetto in Zhetl, and my mother was

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[73] We had previously learned that this was the location of Gestapo HQ in the area.

killed there in the First Slaughter. After the Zhetl ghetto was liquidated, I went over to Dvarec to my cousin, Benjamin Galinsky. After this, they liquidated Dvarec, and I fled to the forest.

For a short interval, I was with the Jewish partisans under the command of Tuvia Bielski. Afterwards, I went over to the area of the Neman, and there I ran into others from Belica. At the beginning, I was among the non-combatants, and afterwards I joined the fighting partisans, after I had obtained a Czech rifle. Our commander was an anti-Semitic Russian, and he sent me to work with those sick from typhus. I requested to be left alone, because I was vulnerable to contract typhus, but he ordered me to do this, and I was compelled to do it, and as a result I became very ill with typhus.

At the same time, the group needed to move to the Grodno area. The Russian commander ordered me to remain, with the excuse that I was too weak, despite the fact that he took along Christian women just as weak as I was. He read the order at a military assembly, and he ordered a Jewish youth to take me away from the area. My pleading before him was to no avail, in which I indicated that this was tantamount to a death sentence for me. Absent any alternative, I returned to the Belica families that were non-combatants. It is worth noting that the previously mentioned commander sis not return my personal arms that I had brought to the partisans.

After a short while, the great siege of the forest began, by the Germans, together with the Vlasov troops. We constantly changed location, we suffered from lack of nourishment, we slept in swamps up to our throats. Only at night did we have any surcease at all. This condition persisted for about six weeks. To our good fortune, the liberating forces of the Red Army drew near, and they set us free.

After the liberation, we returned to Belica. The town was incinerated. We were there for about a half year, and I worked at the flour mill. We were afraid to stay, because of the White Poles, and we moved to live in Lida. From there, I traveled to Austria, and I worked in a kindergarten for about two years. I made *aliyah* to Israel in 1948, when the Jewish State was already an existing fact. I reached Haifa. I married, and lived in an Arab neighborhood for three years. Today, I live in Neve-Sha'anan, well fixed and fortunate, thanks to God.

Two Women Partisans Who Fought The Scourge

By Shayn'keh Bat-Joseph

We Return from Zhaludok to Belica

At the outbreak of the war between Germany and Russia in June 1941, we were living in Zhaludok. Because there was an airfield there, the bombing started immediately. We knew very well what awaited us with the coming Nazi conquest. A panic seized the people who began to flee to the east. Most of my friends boarded a truck that stood beside the building of the communist party that was used to allocate the workers. My friends pleaded with me: – come, travel with us, perhaps we will succeed in fleeing from the Germans. I weighed this for a moment in my mind, but I decided quickly: I cannot flee by myself, to save just myself, how can I abandon my parents and family? My older brother was in the Red Army (he fell in battle beside Vitebsk) and my older sister also was not at home, and the burden of being the oldest daughter rested on my shoulders.

I returned home, with the resolute decision to help my family in these difficult times. My father owned a wagon and horse, and we left, heading in the direction of Belica. My father's entire family was there. When my father encountered his family and relatives, he did not want to continue into Russia. As for me, I could not make my peace with just sitting on my hands. On the morrow, I joined a group of people that walked in the direction leading east. For two weeks I wandered along the roads, with the danger of death hovering over my head: German airplanes would descend on us, and would shoot at any living thing they happened on under them; people fell like flies, and we would encounter the bodies of the dead everywhere; the smell of fires permeated the air, and the sound of bomb explosions. Not far from the Russian-Polish border, we encountered Germans for the first time, and there was no longer any purpose to continuing. No other option remained except for me to return to Belica, to my family. I returned with my feet all covered in wounds, and swollen with hunger.

With the First of the Underground in Zhetl

The enemy began to implement his murderous agenda in Belica, first assembling the dignitaries of the town, and shooting them (many of them were buried while still alive). Afterwards, they assembled the men and compelled them to pass between two rows of Germans with staves in their hands, rifles and boards, that they had torn out of a nearby fence, and the Germans beat them. (My father was also among them). The fear was palpable close to the house in which we lived, and I could clearly see it all through the window. I saw my father run between the two lines, with the murderers hitting him from all sides. He ran in the direction of the house, wounded, and in these short minutes, his hair turned white.

When the order came from the Germans for all of the Jews to leave Belica and go to nearby towns, we went to Zhetl together with most of the Belica Jews.

In Zhetl, the suffering was greater – hunger, cold and cramped quarters oppressed is greatly. Day-by-day they took us to work on the roads, and during the working hours, I would look in the direction of the forests, and the idea had already been aroused in my mind to flee to the forests. They took my younger brother, along with other boys, to work at the railroad station in Navael'nja, and they did not return. The confinement of people innocent of wrongdoing in the ghetto continued, and rumors began to circulate that everyone was to be exterminated soon. I remained with my little brother and parents and all the time I planned in my heart that a day would come when I would flee from *The Scourgers.*

At the same time, an underground had already been organized in Zhetl, at the head of which stood the lawyer Alter Dworecky. I, and my friend Hasia, joined the organization, in which everything was kept in great secret. We knew only a few young men, who allocated tasks to us, the type that involved going in the shadow of death. Most nights I slept with Hasia in her house, with our 'first aid' packs constantly at the ready, in order to flee. In this house there was a bakery with a large oven, and under this oven, my brother and a few other Jews, built a 'bunker.'

We knew that the organization within the ghetto already had contact with the Russian partisans in the forests. The plan was, that one of these days, the partisans would attack the Gestapo building from the outside, and at the same time, amidst the confusion that will ensue, the boys in the ghetto will succeed in clearing a way out. with the little weaponry they had in their hands, in order to reach the forest. To our bad luck, one of the Russians betrayed us, and revealed the plan to the Germans, who began the slaughter of August 1942.

Hasia and I did not succeed in escaping the ghetto, the shooting beginning early in the morning. I was lodging with Hasia, and when I heard the shots, I quickly ran home in order to save my family, and to bring them into the 'bunker.' The bullets flew about me, and when I reached my house I found only my father, and he did not know where my mother and brother were. I took my father and we quickly ran to the 'bunker' that was in Hasia's house.

In the 'Bunker'

There were 36 people in the 'bunker' and among them were: Meir ben Isaac, his wife, Chaya Sarah, and their daughters Rivka and Liebeh; Vikhn'eh Baranchik and her family, Yud'l Kusielewicz, his wife Rivka and their son Eliyahu, and others. The pit was too small to accommodate so many people, and we sat on top of one another and were afraid to move. All the screams and shooting, that reached us from above, confounded our senses. From time-to time the sound of heavy footfall from the Germans, who were searching for Jews. We also hear the calling of the members of the *Judenrat*: 'Jews, come out of your hideouts, nothing will happen to you, this is for your own good....'

By the second day we started to suffer from lack of air and water, and the adults began to suffocate. For the entire time, everyone was certain they could hear footfall going back and forth beside the 'bunker,' our explanation being that they were guarding us so we would not escape. In a short while, they would extract us, one at a time to slaughter us. I was not afraid of death, but I was not reconciled to this kind of death – to fall alive into the hands of the murderers. To flee, to escape, to get a bullet in the back, that didn't bother me.

The third night arrived, and I heard groans from the throats of those who were suffocating, and I decided to leave here, while they were all still alive. I began to whisper with Hasia about the plan, and she immediately agreed with me, and we began to crawl towards the opening. To where, to where? – we hear quiet voices. We are coming out of here – we replied – there is no point in suffocating to death in this pit, we have to find a means to flee. The objection that everyone had was they feared there was a guard posted beside the house. I attempted to persuade the people, that even if there was a guard, and even if I was caught a live, I would not betray them ever, but my words were for naught. Despite this, I continued to crawl in the direction of the opening. A few wanted to forcibly prevent me from exiting, and they tore my clothing and hair. The pictures of my family, my one single memory that remained in my possession, that I held closely to my heart, in an envelope, fell and were scattered. Despite it all, I continued to progress. Beside the opening to the outside, Hasia's mother, Vikhn'eh Baranchik sat. This woman, good-hearted and intelligent, did not lose her composure at this critical moment, when she saw my head getting closer to her, and whispered to me: – Come, I will help you get out. And with her assistance, I went out of the 'bunker.'

Upon exiting, I lacked the strength to get up on my feet, and I crawled to the door that leads to the outside. I attempted to get up, but I fell on a metal plate, and the noise of the metal plate reverberated to a distance. To my good fortune, there was not a soul in the area, and only the sound of the water running in the nearby brook could be heard, running silently in the night. I refreshed myself a bit from the fresh air, and the first thought that crossed my mind was to provide water to the people still inside.

I began to search for vessels, and I found something or another and crawled in the direction of the stream. I brought back water and attempted to persuade them all that there was absolutely no one standing guard beside the house, and it is up to all of them to get up and flee from this asphyxiating hole. However there were those that discounted this, and did not believe, and there were also those who simply did not have the strength to move from the hideout. Hasia joined me, and together we continued to convey water, and whatever was left of the food that we could find in the house. Hasia's brother Nachman, her sister Fried'keh and brother-in-law Gershon – they also came out. Nachman proposed to us that we remain one additional day in the ghetto, to hide in one of the houses, and on the following day, to leave with other members of the family that remained in the 'bunker.' I joined them, because my father also remained, and he was very weak, and did not have the strength to get out. As we later learned, most of the people from the ghetto fled that very night, and in the following one.

The Flight to the Forest

We were certain, that the Germans would not search in the house where we had hidden outside the ghetto, but we were mistaken. A day worth of terror and Hell passed over us, but we were saved by a miracle: when night fell, we succeeded in escaping from Zhetl with the rest of the members of the family.

We reached the forests beside the village of Zachepichi (the Zachepichi Woods) and we occupied that place for about two weeks. We suffered from hunger and thirst, and in addition to this, we lived in constant fear. There was no secure place where to hide from the Germans, and they announced the payment of a bounty for each Jewish head. Hasia and I did not want to remain among the underbrush in the forest this way, because our objective was to join the partisans and take armed vengeance against the Germans

On one day towards evening, we decided to set out along the way. We were certain that the wave of ferocity had passed, and they were no longer searching for Jews. We planned to head in the direction of Jaworskaja-Ruda because we heard that partisans were assembling there. We followed the Neman, in order not to lose the direction. We had not gotten about 20 meters from the forest, when we heard shouts, and saw that we were being pursued, these being Byelorussian police, accomplices to the Germans. They were about 500 meters distance from us, and we began to run back into the forest, but I felt that my legs were giving out, and my strength was leaving me. We reached the edge of the forest with difficulty, and I fell behind a bush, and I covered my head with a jacket, in order not to see the murderers that were getting closer to me. I was paralyzed and could not move. I sensed a complete loss of strength, and I was close to passing out, when they drew near, and literally passed by my side, with murderous screaming and thirst for blood. By a miracle, they did not sense my presence, and continued to run into the forest.

They continued to search for us for a long time, and when they returned from the forest, it had begun to grow dark. I lay silent, when they again went past me, with they feral shouting, but without sensing my presence. When it had gotten completely dark, and silence reigned about, I found some strength, got up, and entered the forest, when I suddenly heard Hasia's voice calling to me. We fell into each other's embrace, and predictably, we cried bitterly out of great joy...

We did not give up, we decided to carry on, and this time we went in the direction towards the center of the forest. We were exhausted and weak, and when we saw the first house, we attempted to draw near to it, thinking that perhaps we will be able to get a hold of a bit of food, and to ask the way leading to Jaworskaja-Ruda. But the peasant who opened the door, threatened us with an axe, and with difficulty, we succeeded in fleeing with our lives in our hands. We decided no longer to turn off to the houses of peasants, and to find our way by ourselves. For many days, we wandered along the ways, hungry and tired, and we subsisted only on the plants that we found in the forest. We proceeded, but only at night, and by day, hid ourselves in the depths of the forest, under the brush. When we stopped, one of us would sleep, and the second would stand watch.

On one of the days, we met up with two Jews who had fled from Zhetl, and they told us that the partisan camp was in a nearby location. They said to us that many young men had succeeded in fleeing the ghetto and had organized themselves, but they were not accepting women; only when a young woman succeeds in procuring arms, do they also accept her, and this too, with reluctance.

We walked with them to the camp, and here, again, we ran into difficulties, because the partisans were of the type that did not recognize us from before, and they objected to taking us without arms (they had an acute shortage of weaponry, and more than their share of young women in the camp). Among the young men, who did not recognize us, they argues that they also have female relatives, who were saved, and are hidden in the forest, and they are interested in bringing them to the camp. On that same evening, a general meeting was held, and a vote was taken, and the majority voted to take us into the partisan camp. We were fortunate in finally being able to achieve our goal.

In the Partisan Camp

Page 280: *Sonia the Partisan (Shayn'keh bat Joseph)*

Page 281: (Left): *The Cydrowicz Sisters*

(Right): *Faygl Cydrowicz*

The head of the camp at that time was Hirsch Kaplinsky from Zhetl. At the outset, we worked in the latrines, cooked and washed. Not only once, did I sit for whole nights, beside the campfire, and watched the warmed cooking food for those comrades, who were expected to return from their sabotage missions against the Germans. Afterwards, Hasia and I received rifles, in order to guard the camp, but after our turn at guard duty was over, they took the rifles back.

We awaited the day we would receive arms that would belong only to us, and so the camp grew, and much weaponry was obtained that was found with the peasants in the area. In that same forest (Lipiczansky) there was a unit of Russian partisans (The Orlansky *Otryad*, headed by Kola) and they helped us. We would do trades with them: our young men would get horses for them, from the peasants who were accomplices to the Nazis (from this type of peasant it was permissible to take everything), and the Russian partisans would give our boys weapons.

In the end, Hasia and I got rifles, for use in our position as 'first aid.' We began to participate in missions for real: derailing trains, blowing up railroad tracks, and other wartime missions. Not only once did our comrades pay with victims during the execution of these missions, and this caused suffering and heartache, because each member was very dear to us. We remained small in number, and we wanted to be privileged to see the central objective in the defeat of the Germans. At frequent intervals, the Germans would concentrate specific forces and lay a siege against the forest, and at those times we also paid dearly in victims (there were also instances when we were bombed from the air).

In the year 1943, Russian paratroopers reached us from the rear, and they brought an order with them concerning the state of the Jews in the Russian ranks. It was my fate to be attached to the *Krasnogvardysk* Division.

On one occasion, twelve of us went out to derail trains, and we succeeded in derailing three trains, carrying military supplies and many Germans, and we returned unscathed and in full complement to the camp. On the following day, during the morning watch, the head of the group cited the entire group for its excellence, approached me, and gave me a pat on the shoulder and said: 'Little soldier, this is how one conducts a battle!' A great joy suffused my heart, that with my meager powers, I had succeeded to take revenge against the murderers that had spilled the blood of my family.

Hasia too, participated in many important sabotage missions, such as: the attack against the gendarme headquarters in Zhaludok, that was carried out successfully, and with a short seizure of the entire town, the

members returned at that point to the camp, drunk with the victory: the Germans had suffered great loss of life, and we were able to capture a great deal of military stores.

In the year 1943, we had continuous contact with the rear echelon, and we got news every day, when the Red Army initiated its counterstrike from one front to the next, and the Germans retreated from the captured territories. The day of liberation arrived, and we came out of the forests, and met face-to-face with the soldiers of the Red Army. I felt myself to be free, but physically sapped and emotionally wounded. This would will never heal, in my soul and heart, whose root is in the sorrow and pain over my destroyed family: over my mother, who was murdered in the Zhetl ghetto, my brother Shy'keh whose place where he was murdered is not known to me, and my brother Reuven, who fell in combat, in the ranks of the Red Army.

My family derived a small comfort from the fact that my sister Miriam was saved, perhaps because my brother David ז"ל, my father and I – did our share in the war of the Jewish partisans against the Nazi scourge.

The Song of the Ghetto

By Leah Garberowicz (Halperin)

What are the houses of the ghetto built from?
The bones of Jews and the flesh of the tortured
From the eyes of hopelessness, set windows
Ands doors set in the openings of wounds.

In the middle of windows crucified by the wind
Innocent Jews with shorn beards
This person, in the stench of his violence, has risen
To proclaim the extent of his victory to the nations.

Women, who shrunk and shriveled from fear
Their tears and weariness growing together
Sit miserably in the dark
To shed a tear and keen lamentation.

Children scurry about like hungry mice
Swollen from hunger, in terror and pain
In the stillness of death they beg for a slice of bread
Accursèd fragments expelled from the womb.

The courtyards of death, how are they bounded?
By blood vessels, the sorrow of torture
From the roiling of hearts the pillars are cast
And shoulder to shoulder the Jews are thrown in

The vulture descended on the heads of the dead
The eagles tear at the corpses of martyrs
They ate, sated themselves, and said their blessings with pleasure
For the meal prepared for them by the devils from the grave.

In the middle of the streets, stuck in their places
Black barbarians, the swastika in their hands
Guide the walk of Jews doomed to the grave
Stricken with hunger, and rife with disease.

And the sun, did you know it could rise in the west
And will set quickly, because its light is also a sword
No day and no night, death radiates there
If it can illuminate the darkness in the silence of the shadow of death.

By Myself in a Compost Heap

By Baba Gordon (Jaffa)

Page 283: (Left): *Moshe-Nathan Szeszko and his wife Freyd'l (Gordon)*

(Right): *Perla Gordon*

Page 284: *R' Yaakov Beksht and the Children of his Brothers*

It is the year 1942. The Nazi extermination machine was already working. The local populace, negatively disposed to the Jews, tried to get rid of them in order to take rights to their possessions. and accordingly, they assisted the Nazi monster to exterminate those of the Jews that has succeeded in escaping their talons, by means of seizing them, and turning them over to the Gestapo. The Germans would summarily execute anyone found to be helping the Jews to hide. Despite all of this, people still remained in whom the image of God remained in them. One of them was Alexander Szymszko who took me into his house after I fled the labor camp in Dvarec.

Alexander and his wife hid me, amidst a danger to their family without any consideration in return, in a compost heap in their yard. I lay in this compost heap for about three months, all that time alone – only by myself...

In the period that I sat in my hiding place, I had no one with whom to talk, and I would speak in a whisper in order not to forget how to speak. In such sorrowful moments, the image of the town of Belica would rise before my eyes, and before my eyes I would see the banks of the Neman River, where I spent my youth in the bosom of my family, most of whom afterwards, were wiped out by the Nazis.

My late mother, Perla Gordon, was widowed in the thirties, and raised two girl orphans: myself and my oldest sister Freyd'l ז"ל. My mother exerted herself, utilizing her meager strength to give us a good education, concerning herself with raising us and providing us with everything. My mother married off my sister in 1933, to the choice of her heart, Nathan-Moshe Szeszko, who was a tailor by trade. She bore him a daughter whose name was Mereh'leh.

With the entry of the Germans to our vicinity, we went to live in Zhetl. I was taken to the labor camp in Dvarec, and there, we worked hard in smashing stones, and transporting them to the railroad tracks.

In the First Slaughter in Zhetl on 13 Iyyar 5702 (April 30, 1942), my mother was killed, while my sister, her husband and daughter survived to the Second Slaughter. During the Second Slaughter, they hid, and at night they fled the town. After several days, they joined me at the labor camp in Dvarec.

At the end of December 1942, the Germans liquidated the Jews in Dvarec. I fled directly from the place of work, and my sister and her family hid in that place. From the peasants, I found out that two days later, they fled from their hideout, and when they were on the way, not far from Dvarec, they ran into a freight truck full of Germans, and Polish police who seized them. They tortured them severely, and in the end, killed them in the middle of the road.

Three Years of the Holocaust and Revenge (1941 - 1944)

By Zerakh ben-Abraham

Here, on your wings
Carry my sorrowful soul,
To those very green fields, forest-hills
That spread beside the banks of the blue Neman.

(From *Pan Tadeusz* by Adam Mickiewicz, translated by Joseph Lichtenbaum)

From Slonim through Belica to Novogrudok

On June 15, 1941, I traveled on a visit from Belica to Slonim, the city in which I had studied for years, and graduated from the high school in 1940. On the way, we heard the famous lie TASS told on the radio, about the concentration of the German army along the length of the eastern borders of the Soviet Union.

In Slonim, I lived with my uncle, Dr. Kremen, and every evening, we heard new news bulletins from radio London, about the Nazi army being sent to the borders. On Friday, June 20, my uncle called to me and said: 'Zerakh, the situation looks very serious, travel home, because I fear that a war is going to break out.'

I left Slonim on Saturday night, in a train heading in the direction of Baranovici. The following day (June 22), at nine o'clock in the morning, I descended to the Neman station, and continued to Belica on foot. The train on which I was traveling, continued to Lida, and was severely bombed by German aircraft beside the station at Minojty (there were many killed and wounded).

As I drew close to Belica, I ran into Ber'eleh Odzhikhowsky (Ber'eleh Leib'keh's), and he told me that war had been declared, and the Germans had invaded Russia. Accordingly, when I reached Belica, I found increased movement and activity in the streets, with people standing around in the streets discussing the event.

Toward the evening of June 22, I was drafted as a supervisor for the local draft board. My job was to convey the orders of mobilization for the men, and especially for vehicular transportation (horses and wagons) to the peasants in the area, and to explain to them that they are required to present themselves in Lida. However, upon arrival at the rendezvous point in Lida, the vehicles were destroyed by the bombing of the Nazi air force, and the horses that survived alive, dispersed and fled.

On Tuesday, June 24, we saw a unit of the Red Army, outside of town, that had retreated from Grodno. A captain, who was Jewish, called to me and to several other Jews, and advised us to leave the town, since the Germans were getting close. We got about ten people together among whom were: Chaim and Yitzhak Zelikowsky, Leib'eh and Yaakov Odzhikhowsky, Eliyahu-Chaim Baranchik, Moshe Ratnowsky, Moshe Shimonowicz – and we decided to walk to the east. We took a bit of food with us, and on that same evening we headed out in the direction of the town of Zhetl, and from there we continued to Navael'nja, and in this manner we reached Novogrudok.

On the following day (Wednesday in the afternoon), the 'base' in Novogrudok was bombed, and when we reached the town, the trains station was still thee in the center of town. Many refugees ran to the place where the fire was burning, since the various storage facilities around it contained a variety of necessities, in particular, soap. The people got close to the storage facilities and filled their knapsacks with soap, which at that time was a valuable commodity.

In the meant5ime, a guard detachment of the Red Army arrived and began to rain a hail of bullets on the crowd. I saw that we were trapped and there was nowhere to flee, and therefore, I arranged our group in pairs, and we began to walk in a military cadence toward the guard. When we got close, and were asked, 'who are you?' I answered that we were draftees that had been sent to Baranovici. The soldiers invited us to the barracks, fed us, and gave us provisions for the journey.

In Novogrudok, we saw the first of those killed, victims of the bombing. From Novogrudok, we wanted to walk in the direction of Baranovici, but we were told that the road was closed by the Germans, and therefore we turned in the direction of Karelicy.

We Get to Minsk...

When we left Novogrudok, we encountered a wagon full of refugees from our town, that included R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz, Shimon Boczkowsky, Eliezer Itzkowitz, Yaakov Kremen, Yaakov Dziencelsky, Rachel Belicki. Yaakov Kremen, who was the owner of the dairy, took the horse and wagon from the dairy and went with the group to the east. We were very happy at this meeting, and we joined up with this group that we had encountered, and we continued on our way together.

In Karelicy, there were still some stores open, and we bought food. We proceeded through Turets to Mir, and from there to the border that separated Poland from Russia, beside Neharlae. Along the way, we were told that the border was closed, and that the 'westerners' (people from the west of Byelorussia) were not permitted to cross to the east. Despite this, we continued, and when we reached the border, we found no guard, because they had fled previously.

It was easier for us with the wagon, on which we loaded our belongings, and we followed in its tracks. In this manner, we reached Dzjarzynsk (Kaidanov), and we stopped there for a while to eat something, and then continued onwards – in the direction of Minsk. However, it became clear, that German paratroops had cut the road to Minsk, and so we decided to reach it by an indirect approach.

We did most of our traveling during the nights, because the roads were being bombed during the day by the Nazi *Luftwaffe* that controlled the skies without any opposition. Past Minsk, we encountered, for the first time, armed units if the Red Army that were moving westward, to stop the Germans. Out hearts filled with hope, that perhaps they will succeed to stop the Germans, and we will be able to escape from them.

In the meantime, a rumor spread that German tanks are moving in our wake. We proceeded to walk that entire night, at an accelerated pace, and we traversed about 60 km until we reached Cherven (Igumen). We went through this city a number of times until we succeeded in uncovering a restaurant, where we heard on the radio that the Germans had been stopped along a line from Lida to Volkovysk.

In the meantime, a mobilization was announced of all those born between 1904 - 1918, and this obligated Yaakov Kremen and Yaakov Dziencelsky to part from us, and to go to Mogilev, which was their rendezvous point. The rest of us decided to go to a collective farm and to settle into some work or another, because the wandering had grown distasteful to us. We remained in the collective farm, which was about 20 km distance from the Berezina River for about two days. The attitude toward us was good, and we even were able to rest a bit after the tribulations of our journey. However, on the morning of the third day, we saw a column of armored vehicles, through a window, moving for the entire length of the road from Minsk to Bobruisk, which was not very far from the village. At first, we thought this was a Red Army column, but very quickly, it became clear to us that these were Germans.

In this way we were flung into the trap of the very Germans we were trying to flee. The peasants immediately changed their attitude, and began to pressure us to leave the village, because Jews would cause them trouble. After taking our own counsel, we decided to return home, because many had crossed the Berezina River, and were saved that way, but by contrast, many of the people we knew paid with their lives for this mistake.

The Way Back

We tore up all of our Russian papers, and we agreed to tell that, if we were stopped, that we had been commandeered into forced labor by the Soviets, and we were returning home.

We succeeded in crossing the road without incident, and as we were passing between the German transport vehicles, we turned toward the town of Paharel'cy. Upon entering the town, we broke up into groups in order not to attract any undue attention, but in the center of the town, a German gendarme was standing, who stopped the group I was with. We feigned ignorance of German, but Yitzhak Zelikowsky (who looked very Jewish) was immediately taken aside. The gendarme screamed '*Jude*' at him, and turned him in a different direction, while telling the rest of us to wait at that place. But when the German got a distance from us on his bicycle, apparently, to report us to his commander, we quickly left the place. We exited the town, and along the way, we asked for the names of the villages in the direction of the Polish border, in the vicinity of Stolpce.

After Pohovicy, I no longer saw Leib'eh Odzhikhowsky. Afterwards, I was told that he was seen in a refugee camp in the Pohovicy area, and he was killed there.

We walked day and night until we reached the bridge over the Neman, beside the village of Novy-Swierzen.

The bridge was burned, and we crossed the river on the piles that were left from it. Getting closer to the shore, the German soldiers helped us out of the water, and directed us to their camp. We reached a military group, where a German captain sat, who began to interrogate us. We said '*nichtferstehen*,' at which he called for a translator who spoke Polish to us. We told him the agreed upon story, and he asked us whether Belica was far. We replied that the distance was about 80 km, and he suggested it was a hundred, and ordered us released.

Once again, we walked on foot for several days and nights. We past Stolpce and entered Novogrudok, and there we spent a few hours with the brother of Chaim Lejzorowicz. From Novogrudok we walked directly to the Neman train station, and from there we reached Belica.

Beside the village of Zarzeczany, we met a peasant who told us of the fires that took place in the town, and the destruction wreaked upon it by the Germans. We deliberately entered the town just before nightfall, in order that the resident Christians not take note of us.

This is how our voyage to the east came to an end...

My mother ז"ל, was in the home of my aunt Dvora, after our house had been completely burned down. All the people came to see us, as if we had come from a different world. We related what had happened to us, and we heard what was being discussed in the town. It became clear to us that a short battle had taken place in the town, with the entry of the first of the Germans, between them, and a unit of the Red Army. After the retreat of the Russian soldiers, the Germans went by all the houses and set fire to the ones they passed by, without giving the residents a chance to get out of their houses. Despite this, most managed to escape, and flee out of the town, and it should be clear that this was not without its victims. That night, a number of Jews from Belica were either killed or wounded, as well as a number of refugees from Lida.

The 'Assembly' at the Cattle Market

In a week, roughly on Sunday, an order was issued that all the men have to gather and report beside the cattle market, opposite the house of Chaim-Reuven Baranchik ז"ל. When we arrived there, we found about ten Germans that were armed with weapons, ready for use, dressed in S.S. uniforms, and the gendarmerie. An order was given to line up in three rows opposite the machine gun trained on us. The German officer read the details of the order that says, that Jews have no rights, as had been set out by the 'Nuremberg Laws.' Afterwards, the officer in charge selected ten men, by sight, from those assembled before him, among them the Rabbi of the town, R' Shabtai Fein זצ"ל. the pharmacist Wismonsky ז"ל, Jonah Odzhikhowsky ז"ל, Sholom Mayewsky, and others, and the others were driven away from the place. At this opportunity, the Germans demanded the radio equipment to be turned over to them, but the set that was in our house I did not give to the Nazis, instead, tossing it into a nearby well.

These ten men were harnessed by the Nazis to a wagon, and they were ordered to pull the wagon to their headquarters at the village of Paracany, about 10 km from Belica.

A terror gripped the town. Towards nightfall, the womenfolk and relatives of the detainees went to Paracany to discover their fate. Those that went, returned and told that after abusing the detainees, for the entire trip, they were locked up in a shed in Paracany, and a list of 'communists' from Belica was read out to them (my name also was on that list), that it required of them to bring before the command.

My Escape to Slonim

That same night, I decided to conceal myself and hide from German eyes, because I knew they would come looking for me (during the day, I would hide among the raspberry bushes in our garden, and at night I would return to my aunt's house). A couple of days went by, and I realized that I could not go on like this, and together with my mother, we decided that I am compelled to return to Slonim, because not many people could recognize me there (I had a Soviet identification card in my possession that had been issued in my name in Slonim).

My mother sent people to the head of the town (Balabanski) to request a travel permit, without which it was dangerous to be moving out on the roads in those days, but the latter indicated that he is not going to issue any such permits. Having no choice, I decided to head out without the permit, and to rely on myself and on fate.

On Sunday, July 20, 1941, early in the morning, I went out, escorted by my mother, and Chana-Leah'keh Odzhikhowsky, in the direction of the bridge on the way to Slonim. We were afraid that there was a guard stationed at the bridge, and therefore Chana-Leah'keh went first, and when she reached the bridge, she signaled us that there was no guard. I parted from my mother k"z for the last time, and similarly from Chana-Leah'keh, and headed off alone in the direction of Zhetl.

I made the trip to Zhetl without incident, and I tried not to meet up with any peasants on the chance they might recognize me. Beside Zhetl in the village of Zaset' there was a local police station, but to my good fortune, I was not stopped there, and before noon, I got to Zhetl, and immediately went to the home of Rushkin (a dental technician whom I knew very well). He received me courteously, and fed me 'royally.' I spent several hours with him, and turned towards Kazlouscyna, which I reached late that day.

I entered the first Jewish house and asked for an opportunity to spend the night, but they explained to me, that it was forbidden to host a strange person because of the 'Viet' that had been appointed by the Germans – he being the Russian Orthodox priest. I went to the house of the priest, at which time there was a reception going on in honor of the Germans. Despite this, the priest came out to me, and I told him that I was a resident of Slonim, returning home, after the Soviets had drafted me to do forced labor in Minsk. He gave me permission to spend the night in the village, and the following morning, early, I continued my foot journey to Slonim.

On drawing near the city, I encountered Jewish women who told me that on the past Thursday, the Germans seized 1200 men, among them the Rabbi of the city, Rabbi Fein k"mz, and took them in the direction of Kazlouscyna, and there, all trace of them vanished, and consequently, they were looking for any remnant of them here. Even afterwards, during the period of the ghetto in Slonim, the Germans continued to argue that the 1200 men had been taken to work on fortifications in the east, but the truth was that they killed them all, on the outskirts of the city, on the day they were seized.

The Slaughter of November 14, 1941

I reached my uncle's house in Slonim in the afternoon. The head officer of the city lived in his house, who had taken over two rooms for his own use, as ell as all the good furniture, and the radio (at that time, we listened to news from London and Moscow, when the officer was not using it). His aide also lived with him, who was involved in all of the details of the household, and my uncle told him that I had returned home from a distant place, which I had done of my own free will, and because of the war situation, I had been unable to get home before this.

For the first time, we lived peacefully, and the Germans did not harass us (because of the municipal officer) and because of the villagers who would come to my uncle, the physician, and would bring him all manner of foodstuffs. However, close to the High Holy Days, the members of the Gestapo came to the city, and also settled in our house, and we were compelled to leave the house and go to a different place.

From the standpoint of keeping employed, it was easier to get set up working as a technical craftsman, and accordingly I began working in the lock works of Mattes Sanowsky, and I became a locksmith for all manner of uses. At the same time, groups of friends would meet, and plan the organization of an exodus into the forest.

After the holidays, a '*Gebietskommissariat*[74]' was activated in Slonim, one of whose missions that it was tasked with was – the liquidation of the Jews of Slonim and its environs. At the beginning of November, the '*Gebietskommissariat*' issued yellow cards to the Jewish craftsmen, and they were required to move with their families, to a special section of the city. As a locksmith, I received such a card, and I added an additional family to the list (who afterwards lived in the previously mentioned section), because my uncle had received his card in his capacity as a physician, and added his family.

On November 14, 1941, the Germans announced a rounding up of the Jews of Slonim (to empty our the section with the craftsmen), and with the help of the local police and tens of police from the police station in Vienna (who were turned around on their trip back to Vienna after transporting the Jews of Vienna to the ghetto in Minsk), – they took about 10,000 Jews outside of the city – men, women and children – and killed them beside the pits that they had dug previously for this purpose.[75]

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74 A District Commission

75 The figure of those killed is reported to have been at least nine thousand, and as many as eighteen thousand Jewish victims.

The First Information I Passed to the Partisans

After this slaughter, we decided, with my comrades, to leave the city for the forest with the arrival of spring, at any cost.

The Germans announced to establishment of the ghetto and because of the Szczara River outside of the city, four different and separate ghettoes were established, a situation that made communication difficult, especially that of the underground. In the meantime, winter arrived, which was very severe that year, and I worked in the '*Gebietskommissariat*' garage, where I was in the territory of the murderers on a day-to-day basis.

The Germans issued an order, to turn over all fur coats and rubber boots that the Jews possessed (some of the Jews concealed them, and others turned them in). At the same time, I met with two officers of the Red Army, who told me that were representatives of the partisans, and I turned over a number of fur coats to them, as well as some weaponry that my comrades had brought from the camp where the war booty was kept, and where they worked. I met with these same two officers when afterwards, I was in the forest, and it became clear to me that they were not partisan officers at all, but at the beginning were operating on their own.

At the same time, my comrade Nunya Tzirinsky notified me that an underground was being organized (this was in March 1942). Close to this date, a notice came out of the *Judenrat* that Jews having outstanding loans owed to them by neighboring peasants, have permission to go collect the debts, with the condition that they are to turn over half the sum to the Germans. My comrade Herzl Shaftinsky was known to the peasants in the village of Zyrovicy, who had a connection to the partisans, and because of this, I armed myself with a permit, and walked to the village of Zyrovicy. I met there with a peasant who promised to arrange a meeting with the leaders of the partisans on the coming Sunday. I told the peasant, that I saw small groups of Germans in the forest, engaged in gathering up their dead, whose bodies had remained from the time of the battles of June 1941. On the basis of this information, they got to the place where the partisans were, where an ambush was set for the Germans, and they were eliminated (they left one German alive, stripped him and sent him to let his superiors know that there were partisans in the forest).

Between the Closed Ghetto and the Open Forest

Before I left for the forest, the head of the underground committee came to me in a state of confusion, and forbade me to go out into the forest, because the information in the hands of the committee, was that the Germans had sent out a punitive expedition to liquidate the partisans (the real reason was that a fire had broken out in that area, and the committee thought that this was a result of the punitive expedition). But I knew this was an opportunity that would not return, like the promise of the previously mentioned peasant, to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the heads of the partisans, so I did not pay any attention to his warnings, and on the designated Sunday, I headed in the direction of Zyrovicy. At the end of the forest, beside the Litwa estate, two officers of the Red Army came out towards me: one introduced himself by the

name 'Officer Pruniagin,' and the second – 'Commissar Dudko.' After I told them my biography, they gave me money, and also butter, and asked me to by tobacco and saccharine on their behalf, and set a time for our next meeting.

On the coming Saturday night, I, and my friend Ar'chik went to the appointed meeting, where the first two appeared, and with them, another person. We spent the entire day in their presence, and they fed us to satiety, and even gave us much provisioning, and on the way back, we were accompanied by about twenty partisans with wagons. We stopped at the village of Skuldic, and the partisans took military uniforms into the houses that Ar'chik, who was native to the area, pointed out to them. After this, a number of partisans on horseback escorted us to the outskirts of Slonim.

Two weeks later, the liaison with the partisan division (*Volodya*) came to work for me (from outside the ghetto), with the order to urgently conscript a physician for the division. I knew from my cousin Yosh'eh Kremen, that the physician Dr. B. is impatient to leave the city, and so I walked to the hospital (on *Ulica* Oprobo) in the middle of the ghetto. Along the way, it became known to me, that the German officer, Rittermeyer, one of the well-known killers of the '*Gebietskommissariat*' was at that hour, walking through the street and shooting any Jews that came across his path. I took a pistol from one of the dead, and went out to fulfill the task, I had received, at all cost, and I got there without incident, and met with Dr. B., and he said to me that, indeed, he was ready, as soon as possible, to go to the forest.

On the following Monday, we gathered in the yard of the Shaftinsky family (*Ulica* Mikhailowsky) with the goal of going out to the forest. We knew that tomorrow, there were be another roundup for the purpose of a slaughter, ir for an expulsion, seeing that units of Ukrainians had arrived in the city. At that time, I did not know the way into the forest, and my comrade Ar'chik was not in the city, so we dispersed. On the following day, the roundup of the men occurred – they were seized and taken to do work on fortifications in Mogilev, among them, two of our comrades from the underground (there, subsequently, jumped off the train and returned to the ghetto).

On the following Saturday night, we went out armed (Ar'chik and I) with weapons, and with us were a number of our comrades. On the following day, on Sunday at night, we returned to the ghetto., and this is what we continued to do every Saturday night, several time, taking out groups of people, ammunition and arms into the forest (we continued with these forays until the end of June 1942).

The Slaughter of June 29, 1942

On the Saturday night of June 27, we were supposed to go out into the forest, and I remember the reason we did not go. On the following day, Sunday, a force of Lithuanians and Ukrainians reached the city, and on the morning of June 29, at 4:00 AM, the neighbors awakened me (*Ulica* Borodinska) and said that the ghetto was surrounded. I immediately went out of the house in the direction of the government bank (a Lithuanian stood at attention there), I quickly descended to *Ulica* Barg, and met my comrades Baba Abramson and Abraham Bubliacki from the underground. We ran to our arms cache, and took out four hand grenades, and afterwards turned in the direction of the labor office of the ghetto, and we were witness to how the S. S. officer Rittermeyer shot to death the office manager Quint, beside the office gate.

In the meantime, a few other comrades from the underground arrived, and we decided to remain in the attic of Bubliacki's house for the rest of the day, and to leave for the forest that evening. In this house, there was also a 'bunker' but we did not want to enter it, because the people in the 'bunker' were afraid that we might start shooting, and they might possibly be wiped out as well.

At approximately 8 o'clock in the morning, the men of the '*Gebietskommissariat*' stopped opposite our house, with the '*Stabsleiters*[76]' [Gerhard] Erren, Schtalla and Heik at their head, and other senior officers, with maps, in their hands, of the ghetto they were planning to liquidate.

We sat in the attic for the entire day, the hours dragging on endlessly, and from the outside we heard the report of gunfire, screaming and pleading. Towards nightfall, we sensed the odor of fire, and it became clear that the murderers were setting the houses on fire, in order to force the Jews out of their hiding places. The fire began to spread, and began to threaten the neighborhoods outside the ghetto, and then the Germans stopped murdering and forced the Jews to put out the blaze.

With the arrival of darkness, we descended from the attic, and began to make haste in the direction of *Ulica* Borodinska – from there, the road led to the outside of the city. The guard beside the bank was not in place at that hour, and I raised the barbed wire that surrounded the ghetto, and we all went under it. Afterwards, little by little, along the sides of houses, we exited the city without running afoul of Germans.

The Jewish Partisan Group

When we approached the vicinity of the village of Zyrovicy, after a night of walking, I turned off to the peasant who was our contact, but the latter warned me that there were Germans in the area (on that same day the German conducted a roundup against the partisans, so that they would not come to the aid of the Jews in the ghetto). It was for that reason, that we noticed an auto of the Germans, at the entrance to the forest, but we succeeded in hiding from them and all day we searched in the forest for the partisans, and didn't find them. Towards evening, we met Ar'chik with a group of our comrades, who also had left the ghetto on the previous night, and together, we continued to walk until we encountered the partisans. We joined them, but on the following day, we returned to Slonim in order to extract the remainder of the people from Ar'chik's group – to the Wlacza-Nury Forests, where the divisions of the Russian partisans were concentrated.

A large part of the Russian partisans simply let us fend for ourselves, because they did not want to be together with Jews. To our good fortune, the Commissar Dudko remained with us, the officer Pruniagin, and one other officer, the latter two because of the women who were with us. The officer Pruniagin, who was the head of all the groups in the area of the forests of Vlacza-Nury, took us over to other groups, and there, after a stormy argument, it was decided to establish a Jewish partisan unit called the 51st.

The first quandary that stood before us was how to get a hold of additional weaponry, and to extract the

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76 Staff leaders

remainder of our comrades who remained in the ghetto. We managed to sneak our people into the ghetto, and to get in contact with our comrades there, who had begun to accumulate weapons from the German booty camps. In a house outside the ghetto, there was a carpentry works in which our comrades worked, and they had arranged a 'bunker' there, and these would frequently get there from the forest and take people with us with ammunition and weapons. During a month and a half, the number of combatants in the Jewish group (the 51st) reached 150 men, provisioned with a lot of weaponry. We had 25 machine guns, 51 sub-machine guns, and everyone else had – rifles, pistols, hand grenades, etc.

We participated in a partisan attack to capture the village of Kozhevo, and in this effort, we liberated a group of people from the ghetto there, among them the resident Rabbi. This was the day in which the slaughter in the ghetto had been scheduled, and the murderers got their just desserts from our hands.

In September 1942, the partisan leadership decided to move to the east, closer to the front. We traveled on the roads during the day, and we wiped out small garrisons of Germans that were in the area. This initiative ended in such a way, that the Germans brought in a division of S.S. troops from Minsk, which besieged us, and sealed off all the roads. After an open battle of a full day, in which the Germans also made use of military aircraft, we began to draw back through the swamps, and we arrived at the tenth dam on the 'Ogiński Canal.[77]'

Under lack of visibility, we entered into open battle to capture the dam, and in this battle we killed about 100 S. S. troops (on our side, we had many victims, among them our Jewish head Fyodorovich). After the battle, we stopped for a while in our journey, in order to conserve strength and to give our wounded a chance to heal.

It was here that the thought popped into my mind to go to Belica, and to burn the bridge, thereby taking revenge against the local murderers. I organized a group of fifteen men, armed with the best of the weapons at our disposal. We began our trip, but on the first night, in our desire to cross the railroad tracks of the Brisk-Baranovici line, we fell into a German ambush, and were forced to retreat. The Germans pursued our trail up to the camp, and forced us to retreat with the entire division to the south, and this is how we reached the large swamp in western Polesia – The Ricin.

During the winter of that year, we also encountered a group of partisan paratroopers, who instructed us in the art of sabotage. Seeing that we did not have any relevant explosives for this purpose, we made us of unexploded shells, which in their time had been scattered over the area. In a short time, I became an expert saboteur, and until the snows melted, I blew up four trains on the rail line from Baranovici to Luninec.

With the arrival of spring, the Germans implemented a huge siege against all the areas occupied by partisans, and allocated 45 thousand soldiers to this task. Under the pressure of the siege, the partisans retreated to the vicinity of Baranovici, at which point we received an order from Moscow to head in the direction of Brisk. We rendezvoused in the vicinity of Drahicyn - Kartuz-Bereza, and there, I continued in my mission of

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77 The Oginski Canal is a canal in Belarus which connects Yaselda River and Szczara River of length 54 km. Its construction was started in 1765 by count Michał Kazimierz Ogiński, hence the name.

sabotaging trains on the Brisk - Moscow line, and carried it out with much success. In honor of the October holiday (1943), along with a group of three other men, We managed to close down the rail line and prevent train traffic for a whole day on the rail lines leading to the station at Ornocic.

In December 1942, our Jewish group was disbanded, and its members were dispersed into the other units. However, the fighting people in our group had bunches of seasoned fighters. My bunch (consisting of ten men) continued its activities in sabotage, until the liberation, it chalked up to its credit more that 200 wrecked train transports, for which I, personally was responsible for 22 such train wrecks,

The "Hunting Trip" of S.A. *Gruppenführer* Fentz...

In addition to my position as a train track saboteur, I participated in many open battles with Germans, and in what follows, is an incident etched deeply in my memory.

On one of the days in February 1943, three Jewish partisans reached us: Nathan Likar from Warsaw, Barzin from Medvedici, and myself (from the brigades named Shchuras and Kotovsky) to the environs of the village of Maszuki, in the area of Hancavicy, to get our hands on weapons that were hidden with peasants. We entered the home of a forest watchman who was known to us, to lodge with him, but he began to try and persuade us to quickly leave the area, because on the morrow, a large group of Germans was supposed to be arriving to hunt. He explained that the Germans had invited between 50 - 100 villages to serve as animal beaters, at the time that the Germans would disport themselves in hunting.

We knew that, in this forest, was the encampment of the paratroop brigade, '*Otryad* Orlowsky,' and therefore the idea arose in our thoughts, that under the cover of a 'hunt,' the Germans had decided to conduct a roundup of this group. We decided to immediately alert the paratroopers about this, even though we did not know their precise location, but we did have a general idea of the direction in which they could be found. Accordingly, we did find them, and told them about the matter, about which they did not know, but among them was a local forest watchman, and he went outside, inspected the snow, and concluded that the conditions were not suitable for a hunt, his explanation being – that the 'hunt' was really a roundup. The head of the paratroopers, Orlowsky decided to leave this place, and to organize an ambush against the Germans.

About an hour before dawn, we set out on our way (the entire unit, including the three of us, came to thirteen men). The forest watchman brought us to a crossroads in the forest, and it was here, he said, that the Germans would have to pass by. We took our stand in the snow (about ten meters, one from another), in order to get the maximum cover, and provide for avenues of escape, so we could, afterwards, rendezvous at a single point to the rear. We had a machine gun, and everyone else had – rifles and sub-machine guns (the head officer also had several packages of TNT, each weighing a kilogram, that was tied up with Bickford twine[78]).

With the coming of dawn, the sounds of the animal beaters and a few shots, reached us, and we grasped that in actuality, a real 'hunt' was going on, from what we could see.

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78 Reference to a *Cordeau-Bickford* detonator.

Time went by, but the Germans did not get any closer to us. At about ten o'clock, they returned in the direction of the village, and gathered at the edge of the forest, started a bonfire, and sat down to have lunch. At that point, Orlowsky decided to move us from our positions, and to draw all of us closer to the Germans in one fell swoop. We accomplished this with deliberate speed, and began to draw close, against the wind, in order that the dogs not sense our presence. When we were about 50 meters from them, we clearly could see the Germans sitting by the bonfire, with peasants around them, such that in a hail of our gunfire, only the peasants would be hit. We began to plot an indirect assault, but at the same time, they all go on their sleds, and vanished into the forest, spreading out close to our previous positions, and continued their hunt. With a feeling of pain and anger, over the lost opportunity, we returned to our previous positions, and waited for the Germans to come back.

We altered the plan of attack as follows: we were going to let the Germans go by us, until the first winter wagon will come opposite the machine gun (the end of the line). The machine gunner will kill the horse, and in this way, the road ahead will be closed off; at the same time, we will all open fire on the wagons in front of us.

We waited a long time, and we began to thing that maybe they would return by a different way, until the jingling of the sleigh bells reached our ears, and they appeared before us. We permitted them to pass, as planned, and when we heard the first gunfire from the machine gunner, we opened up with a enfilade of fire. At that same moment, Orlowsky lit the 'Bickford' and threw the package of explosives and shouted: 'Artillery, fire!' He did not succeed in throwing the second package, and it exploded close to me, and the leader himself was severely wounded. Some of the Germans recovered from the surprise of the initial attack and began to return fire, but we easily overpowered them, giving 'first-aid' to the head officer, and began to move along the length of the road. We frisked the dead and wounded among the Germans, and it became clear that we had bagged some 'Big Fish,' among whom was *Hauptkommissar* of the central command in Baranovici (the center of Western Byelorussia), and his driver, as well as the commanding officers of the police in Baranovici, Kleck, Siniawka, and the senior officers from other locations. According to the papers we found on *Hauptkommissar* Fentz, he was born in Linz (Austria), and was a member of the Nazi Party since 1928 (He had a gold division insignia, that was only awarded to senior Nazi officials). Among his papers, we also found a notice about a conclave of all of the *Gebietskommissariat* officials in Byelorussia, that was to take place in Minsk, and we notified the Russian command in the rear of this by wire, accordingly, Minsk was subject to pinpoint bombing on the day of that meeting.

Among the possessions of the Germans that we killed, we also found pictures that they had taken of the slaughter of the Jews of Baranovici and Kleck.

The Germans were embarrassed, that the elite among their division officers were engaged in a hunt during wartime, and because of this, they took Fentz's body to Smolensk and buried him there, announcing in the papers, that he 'fell for the Fatherland...'

The severe wounds of our admired leader Orlowsky, dampened our happiness (he remained alive, but was severely invalided for the remainder of his life). My personal pleasure was especially great, when I donned the uniform of S.S. *Gruppenführer* Fentz on my body, knowing that he was responsible for all of the slaughters conducted in the towns and villages of Western Byelorussia.

After the Liberation

We met up with the Red Army in March 1944. After we crossed the Pripyats' River together with the army, most of our comrades were simply absorbed into their ranks. Being a teacher, I was exempted from this call-up, and I was sent to the city of Gomel' where the administration was being organized, that was supposed to include the Brisk area. When I reached Gomel' I volunteered for the Polish Army that fought beside the Red Army. I was transferred to Rovno, and their, I was attached to a Polish army unit, with whom I served in the upcoming fighting. With it, I reached Majdanek, and there I saw for the first time, the barbaric acts of the Germans in the extermination camps, about which I had not previously known at all, as we fought them from the ranks of the partisans.

While we were partisans, and then afterwards, in the regular army, we took a small measure of vengeance for the vast amounts of blood spilled among the Jewish people ה"ד.

Life in the Bunkers

By Meir ben-Isaac

Page 298: Meir ben-Isaac and His Family (1945)

In the year 1939, after the Russians captured the territories in the area, I bought a horse and wagon, and began to work at the airfield in Lida, in order to support my family, and I worked there with others from Belica until the Germans came (June 1941). When the first bombs fell on the airfield, we fled by roads, and off the roads, and got back to Belica. When I got to my house, Eli-Ziss'l Kalmanowicz appeared and said: 'Meir, you have a good horse, let us take our families and travel to Russia.' However, my wife did not want to leave all our belongings, and it was in this way that we stayed in Belica. The only ones who fled were: Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz, Yaakov Dziencelsky, Yaakov Kremen, and his sister-in-law Rachel Belicki.

In Karolinka beside Belica, there was a small airfield. The Germans arrived so swiftly, that a part of the Russians on the airfield did not manage to escape. They hastened into the town, in order to cross the Neman, and came face-to-face with the Germans. The dead fell on both sides, after which the German reconnaissance units entered the town, and began to seize people without regard for who they were, Jews along with Christians, and began to shoot them. In this manner, Shmuel (Mul'yeh) Shimonowicz, and Eliezer Gapanowicz were seized, put against the wall and shot. Eliezer Gapanowicz was wounded, while Shimonowicz fell, and lay on the ground feigning death. the Germans thought they were both dead, and left the place.

The Germans began to burn the Jewish houses. I left my house and began to look for sone sort of refuge. Together, with Ziss'l Kalmanowicz, and Nathan Baranchik, we ran from place to place, until the Germans spotted us and began to fire at us. Nathan Baranchik wanted to get into his sister Chaya-El'keh's place, but fell beside the house balcony.

I was spared, and I fled through the gardens to the house of Yitzhak-Yaakov Orlansky, and from there, I manage to get myself out of the town, and fled to the Riutsz Forest, alone, and without my family. From Riutsz, I ran to the nearby village of Saruk, and found some Jews there, among them, Eliezer Gapanowicz. A number of them said they saw my wife on the road to Stoky, where we had a family friendly to us among the Christians (Dwarnin). I lay in the forest the entire night, and when dawn broke, I began to move through the fields to Stoky, and there, I met up with my wife, my beloved daughter, and several other Jews.

The Christian family was afraid to keep us, because there was a decree that anyone who took in and concealed Jews would be taken out and killed with his entire family. Somehow, we managed to get back to Belica, and found the town burned down. Only a few of the Jewish houses remained standing, among them the house of my sister, Rivka. Through the gardens, I entered my sister's house and found my mother there. After this, I also found my oldest daughter Rivka in the middle of our garden, between the furrows. My little daughter Shifra was with a Christian beside the Neman, and I brought her, as well, back with me, and we remained living in my sister's house.

When they rounded up all the Jews beside the Catholic church, and made them file between the Gestapo troops, who beat them with boards taken from the fence, they took me and Shimon Novogrudsky, Aharon Bussel the Smith, Wismonsky the pharmacist, Chaim-Yitzhak Kremen, Yaakov ben Shlomo Kremen – and put us off to the side. A German guard took us out on the road to Paracany, but once we left the town, the guard began to shoot over our heads, in order that those in the town think they were shooting to kill us. In the village of Paracany, they put us into a grain silo, and after some hours, they brought me to an interrogation to determine if I was a communist during the Soviet occupation. After that, then sent me to the camp gate, where three Germans waited with staves in hand. They began to beat me left and right, such that my blood ran from every part of my body. They told me to walk on the path, between the furrows, beating me all the way, until I reached the edge of the field, and there, they let me be.

When I reached home, we built a 'bunker' and when the Germans were out, we would hide in it, or we would flee, by way of the gardens, into the Royce Forest. This is the way we behaved in all instances when the Germans would penetrate into the ghetto, until they drove us out of Belica. Even when we were in the ghetto in Zhetl, we had a bunker there, in which we hid during the First Great Slaughter of April 1942. During the Second Great Slaughter in the Zhetl ghetto, we fled to the forests beside Lachoczy, and there too, we built a bunker in the middle of the forest.

In this flight, I again was separated from my family, because they fled with my brother-in-law Yud'l Kusielewicz to the forest beside Zachepichi. I found them afterwards, together with a number of other families from Belica, and went off to search for food to give them. But because of this, my cousin Yehoshua Stotsky said: 'Meir is going to cause us problems.' He, along with the entire family of Ben-Zion Stotsky and Shlomo ben Yitzhak Mayewsky crossed the Neman River, and went to a Christian in Karolinka. The Christian went and informed the Germans of this, and they came and killed them all.

During The Second Slaughter in Zhetl, my daughter Shifra was in a different bunker, and the Germans uncovered this bunker and took everyone to the synagogue, after which they fled and reached the forests of Zachepichi, and there, they found us.

The Germans seized the wife of Leib'keh ben Shmuel-Joseph Zhokhowsky. She argued that she was a Christian, and when they asked her how would she prove that. she 'recited' Catholic prayers by heart. They let her go, and she got to her husband and children in the forest.

Initially, we did not have any food in the forest. We would go at night to the Christians on the other side of the river (so that they would not know from where we had come) and ask for food from them. A few would give us slices of bread... but after we had joined the partisans, we had food to eat, because the partisans would not ask, they would take. I was familiar with the entire area, and because of this the partisans took me as a scout, and I also was able to take revenge on those who has assaulted us before.

In one of the attacks the Germans made against us, during our retreat, the wife of my uncle Sholom Krasnoselsky drowned in the Neman River, together with two of her children. At the same time, my daughter Shifra caught cold, and fell sick, and she never rose from her sickbed, and died in the forest.

One time, I was sent with about thirty partisans to cross the Neman River in rafts. We entered the village of Mostobelny, and there we took horses and wagons from the peasant, who cooperated with the White Poles. When we got to the rafts, we began to load up the horses and wagons, and bullets began to fly from all sides, which were coming from a very close range. Somehow, we crossed the bridge, and from there we got to Peskovcy, and from there we were taken across in a boat. In this way, I saved fourteen people from certain death, because I was the scout, and I was able to negotiate the area very effectively, and accordingly, I knew how we could escape from the gunfire. When we returned to the forest, the head of the partisans exchanged kisses with me, and gave me a citation for this deed.

One time, I went out with a number of additional partisans, to bring food to people living in the bunkers. When I got to the river, we hear gunfire from the other side. The Christian who would ferry us over in a boat, made signs for us to flee to a reserve bunker, that we had readies beside the river, for exigencies that might arise. This bunker was built in such a way, that we had to enter it through the river itself. Because there was air inside, we made a hole inside of the tree that stood over the bunker, and there was room for 80 people inside it.

On one rainy day, my wife arose to cook something, and I went over to the bunker of Joseph Lozowsky. Suddenly, gunshots were heard from the direction of the bunker of my family. We fled into the brush, and we heard Ukrainians talking among themselves, about how they had killed Jews. When they drew away a distance, I ran to the bunker of my family and found it empty. My wife and daughters had fled in the direction of the Neman, and U found them there, practically entirely naked, because they didn't have time to put on clothes at the time of the attack. I went to the nearby villages, and I obtained other clothing for them.

At the end of 1944, the Vlasovites surrounded our bunkers. At that time, we were beside the village of Dminovic in the forests of Lyubyczyn, band we did not know where to flee. We ran into the swamps in that area, and we succeeded in getting away from the murderers. We decided to return to the Belica vicinity, where we were familiar with the area, and it was easier to provision ourselves with food, and it was also easier for us to hide ourselves during those times when the Germans and their accomplices attacked us. Somehow, we got back to the forests beside Belica, we cleaned out our bunker, and remained there until the liberation.

Regarding My Father & Mother, My Daughter and 20 Other Women

By Rachel Itzkowitz (Szkop)

Most of the people in our town were good-hearted folk, simple and honest, just like all the towns of the Diaspora. They were concerned not only for themselves, but also for the community about them. These are the ones who organized the mutual aid, and established the community institutions such as: *Bikur Kholim, Gemilut Hesed,* a People's Bank, the school, and others.

One of these was my dear father ז"ל who was first and foremost a good father, dedicated to his children. But, he was also a good father to those who were in need of help or comfort. He would heal broken hearts with a smile on his face.

After a hard day's work at his flour mill, he would go to pray the afternoon and evening (*Mincha & Maariv*) services on a daily basis, and after services, he would remain in the *Bet HaMedrash* to study a page of the *Gemara*, giving a lesson to a group of listeners who liked to hear his becoming explanations. In the house, as well, when he had a spare hour, he would open a book and study, and some times, he would get up early in the morning [to do this], or remain up late at night.

My father ז"ל held rabbinic ordination from the great Rabbis of his generation, but himself did not want to be a Rabbi. He would find the time to read a secular book, and was thoroughly familiar with all the world's experiences both religious and secular. It was possible to carry on a conversation with him of a variety of subjects, and to enjoy such conversation.

I will never forget the nights of the Sabbath in our house: A regal air, light, and cleanliness, pervaded every corner of the house. My father and brother would come from the synagogue, bless us, the womenfolk, with the Sabbath blessing, and immediately begin to joyfully sing '*Shalom Aleichem.*' We would all stand around the table, as father blessed the wine, and the delicious Sabbath feast would begin.

When the war between the Germans and the Soviets broke out, my brother Eliezer ה"ד came from Scucyn, where he was a teacher, and proposed that we all flee to Russia. It was difficult for my parents to agree. They understood that I, with babies on my hands, would not be able to accompany them. My brother Eliezer stood his ground, and beseeched my father to go with him to Russia. At first, my father did not want to listen to him, but my mother understood that my father, being one of the heads of the community in the town, was exposed to a great danger from the Nazis. She began to persuasively convince him and he should go with Eliezer, and thus we were separated from my father and brother, and a few other people from Belica who left the town in the dark of night.

After several weeks, the Nazis drove all of us out of the incinerated town, and we wandered to nearby Zhetl. In Zhetl, we passed a severe winter in the ghetto. From time-to-time, we heard that partisans were beginning to organize in the ghetto, and from them, there were those who went off to the forests. As a mother to infants, it was not even possible for me to think about contact with the partisans, because they knew, from the outset, that women with children don't enter into their calculation. In general, I was unable to even imagine what our life would be like in the forests, but my mother was of a different state of mind. She proved to me that we must go to the forests. Especially, she would say: 'What do we have to lose? After all, here we are all lost, and there, there is some chance that some of us may remain alive.'

With the coming of summer, two slaughters took place in Zhetl. We were saved from The First Great Slaughter, because the murderers demanded only one thousand Jews, and after they got them, they ceased

searching for more, and those who hid themselves stayed alive for a few more months. When The Second Great Slaughter began, eighty people went down into one bunker, and the condition was horrible. There was no air to breathe. After the second night, most of them left the bunker, and fled to the forests, leaving us behind, and even warning us not to run after them with babies.

After the fifth night, we were compelled to leave the bunker. Then a question loomed before us: Where do we go? The surroundings and the roads were not known to us, but we exited, and went to look for the one way we could go that would lead to safety – [to] Dvarec. The exit from the ghetto was terrifying, all of the streets were littered with corpses of people, and we heard the sounds of dying that tore at the heart.

Before leaving the bunker, an additional severe quandary confronted us: What will we do if the baby, Leah'leh suddenly begins to cry? When she heard these words, she turned to me and said: 'Mama, I will not cry out, I will cry only silently, Mame'leh don't be afraid. I will be a good girl.' But there was one thing she didn't understand: Why she doesn't have a father! Because when I explained to her that her father was in the army, far, far away, this was beyond her understanding, and she didn't grasp it.

We walked from Zhetl to Dvarec (12 km) all night, and came to a crossroads. We stood confused, and did not know which direction to choose. We decided to rely on Leah'leh. We put her down on the road, and walked after her, and in this way, we arrived in Dvarec. This, literally, was a miracle, because on that same night, some Jews went along the other way, and reached a village where the peasants seized them and turned them over to the Nazis.

In Dvarec, we ran into Benjamin Galinsky, and he took us into his house that was already full of people. In his house, we found Shifra Baranchik, and my friend Chaya Kremen.

There were approximately four thousand Jews in the Dvarec camp, that had been brought here from seventy towns. The work was hard. We smashed stone into large mounds, transporting them from one place to another, without knowing why. For this hard labor, everyone received 120 grams of bread and a bit of soup, which in fact was spoiled water. The lines to get soup were terrifying, with everyone pushing to be among the first, and not once did it occur that they would spill each other's soup, leading to fisticuffs. After several days, we decided not to stand in line, and our mother attempted to prepare a bit of warm soup for us, somehow in the house.

In Dvarec, in those days, there was a Jew who tried to help others – Joseph Lusky, with his two daughters and a child of his oldest daughter. He was a simple Jewish man, but with a warm heart and a pure soul. He sought out the hungry, and in secret, helped them in order not to embarrass the recipient. Every Sabbath, he would come into our room, with a big radish under his arm, quickly prepare the radish with an onion in a large platter, and place it on the table that stood in the middle of the room, and all twenty people (from different towns) that lived in the room, would be compelled to eat from the radish and its meat, and he would be lucky. This dear man was exterminated together with his entire family, and no trace of them remains ה"ד.

One cold and crisp morning, we went to work as usual. I settled my sister Lieb'eh with a peasant woman, to work in her house. I was fortunate that she would not have to be out of doors all day, and would also receive food, and be able to bring something home. I would do part of her daily work on her behalf.

Suddenly, the news reached us that the camp had been surrounded and they were planning a slaughter. We were twenty women, and we were mystified, not knowing what to do. Instinctively, we fled to the nearby forests. Even if I had gone back and returned to dear one, I would not have been able to save them. But my conscience tortured me, and gives me no surcease, and I will never, ever forgive myself for what I had to do on that bitter day.

Among the twenty women who fled that day, not a one knew the way into the great forests. A few wanted to walk to the ghetto in Lida, others wanted to go to peasants whom they knew, and there were those, also, who wanted to go into the forests to look for partisans. I was apathetic, I thought that perhaps I would meet up with my loved ones, but my hope was in vain, and I remained alone and isolated.

These were the last days of the month of December, and the cold was great, and snow was falling, and we, the women, did not know where we were. After a number of dark, black days and nights of this, we felt that we had to do something. We began to think about how we could procure some food, but we were afraid to approach any sort of dwelling. In the end, having no other choice, we approached a solitary house in the forest, and knocked on the window. When the peasant woman came out, and saw a mass of Jewish women, she drove us away, and set her dog after us. After several hours, we tried our luck again at another house, and this time we succeeded, and they gave us permission to come inside the house. In this small and poor dwelling, there was an elderly peasant and his wife, dear people, and they sat us around their table, cutting us many slices of bread, and they also brought us cabbage and honey. All of us fell upon the food like beasts of prey, grabbing the cabbage and honey in our hands. Before we left the house, we kissed the hands of these good peasants. They blessed us, and the wife added: 'My dears, you are located near Zhetl, and that place is dangerous for you, continue walking towards the great forests.'

We concluded that it is not possible for twenty women to walk together, and we have to break up into smaller groups. But how? Who will go with whom? I do not recall exactly how we divided up and separated, all I remember is that I went with two other women to a peasant to beg for bread, and when we returned, we no longer found the others.

About ten days went by, and the three of us slept in the forest near an area of an agricultural colony. A Baptist lived in one of them, a good man, who helped everyone who turned to him. For a number of nights, he permitted us to sit in his house around the warm stove, and when danger drew close, he would let us know to leave the place.

After 24 days and nights of wandering, we arrived at a desolate place, frozen and hungry. Everything in it was burned, and there was not even anyone to ask where we were. We were so despondent about our lives, that we walked without thinking, to try and reach some location. We reached a forest with thick trees, and we saw a pit from which potatoes had been emptied. From this pit, a number of narrow paths led away, and we followed one of these paths, and suddenly, at the edge of the forest, I saw a horse hitched to a sled.

Suddenly three men, dressed in police uniforms emerged from the forest. We were frightened and stood still without moving. They aimed their rifles at us, and we stood, waiting to die. Suddenly, one of us screamed out wildly: 'Pesach!'

These were Jewish partisans that were wearing police uniforms. Among them were young men from Zhetl, and from them we found out that we were located in their forests, and they showed us the way towards other Jews from Zhetl and its environs.

When we reached the Zhetl families, my two companions from Zhetl found a place in the camp among their *landsleit*, but I felt myself to be 'left over.' After several days, I met Faygl'eh Kreinowicz, and the two of us walked to the Belica families that were located on the banks of the Neman. The first one I met was Meir Baranchik, and when he called me by my mother's name, I understood a bit what I must look like. Faygl'eh brought me to the hideout of Ber'l Stotsky, and there I found Leah Halperin and others. Suddenly Chaim Yosselewicz appeared, and asked if they knew where Rachel Itzkowitz could be found. When I replied, he did not recognize me. He said that Elazar Meir Savitzky had sent him to call me to their hideout (I will never forget him, he was like a brother to me). There were already seven people in this tiny hideout, and when I went into the underground pit, I felt a pleasant warmth, because they had a small iron stove with which to heat the hideout. In the end, after days and nights of fear, hunger, cold and despondency, I had found a place to rest.

I ;lay in the hideout for about a month, not being able to move from my place, because my legs were frozen. Ber'l would bring me bread, and Elazar-Meir would bring me warm soup. I was no longer hungry.

During the quiet times in the forest, we managed to live somehow, each one doing their work, and we felt ourselves to be like one family. However, during the times of siege by the Germans or White Poles, everything that we had built with such hard work, was destroyed, and we ent to find a new location for temporary surcease.

It is so difficult for me to understand, how woe could survive under these inhuman conditions, without losing the strength and stamina, to struggle in order that we could continue living....

Cast Thy Bread Upon the Waters...

By Leah Garberowicz (Halperin)

Page 306: Top Left El'keh Kremen Top Right Masha Kreinowicz
Bottom Left Esther-Rish'eh Meckel Bottom Right Bracha Kalmanowicz

It is my intention here, to place a mark and memorial to the departed soul of my father and mentor, who was killed in the Holocaust along with the Jews of our town, Belica. And here, out of a dark enveloping mist, the

general appearance of our town rises in my memory – the town where I was born, in which I grew up, and where I was educated, and in which I spent the best years of my youth.

This is the town in which we first saw the light of the world, and in which we had our childhood experiences, in which we absorbed the experiences of life. But, it was a typical Diaspora town in its appearance and sounds. However, it is celebrations and festivals, the town imbued us with a sense of Jewishness and humanity, in the course of the transformation of the older way of life to one that was more modern and accelerated. This situation made an impression on the Jewish youth in Belica, on all aspects and nuances, – with a dissatisfaction with the 'status quo' and substantive struggle and rebelliousness. The desire to realize a new life in Our Land, was the line that led us all, and for this reason there was a thirst to learn, to know, and to attain a higher cultural level. In the stagnant live of our town, the yearning for redemption in Our Land found a home, and there was influence for this coming from the teachers in school, who knew not only how to teach the young people, but also how to impart a vision, and to promote a new way of life.

The Sabbath in Belica – the sores are closed. Everyone is dressed in holiday finest. A spirit of sanctity hovers over the streets of the town, and especially in the marketplace quare. R' Itcheh the *Shammes*, escorts the Rabbi of the Town, R' Fein ז"צ"ל to the synagogue, with honor and respect. After services, and the midday meal, everyone goes to a wooded area beside the nobleman's estate that is on the banks of the Neman. The young people would set aside their cares in this location.

This location was particularly beloved to me. It was a pleasant hill, and beneath it, the Neman River flowed. to this day, I long for this wonderful place.

My mother, Rachel Dykhowsky[79] was born in Dereczin near Slonim. She was a scion of a Rabbinical family, and carried in her soul that good foundation, and source of refinement, charity and graceful modesty and above all – rendering aid to the needy. During The First World War, she provided considerable assistance to the needy, and distributed charity to the many (she would even divide yo the slice of bread we had, between her children and other hungry children). My mother ע"ה died at a young age, at the age of forty.

My father dedicated himself to his children with heart and soul, and with great difficulty tried to impart Torah to them. I, the youngest in the family, was sent to Vilna, to study at the Teacher's Seminary.

My father ז"ל, Israel ben Abraham Halperin, born in Belica, was a handsome man, with a beautiful soul. He was a man of integrity and possessed a good heart, in harmony with his environment, who had a spark of refinement in him, and above all – provided assistance to the needy. His had was always extended to provide assistance to the community, and he was always in a positive frame of mind and never refused. When the World War broke out, Jewish refugees began to stream in our direction, hungry for a piece of bread, exhausted and naked. My father's house served as a refuge for everyone who was fleeing and without a roof

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79 The Dykhowsky family (spelled Dykhovsky there), receives considerable mention in the Derezcin Memorial Book).

over their head, and he gathered them into his house and was like a father to them, worrying about their survival, going so far as to arrange marriages between the bachelors among them, with daughters in the town, all in keeping with custom and law. From these, there are those who today are found in The Land, and they do not forget this great boon, coming to my house, and recollect my father with love and respect.

At that time, every corner of our house was full of people, and we, the members of the household, slept on the floor not only one time, turning over our places to guests. Not once did my father wake me up along with my brother Mendl, at night and say" – 'Get up and go sleep in the attic, tired and hungry people have arrived, and they need some warm cooked food, and a warm bed.–' In this undertaking, the saying that was on his lips was: 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, because in the fulness of time, you will find it.'

Indeed, this saying came to be after this, during the time of the liquidation and slaughter, when two of the children of my sister (Fyvel'eh and Yerakhmiel) fled to the town of Dvarec, and there, they ran into a physician who was one of the heads of the *Judenrat.* This doctor, previously, had spent a considerable amount of time in our home as a refugee, and benefitted from my father's generosity. He remembered, favorably, what my father had done for him, and he returned this favor to the children, helping them out with bread, and a roof over their heads, giving them assistance and encouragement.

When groups of us, who were driven out of Belica reached Zhetl, they took away our food and clothing from us. I then turned to the *Judenrat,* to at least give us a bit of sugar as a medicament for my father. The person I turned to, recognized my father from years past, and that he had been helped by him, and he returned all the things that had previously been taken from us.

My father was an ardent Zionist, and his desire was to make aliyah, and to be reunited with his children here, but his dream did not come true. He was killed by the Nazis in the town of Zhetl.

May his memory be sanctified.

The Tales of One Family

By Bluma Lejzorowicz (Odzhikhowsky)

I was born in Belica to my parents: Leib & It'keh Odzhikhowsky. We were eight (8) children. I was the oldest, and afterwards Riva'cheh, Min'cheh, Chay-Liebeh, Perl'eh, Bash'keh Ber'l & Malka. My father had a saloon, whose principal income came on the market day, when the gentile peasants from the villages would come to drink whiskey.

In 1924, I married Chaim Lejzorowicz from Zhetl, and we had three (3) children: Yitzhak, Szprinza ז"ל and Leah, who was born in Russia.

When the war broke out in 1939, the Russians entered Belica, and the N.K.V.D. arrested my husband and sent him as a prisoner to Lida, where he sat in jail together with Metacki from Lida, for a period of three months. In prison, he suffered from cold, hunger, and received no small amount of beating. On May 30, 1940, he was transferred to Minsk, and from there, to Vitebsk. In Vitebsk, he was separated from Metacki. My husband was sentenced to eight years in jail judged guilty of 'political crimes,' and was sent to do hard labor in Moncegorsk, near Murmansk. A month before my husband was taken to jail in Minsk, on April 30, 1940 before Passover, the men of the N.K.V.D. came to my house and took me out along with my children, telling me that they were taking me to my husband. We traveled by train for about a month, until we reached Kazakhstan. There, I worked with my son, Yitzhak, in the forest. To my question of where was my husband, I received the reply: You will yet see him...

With the outbreak of the [German-Soviet] war in June 1941, we did not know anything about it. He searched for me for three months, until he found me in the Kartaly Province. From that time on, all of us worked on railroad tracks, and there my daughter was born: Leah. In 1942, they took my son into the Red Army. At the end of the way, we returned to Germany, and there we were in the UNRWA camps.

In 1948, we made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel in the ship '*Galila.*' Initially we were in immigrant housing in Pardes-Chana, and afterwards we went over to live in Acre, where we live to this day.

❁

My parents were in the Zhetl ghetto. My father ז"ל was killed in the First Great Slaughter. The Germans wanted to keep my sister Chaya-Liebeh alive, but she did not want to part from my father, and she too, was killed. After the slaughter, my brother Ber'l fled with Jonah Chana-Shy'keh's to Dvarec. Along the way, they hid in fields, by to their misfortune, a gentile detected them, who went quickly to tell the Germans, who came and shot them.

The Second Great Slaughter was on 23 Av. My mother and sister Malka'leh hid in the bunker. Together with

them was a woman and a small girl, who began to cry. Because of this, the Germans discovered the bunker, and took them all outside. Malka'leh was so frightened that she had a heart attack and died on the spot. The Germans shot her after she was already dead.

My sister, Riv'cheh-Baylah and her son his in the attic of the fire brigade building, but the Germans found them and killed them. My sister Pearl'eh hid in a pile of hay on the property of the burgomaster of Zhetl. She lay there for a week, until he, personally, informed on her and the Germans took her together with all the rest to the marketplace. There, they were told to lie on the ground face down. After this, a vehicle was brought, which took them out of town, where they were all shot.

Min'cheh married in Warsaw in 1938, and Bash'keh joined her. When Warsaw was bombed (1939), both of them were there, and to this day, I do not know their fate.

A Dear Friend, Zechariah-Shlomo Nignawiecki ה"יד

By Chaim Yosselewicz

Page 309: (Left) Dvora Sokolowsky; (Right) Elazar Novogrudsky

A long time has passed from that moment when you were taken from us by hands bathed in Jewish blood. You left us while you were still young, so full of talent and hope for the future. The cruel fate of our people during the period of the Holocaust did not pass over you either. You were cut off from your taproot. It seems to me as if the whole thing took place just yesterday.

Our common childhood years are deeply etched into my memory. The circumstances that existed in your house were difficult ones. I sensed this from the fact whenever I came to you. I always tried to help you, but you seemed contented with your lot. Already as a youth, you recognized the difficulties of life, and you struggled with them. You learned, that even under these conditions, or rather in spite of them, it is possible to take advantage and deepen the skills that you enjoyed.

When we would be invited together, I always wanted to spend more time in your presence. Already in those young, formative years, I senses your blessed talents, and I was proud of you. Already, by then, in the Hebrew School, we began to speak Hebrew between ourselves. From the time you were small, your gift for language revealed itself, and the spark for the Land of our Forefathers, and for pioneering. This came to you from your father, who constantly yearned too make *aliyah* as a *Halutz*, to the Land of Israel.

Time went by, ans with the completion of the Hebrew School in Belica, you were revealed to be a scholar of the modern Hebrew. Your notebooks became filled with Hebrew poetry, full of longing for The Land. The poems no only impressed your teachers, but also others who knew how to evaluate this kind of work. Everyone foretold a bright future for you.

Our relationship as friends was intense, indeed. I recall the walks that we arranged to take along the banks of the Neman River, during which our goal was: to speak in Hebrew about matters pertaining to The Land. It was pleasant to listen to your expositions and excerpts from your poems. I would be the first one to whom you would read a new poem, and you would smile at my reaction.

You were a good and dedicated friend. I remember how happy you were when you were accepted to the *Tarbut* School in Lida. You were lucky, and you were already weaving together plans for the future. I was certain that you would find a place among the Hebrew poets.

This great joy faded with the beginning of that terrible epoch of the World War (1939). The sky was covered with black clouds. They foretold the onset of the Holocaust. Everything that appeared which at first looked to be distant and unreal, all came fruition, to the detriment of our people. Our lives became worthless, and we were uprooted from our homes. We suffered bitterly and greatly. All our beautiful plans were cut away and vanished from us.

The barbarous murderers seized you, while you were still young, full of energy and hope. Even in the last minute of your life, you rebuked these murderers to their bestial faces. Your last words were not pleasant to them on their account, and because of this, they tortured you before your tragic death, severe torture – that was inhuman.

You went with your head held high to martyrdom, together with the thirty-six martyrs of our town.

The Lord will avenge your blood, and may your memory be for a blessing among us for all eternity.

My Comrade and Friend, Zalman (*Zhameh*) Itzkowitz ז"ל

By Herzl Sokolowsky

Page 310: *Zalman Itzkowitz*

Page 311: *From the Right: Zalman Itzkowitz, Y. Kaufman, A. Rudnick (Abir) and Zerakh Itzkowitz*

He was the son of a prominent family in town – the family of R' Shmuel-Joseph and Gitt'l Itzkowitz. But each person has his own virtues and even his own personal inner strengths. For most of those about whom it is written in these pages, during the same period of their lives, this manifests itself on singular occasions during a specific period and is sufficient to carry them all their lives. In the life of Zalman (*Zhameh*) Itzkowitz, there was a period of heroism of this sort at the time that he worked on behalf of the Zionist youth movement in town. At that time, when he was sixteen years old, he participated in a *BETAR* meeting in Novogrudok, and his fiery speech there made an strong impression on the hundreds of participants in the assembly, and was etched into the memory of many of them.

Zalman ad a fiery and burning spirit, a pleasant disposition, and was self-effacing and modest. Recognizing his own worth prevented him for jumping to lead, or to make himself prominent on account of what he had done, to those about him, but he did have a good instinct that made him very acceptable to peoples from all walks of life, and many of these were not Jewish. In his work, in the flour mill of his father, he would come in daily contact with the peasants of the vicinity, whose anti-Semitism grew inexorably stronger during the last years before The Second World War, – but despite this, he never had any conflict with any of them. He earned their trust, and even in other matters, he was trusted by all ranks in the populace – whether Jewish or Polish – and everyone treated him with respect and affection.

With the invasion of the Soviets in the year 1939, at a time when he was a Zionist activist that stood out, and the scion of a wealthy family, Zalman was compelled to leave the town, and wander, in order to find some form of work in a place where he would not be recognized. It was at that time, that we both met in Baranovici, and I told him about the '*Ortel*' (A cooperative) that was looking for an accountant. At first, the opportunity did not seem attractive, because he was not an accountant, but afterwards, he got up his nerve, and decided to accept the position. Accordingly, he came to master all of the details of this profession quickly, excelled in his work, and succeeded in carrying out the administration in a marvelously good order. Everyone – the management and the workers – were very satisfied with his work, and the amicable way he conducted himself.

Two weeks before the outbreak of the war between the Soviets and the Germans (1941), Zalman received a draft order from the Red Army. The management of the '*Ortel*' tried to get him released from this order, but their endeavors were to no avail, and Zalman was compelled to enter service and leave Baranovici. From that time on, we never met, and no one knows his final resting place to this day.

Zalman was my friend and companion from the time we were children, learning together, and spending time together, and consequently, I was witness to the way he carried himself for all of his life. Those who studied with hi, and spent time in his presence, were witness to his organizational efforts on behalf of the Zionist youth movement in the town, and they will remember for all of their lives, this loyal and precious friend. His thoughts and aspirations were always dedicated to making aliyah too the Land of Israel, to assist in the building of the future of our people and our country. He was prepared to make every sacrifice on his part, for the purpose of achieving this ideal, and therefore the sorrow we experience is sevenfold that he was not privileged to live with us in the free and independent Land of Israel.

May his memory be for a blessing!

Man and Beast, One Opposite the Other

By E.M. Savitzky

The Ruthlessness of Humanity

Nechama-Leah daughter of Fyv'eh and Rachel Odzhikhowsky and Elazar-Chaim the son of David-Aryeh and Leah Szeszko, married during the thirties. The settled with a member of their family, Alta Milikowsky, who was childless. The couple were quiet, decent people, and they live modestly like this, in Alta's house, until the Holocaust erupted.

When the decree was handed down that we were forced to leave our town, this family went, together with most of the members of our town, to Zhetl, and the family resided there until the Second Great Slaughter, when the German murderers 'cleansed' Zhetl of Jews. During the slaughter, the opportunity presented itself for this family to flee from the ghetto, and the two of them, with their little daughter Szprinza'leh fled to a peasant beside Belica (Koliesz) and here, they hid themselves with their clothing and utensils, thinking that here they would find a refuge during this time of ire. And indeed, Koliesz received them graciously, gave them food, and a place to rest, however they had barely laid down and fallen asleep, and Koliesz went to the Germans and informed them that there was a Jewish family in his home.

The father of the family, Elazar-Chaim, was shot by the murderers on the spot, but Nechama-Leah and the daughter Szprinza'leh (who was four years old) the tyrants took to the town and made them the object of sport, 'the Jewess and her little daughter,' before killing them and taking their lives.

All the residents of the town were ordered to gather on a sports field behind the municipal building. The sadists sported with these two lives in all manner of satanic ways, in order to amuse the non-Jewish residents of the town. In the end, they shot the mother and her daughter, and left them for one added abuse – they gave her 'freedom to act' to see how the little one would react. And so, little Szprinza'leh, who did not grasp what was going on about her, went over to her mother's body, and began to pull on her garment, and called out: 'Mama, get up Mama, come, let us go home.' When the tine Szprinza'leh saw that her mother did not reply, she left her body, and went to the house where her grandmother once lived, went up the porch and knocked on the door, and cried out in a tearful voice: '*Bubbe*, open the door for Szprinza'leh.' (But there was no answer from the grandmother as well..)

In the end, the sadists appeared to have had their fill of amusement from their 'game,' and they brought Szprinza'leh back to the body of her mother and shot her as well. When the bodies of the daughter and mother fell together, and their blood was still warm, and cried out to the heart of heaven, the daughter of the gentile Ingula (the shoemaker) came up to them, and she took off the shoes from Szprinza'leh...

The Compassion of a Dog!...

After the extermination of the Jews in the Zhetl ghetto, my [subsequently] martyred brother Schraga ה"יד and myself, remained as the sole surviving members of our family. On 25 Av 5702 (1942) we were taken in a group of 220 Jews from Zhetl – to a labor camp in Novogrudok, there in a camp surrounded by barbed wire, we were tortured in severe ways, and with hard labor.

On the night of Yom Kippur of 5703, my brother and I decided to leave the camp. We got out under the barbed wire fence, and went out in the dark of night, our hope being to reach the Neman, and to join up with the people from our town who could be found there in the forests. However, we did not know the way, and therefore, we wandered about for several nights (during the day, we hid in the forests) until, finally, we did reach the Neman River. Once again, we experiences several nights of wandering, until we reached the virgin forests beside the banks of the Neman, and we found those from Belica who had escaped the sword.

The first thing we did was dig a deep 'bunker,' into the ground (in concert with R' Zalman Yosselewicz, and his dear sons, Moshe and Chaim). Because the forest was large, we were about to go about in it freely, but it was not possible to find anything for people to eat. We were compelled to come out of the forest during the nights, in order to procure a bit of food from the peasants who lived on both sides of the Neman. Such forays were laded with enormous dangers, so that we would not fall into the hands of those lying in ambush, waiting for us on all sides, but the pressure on us compelled us to accept these difficult risks. From time-to-time, my brother and I would go out to those peasants whom we knew, and accordingly, we would get some food from them.

On one dark night, we decided to cross the Neman and to reach a number of the peasants from out town that took up residence in the area around the two. these peasants, who were our neighbors before the Holocaust, when we would come to them, they would always receive us graciously, and with compassion, and helped us out with food.

The first house that we thought to go into was in the vicinity of Ostashin, the two-family home of the peasant Fabiacznyk. In this residence, the elderly couple lived, and additionally – their son and his family (his wife was the daughter of Antoszka Boriczek, who were visitors to our house and very friendly with our parents). In their yard, a vicious barking dog was tethered on a long rope, and every time we got close to their house, we would hear the sound of his barking from a distance. But once, we got close to the house, and it was to wonder: we do not hear the bark of the dog.

Despite this, we quietly opened the gate to the yard, and quickly went inside, and we discovered the dog, walking about as usual on his rope, but he is not barking at all. We decided to first go into the elderly couple, and we opened the door, and before we had managed to enter inside, the elderly woman faced us and in a trembling voice said: 'run for your lives, run quickly from here, there are police sitting with our son.'

We left the threshold of the house with all speed, went out into the yard, and passed beside the dog. We quickly opened to gate to the yard, and fled in the direction that took us back into the forest.

The barking watchdog did not bark once. It would appear that he took pity on us: and so, this is an indication of the compassion of a dog!...

Kaddish in the Forest

By Elazar-Meir Savitzky

Page 317: (Left): Yud'l Kusielewicz and his son, Eliyahu (Right): Schraga (Fyv'eh) Savitzky

The Neman River spreads its broad arms, covered with the undergrowth of Byelorussia, dividing its two sides into two different worlds. It was difficult to know what was going on or happening on the other side of the river, that were ever flowing as usual. Therefore, it was as if the sounds and shouts that would roll and propel waves from shore to shore had fallen silent, and the laughter and carefree noise of the peasants lads had been quieted, and the upright shining young peasant women, who in the good years, would disrupt the quiet at nightfall and the air of mystery about the river. The river now lies in its clear bed of sand, and no person has enough nerve to go up to it, and disturb or arrest its flow...

From time-to-time, the odor of the earth wafts over the town, from the pastures being emptied. Here and there, the yearning in the heart of a peasant, cannot be suppressed. With trembling, he takes an oar of wood in his hand, and silently steals along behind the granaries of the town. in stealth, he continues to walk to the river. Upon reaching the river, he swiftly puts the boat into the water, ands with the dry oar, he begins quickly to ford the waves as if they were not waves, as if he wants to tear the gelled waters, and drive away the bitter dark silence.

It was from the mouths of such peasants, victims of yearning, that the Jews of the forest would put together bits of news regarding what was taking place on the other side of the Neman. These discontinuous words never brought good news. They told constantly of the predations of Hell and the organization of branches of the 'White Poles.'

When a peasant doing this , who was frightened of his own footsteps, would by chance encounter several Jews, he would fervently begin to cross himself, and in a broken voice of the pious would begin to mutter silently: 'Young men, dear and precious, see, see and beware! Take pity on the remnant of your people. Know that the accursèd Poles who cause a great deal of trouble also for our Byelorussian brethren, are planning to exterminate you entirely.' And always the same words: 'Be careful, and God watch over you.' – and this peasant would then vanish like an apocryphal messenger.

Fundamental scraps of news, from a man passing as if he was a shadow, from the other side of the Neman, engendered a sense of pain on all those dwelling in the Klaty Forest, and gave them no peace.

It is Sunday before daybreak. In the Jewish camp beside the 'Gold Branch' everyone arose earlier than

ususal. Clear blue skies hung over the ground. An end-of- summer sun began to shine down its warming autumnal rays, that stretched and wove themselves into the pastures, wearing a decorated mask. Everything seems proper, and this was yet another end-of-summer day in Byelorussia, warm and pleasant.

The women began to busy themselves with preparing breakfast, and in less than an hour, everyone sat down and ate. The assaults and the wild shouting were not heard, and the resignation from within, everyone sat silently, almost not sensing the breath on one's mouth. Not a single person said so much as a word, and on every face there was a stony, funereal look of silence. It was as if everyone sensed their fate in the nature about them, as if someone awesome and terrible is on the way and is coming.

There was one of us, on whom this was especially noticeable, his light and happy face changed in the end. He looked half white and half yellow, like a peasant's linen that hadn't bleached sufficiently. In the final days, he separated himself entirely and practically spoke to no one, struck dumb, wandering among the tall trees and thick underbrush, as if he was looking there for some relief from the burdensome sorrow that has taken hold of him at the end.

In those last days, he felt more acutely than in the past, his blood relationship to his brother Fyv'eh who was the only one left from his entire family. His eyes never left him, and wherever Fyv'eh turned to go, the worried looks of this man would follow him, to each and every place. And when Fyv'eh would have to stand guard at night, his brother was left without recourse, and he would sit tensed up for the whole night, in his corner. He would toss back and forth like the last leaf on a tree, and with eyes shot through with a craze, he would sit and wait for the minute of his return. He could not explain, even to himself, what it was that disturbed him so greatly, he just felt that someone awesome is stalking us, and that he cannot be rid of him.

After the silent breakfast, the men began to spread out in groups to various destinations, each group to fulfill its responsibility. Meir went with the small group to the Neman, to call the ferryman on the other side of the river, to get news of the situation. Leib'keh the fisherman, together with his son, 'Tzal'yeh, went in a different direction of the river, in order to make contact with a different ferryman. Our fried, sat like a piece of stone at the place where he ate breakfast, as if he had forgotten to get up. Fyv'eh went over to his brother, with the intent of trying to dispel his stoniness, and said: 'Nu, let us walk to Zalman's group, maybe they have gathered some news.' His brother did not offer any reply, and he just stared at his brother Fyv'eh and did not move, but when Fyv'eh called to their cousin Mikhl to walk with them, and they set out along the way, He rose with difficulty, and followed them. They went to a different Jewish group – a distance of about 5km, even if a number of men and all the women remained in the camp. The women cleaned up the remains of breakfast, and began to prepare the midday meal.

After having gone about 2 ½ km, suddenly three random shots shattered the silence of the forest. The sound of shooting in the forest was not, of its own right any surprise, but today, the shooting lasted longer than usual. Still as stone, they stood, and not one of them uttered so much as a word. After a short silence, and an exchange of glances, they did not continue along their way, but without a word, they returned to their camp.

When they reached the camp, they found a small campfire, with pots simmering, but not a living soul, seeing

that everyone was frightened, and quickly fled. All about, an eerie silence reigned, and only from time to time, in a not too distant location, a rooster would crow in his temerity, and interrupted the silence for a second.

Mikhl was the first to be aroused and move himself, and he turned and said: 'Come, let us go look for and find everyone, and call them back to camp.' Fyv'eh declined to go: 'they will hear that it is quiet, and will return in a short while by themselves,' – he answered. However, Mikhl did not want to wait for them to come, and went off to look for them. Seeing that Mikhl was going, his brother went up to Fyv'eh and begged him: 'Come, let us go with Mikhl,' but Fyv'eh demurred and this time he said: 'Go, if you want to, I will not go.' The brother found himself in a quandary, and did not know how he should behave, however, out of a sense of companionship, he went off with Mikhl, and Fyv'eh remained in the camp alone.

They went looking deeper into the Klaty Forest. And as it happened, along the way, they met up with everyone, in the process of returning and all of them walked back to the camp. When they were not far from the camp, they suddenly heard a bugle call. Everyone froze in place, because everyone recognized it as the call of the White Poles. In the blink of an eye, everyone moved instinctively, and a line of several tens of people automatically moved off in the direction of a lake that was not too distant, where a refuge was located that was well camouflaged. When they reached the lake, they found Meir and his group there already. They related that when they got near the Neman, and called, as usual, to the ferryman on the other side of the river, he only came out onto his threshold, and showed with his hands that they should flee as quickly as possible. Everyone entered the underground hideout by crawling, and remained there in silence, not moving a muscle. Not a single person said anything, and everyone sat sunken in their own thoughts, only every now and then would a deep sigh break the underground silence. Despite this, in the air of the subterranean hideout, you could sense in the air the thought roiling in everyone's mind: 'What will the day bring?'

The brother sat in the corner and trembled. From time to time, his lips would whisper, as if in prayer: 'Fyv'eh, my precious brother! Why did you not come with us: Why did I leave you today to be alone?'

Towards evening, when the sun was setting, everyone came out of the hideout. For a minute, ears were cocked to the surroundings and the center of the forest, and when it was established that all was still around us, everyone silently walked towards the camp. When they neared the camp, they already found people there, who had previously fled in different directions. They stood silently without words, silent as mourners, but they faces bore witness to the tragedy that had occurred that day.

The brother felt that people were whispering about him, and not looking directly at him. He went up to Yud'l son of Zalman and asked: 'Tell me Yud'l, where is Fyv'eh?' The short and difficult reply fell – in the parlance of the forest: 'He is lying beside Meir's trench, the one from last year.' But this indirect answer confused the brother, and he remained confused and unwitting, but this tragic news immediately restored his senses. He did not speak anymore to anyone, and just walked by himself mumbling: 'Fyv'eh, my dedicated brother! Are you still alive? Or am I now by myself alone in this big world?'

When it got completely dark, they went to bury Fyv'eh. Twelve Jews trod in silence in order to bury their martyr, who fell on that day. Stealthily they proceeded by winding paths, literally like people who not only had no right to life, but also no right to death, or to bring their brother to a proper burial.

When we reached the place where Fyv'eh lay, cut down like a pine tree after a storm, the brother no longer could remain so frozen. He threw himself on his dead brother, and began to hug him, kiss him, and silently whisper something. At that point, Yud'l went to him, and took him off the dead body, and said: ' At this moment, behave like a Jew; know that your brother Fyv'eh is a genuine martyr; it is certain that he has some privilege, because we are able to bury him in accordance with our customs; as for us, who knows who it is that will come to bury us.'

The grave was speedily dug, and the martyr was immediately interred in his final resting place. As soon as the fresh grave was covered, the brother was called upon to recite the '*Kaddish.*'

The brother, silently, walked up to the naked mound in the middle of the forest and said: 'My dear martyred brother! I cannot and do not want to carry out the ritual over your grave, so young; I think this would not be right and would be dishonest of me; If I said '*Kaddish*' it is only to comfort you, my brother; know that I am still here to say the '*Kaddish*' for you, because there is no one left to say '*Kaddish*' for me.

A silent, barely audible sound pierced the silence of the night in that ancient forest: *Yisgadal, veYiskadash Shmey Rabah...*

A Prayer in the Forest

By Y. Feigin

The author of the poem, the poet Y. Feigin ז"ל, is the husband of a daughter of our town, Chana of the Halperin family, and the sister-in-law of Leah Garberowicz (Halperin). The poem is based on an incident that took place among the Jews in the forest, as recorded by the poet from the tales of Leah, the survivor, whose story, and the story of her family can be seen in the poem, and in the writings she has done in this book (pp. 206, 226). The Editor

I had a day of much murder today

My brother and paramour both fell in combat

And my spirit and soul were both bereaved in one day.

And now, between the forest trees, the remainder of the camp,

Eyes glisten in the dark, from hunger and exhaustion,

And on every pair of dumb lips there is no sigh or tear,

And my heart lies like a boulder that cannot be moved

And the quiet about is death and silence,

Only in the presence of a filthy partisan, whimpering like a dog,

An uncircumcised gentile looking to comfort himself with a female

Nears me, insanely; You have a dress? Oh...

And so the heart stirs to guard the end of my virginity

The honor of a Jewish daughter, suffering and ravaged,

And as the heart so stirred with life and emotion

With my fingers I felt my face and exposed breasts

And I remembered, today I lost my love and my brother

And I will remember yet my father who died of torture

And the sister, violated on her five children

And what is the sense of life to remain alone

And to continue to suffer agony and hunger, why,

But for the sake of vengeance, some small emotion of the avenger

But is it not better sevenfold to fall on my sword

Or my head mashed by a machine gun

And I will aimlessly wander in the dark to flee for my life.

And I will fall at the feet of ... R' Baruch Moshe's,

First I said to just kick him and move on

But he immediately deterred me and called me by name

Oh, R' Baruch! I recognized his voice

And what are you doing here, and why do you lie here

And where are the rest of the Jews that were left

And it what sector did you fight, you R' Baruch

And when did your grandson fall, today, or then,

Because you see, R' Baruch, it is difficult to recall

And as for Kaddish, R' Baruch, there is nowhere to recite it

For about us are gentiles, and lo, we remain solitary.

We are not solitary, and not abandoned – he comforts me –

We have a great and awesome God in the heavens

For even should thousands and tens of thousands fall from us,

We will yet arise and live rise and live

It is forbidden to lose faith in God

Lest we are all lost, and be erased from the earth

It is necessary to trust, my daughter, it is necessary to believe

That they will yet rise to life with the rebirth of the nation

And your Mendl, and your chosen one Leib'l will also rise

And my grandson Yankl'eh of the bright eyes

And you too, will bear sons and daughters in profusion

And they will be fruitful and multiply, and will fill the earth with Jews

Like the trees of the forest, and be mighty like them,

And before R' Baruch can complete his works, there is light

The commander, wounded in his hip calls for a rest

Until he can organize his camp and arrange his ranks.

Thus. How good. R' Baruch's face turned

And he will guard me tenderly and with compassion;

Be aware that it is Yom Kippur today, sanctified to The Lord

Yesterday – *Kol Nidre* – I hummed it alone in the dark

And now we must assemble a *minyan* of Jews

Because we must pray in a quorum; and he took out his *tallit*

That which is tattered with the red of blood at its edges

A memento of the time he covered his dead grandson before he was buried,

And R' Baruch passed through the camp, searching and counting

And he could not raise a minyan, even counting me

But the commander, a mocking gentile, offered three gentiles

To make up the group in order that the worship could be conducted.

But R' Baruch Moshe's passed up his kind offer

And slowly, we retired to a secret location

Where we could come together without having the gentiles mock us,

And R' Baruch wrapped himself in his *tallit* and intoned;

Let us not raise our voices in prayer, lest the enemy hear us

Or have his dogs scent the rising exhalation from our mouths

And thus each man should stand and pray in his heart

And direct his emotions to the God in heaven, and let not

Any man think secular thoughts about killing and annihilation

Because this is a holy day to God, and for Him only,

And I remain alone, leaning on a tree

And I hug it, and silently kiss it as if it were my lover.

And it was as if the forest itself stood silently in prayer

Its trees spreading its branches to cover the Holy People

No bird chirp, nor did any creature make noise

To disrupt the prayer or upset the thoughts –

-*U'Nesaneh Tokef*- says R' Baruch unwittingly out loud

But immediately the silence returned and continued, on and on...

Only a whisper, a whisper moved the lips

And I, Oy, R' Baruch, will God forgive me

I did not direct my heart to Him because I could not find Him.

But, however, see, R' Baruch – I wanted to stop him

With the clarion call of joy, happiness, but I knew not her name

To point there with a finger, to focus His gaze

That he will straighter His gaze and look and see as I do

If that is not the Holy Land there, on her palm trees

And is that not the Mediterranean Sea, and is that not the Jordan

For R' Baruch is a scholar and well-grounded in *Tanakh*

And knows every river, mountain and hill

And this one who is looking out from Mount Scopus, is this not

My sister Shulamit, my twin

Does she not tread there with a telescope in hand

And asks me to look, and to partake in the view

And here, there is a flag in her other hand, and she waves it.

So, R' Baruch, in reality, she is the sign to make *aliyah*

Finish your prayers R' Baruch, and let us arise and go

Do not ask the way, for here is the light rises, and the heart is suddenly lightened, and tears also are seen in the eyes

Blessed, glistening, tears that light like the seven colors of the rainbow.

And I sit down beside the tree on my hand

And I sat my sister down, and gazed deeply into her eyes

Will you recognize me, I asked in my heart, will you brighten up to me

And she is so beautiful, like days of old, and is so graceful

For a minute I wanted to jump on her and bite her

And all at once the calamity of misfortune came upon her

But I immediately comforted her, and only hugged her

And I buttressed my heart with my remaining strength;

There is something to live for, to fight!

And for a moment I forgot Father, brother and the mass killing

I threw myself into her hands, with a surfeit of good fortune, and I fainted,

I can't do this, my heart cannot stand this much joy

The profuse light struck me like a lightning bolt, but –

Suddenly I was awakened by the cries of the terrified

Did the enemy sense us, did he pick up the scent of his prey

And I moved and girded myself for the battle and around us

There is no clamor or noise of the enemy.

But I immediately grasped the issue

Because at the front, it is necessary to think quickly

R' Baruch Moshe's, as is known, is not

A high official, nor the head of a group

And if he is the one shouting and raising his hands heavenward

There is doubt if there is a reason to open fire with rifles immediately.

But R' Baruch Moshe's certainly is not given to absurd behavior that is out of the ordinary

And never was fond of child's play; and words to him, quiet and trembling, so that only the forest trees would answer him out loud

and here, he let his tallit fall, and he tore it to shreds

His beard splayed wildly like the hair of Crazy Vanka

And his voice continues to rise with swearing and cursing

And lo, he is letting words drop explicitly directed heavenward

Not conversing with, but rebuking, scolding and intimidating

And not any angel, and not any seraph, but

At the Holy One Blessed be He, in His resplendent glory, Himself,

At first the remaining people whispering prayers restrained themselves

And attempted to explain it as a consequence of

faintness from fasting

But they immediately saw that R' Baruch was not being light-headed

And this was not an ordinary craze, and especially

As his words were spoken like barbs, sharp as swords

Not in the manner of Levi-Yitzhak, and not pleasant like him;

R' Baruch Moshe's is cursing explicitly, without any sense of self humiliation and no justification of law

And this is not because many thoughts oppressed him

If he had risen at the end of the holy day of Yom Kippur

And accosted the Master of the Universe to shame him and abuse him;

'You shame your people to go and die

And you give license to sinners to cut us down

You sit in the high heavens and look down

How they bury us alive, and You do not stay their hands

You, who permit the shedding of blood and flesh of our daughters

Who command we be tossed as prey to the dogs...

You, whom I have worshiped for naught all my days on the earth

Now I am ashamed of You." And who knows

Where R' Baruch would have gotten with his rebuke

Had the people of the camp not fallen on him

And the bound R' Baruch was brought to the commander

And for the crime of disturbing the peace, and endangering the location of the camp hiding place

Was sentenced to die as if he were a traitor...

I stood and begged fro his life

And the other Jews were aroused to beg he be shown mercy

But not so R' Baruch who pressed me to his heart;

I do not fear death, because

R' Baruch chooses death after having lost his God.

On the following day, when the enemy attacked us

We sallied against him with what was left of our strength

R' Baruch Moshe's was no longer with us

But his spirit was with us, to intensify our battle

And the shreds of his *tallit* were bound around the swollen feet of the gentiles...

6 Tishri 5707 (January 10, 1946)

The Rabbi R' Chaim-Leib Boczkowsky – My Father the Martyr

By Shimon Baker (Boczkowsky)

Page 321: The Rabbi R' Chaim-Leib Boczkowsky

In my journalistic activity, I get the opportunity to describe people from all walks of life. I have the opportunity to meet – and have interviewed – a variety of personalities, all of whom have played an important role in a given capacity.

However, it is very difficult for me to write about my own father, Rabbi R' Chaim-Leib Boczkowsky, הי"ד the *Gaon* and martyr, who was killed by the German murderers in such a terrifying manner. The difficulty arises from the fact that as his son, it is inappropriate for me to talk about the greatness of one's own father, despite the fact that from the other side, I have to be – and I am – full of pride, that I had the great privilege to be raised under his influence and to warm myself in of his Gaonic rays of Torah.

It is a fact, that my father זצ"ל, very, very rarely – almost never – told me about just himself alone. When I was still very little, he was already committed to the idea that I would master the *Gemara* well. Also later, when I grew up a bit, and went off to study at the Yeshiva in Baranovici, after he had given me a 'foundation' my father was quite far from telling me the details of his life in the Yeshivas as both a youth and a young man, as well as about his further life's journey.

From time-to-time, he would relate episodes to me from his yeshiva live, that he thought were relevant experiences. But it was very rarely that he told me things about himself personally, not heeding what he was – as I subsequently learned from other sources – an outstanding personality in the yeshivas where he studied. His thorough knowledge and sharp analytical mind was renown not only in the yeshivas where he studied. He got the nickname of '*Suprasler* Genius' at the renown yeshiva of Mir, and was a synonym for scholastic excellence in the yeshiva world. This reputation was strongly shared among the experts in Talmud, who would refer to his ideas and deeds.

The word '*Suprasler*' which was said together with the word 'Genius' reached the *shtetl* where my father was born and raised (Suprasl was a small *shtetl* beside Bialystok). Thanks to the brilliance of one of its sons, it became recognized in the rabbinical world.

Born to a father who was a great scholar, but who ran a small town store because he did not want to use the rabbinate as a means to make a living, my father began to manifest his skilled mind for learning at an early age. Already, as a little boy, his parents sent him off to yeshivas in the wider world for study. He studied in (I think) Malcz[80], Krynki, Volozhin, Slobodka, and – most importantly – in the Yeshiva at Mir, which became baked into his heart forever, and where he quickly became the 'wonder-child.'

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80 Called Mlatsza in Byelorussian

It did not take long, and he became a study companion to the Rabbi, R' Eliyahu-Baruch Kamai זצ"ל, the Headmaster of the Yeshiva of Mir, which seethed with Torah and knowledge and was one of the great scholars of his generation. When I was already living in America, after the war, a Rabbi from Brooklyn, a former student at the Yeshiva of Mir, told me in the presence of a group of Rabbis, how 'Leib'l the *Suprasler* Genius,' would review the more difficult lessons of R' Eliyahu-Baruch. Thereby, he also noted that after a lesson, my father was able to relay the entire lesson of what the famous Rabbi had said. The young men of the Yeshiva, which produced great Torah scholars, yeshiva headmasters, and Rabbis – would array themselves around the young man from Suprasl, who did not miss so much as a single word that his teacher had said.

My father זצ"ל whose ideas would circulate about the yeshiva from time to time, also long after he had left it, apart from his brilliance, was also blessed with a phenomenal memory. I am reminded of an interesting episode, at a Friday evening having dinner at the home of R' Israel-Yaakov Lubczansky הי"ד, the spiritual leader for the '*Ohel Torah* Yeshiva' at Baranovici, where I studied (R' Israel-Yaakov זצ"ל, my one-time supervisor and a great exponent of *Mussar*, who was a son-in-law of R' Yoizl Hurwitz of Novogrudok, was murdered by the Germans). That Friday evening, in the middle of the meal, when the supervisor and my father were discussing some learning, and I listened in, my father repeated a concept about a difficult matter in the *Gemara*, that R' Israel-Yaakov had told him 25 years previously, also at a Friday night meal, in the home of the newly appointed Rabbi of Baranovici, where my father had spent a Sabbath on his way back from Da-Mir. My supervisor, who himself excelled in having a very strong memory, was astounded, when my father repeated this concept from 25 years ago. It is also a fact – this I can better grasp after having developed a bit of understanding and relationship with people – that my father's thoughts flowed with unusual speed. The words that he uttered had a difficult task in keeping up with his profound thinking, which swam swiftly in the sea of scholarship.

In a certain way, my father was similar to R' Aharon Kottler זצ"ל, the Headmaster of the Kleck Yeshiva, and later of Lakewood [N.J.] in America. I saw this similarity while still in Baranovici, when I observed close up, the movements of R' Aharon's eyes, and listened to the way he spoke. I got the same feeling again, when a few years ago, I had the opportunity to hear R' Aharon's exposition and casuistry. My father would speak of R' Aharon with great respect, as the '*Slevicher*[1] Genius,' with whom at one time, he had studied together in a Yeshiva, and was a good friend of his.

❁

My father, in my humble opinion, was a man truly contented with his lot, despite the fact like, with every individual, he had disappointments in his life. His greatest pleasure lay in providing an answer to a difficult scholarly question, his entire persona being dedicated to study. He had no small measure of happiness when his son would demonstrate intellectual prowess in the study of a page of the Gemara, and he demanded that I should thoroughly know the literal test, which is the 'foundation' of all learning. However, at the same time, he also wanted that I should 'sharpen my mind' by answering a variety of questions.

While I was learning the Gemara with my 'private' tutors in the shtetl in Belica, – with R' Abraham-Hirsch Kaufman and R' Yaakov Shmuckler (Yankl Tsin'keh's), הי"ד – my father would often come and listen in to see if I was making progress.

Before the last World War, at the time when the so-called modern winds had already reached Belica – when on the Sabbath after *cholent,* the larger majority of the town youth would go to the waterfront, or to the 'yard' – it was not among the easiest of tasks to hold back a youngster, tied down to the *Gemara.* But my father accomplished this, even with the specific difficulties, and in order to supply me with an incentive, that study of the Torah was the greatest education of all, no matter where one goes. 'If you know a language' – he would say to me – 'it is only good where it is used: with Torah, however, you can go anywhere in the world...'

I am certain, that when he studied at the Yeshiva, he didn't need any such 'foundation,' this was the study of Torah for its own sake, from which he did not anticipate any compensation. Later on, it was necessary to take comfort in the fact that from a study *not* for its own sake, would come study for its own sake, and a need to give an incentive to a small-town youth to motivate him to learn.

My father, himself, never ceased to learn. It is possible that he would have spent a countless number of years studying in his beloved Yeshiva at Mir, but his reputation as the '*Suprasler* Genius' went before him. When the renown Rabbi of Zhetl, Rabbi R' Baruch-Abraham Mirsky זצ"ל came to the Yeshiva at Mir, looking for a bridegroom that would be suitable for his granddaughter, an orphan, he selected 'Leib'l *Suprasler,*' one of the best – and perhaps the best of all – the young men in the Yeshiva.

Also in Zhetl, after the wedding, the outstanding pupil of R' Eliyahu-Baruch Kamai זצ"ל sat alone studying the Torah, and also held forth a study session in the local Yeshiva, which had been placed on a high level, and became a leader in its field.

When his first wife passed away, leaving behind two young orphan girls (Henya and Malka, הי"ד), after a certain amount of time, my father found his fortune in Belica, where I and my two sisters who were killed (Faygl and Mash'keh הי"ד) were born and raised.

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For another person of his caliber, it might have proven difficult to adapt to his new surroundings and way of life. After everyone, he did not have people in Belica at the same level in education, and even in worldly matters. Here, too, he was confronted with a new challenge, where overnight, he became a merchant in my mothers manufacturing and leather store. My father met this challenge, his long beard and side locks with is winter rabbinical *shtrymel* elicited respect, even by the local peasants, who would come to the store, and if an unruly individual did appear, who wanted to make sport of the beard and *kapote*, my father did not get upset. He especially took satisfaction in his role as the 'buyer' for the store, because in this capacity, he would have to visit Lida, Vilna, Baranovici, Warsaw, Bialystok, as well as other cities and towns. This would afford him the opportunity to meet with R' Chaim-Ozer Grodzinsky זצ"ל, R' Elchanan Wasserman, הי"ד and other Gaonim and Rabbis of that generation.

It goes without any doubt to say that my father's capacity to accustom himself to his new surroundings in the Belica vicinity was a result of my mother's understanding. My mother Brein'eh הי"ד who was thoroughly suffused with much common sense, and seemingly inexhaustible energy, and to whose words all people would pay careful attention, respecting her wisdom and strong will – understood my father very well. In a

very quiet way, she would 'pave the way' for him, and save him energy and work. She made time for him to study. Also, my brother Yaakov, who was from my mother's first marriage, always demonstrated great respect for my father, even though he, himself, was not observant.

The marriage of my parents at first looked (or so I imagine was the case) to be rather bizarre: on the one side, a very religious father, a Rabbi and a *Gaon*, that literally bubbles over with Torah, and on the other side – my mother, an enlightened person, already more or less a modern woman, who in the year 1905, played an important role among the *shtetl* Jewish-revolutionary circles of the *Bund*, thanks to her considerable oratory talents. But it worked out very well, and a mutual love and understanding took hold between them. My mother, who approaching her second marriage, was already religiously inclined, understood and responded to my father's requirements. She did it with love, perhaps more than out of conviction, as well as out of an understanding for his wishes. And had my father had accepted a Rabbinical post, my mother, who had a swift capacity to orient herself, and a sharp mind, with the ability to render help to people in times of need, would have had great value in the role of being a *Rebbetzin*.

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My father's greatness goes beyond his brilliance in Talmud, and also lay in his deeper grasp of global politics. It sounds, perhaps, not believable, but those who knew him, remember very well, he was in the habit of being able to predict events, that eventually came to pass. It was not only once that he pronouncements seemed to be unreal, but it did not take long for people to realize that he was right. And this was the case regardless if the issue had happy or tragic consequences.

My father excelled in his simplicity, giving no heed to the fact that his mind was always occupied with deep thoughts, he was nonetheless a very modest man. The 'common Jewish man' appealed to him, was always very near to his heart. Not once, did I note in the *Bet HaMedrash*, or even in the marketplace, how he would go up to a fellow Jew, and have a fraternal conversation with him. Also, on the Sabbath, he would not rarely go home accompanied by the *balebatim*, who didn't necessarily sit on the east side bench. He felt at home in their company, and he would 'long' to study a portion of the Pentateuch with them on a Friday night.

When I attempt, sometimes, to penetrate into my father's personality, I arrive at the conclusion, that it is indeed because of his great modesty and simplicity, that he did not take a position as a sitting Rabbi. His relationship to the 'year-around Jews' whom he met face-to-face more than previously, held him back from taking a rabbinical appointment, which could be transformed into a barrier between him and them.

From time to time, I think I am speaking to my father the martyr, who helps me traverse this uncertain and brutal world. I have the same feeling about my wise mother, who shields me from all injurious forces. I do recall, however, that both of them, like my four sisters, were killed by the Germans – yes, German, and not only Nazi – murderers. And exactly in the middle of writing these description, I received the sorrowful news, that the last of my father's brothers had passed away.

There were six of them: three brothers and three sisters. Five of them, including my father, were murdered by the Germans, and only one died a natural death in America.

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

A Few Chapters from My Memories

By Shmuel Shimonowicz

Page 328: (Left): Shimon Shimonowicz (Right): Leah Shimonowicz

Chapter A: Early Recollections

Memories, memories – of our dear little *shtetl* Belica, even though many years have flown by, they remain etched into my memory.

I remember the last year of The First World War. We never derived any good from the local gentiles, to whom the Russian soldiers came. The last of them remained in the forests, after the Czarist Russian military retreated from the Germans. These very soldiers organized themselves into groups of bandits, and with the help of the local peasants, fell upon the Jews from time-to-time, who would travel along the roads, robbing them, and some of the time, killing them.

In 1918, when the German forces had already become weakened, they also permitted themselves to assault the Jews in the towns, among them also Belica, where the killed and robbed several families. Later, when the Germans abandoned Belica, we organized a 'self-defense' unit together with the local gentiles, consisting of 30 Jews and 30 Christians. There was no enough arms for everyone, and according to this arrangement, we would use what little arms we had, to defend the *shtetl.*

I remember one Wednesday (which was the regular market day), a large group of bandits fell upon the town, together with the gentiles from the vicinity. We attempted to defend ourselves, despite the fact that we were small in number, and deficient in arms. However, in the end, we received an order to save ourselves. All the Jewish stores, on that day, were robbed, and 6-7 Jews were murdered.

Chapter B: Not Easy Under Polish Rule

Also, with regard to the successor Polish régime, we were not always secure regarding our lives. I recall, when on a certain early morning, the entire family of Shmuel-Nahum the Smith were found murdered in their own home. Despite this, which everyone knew, that the murderers were Poles, who were building the bridge over the Neman, the Polish authorities did not intervene in the slightest, in order to reveal and punish the murderers.

Despite the abuses of the Polish régime and the burdensome taxes, Belica managed to develop. A variety of institutions were created, which had no cause to be embarrassed in comparison with those of larger towns.

It is sufficient to recollect: the public school, where the largest part of the children studied; the fire-fighting brigade; and the brass instrument orchestra; the amateur group which put on theatrical productions (previously in the barn of David the Butcher, and later in the 'Serai' of the fire-fighters); the '*HeHalutz*' organization, thanks to whom, a part of the young people made aliyah to the Land of Israel; and many other institutions and organizations. All of this existed and continued to develop up to 1939, when the angry winds came from Germany, and we immediately began to feel this in our relationship to the local Christians. They immediately let us hear: 'Wait, wait, Hitler will come and put an end to you.' And, indeed, that is the way it happened.

Chapter C: World War II Arrives

Even earlier, in the years 1939-1941, when the Soviets were in the *shtetl*, we already had to withstand trouble visited upon us by our Christian neighbors. I was forced to flee to Lida, because in their eyes, I was a 'Bourgeois,' because I had previously owned a restaurant, and a shoe store. In Lida, I worked at carpentry, and when I would want to be with my family, I would come home at night, and travel back on that same night, in order that I not be seized and sent to Siberia. Yes, there was fear of the Soviets, but not a fear of death. the fear of death began on June 22, 1941 when the Germans began their assault against the Soviet Union. On that day, coming home, I found my oldest son readying himself to go off into Russia along with eighteen other young men. They made the distance of about 40 km to Mogilev, and there, a German landing troop was able already to apprehend them. Part of the young men with him were shot on the spot, but my son succeeded in coming back home, he had money and valuables in his possession, and he bribed the Byelorussian translator, who gave testimony that he was a Byelorussian.

Chapter D: Barely Escaping Alive

Page 330: *The Family of Meir Shimonowicz*

Many Jews, out of fear of the Germans, fled from Lida to Belica. They came penniless, without provisions, and it was necessary to help them. Ziss'l Kalmanowicz and I went out to collect food for them, and on our way, a German officer grabbed me, put me against the wall, where five Jews already stood. The officer ordered an additional six Jews to be brought (making the total twelve) and this is how we stood, with our hands up in the air, opposite a soldier with a machine gun, until the additional six Jews were brought. At that moment, Lejzor Freid'keh's had an impulse to flee, and the officer shot at him, but he escaped with a bullet in his back, and we had to wait while another Jew was brought.

At that point, a whole list of 'infractions' that we were accused of, were presented, that the Jews were guilty of, and we were asked what we had to say, because we were given three minutes to live. We asked that we be shot, however more quickly as possible. An order was immediately given: 'Fire!' and all twelve fell to the ground. I was not hit by any bullet, but I feigned death, the others screamed, and were fired upon once again, until they expired. This was on Saturday June 29, 1941.

When there was no one left at that place, I stood up, ran home, and then I saw that my house, along with other houses were burning. I went in through the fire into the house, and did not find anyone from my family. I went off to the cemetery, and hid there for the entire night. Before daybreak, I went off to a Christian of my acquaintance, and asked, if he knew where the Jews were, and he sent me to the Neman. In passing through Wygon, I encountered a Christian woman,. And when she saw me, she began to cross herself, and shouted: 'Jesus Maria! Szlomka, I saw with my own eyes how you were shot, how is it that you are here?'

I found my wife and children by the Neman, and we came back to the *shtetl.* In passing by the group of Jews that were killed, I told my wife how it was, by a miracle, that I had remained alive.

Chapter E: To the Zhetl Ghetto

As a group of Jews, we gathered together at the home of Noah-Abba Gapanowicz, there being: Israel Zlocowsky, Ziss'l Kalmanowicz, Hirsch'eh-Lejzor and Mot'keh Shimonowicz, Yehoshua Stotsky, Chaim Wiszniewsky, and others. We cried ourselves out, and took leave of one another without any hope that we would remain alive (and indeed, only very few did remain alive).

My family and I traveled off to the ghetto in Zhetl, where my brother's family also was to be found (seven people), and who were killed in The Second Great Slaughter. Also, my two sisters Hinde and Bayl'keh were in the Zhetl ghetto and were killed there.

All the residents of the ghetto were forced to go work outside the ghetto. I worked in a Christian school, where the young gentiles got food, which created an opportunity for me to bring a bit of food home. I would steal potatoes into my pockets, and in order to be able to take more, I made holes to allow the potatoes to get in deeper.

Chapter F: Plotting Escape

Page 332: *The Family of Benjamin Shimonowicz*

The youth in the ghetto prepared itself to resist the Germans. I knew this from my son, Moshe, who was a lock smith and was involved in provisioning arms. It was an organized group of young people, led by the President of the *Judenrat*, Dworecky, who later, indeed, was killed in the forest at the hands of Christian partisans. My son, Moshe, with a few other young men, were also killed in the same forest, two weeks later.

Chapter G: Into the Forest

During the last slaughter in the Zhetl ghetto, we hid ourselves in an underground hideaway. In this hideaway, along with us were: Lejzor Kreinowicz with his family, and son-in-law Tul'yeh with his family. The German

murderers, together with their Polish and Ukrainian accomplices, uncovered many such hideaways, threw grenades into them, and killed out the Jews. They came near our hideaway three times, but to our great good luck, failed to discover us.

At twelve o'clock at night, I said that we must flee, but my wife attempted to restrain me, saying, that the drunken murderers are wandering about, and they will catch us. I had already seen death before my eyes, and therefore I said: better to fall from a bullet while escaping, than getting shot in a pit.

We fled to the Zachepichi Forest. It was the summer of 1942. Nothing was growing on the fields, and we would go to the villages to beg for bread. The gentiles did not want to give us any, especially, in seeing as they stood by their window, that I am without arms. It was, indeed, very bitter, we did not yet have any contact with partisans. Later, when we reached the Lipiczany Forest, we encountered partisans, but they didn't want to take us along. They argued: 'First kill a German, and get a gun, then we will take you.' Later on, when we already had arms, and the arms assured us of sufficient bread, we were still uncertain about our lives.

Chapter H: Thirty Months to Liberation

During the thirty months that we were in the forests, many Jews died during the German assaults on the forests. In the final days before the liberation, we suffered hunger, because we were afraid to come out of the forest. I, along with a comrade, Mikhail Grodznik, decided to go to a peasant to obtain bread, and we had to traverse about 5 km in the middle of the forest, because it was dangerous to use the open road. We succeeded in reaching the peasant, who needed to prepare the bread, but on the way back we were spotted, and they began to fire at us. I ran into the corn, and Mikhail ran into the forest. He was captured and ordered to call to me. Lying in the corn, I heard how he was shouting: 'Shimonowicz, *Naszy*!' (Meaning 'Ours'). When he began to shout in Yiddish, I came out of the corn, and saw six Russians in front of me, and they began to question us to find out if we were not some sort of bandits. So I said to them, that we were partisans. One of the Russian officers said to the others, that we were Jews, and Jews are not bandits. I wept for joy, and he stroked me on the head and said: 'Do not cry, *Papa'cheh*, you are liberated; just be careful because of bandits that can still be found in these forests.

Chapter I: Anarchy in Post-War Belica

Along with my family, and a few other families that had remained alive, we returned to Belica, where all there was to be found were the local gentiles ans 'White Poles,' who caused us so much trouble in the forests. There was no organized authority in place in the *shtetl* yet, and it was dangerous to remain here, and indeed, others, out of fear, fled to Lida, and only I and one other family remained behind. A few weeks later, we received an order to enlist ourselves in the Soviet Army. My son, Shimon, voluntarily enlisted, and my son Hirsch was drafted into the Истребителний-Отрияд, meaning the 'Extermination Brigade' that would wipe out the Germans and bandits in the forest.

I was not mobilized, I left Belica and went to Lida. I received permission to travel out to Poland, and using the permission of my sons, we all crossed the Polish border, arriving in Lodz and immediately registered to go to The Land of Israel.

Chapter J: To DP Camps, and then – America

Page 335: *The Family of Shmuel Shimonowicz After the Liberation (1945)*

An entire group of Jews left Lodz, and they brought us to Austria, to the D.P. camp near Linz (Binder-Mikhl). They I encountered Israel Zlocowsky, and on the following day, he sent us off to Steier to open a new camp for 250 men. We all lived there like a single family. The administration of the camp was in the hands of former partisans, who had fought together in the forests.

May family and I moved from one camp to another several times, doing this until 1949, because we had registered to emigrate to America. I had the opportunity to get in contact with my brother Joel, who had lived in America since 1912, and he got the permission for us to come to America.

My brother Joel was greatly concerned for us, and after we came to America, he provided a residence for us, with furniture, and helped us until we were able to start earning a living and get ourselves on our own feet.

– Quite a few years have passed already, the children have all gotten married, and make a nice living. Also, thank God, I am not in a bad way. but all of this cannot wipe off the memories that have been brought out of those bitter days of the ghettoes and murders. For lo, these very memories, will bore into the memory, and clutch at the heart until the last day of life.

Poems of Suffering and Anger

By M. Savitzky

Page 337: *(Left): E.M. Savitzky* *(Right) Leah (Lila) Savitzky* ז"ל

A Candle of the Soul in Memory of My Only Little Daughter Mash'eleh,
Killed by the Nazis in 1942 in the Zhetl Ghetto

My Child's Cradle

Mounds of smoldering cinders
Mounds of blackened brick;
Once, years ago
I had a warm little home here.

And in this house stood
My only child's cradle;
On which the sun sent
Its mild rays from heaven.

Abandoned mounds, desolate
Mounds overgrown with wild grass;
Once here, we drank *L'Chaim*
Clinking one glass with another.

The glasses were full
With a sweet strong wine;
And from shining faces
A pale glow would emanate.

Mounds of discarded ash
Mounds of wrecked buildings;
Once cleaned so decently,
Always swept out so clean.

Plains clothed in greenery
Flowers around and about;
And people – busied themselves about,
Come enjoy our fragrance, come, come.

Not a shred remains,
Everyone went away – annihilated;
Like a wild nightmare-dream
Everything was ruined and obliterated.

The tiny grasses are no more,
The fragrant flowers are no longer;
Everything mired in deep sorrow,
In dumb silence.

The little house is no more,
The cradle is gone;
And no longer is heard
The mother's tender cradle song.

Only, from time-to-time,
One hears the sighing of the wind;
It demands, requires and asks:
For which and whose sin?

The Only Sin

Tell me, say, my child:
What does your transgression consist of, your sin?
Did you insult-embarrass someone?
Did you oppress-make someone anxious?
Tell me, say my child:
What does your transgression consist of, your sin?

Oh, no my Pa! Oh, no my Ma!
I did not insult-embarrass anyone
I oppressed-made anxious no one.
My one transgression, my one sin:
I am the child of the Jewish people.

The Old Man's Revenge

Oh! A black thick darkness
Who can find his way in you?
Only the heroic grandchildren of grandfathers
Took revenge in dark days...
Darkness diminishes and swallows small steps
A poor wanderer remains in his place.
The night has consumed the noisy roads
Sha! Quiet, there is no death, no sound, no word,
And there, on the other side of the Neman
Under the wing of darkness, the *shtetl* rests.
Each hut, each little house, each byway
A corpse laid out on the purification table.
The forest also stands sunken in sleep
Under a gray-bordered sky.
Only he, the broken Moshe-Leib
Lies restless in his house of earth.
He lies there, dreaming of new Gideons
Hearts burdened with the sacred fire of revenge

Drawn from stone by the dusty gate...
One two, one two, they tremble
Under the grown of the wintry earth.
With containers stoutly made in hand
With wooden kindling tied onto their backs.
They are moving to smash the enemies steel walls
To upset, interdict his intent.
And the old man lies until the middle of the night
He daydreams, dreams and thinks.
The first shot breaks the silence suddenly
And the old man begins to take stock.
His prayer, a pitiful one, a complaining one,
Poor words, a prayer saturated in bitter gall.
Extended echoing of heart-rending sighs
From a black-deep frozen wellspring.
Suddenly the second shot is heard
The old man senses this is the full measure.
His prayer and tone is changes
He begins anew with cutting words.
I don't beg, I demand, I require!
From You, because I am carrying Your holy banner.
O, Creator! I do not have to pray before You
I don't beg, I demand, I require!
I demand vengeance for my little child, the pure one
For those who had to wait for death.
For hearts congealed before death
For eyes extinguished while yet alive.
Vengeance for a hoary gray old age
A holy soul, a pure heart

For a grandchild pure and small
With well-formed limbs and a beautiful face.
Suddenly the old man's plea for vengeance is disrupted
There is a rustle in the nearby branches.
He quickly picks himself up from his earthen bed, and listens to the noise and movement.

Ahah! They are returning from their work
The heroic brethren of Gideon.
They, the carriers of the sabotage mines
Tell how a train flew off the rails.
The old man hugs them, and kisses them
A joy and a blessing from a our soul.
He casts his glance to God in the heavens:
We! We have taken revenge!...

(Written in the Forest, 1943)

War and the Extermination of Jews

By Chaim Yosselewicz

The bad premonition of a new World War had awakened in the beginning of the year 1939. The drive to seize and destroy Poland ripened in the Nazi-German régime shortly after the occupation of the Sudetenland (1938). Hitler and his government strove to rule all of Europe. Among the entire population of Poland, the feeling spread that any day, the war was going to break out, and was especially evident on the Jewish street.

Anti-Semitic outbreaks and abuses became daily occurrences. The economic condition and the morale of the Jews became more and more difficult, and life worsened in every respect. As was the case in other cities and towns, in Belica also, one could see the depression and sense of being beaten down.

The war broke out on September 1, 1939. the battles did not last very long. Within two weeks, the German army occupied half of Poland. The Soviets occupied western Byelorussia and the Western Ukraine. Belica fell into the zone occupied by the Soviets.

The Soviet authorities quickly installed their new order in the area, and nationalized all the larger businesses, factories and the estates of the nobility. The *balebatim* who owned the factories and businesses, as well as the nobility were arrested and exiled. Also, a part of the more prominent of the community activists also fell under the decree to be exiled.

In the long run, matters stabilized themselves under the new Soviet régime. We became accustomed to the new life, and things became 'rather good.' As equal citizens of the Soviet Union, many of the young people took to getting an education, and also occupied responsible positions. A part of them traveled off to other cities, in order to arrange to get work for themselves.

In the beginning of 1940, the terrifying news began to arrive about the plight of the Jews on the other side of the border, under German control. Thousands of Jewish refugees from Warsaw, Lodz, Krakow, and many other cities, which fell under the German régime, began to flow towards the Soviet-occupied areas. They brought with them, the frightening news of gruesome acts, ghettoes and forced labor. Literally, the mind was not capable of believing, that the Germans were actually doing such sadistic things as described by the refugees.

The diplomatic relations between Soviet Russia and Germany were sufficiently good until the beginning of 1941, and nothing [ominous] was yet anticipated for the future. It was first in the summer of 1941, that the politics was seen to be undergoing a change, and the Soviets began to build aerodromes and many other important defense points.

Not far from Belica, they also began to build an aerodrome. Everyone spoke about this project, and it was thought that once again, we were not too far off from a war.

The First Week of War

On Sunday, June 22, 1941 the terrifying news reached everyone about the sudden German attack against the Russian cities, and their bombardment. At that time, I was working at the aerodrome, and I was among the first to know about these events. The Soviet command knew about nothing. The panic became great, and everyone began to flee their place of work. By midday, the *shtetl* was on war-footing and the *shtetl* was under guard.

On Sunday night, a mobilization of those from 18 to 45 years of age was announced. Everyone assembled at the municipal building, and went off to Lida on foot. At that time, the bombardment of the city of Lida began, and the fire spread all over. The recruiting offices, and of the central city command, were destroyed, and half way there, everyone turned around and went back to the *shtetl.*

On that same Monday, from morning on, German airplanes came back again, and bombed Lida and the Neman Station (10 km from Belica). By midday, the entire city of Lida was engulfed in flames, and the smoke could be seen for tens of kilometers.

The incineration was frightening, there being both killed and heavily wounded already on that same day. The Jews of Lida began to flee *en masse*. Many refugees from Lida fled to Belica. Everyone's home was filled with those who had fled, and the Jews of Belica did everything for the refugees, that was possible. As long as there was anything, it was shared among everyone to the last, and everyone was taken in with great warmth.

The war continued at its full intensity, and the Germans began to draw near. The young people set themselves to flee with the retreating Russian army. From Belica, the young boys and girls got together who also went off (this was Monday evening). Among those who fled, were: R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz and son, Lejzor, Shimon Boczkowsky, Yankl Dziencelsky, and Rachel Belicki with Yankl Kremen. All of these reached Russia, but all the rest, who left later, were compelled to turn back half-way, because the Germans caught up with them at about Minsk.

The Red Army ran hungry, and barefoot without shoes. On Thursday, we received word that Grodno had been occupied, and we got ready for the imminent arrival of the Germans to where we were. The Christian residents (*Mieszczany*) of the *shtetl* immediately began to plunder the cooperative businesses, and the *shtetl* remained lawless. Before night, a couple of fleeing Soviet recruits barged in, who maintained a bit of order, and three of the robbers were shot (Ciechanowicz's two brothers and Burba).

The night of Thursday into Friday we heard shooting that was quite close by, and we braced for the arrival of the Germans. On Friday morning, rumors spread that spies are going around, and apparently an investigation had been launched here, and one is advised not to go outside into the streets. By Friday night, Zhaludok had been taken, and the fear gripped everyone and there was no place to hide one's self.

The Sabbath day dragged on like it was a year. At 3:00PM the first of the German advance scouting parties penetrated the town (two men on a motorcycle), coming from the direction of Zhaludok. About an hour later, the regular German army began to arrive in the shtetl, but in the meantime, a residual group of Soviet soldiers arrived from the aerodrome. The Soviets arrived from the opposite direction (from Vasiliski) and a great battle ensued. There was heavy gunfire, but after an hour, it got quiet. The Germans smote the Soviet soldiers and began to take to the Jewish residents. They began to burn houses, going from house to house and igniting them. The *Mieszczany* slandered the Rabbi to the Germans, saying that the Rabbi had fired on them from the *Bet HaMedrash*, and so they took the scrolls out of the Holy Ark and the volumes of the *Gemara,* and burned them. They blew up the *Bet HaMedrash* with dynamite. Whomever they caught, they shot on the spot. Eleven men fell at that time (most of them refugees from other cities), and among them the first Belica victim: Not'keh Baranchik (Azriel's son). The murderers shot him in the head, on the porch of his nephew, Mendl Fysh'eh's. In the shooting, Lejzor Gapanowicz was wounded in the foot, and was saved only by miracles. Jews, frightened by the great misfortune, began to flee the shtetl in the direction of the forest, or to the nearby villages.

Our family (together with that of Yoss'leh and his wife) fled in the direction of the nearby village of Kriwiecz, and there, we lay in a cornfield for the night. On the following morning – early Sunday, the owner of the field came to us (Wietuczka), and he told us about everything that had transpired in the *shtetl.* During the day, this Christian had gone into the shtetl, and coming back he related that the entire *shtetl* is burned down, but many Jews are going back. Our house had been burned down, and we decided that we would remain where we were for another couple of days, and see what will happen further. On Thursday, we returned to the *shtetl*, and went off to the family of Lejzor the *Shokhet* (their house remained after the fire). In the meantime, the *mieszczany* took control of the authority, and began to demonstrate how they were going to exercise it. The Belica Christian Antak Balabanski became the burgomaster of the town, and began to pepper the Jews with all sorts of decrees, with the police driving [the Jews] to hard labor on a daily basis, and beating them with murderous blows.

The S. S. Troops Rampage and Murder

When the special S. S. group arrived, all the men were driven together near the house of Chaim-Reuben Baranchik, and declared that from now on, Jews have no rights to move about freely, and each German soldier can do as he pleases with them, whatever his heart desires, every Jew must put on a white badge with a blue Star of David on the left arm. Among these men, was also the Rabbi of Belica, Rabbi R' Shabtai Fein ז"ל. The Germans told him that since the Jews of Belica had fired upon the German army from the *Bet HaMedrash*, they will be specially reckoned with at this time. Ten men were selected, the Rabbi among them, the pharmacist Wismonsky, etc. and told them to haul a wagon full of guns and radios to the village of Paracany where their headquarters were. The Rabbi and the pharmacist were harnessed to the wagon, and the rest pushed, and the murderers beat them without pause, the entire way. In Paracany, they read them a list of 'communists' that were being sought. Among the names was that of the pharmacist Wismonsky, Yankl Kremen, Zerakh Kremen, Meir Eizh'keh's. This group of ten Jewish men was held in Paracany, then they were all released to go home, broken and beaten, for several days.

Several days later, the same S. S. troops once again, burst into town, seized Chaim-Itcheh Kremen (Chaya-Sarah's son) and Fyv'eh Sotsky (the youngest son of Moshe-David) and ordered them to collect eggs

throughout the town. They were escorted under guard from house to house, and after collecting the eggs, the murderers led them off out of town, where they were killed (near the village of Nesilovtsy). After this event, the situation became very tense. Everyone trembled against the wall, and took care not to go outside in the street, because after the Paracany incident, it had been strictly prohibited for anyone to simply be going about outside in the streets without a white badge with the Star of David in it, and anyone caught this way would be shot immediately.

These same S. S. troops, again burst into the town one early morning, encircled the Jewish houses, drove all the men to the place opposite the Polish church, and beat everyone severely. My brother and I concealed ourselves in an attic, while the murderers were crawling about and sniffing out all the holes in order to drag out people who had concealed themselves. They found both of us, and threw me off the attic violently, and beat me with the rifle but and hard rubber truncheons, on my feet. I ran to the marketplace all bloodied, and found all of the men form the *shtetl* there, waiting for a judgement, many of them very severely beaten, such that blood flowed.

The murderers surrounded everyone with machine guns. We were certain that they were going to shoot us all. A half hour later, the commander arrived, and inspected everyone from top to bottom, and meted out murderous blows. The burgomaster (Balabanski) approached, bringing a li8st of the 'communists,' handing it over to the German, and he read out [the names of] fourteen men, among them Shimon Herzl's, the pharmacist Wismonsky, Meir Eizhik'eh's and a few others, who were again taken off to Paracany. There, they were taken into a barn, confined and held in arrest.

Of all the others that remained on the place, the older people were allowed to go home, and all the younger ones were placed in a line. The murderers began to uproot the boards from the fences, and used them as well as rubber truncheons, and they beat them nearly to death. This murderous detachment consisted of about 80 people, and every one of them had to run the gamut between people who beat them, who were arranged in two rows. The murderers hit people in the head in order to knock people out, and even when one already lay motionless on the ground, they would still rain down blows.

On Wednesday July 23, 1941, these same murderers again, in the morning, stole into the town, and began to rampage anew. Young and old alike began to flee into the nearby forests and fields, in order to hide from these marauders. The Polish nun, who was a nurse, Maria Liszycka, who was a virulent anti-Semite, incited these people against the Jews. The S.S. troops sat at her home for a half day, and drank, and she gave them encouragement to wipe out all the Jews of the *shtetl.* At about 2:00PM, they began to se3ize people to go to work. Whoever fell into their hands, were taken to the Russian Orthodox Church. The Rabbi was again arrested, and the pharmacist, and with them, a group of the intelligentsia. These murderers especially subjected the Rabbi and the pharmacist to the greatest tortures, both were ordered to wash a horse, and drink the waste water from the washing. Later, the Rabbi was tied to the horse, that ran speedily, and dragged him over the ground. After that, the hairs of the Rabbi's beard were pulled out one ant a time, and subjected him to painful tortures and suffering, until he expired from great pain.

On that day, 36 men were shot not far from the Russian Orthodox Church. The screams of the hapless, could be heard several kilometers away, and many of them were buried alive. Among those who were killed were: Yitzhak Kamenietsky, Shlomo Kremen, Itcheh the *Shammes*, Shef'teh Kaufman, Abraham-Hirsch Kaufman,

Zechariah-Shlomo Niegniewiecky, Yud'l-Ber'keh's Reisner, Yaakov-Tzin'keh's. Reuven Rothstein (a son-in-law to Faygl Sotsky), Iliutowicz (a songwriter, and son-in-law to Abraham-David Dobkowsky) and others. The *mieszczany* of the town later, buried them, on this same ground, but for weeks after this, the ground there was not steady because of the fresh blood.

The Expulsion of November 10, 1941

After that bloody day, decrees began to be heaped on those frightened Jews that remained in Belica. Only two Jews had the privilege of meeting withe the burgomaster Balabanski, and talk to him about meeting the terms of his decrees – Israel Zlocowsky and Eliyahu Sokolowsky. These two men invested their entire energy, health and lives in order to rescue the general community, but none of it helped. Every day, they drove people to the hardest labor, beating them, and taking away the last of whatever was of value that they might have still had. In this manner, several months of tribulation and torture went by, until a decree was issued that all the Jews of Belica must transfer to the larger cities, where ghettoes were being created. Belica was supposed to relocate to Lida, and the date of the expulsion from Belica was supposed to be in the first half of November, 1941.

Before the expulsion, the marauders levied a 'contribution' on the town of one-hundred fifty thousand rubles, and immediately gave warning and arrested 25 men as hostages. Israel Zlocowsky addressed this matter vigorously, and ran on foot to all the towns (Zhetl, Lida and Scucyn) until it worked out for him to accumulate the money and save the 25 lives.

On November 10, 1941 the expulsion from Belica took place. A special group of (S.S.) Murderers arrived that day, and violently drove everyone from their houses, beating everyone, and not permitting people to take anything along. On the following morning, there was not a single, solitary Jew to be found in the *shtetl* – the largest part having gone off to Zhetl, and the rest traveling off to Lida and Scucyn.

The *mieszczany* in Belica knew of the expulsion in advance, and provided requests to the area commissar in Lida, that the Jews were dangerous, and it was necessary to remove them as early as possible, in order that whatever assets were left behind would fall into their hands. The time of travel was circumscribed, and the *mieszczany* did not permit access to wagons from the villages to cart of belongings. They had to be rented, and there was a lot of trouble, until they were able to come to an understanding over the cost for the use of the wagon. They would tear the skin off us for every little thing, especially when the travel to any of the towns other than Lida, needed to be done stealthily. The burgomaster Balabanski took money and gold, to permit an earlier departure, so they would not be detained at the bridge over the Neman and that they would not be shot at. Thanks to Israel Zlocowsky and Yitzhak Krasnoselsky, all of this was made to happen, and everyone left and traveled through unmolested.

And so, it was in this manner that our family, together with others, left for Zhetl with the last bit of our poor possessions. My mother, at that time, already had a very bad premonition, and she said: 'All of us are leaving, but God knows how many of us will ever come back?' (We were deceived and told that we were going for only three months). The column of wagons dragged itself along for the entire night, along with the little but of junk and impoverished possessions, all of us following the wagons, broken, our hearts drenched in blood,

with no future, homeless people, going where? – to death! The residents of the villages along the road come out of their houses, they stare at us, part of them mourning us, but the larger part laughing at us: 'Zyds, the good times for you are over, now we will be able to live!'

We arrived in Zhetl at daybreak, our uncle Yoss'l having arrived earlier and he came out to greet us. We had no domicile, and temporarily we remained standing in the street. It was immediately communicated to the gendarmerie that a fresh load of Jews had arrived, and the gendarmes came running forthwith, to stop all of the wagons containing our things. Thanks to the fact that our mother spoke a good German, she began to plead fervently, and our wagons were released, and we took up residence with five other families together. Our family was very poor when we arrived in Zhetl, we had no money, and all our possessions had been burned. All we had was some food for a few weeks (potatoes, and flour for bread). After a short while, we began to feel want. Troubles began again. Every day, we were driven to hard labor.

In the Zhetl Ghetto

On February 2, 1942, it was on a Friday,[81] a decree arrived from the area commissar in Novogrudok about the creation of a ghetto in Zhetl. A fright and panic seized the entire populace. Everyone thought that simultaneously, a slaughter would take place, as had been the case in other cities and towns.

On the following day, the murderers surrounded the Jewish quarter, and drove everyone out of the houses. Also, all the Jews in the surrounding villages and towns were rounded up and driven into the ghetto. The territory of the ghetto encompassed the entire synagogue street, Lisagura and a part of the houses on the Slonim and Dvarec streets. Until evening, everyone was driven into this 'territory,' the ghetto was created, and the *Judenrat* and Jewish police took over control. A tall fence of board and barbed wire was constructed on all sides, and in the principal street, opposite the German gendarmerie, a large gate was erected. On one side of the gate stood a Byelorussian policeman (the ghetto constabulary) and on the other side stood a Jewish policeman from the ghetto. On leaving the ghetto, everyone was required to have a special work pass.

Each morning, the worker colonies would each go off to various working places through the ghetto gate, to the outside. A special guard of Germans would inspect the people, and control those leaving to assure they were not taking anything out. After this control, the groups would go through the gate, and the same process was repeated upon their return to the ghetto. The Christians had no right to come into the ghetto, and no Jew was permitted to get close to the boundary. Anyone caught outside the ghetto, without a pass, was shot on the spot. Within the ghetto proper, the *Judenrat* provided the authority to maintain order, under the direction of the Zhetl lawyer Alter Dworecky. Without a yellow Star of David on the left side of the breast and back, it was forbidden to even leave one's home to a neighbor (in instances when a German saw this, he had permission to shoot).

As soon as it began to get cold, every day, the people were driven to the hardest of labor. My brother and I were then young boys (13- 14 years old) and the Judenrat sent both of us with other youths to Navael'nja (in

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81 Not verified by the calendar.

the Zhetl area) to work in the train factory. The work was a very hard sort for those of our age, given the food intake of 120 grams of bread a day with a bit of watery soup, and we had to sleep out in the street in great fear, and we would work under the rubber truncheon for 12 hours a day, loading grain, and wood, or pulling stumps. It was not only once that we were murderously beaten, the S.S. trooper standing with a revolver in one hand, and a rubber truncheon in the other, driving us without any pause.

During the initial period, our father was not driven to forced labor, but later, as winter approached, when there was a shortage of workers, the older people had to go to do snow removal on the roads, where one had to work hard until late in the night. In a short time thereafter, collective stores were created for the tradespeople, where Jews works for no pay, and in fear of their enemies. Other craftsmen received jobs where they worked under special passes, and had more privileges granted to them by the Germans.

The Christians from the villages in the area had the right to place goods in the Jewish stores at no cost, but the more decent Christians would bring a gift for the work performed, and thereby made life much easier on the craftsmen. Other specialists, who would go to work, would take out a bit of clothing, selling it outside the ghetto, and upon returning, would bring back some sort of food. Those people who could not do this, suffered terribly from want and hunger. Rumors were heard in the ghetto that because of the good work done by the craftsmen, Zhetl was one of the best ghettoes in all of Byelorussia (the murderers were particularly pleased with the work of the shoemakers).

Very often, the gendarme-murderers would come from Novogrudok and Minsk, and demand that a variety of items be provided to them, which could not even be procured for money. Once, they ordered that 75 varieties of goods be provided, and the Judenrat ran from house to house and with the expenditure of a great deal of effort and energy, got all these items together.

With great bribery, my father got a job as an illegal worker in a brick factory, not far from the town. The work was very hard, digging loam, fabricating and transporting the molds, just like the Hebrews did in Egypt... despite this, we were fortunate, that we were able to work, since this might be a means to stay alive. People were left with one shirt to cover themselves, but this did not affect anyone, since everyone was more concerned with how to live through this terrible time.

Om March 23, 1942 and order arrived from Novogrudok that all the Jews must turn over all of their gold, silver and copper, valuables, watches and fur coats, and if anyone is found to have any of these items afterwards, they will be sentenced to death. Everyone brought whatever they had, in order to buy their way out of the decree, but the sum of the items turned over was a small one, and the murderers demanded even more. A woman from Zhetl (Liebeh the Baker) brought all of her assets, but during the inspection they found a little gold ring that was hidden away in a purse, and she was sentenced to death.

A new sewing machine was found in the possession of a Zhetl Jew (Krawiec) (it was strictly prohibited that a Jew should own such an item), and the *Judenrat* intervened, asking that the Jew be released, but nothing helped. The murderers shot him the same night of the inspection. Tens of such instances took place on a daily basis, always with the statement that the Jews had violated the laws of the German Reich. No mass slaughters had yet taken place in this interval of time, but one could begin to sense the blood-thirstiness for these gruesome acts.

The days were made bitter by fear, tribulation, suffering and hunger. We would be on guard entire nights, waiting while fully dressed. The situation in the ghetto became very tense, and everyone became hopeless. News circulated that not far away, in Horodec, a slaughter had already taken place, and afterwards in Kazlouscyna, and after that in Novogrudok, and here, the Zhetl ghetto is in line. Many thoughts run through the mind, chasing about: to hide one's self, to seek some counsel, maybe we will live through this? People were digging hideouts – we will hide ourselves, and maybe the murderers will not find us.

...Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die

On April 25, 1942 an order arrived at the *Judenrat* from the district commissariat from Novogrudok, that 800 men are to be provided, older men, women with children, who have no work skills. The leader of the *Judenrat*, Alter Dworecky, understood the danger in this order, which was nothing more than a provocation. A day later, the Germans let us know that they had captured a Jew with arms, who was going to the partisans. At the outset, it was thought that this too, was a provocation, but it showed itself to be, indeed, correct. A Jew had been seized outside of the ghetto without yellow badges, this was the young man, Sholom Fialon, a refugee from Poland, who, during the time of the Soviets, had taken up residence in Zhetl. He was a liaison for the Jewish underground movement, which had developed a plan to lead out the entire ghetto into the forest to the partisans.

Alter Dworecky belonged to the underground movement, and indeed, after the incident with Sholom (with a group of youths all of whom were armed) fled to the forest. The murderers demanded that he turn himself in, and they looked for him all over, for an entire day, but did not succeed in finding him. In the evening, the murderers declared that if Dworecky is not found, there will be frightening consequences in the ghetto. Late in the night, when he did not present himself, the murderers arrested the remaining members of the *Judenrat*, and murdered them. They permitted only one member of the Judenrat to remain alive – Alin'keh Fy'tcheh's, who had to reconstitute a new *Judenrat*.

On April 30, 1942, the ghetto was surrounded on all sides by a special guard of S.S. troops and Byelorussian police. On that night, nobody slept anymore, and everyone was fully dressed, Our family hid themselves in a hideout. There was considerable shooting for the entire night. On the following morning, as soon as the sun rose, it became quieter. In the ghetto, a movement of people began, and it appeared that the guard had been removed.

The Jewish ghetto-police went through the houses and called people to work. They entered our premises and called me to work in Navael'nja. I came out of the hideout, washed myself off, took something to eat, and took leave of my nearest. I understood very well that this matter would not go through this way, even though the guard around the ghetto had been removed. I went in the direction of the *Judenrat* office, and the policemen told me that the Germans are demanding only laborers. But half way, I perceived the calamity, and immediately wanted to run back. I saw many people near the Judenrat, as well as two rows of S.S. troops, and Byelorussian police. The murderers detained me, and led me into the *Judenrat*, and there, we encountered many people that we knew. All were concerned about this created situation. Nobody knew what was supposed to happen, some thought that some of the people will be taken as hostages, or to be shot for

the entire *shtetl.* All of us were kept under a strict watch, not even letting us out to take care of bodily functions.

The great calamity began at nine o'clock. The group of murderers, that was arrayed near the *Judenrat,* surrounded the ghetto. Part of them went off in the direction of the old cemetery, setting up posts there. They then began to drive people out of the houses to that place (on the cemetery). The group of workers, that were sitting in the *Judenrat,* were also brought here. The area filled up, and in these minutes they began to beat and torture. The tragedy became clear, and everyone understood the great calamity. There was no evident way to escape. For several consecutive hours, these unfortunates were driven to this place, until the entire cemetery was filled up. Then the Great Robber arrived, the area commissar, and we were ordered to array ourselves by family (husband, wife, children). We were told that now, that great criminal Fialon would be brought before us, and shot as an example to the others, then the entire assembly will be released, to go home. The reality was, that we understood this to be precisely the beginning of the sorting out of who would live and who would die.

The murderers looked into each person's eyes, to determine if that person was still capable of doing work for them. Whoever satisfied the murderer, was let go to live, and they pulled out of the row those whom they condemned to death. A part of the young people that had work permits, were set aside to the left, sent to live. After another couple of hours of sorting, when the number of those set aside for living had gotten large enough, all the rest were compelled to go to their death.

If you were not there, you cannot imagine the gruesome acts of atrocity that then ensued, when this colony of people began to be driven to their death. Tens of people were killed or trampled under the feet of the mob that had gone mad. Many people lost their minds right there, and did not know what was really happening. Out of terror, a blind man suddenly was able to see. The pandemonium became very great. The weeping and crying of the women and children could be heard for tens of kilometers. The heavens could have split open from the heartrending voices of the innocent young lives.

The murderers hit with their truncheons and rifles, and shot into the mass of people. Many older people, who could not follow the colony, were shot on the spot by the murderers. Before my eyes, they shot a young man (Gercowsky) who ran from the ranks of the 'living' to rescue his bride. Also, the elderly woman, who could not move, and an old blacksmith aged 96 years, who struggled against a policeman, were killed with sticks by the murderers.

I, personally, was sorted out by the murderers to live, but my family was sent to death. Several times, I ran from the 'living' back to my family, in order to either be saved with them or to die with them. I did not want to remain alive alone, and I went off with them to death.

The murderers said we were being taken to Navael'nja (not far from Zhetl) to work. The mass stretched in a long file in the direction of the Belica road. It looked terrifying, the living dead were walking, half crazy from torture and beating, with no means to save themselves, like sheep to the slaughter. Every three meters an S.S. trooper went along, and rained down murderous blows to the head with his rifle, in order that one fall, and be trampled by the feet of the others. My youngest brother Mott'leh ע"ה begged me: 'Let me be, I am

a small person, and I will flee and save myself, I want to live, and I do not want to go to the slaughter...' My mother comported herself well, and said: 'Break out a board from the fence, maybe it will enable him to save himself and he will remain alive.' I broke out a board from the surrounding barrier, and Mott'leh fled through the hole and he no longer returned to us.. A Byelorussian policeman observed this and began to beat me with a rifle butt on the head, and to drive me further on.

On the marketplace I noted the German who was my overseer at work in Navael'nja. I ran over to him and began to plead fervently with him, that he should save us. He recognized me, promised to do this, and asked 'do you have a family?' I became confused out of joy when he said 'you will remain alive.' I called to my family and he saved us all. With another group of people, who had been rescued from death, among them my lady neighbor Bronstein, we went, under his protection, back to the ghetto (he led us through a back street, in order that we not be observed).

The Mass Executions Beside the Pit

The mass that had been sentenced to death, went on further in that long echelon, accompanied by beating and shooting. People whom we knew, who saw us, said farewell to us from a distance for the last time. I heard their cries for a long time, and they became stronger when they approached the pit – three kilometers from the *shtetl*, on the way to Belica. Christians from the nearby villages had dug a pit the entire previous night, about fifty meters in length, four meters wide, and five meters high.

When the entire mass came close to the pit, the murderers ordered everyone to lie down on their stomachs, and not to dare lift up one's head. A thin wood separated the hapless from the place where the atrocities and mass murders were carried out.

The sun shone warmly, the day was like a midsummer's day, and the surrounding nature did not sense the great calamity. The murderers would count off up to 25 men, and in a group, they would lead them off to the other side of the wood. Beside the pit, each victim was required to take off their clothing till they were naked, and was then searched to make sure he did not have any gold in his possession, or anything else of value (they would extract gold teeth from anyone who had them). Each individual had to ascend a platform, and face the murderers, who would shoot at the hapless people with machine guns, the half-dead and wounded would then fall off the platform into the pit, and many would expire even before they were shot.

For the pitiful little ones, they did not want to waste bullets, and so they were thrown alive into the pit, or speared with the bayonet on a rifle. Of the onlookers who nevertheless were able to save themselves and returned from the pit, many of them lost their minds. The executions lasted for four hours, until the murderers sated themselves with Jewish blood, and more than one thousand unfortunate Jews were slaughtered in a few hours.

While this was going on, the Christians of the town were rampaging through the ghetto, having broken into Jewish homes and robbed them. The Byelorussian police shot into the ghetto from the other side and tens of people fell this way, who had saved themselves from the pit. Many corpses lay strewn in the streets, who could not be given a proper Jewish burial.

It became somewhat quieter at night. the Jewish ghetto police went through the houses, calling on people to come out to bury the dead, that lay strewn in the streets. I went off with other young men to do this work. My parents, with my younger little sister, remained at home broken, with hearts drowned in blood. (My older brother Moshe was in Navael'nja at work, and in this manner, avoided the calamity).

On my way, I went into the house of my uncle Yoss'l, to see what their situation was. Out of the entire house where five families lived, only the lady of the house had saved herself. She told me that her children had been killed in the slaughter and that our Yoss'l, along with his wife also were beside the pit. She did not know what happened to them. She does not even know how she became separated from her children. In the middle of this narrative, my uncle and his wife came into the house, both as pale as the wall, the living dead. An hysteria seized us all, and nobody could hold in their crying, because we had not believed we would ever see one another again.

I went off to the cemetery, and together with other young people, buried the dead. There, I became aware of a part of my acquaintances and close friends from Belica, who were killed on that day. Here, only fifteen names of families are given: 10 Shimon Novogrudsky (a son of Herzl), his wife Min'cheh, the daughters Bash'keh and Dob'keh; 2) Leib'keh Odzhikhowsky (a son of Ber'keh); 3) Dvora Galiansky (a daughter of Chay-Sarah); 4) R' Zalman Fleischer and son Velvel (Joch'eh's son); 5) Moshe Savitzky (son of Itcheh-Leib the carpenter); 6) Faygl Stotsky and her daughter Dob'eh (a daughter of Reuven Szamszka); Alta Milikowsky (a daughter of Itchkeh Min'keh's); 8) David-Leib Szeszko (a brother of Yehuda the floor maker) and wife; Yosh'keh Szeszko; 10) R' Lejzor the *Shokhet's* family (his wife, Chaya-Baylah, the oldest daughter Frum'keh, with her husband and little children, the two younger daughters Gitt'l and Dob'keh, the youngest son, David'keh); 11) Benjamin Green and family (from Husztat); 12) Hinde Leah'cheh's; 13) Chaim Baranchik and family (Lieb'keh's son, Yankl Tsin'keh's grandson); 14) Yeshaya-Moshe Kusielewicz (a son of Zalman Eliyahu); Luzer Shmulewicz.

Between One Slaughter and the Second

Inside the ghetto, people like skeletons walked about in the streets, and could not come to themselves after seeing these terrifying images, which stood before their eyes. In our hose, we strongly felt the absence of our youngest brother Mott'leh, since he stood before our eyes wherever we looked. The fear of death was so great, that we would not sleep for whole nights, remaining on our guard. Days stretched out interminably. The workers went back to work, and everyone wanted to excel at their work, in order to find favor with the murderers and thereby obtain the fortuitous pass permitting us to live. Many of the young people left work along the roads, and into the forests about 10 km from the *shtetl.* Upon their return, they would bring back news about the war, and about the organization of the escaped Russian prisoners into partisan groups. Nobody wanted to believe this, and it was not possible to discourse about this extensively either, so that, God forbid, it should not reach the murderers.

A few weeks later, we received information that on May 5, 1942 there a slaughter took place in Lida, and more than 4,500 Jews were killed there (my great-aunt Yenta and her family were killed at that time). In the ghetto, we were again plagued with fear and unease, and again, we began to seek counsel about how to

conceal ourselves. Many began to construct hideouts, while others began to plan how they would flee into the forest.

The larger part of the young people joined up with partisan groups, which had the objective of planning a flight from the ghetto into the forest during the time of a danger of a second slaughter. Everything was done is strict secrecy, with liaisons from the partisans coming into the ghetto bringing news from the front and from the underground movement. They would take along necessary items and medicaments and relate battles and clashes between the Germans and the partisans.

The gendarmes from Zhetl went off to launch an attack against the partisans, and then we began to believe that there really were partisans and that the news we were receiving was correct. The Germans encountered the partisans in a village not far from Dvarec where a battled ensued. Several Germans fell dead, and the murderer Grifinger of the Byelorussian police was severely wounded, and a Byelorussian policeman from Zhetl was also killed. The news of this immediately reached the ghetto, and we greatly feared the arrival of the day they would bury the plunderer. The members of the Judenrat went through all of the houses and gave strict orders not to be found in the streets on that day.

The day that we feared so much passed quietly, but a few days later, August 4, 1942, in the middle of the night, intense gunfire erupted in the ghetto. The panic became great, and we did not know what had happened, thinking that it is nothing other than a slaughter yet again. Many hid themselves in the hideouts, and stood watch all night, listening for every small sound. When the gunfire died down, we learned that partisans had entered the ghetto and shot at the gendarme posts. The Germans fled, and only later, did they return to search the ghetto, to find out who shot at them. The Byelorussian police shot at everyone, anyone who attempted to flee the ghetto. Among those attempting to flee, at that time, they killed a youth from Zhetl, and wounded a girl from Belica (Sarah Kremen, Israel Meiram's daughter). A Byelorussian policeman shot her in the stomach and after severe suffering, she died.

Many fled as far as Dvarec, and not far from the town, a group of young men and women hid themselves in a field of corn. Christians noticed them, and conveyed this to the police, who made a sweep of the field, and found them all. Very few had the opportunity to escape and save themselves, most having fallen into the hands of the murderers and they met a terrifying death. The following from Belica were killed: Moshe Shimonowicz, Ber'l Odzhikhowsky, (a son of Leib'eh Ber'keh's) Jonah'leh Leibowitz (a son of Chana Shy'keh's) and many other young men and women from Zhetl. The situation became very sorrowful, when the news about this reached the ghetto. Nobody any longer believed in staying alive, every day, we anticipated the arrival of a fresh calamity, and that fresh calamity felt imminent.

The Liquidation of the Zhetl Ghetto

Page 358: (Left): Yenta Trotzky (Yosselewicz) & Husband (Right) Eliyahu Milikowsky

On August 6, 1942 (23 Av 5702) at 4:00AM, as it was just beginning to get light, the ghetto felt that today there would be a slaughter, and this time, Zhetl would be rendered '*Judenrein.*' The clanking of tanks and

vehicles woke up the sleeping populace, the murderers had arrived with all the military equipment that you might expect for the largest of battles. On the second side of the fence, the streets became full of the murderers: Germans, Latvians, Estonians, and Byelorussian police.

We dressed immediately and ran out into the street. The panic in the ghetto was terrifying, the cries and screams of the pale, frightened Jews, mixed in with the tumult of the plunderers. Everyone ran to the high fence in the ghetto, looking for a way to break through the blockade of the murderous S.S. troops and Byelorussian police. However, the murderers had surrounded the ghetto in such a way, that there remained no means or possibility to save one's self by fleeing into the forest, or even into the nearby fields. A group of young people (boys and girls) were able to get out of the ghetto proper, but there were fields around the town, through which it was not possible to pass alive. A frightening outburst of gunfire ensued, aimed at those fleeing, and in this way the lives of tens of them were cut down, young boys and girls, the finest budding youth of the ghetto.

The murderers did not enter the ghetto until nine o'clock, and only shot through the barrier. With the moment that the order arrived, the murderers broke down the barrier, and like wild beasts, they forced their way into the Jewish houses and drove everyone to the marketplace.

On the marketplace, the murderers sorted out 225 craftsmen to be sent to the labor camp in Novogrudok. Another couple of hundred men (mostly young, strong boys) were set to dig trenches at the front beyond Smolensk and Vitebsk (the larger part of them died there later from cold and hunger). All the rest of the Jews were driven in long rows to the Zhetl cemetery outside the town, on the road to Belica and there they were shot in groups and thrown into deep pits. This was the way the first day of the slaughter ended.

In the ensuing days, the murderers sought out Jews who had hidden themselves in hideouts, extracted them one at a time from houses, took them off to the cinema building and then took them in groups, by auto, to the cemetery, and there they shot them. During the course of seven days, the murderers emptied out the ghetto. They left only one female Jewish dentist and three other people with special skills, whom they needed for their purposes. During these seven days, the houses were robbed by the Christian mobs that had run wild, which fell upon them like bees on the remaining wretched belongings that were still there.

Beside the Extermination Pits

By Joseph Fleischer

A. Decrees and Extermination in Belica

When Hitler's bestial murderers entered the *shtetl,* they immediately burned our houses. Only a few houses remained on the Netzana side street, and it was there that all of the residents of the *shtetl* gathered themselves. the crowding immediately became very great, because tens of people had to live in each little home. It was in this fashion that the 'Jewish ghetto' in our town came into being.

A few days later, a punitive command arrived. They drove all the men together at the horse marketplace, ordered that they arrange themselves in two rows, and then the leader of the murderers, Goldmann, informed us that we Jews no longer had any human or ownership rights.

They took the Rabbi out of the rows, and a few other men, and they were hitched to a wagon. Several of the murderers sat themselves in the wagon, and the Jews were compelled to pull them to Paracany, 8 km from Belica. A great panic broke out in the *shtetl*, and everyone felt that sorrowful days were coming to settle on us Jews.

Several days later, a band of Nazis arrived again. On a Sunday, before daybreak, these [Nazis] again drove all of the men together on the place opposite the Roman Catholic church. On that same day, other German murderers shot all the Jewish men at the Neman Station. As we were later told by our *mieszczany*, they had pleaded for our lives that day with the Germans. However, the murderers did not release us entirely. In a rampage, they broke up the fence around the Polish school, and arranged themselves in two rows. Each of us had to run between the rows, and the dissolute killers beat us murderously.

A few days passed, and again, a band of plunderers arrived in the *shtetl*. This time, our *mieszczany* received them with gladness, and got them good and drunk. The drunken Nazis let themselves loose to seize Jews. On that dark day, they seized the first thirty-six men, among whom were the Rabbi and the finest *balebatim* of the *shtetl*. These 36 Jews were subjected to various forms of torture, and in the end, they were forced to dig a pit, in which they were all shot.

After this tragic event, the men stopped sleeping in their houses, rather they lay hidden in the fields surrounding the town. Also, in the few remaining houses, they began to make hideouts, thinking that this would save us from their murdering hands.

But very quickly we saw that the Germans were not going to let us remain in the *shtetl*. The larger portion of us quietly fled to the surrounding cities.

The Polish burgomaster of the town (Balabanski) carried the news to the German authorities in Lida, that the Belica Jews are moving out, without any order from the authorities. As a result we, indeed, received an order, to provide 25 men for work. Seeing that it was already difficult to gather 25 men in the *shtetl*, there were women who were included in this group of 25.

When we presented ourselves for work, we were suddenly surrounded by the Polish police. The burgomaster read an order from the German command in Lida, that the Jews of Belica must donate a contribution of 150 thousand marks as a punishment for abandoning the town without an order from the authorities. In the end, he added: if this sum will not be provided at the end of five days, all of you will be shot. We were all locked up and the police posted a guard at the building.

A hue and cry went up immediately from the women and children. We began to look for means to put the money together, because from the first day of their arrival, the German murderers burned the *shtetl* and the larger part of the residents were left with nothing. It was decided to send emissaries to the surrounding cities to ask for help. Ziss'l Kalmanowicz traveled to Lida, and a second person[82] traveled to Zhetl. A few days later, an elderly diminutive, little Jewish man came from Zhetl, R' Israel-Lejzor and brought money. At that point we no longer needed the money, because with our own effort, we were able to come up with the money, and the hostages were set free.

B. The First Slaughter in Zhetl

Page 362: *(Top)* *Mordechai Fleischer & Wife*
(Bottom) (Left): *Rachel Fleischer & Rachel Shelyuvsky* *(Right): Zalman Fleischer*

Page 364: *Rachel Liebeh Fleischer and Her Little Son*

A short time after this incident, an order arrived that we had to leave our *shtetl*. We took leave of our homey *shtetl* with bitter hearts, and from that time on, our dear little *shtetl* remained '*Judenrein*.'

We parted from one another, and dispersed in all directions: some went to Lida, and some to other towns, the majority having gone to Zhetl. In the winter of 1941-1942 we resided in the Zhetl ghetto, and from time-to-time we got news that the Jews in the surrounding towns were all killed out. We got this news from the few who managed to save themselves from the towns where there had been a slaughter, and had managed to reach Zhetl.

On 13 Iyyar 5702 that being April 29, 1942, before dawn, we were driven out of the houses and assembled us on the old Zhetl cemetery. there, we were ordered to array ourselves by family, and then the murderers began to sort out who would live and who would die. The people became confused, and didn't know where

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82 From other narrative, this would appear to have been Israel Zlocowsky

to go. Then, the murderers began to shoot into the assembled Jews. Many people were shot and fell at that place.

I saw with my own eyes, how the murderers arrayed all of the handicapped people on the park area of the cemetery, and shot them from the rear.

Later, those of us sorted out for death, were driven away to the pits, which had already been prepared. Driving us out of the ghetto, I saw vehicles filled with the elderly, who were being taken to the pits. The cries of the elderly, to the heavens, was terrifying.

My wife and I, and our four young children, kept ourselves together at the pits. We were toled to lie down on the ground, face down. On arrival, I found there were already many people lying there like this. Lying like this, my wife and little children wept in fear, but my heart was hardened and no tear fell from my eyes. During these frightful moments, all I could think was that the pain of the bullets not be any greater. With my dried lips, I quietly whispered '*Shema Yisrael*' and thought of the World to Come.

Suddenly, my youngest child began to beg in a wailing cry: 'Mama, some food please.' The second whined: 'I am cold.' and the two older ones began to ask: 'Papa, when are they going to shoot us already?' I called out to my Rachel-Lieb'ehchkeh 'Do not cry my dear, you are frightening the children, and perhaps God will still take up our cause and yet help us out...' Near me lay David-Velvel from Zhetl, and he heard my words, and he spit in my face and said: 'Where is there a God, when Jews cry out '*Shema Yisrael*' and they are being shot?'

All at once, my wife stood up from the ground and said to me: 'come Joseph, I cannot bear to watch how they are shooting here, come, let us try to go.' I took one child in my hands, and she had the second child, while the two older ones held on to us and in this fashion we went off for about a hundred meters, and a miracle took place, that nobody stopped us. We went over to a place where the German murderers had sorted people out to live, or to die, (to live to the right, to die to the left). My wife and I fell before the Germans with a great outcry, and we began to plead: 'We are still young and skilled workers, let us live.' And again a miracle happened – my wife and I and our four children were sent to the right, to live. We met many people that we knew in this group, and also David-Velvel from Zhetl, the one who had previously spit in my face. We did not speak one to the other. He was ashamed to raise his eyes... I also encountered my sister Sarah'l and brother-in-law Niss'l with their children. When my sister spied me, she fainted away, and we were barely able to bring her around.

They detained us here for an entire day, until the killers were done with their murderous work.

I saw how Leib'eh Odzhikhowsky led his daughter Chaya-Baylah, who had been sorted to live, and he was sent to his death. When she was separated from her father, she flung herself to the ground and cried out: 'Papa, where have you gone away from me?' I saw many other frightful things on that terrifying day, and I can still hear the shooting off to the side, where the pits were located for those sorted out to die.

Before nightfall, those who had been sorted out to live, were led back into the ghetto. In the house, where I had lived with my entire family, I encountered my younger brother, Zalman, who had hidden himself in a cache. When he came out of the hideout, and did not find any of us, he broke out into a frightful weeping. People comforted him: 'Perhaps someone will yet return from the pits?' And indeed, this is what took place. We returned immediately, and for a short time, our joy was great.

Immediately, Israel-Meiram Kremen came into us in the house, and called us to come and bury the [murdered] handicapped and others, who had been shot at the cemetery. I immediately went and helped to gather up those who were killed, and gave them a proper Jewish burial. No matter how frightening this might seem to people who did not live through it, this is the way it was. We, meanwhile still alive, were envious of the dead, who at least were privileged to have been given a proper Jewish burial, because we, personally, were not at all certain that we would have the same 'privilege.'

After The First Great Slaughter, the German murderers ordered the *Judenrat* to shrink the ghetto, and made assurances that no more evil would befall the Jews in the Zhetl ghetto. Those who remained alive, were again driven to a variety of hard labor. Everyone went off to work with the hope that perhaps, after all, they will remain alive. However, deep in their heart they did not believe the assurances of the murderers, and this secure status did not carry on, so sorrowfully, for very long. In my conversations with my wife in those days, I would always say that I will no longer ever go to the pits.

Immediately news began to arrive from other cities and towns, that additional slaughtering had taken place there, and this time, the murderers had killed everyone and made those locations '*Judenrein.*'

Three added frightening months passed in this way, in the Zhetl ghetto, until our time came to die in Sanctification of the Name.

During those three months, I would get up very early, cry myself out thoroughly, and then go to the synagogue to say *Kaddish* for my father, who had been killed in the Lida ghetto, and for my brother Chaim, and his wife Min'cheh and for my sister Rachel, who had all been killed in the Scucyn ghetto.

C. Zhetl is '*Judenrein*'

Page 366: *The Family of Sarah (Fleischer) & Nissan Baranchik*

In the early morning of the last day in the Zhetl ghetto, I arose early, as usual, opened the door, and went out into the street. Suddenly, a Jewish policeman came running, and said to me: 'The ghetto is surrounded by Germans, today Zhetl will be emptied of its Jews.' I immediately opened the door and shouted inside: 'Rachel-Lieb'keh, get up, dress the children, the ghetto is surrounded,' and I myself ran to the ghetto gate.

On the way, I encountered many people already, who were also running to the ghetto gate. We immediately

began to break the gates, and the plunderers began to shoot. The tumult and pushing was frightful. Many people immediately fell dead, and a few broke through and fled. I, personally, ran for 3 km until I came to the forest and there waited for a day and night. On the following day, I sent a Christian of my acquaintance to Zhetl, so that he could bring me news of what was going on in the ghetto. He returned with the frightening news that everyone in the ghetto was being killed, and they are only going to let 170 of the young men, skilled for work, remain alive, who would be taken to the work camp at Novogrudok.

On receipt of this tragic news, I decided to go back, but not to Zhetl, where I had lost everyone, but back to my familiar home area in the Belica surroundings. Beaten, orphaned, and alone, I went off to try my luck in the forests around my hometown.

(Prepared for publication by E.M. Savitzky)

He Was Taken for Dead

By Shimon Baker

A Child that Survived the Nazi Ghetto and the Forest among Partisans – His Miraculous Rescue

(*Morgen-Zhurnal*, New York, 1961)

In the coming days, a very substantial and beautiful wedding will take place in one of the most famous aristocratic hotels on elegant Park Avenue in New York, of a 24 year-old man named Sanford May. Among his many *landsleit* from the Lida area, he is better known as Sender Mayewsky. He is marrying a 22 year-old gracious American-born Jewish girl, that Sender met a couple of years ago, at a New Year's celebration.

Among the *mekhutonim* that will attend this lavish wedding there will be two categories of guests: 'forest-people' meaning those that lived through the years of the frightful World War in the forests, after it was given to them to flee from the burning ghettoes, and – real 'Yankees.'

This will certainly be a wedding just like all other joyous Jewish occasions. A good time will be had by all, and the attendees will derive great pleasure. But e the center of attention of this festive occasion, the groom, is a finely built young man, somewhat above average height, with a pair of blue eyes, is one of a kind. The invited guests, who do not know his 'biography,' would certainly not guess that this young man has a 'past' that sounds nigh unbelievable.

As previously said, Sender is not more than 24 years old, but what he lived through for the first five years of his life, reflects the horror, torture and suffering of the Jewish people in occupied Europe during those blood years of extermination of The Second World War. He symbolizes the victory of the Jewish spirit over the enemies of the Jewish people.

The details about the childhood years of the groom, Sanford May, which are weighed down with so much tension and beating of the heart, were conveyed to me by his parents, Joseph and Dvora Maywesky. They live today in Flushing, and they came to America as refugees from a camp near Munich, Germany, in the year 1947. Joseph Mayewsky is now a builder, and is a scion of Belica near Lida, and his wife, from the Shmuckler family, who before they married, lived in the town of Iwje. A daughter (Masha) was born to them in America, who is now 14 years old.

The Mayewskys who ran an ironmongery on the market street in Belica, married in 1939, shortly before Hitler's Germany attacked Poland. A year later, Dvora gave birth to a son, who was named Sender. This was already in 1940, when the shtetl in which they lived – as a result of the German-Polish war – belonged, just like the rest of western Byelorussia did, to the Soviet Union.

Time passed, and June 22, 1941 arrived, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union. Joseph, Sender's father,

was mobilized for a short time by the Russians, but they discharged him literally a day before Hitler's airplanes flew over the Soviet cities. This alone shows that the Kremlin was not anticipating the German attack, believing the 'treaty-bound' Hitler, may his name be erased, and taking him at his word. Six days later, on June 28, there were Gestapo people to be found in the *shtetl*, arriving from the direction of Lida and Zhaludok. the Germans immediately burned down the marketplace in Belica, where approximately 130 Jewish families lived, among a population of Christians twice that number. Jewish assets were carried away in the smoke. But this did not suffice for the German murderers. To this, they levied a 'contribution' of 75,000 rubles on the local Jews, and in order to secure it, and assure that the Jews would come up with the money, the murderers took 40 hostages.

For the Belica Jews – burned out – this was an astronomical sum. But precisely on that same day, an elderly Jew from the town of Zhetl, he was named R' Israel Lejzor, brought 25 thousand rubles on foot to Belica, expressing his readiness to go back home and bring more money from the Jews of Zhetl, if it was needed. 'This was an act of exceptional devotion,' Joseph Mayewsky (May) told me. The distance from Zhetl to Belica was a walk of 20 versts.

Several months later, Belica became *Judenrein*, and the Jews who remained alive were transferred to the Zhetl ghetto, where the local Jews there shared their overcrowded accommodations with them, and with the last bit of food that they had.

The First Great Slaughter in the ghetto took place in the month of Iyyar in 1942. The Mayewsky family was able to save itself, thanks to being able to hide themselves in a double attic, that Joseph who knew carpentry, had prepared for them. However, things were different during The Second Great Slaughter, which commenced about three months later (23rd of Av) when the venerable and famous Jewish community in Zhetl was exterminated.

On the first day of the *aktion,* Joseph, Dvora and their two-year-old son Sender'l managed to survive in a pit, that Mayewsky had provided for in a side location. But as soon as it became clear that they were not going to get out of that place alive, they fled to the forest on that first night after the extermination, with their child in their arms. In fleeing, they saw dead bodies of their nearest and dearest before them, that were splayed all over the ghetto.

Coming to a small brook (a canal of sorts), they were so confused, that the couple and their child nearly drowned. Only by a miracle did they manage to get to the other side, reaching the forest, in Zachepichi, where in the dawn hours, they encountered other Jews from the shtetl, who had also fled the fire. 'We were deafened by the cries from the martyrs, which we could hear the entire way,' Mrs. Mayewsky told me, during the interview for the *Morgen-Zhurnal.*



The fate of the Jew was hard and bitter under German rule, whether it was in a ghetto or in the forest, or in a concentration camp. But it was even worse when it was necessary to carry around a two year-old child on

one's hands. A child is not aware of any tricks, and if it is hungry, or thirsty, it begins to scream and cry. and this was a time when every noise could precipitate a German assault, which would have eradicated whatever trace remained of the Jews.

While they were still in their own shtetl of Belica, the Mayewskys gave away their child to a Christian woman, Katya Lebiecka. But two days later, that woman regretted her decision, regarding the 'bargain.' She would have taken a little girl, she said, but not a little boy, which can be identified as a Jew. The Christian woman apologized for not wanting to put her life in danger. The truth is, that when they were still in the Zhetl ghetto, Sender'l already had a blond head of hair, and he already understood that he was not allowed to cry and not to speak loudly. However, upon arrival in the forest, where he suffered hunger, thirst and cold, he didn't know about any answers – the two year-old child cried.

His mother fed him with grass, but the little boy would throw up with blood. She worked at slaking his thirst, when he lay stretched out as if dead, with other means, but they also did not help. In the forest, people who knew them, distanced themselves from them, because they were afraid that the child, with his screaming would attract the attention of the Germans, or their Byelorussian or Polish informers. Being hidden in the caches in the forest, the Jews had to be wary not only of the Germans and their accomplices. Also the 'White Poles,' the so-called *Armia Krajowa*, which fought for Poland's independence, murdered Jews. The Vlasovites did the same, and even the partisans of the Soviet brigades were far from treating the Jews charitably.

Nevertheless, there were Jews that risked their lives and helped the Mayewskys with their little boy, by carrying him from one location to the next, when the Germans pursued them. Such dedication was shown by a young man named Velvel Kreinowicz ז"ל.

However, since father and mother thought that the war was lost, they approached a Christian that they knew, Sasha, in the village of Novoselki, requesting that he come into the forest at night and take the child with him, in order to hide him until the war was over. For this, as a price, they turned over everything they had in the way of valuables, that they had buried in the property of yet another gentile in a nearby village.

At night, Sasha came into the forest, with a large empty grain sack, into which he put Sender. Sasha tied up the sack with a thick rope, and threw it over his shoulder, being ready to return home.

'However, as soon as we saw Sasha beginning to rise and take his first step,' the tearful mother told me, when her husband was crying along with her, 'we began to tear at our own flesh, and Joseph began to shout, 'Sender was so difficult for me to come by, and I will not give him up so lightly.'

Upon hearing such words, the Christian became confused. He began to cross himself and said: 'I do not want to sin, God will punish me, because I have my own children, so here, take back your son.'

When the sack was untied, little Sender was lying glassy-eyed, with dried out lips, which desperately longed for a drink. Everyone thought that his little heart had stopped beating, and that it was over... but in a few minutes time, he again began to show signs of life.

All of a sudden, the parents realized that, in the forest, their child had no prospects of staying alive. So, again, they began to beg the peasant that he should take Sender with them. However, at this point, Sasha did not want to hear of it. 'Your weeping has broken my heart, and I will not take your child away from you,' he answered them.

Other efforts were made to find a way to get Sender out of the forest. Several times, it even occurred that he was 'suffocated' in order that he not cry out, when the Germans surrounded the sunken earth huts, but the child survived intact. It was his fate to survive the war in the Lipczanska '*Puszca*' and emerge intact. It was not only once that his parents saw him as being 'dead,' but it would not take long, and he would revive. He already knew that when the Germans were 'shooting' that he had to 'keep quiet.'

On a certain day in 1944, when Sender's father went off to a village to look for potatoes, and the child remained in the forest with his mother, the Germans suddenly attacked. The Jews from the surrounding 'pits' began to flee. At that moment, the little boy, with his mother at his side, went to Yaakov Molczadsky, who today lives in Toronto, and shouted to him: 'Dear Yankl, take us along, I want to live, take pity, don't leave me alone here with my mother, we will be killed here. I promise you that I will not cry.' Sender kept his word.

It also happened that the little boy would go about wrapped in rags, and one frosty day in the forest, he fell into a pool, and it was no simple job to pull him out alive. His mother recalls, that when Sender was stretched out on the rags, his skin also peeled off of him.



And what does Sender, or Sanford look like now? I saw him, when I met with his parents. He is a handsome young man with many fine attributes: he is refined, smart, intelligent and has a good sense of humor. Young women always pursued him, and he had a grace that can enchant those who converse with him.

The 24 year-old young man graduated from Queens College and is close to finishing his studies at 'Brooklyn Law School.' He has always been an outstanding student, and also works, in order that he can support himself, and not have to depend on his parents, who, by the way, live quite comfortably. He is independent, speaks Yiddish as if he had just yesterday arrived from Belica...

When I finished my conversation with Sender's parents, it was already one o'clock in the morning, and a deathly silence reigned in the street. For long minutes, I thought about the iron of this fate...

I thought of the nerve of the Bonn régime, that just twenty years after the end of the war, was ready to grant an amnesty to the German murderers of the Jewish people.

A Family that Survived

By Joseph Mayewsky

The Second Great Slaughter in Zhetl

Page 375: Rod'keh Mayewsky

Page 373: (From the Left): The Brothers, Lejzor & Joseph Mayewsky; Abraham Rudnick (Abir), Meir Zager

Very early, as soon as the sun rose, we heard a frightful tumult outside. The slaughter had begun, and it was already to late to flee.

Also, my wife and child had run outside through the lower window into the garden, where a hideout had been prepared. There was always water there, bread, and a candle, because our little child, Sender'keh, was afraid to sit in the dark.

The hideout, which had been made two months before, was well constructed with a special little concrete door. I had to be the last one to go inside, in order to be able to close the door in a way that it would not be detected. At that moment, a neighbor approached – Abraham'l from Kazlouscyna and asked to be let into the hideout. Despite the fact that there was no room, he also came in with us. We locked ourselves in, and remained quiet, sitting in the hideout. During the long hours we heard screaming. Suddenly we heard sounds coming close to the hideout.

The murderers looked into a nearby closet, and one even threw in a match after he had lit a cigarette. A lit match actually did fall into our hideout. We were certain, that a fire would start, and we will be burned up. Nobody could imagine that underneath was a hiding place and that living people were hiding there.

That day, we spent in the dark cellar, and as soon as it began to get dark, I decided that on this very night we must get away from here as quickly as possible, because the situation, come morning, will be worse: they will begin to search for the hidden people, as soon as they will have killed all the Jews in the houses. Abraham'l asked where we were planning to go. I answered that first, we have to run through the ghetto, and then we will see. Abraham'l went up and into his house in order to hear if his family was ready to go, and also to see if his friend, Ab'eh Wilika is still there. A quarter of an hour later, he came back with the news that the hideout is open and there is no one there.

The time was too short to make other plans. We immediately went off in the direction of the street. It was a quiet night, and all we heard was the tread of the murderous gendarmes, who were making their guard post rounds. While carrying the child in my arms, my wife and I, and also Abraham'l went past Schneider's hotel. We passed through the street – and reached the small river Kanarika without incident. There, we became confused, and instead of crossing the river to the other side, we went along its shore and reached the mill, where the water was deep. Abraham'l took note of this, and said that if we go this way, we will end up back

in the city, and fall into the hands of plunderers. We therefore went into the river, into the depth of its water, each of us holding onto the other by our hands. In this way, we came to the burial place that lead to Belica. Abraham'l preferred to go to his region – Kazlouscyna, where he had possessions stashed with a Christian and he was certain that they would hide him for the duration of the war. He also convinced us to go with him. I preferred to go in the direction of Belica, with the hope of yet being able to meet with members of my family. I had 250 rubles, and I shared the money with him. and we parted. He went off his way, and we went our way, in the direction of Belica.

Approaching the yard of Zikowszczina, we heard footsteps. We stood a still as stone. I thought about running into the nearby field of corn. However, the thought occurred to me that perhaps these were not Germans, because otherwise, they would have shot at us. When we got closer to those who were coming after us, we saw them to be Belica Jews, who had fled the ghetto. We were very happy to see them. The people were: Mul'yeh Shimonowicz with his wife and children, and also the children of Lejzor Kreinowicz: Velvel, Mash'keh and Faygl. They helped us carry our child for several kilometers.

At the village of Novoselki, Mul'yeh asked me where we were going. I told him that we were going to the Christian Koszko. Mul'yeh said to me, that he too was going to him, but he does not know, will he have enough room for everyone? Mul'yeh and his family went on further, and we arrived at Koszko's house and knocked at the window. He did not want to open up, and did not permit us to come in to his place. It vexed us sorely at that time, that we had to be parted from Mul'yeh's family.

It was left for us to go into the forest, closer to Belica. The first night, it was frightening to lie under the swaying trees. The echoes of the voices and screaming of the hapless victims in the ghetto, continued to reverberate in our ears, at the time they were thrown out of their houses, and dragged like animals to death. It was very cold at night, and we huddled one against the other. We were afraid to speak, in order that we not be overheard. The dried out twigs would snap and make noise whenever one took a step. Nevertheless, one felt more secure, because it was, after all, a forest, and during an attack, it would be possible to flee.

We awoke quite early, and hear footfall not far from us. Through the thick bushes, we saw people passing through, and we recognized the children of Chaim Reuven – Nach'keh and his sister Frad'keh with her husband, and brother Henokh. We were not certain of this, but still, we hoped that someone was still left alive. From this alone, our hearts became lighter. Several hours later, the following went by: Vikhn'eh, Chaim Reuven's wife, and Sarah'keh her daughter, and we were very happy with them. Now we were certain that those, who had previously gone by were Nach'keh and his family. We drew closer to them, and we obtained a greeting from those who had remained alive. They also told us, that their son, Henokh was wounded, when he fled the ghetto. He has to be carried, because the wound is in his foot. Vikhn'eh with Sarah'keh did not sit long with us. they were afraid that our child would start to cry.

Vikhn'eh said that she was thirsty, and would go to a Christian that she knew to get a bit of soup. I begged her not to go in the middle of the day, since Germans and Christians were in the vicinity, and they could seize her. She did not hear this, and went off. About 20 minutes later, she returned with a Christian. He was named Makhna and worked with the Germans. I said to her, 'What have you done? He will inform on us, and we will all be killed.' Vikhn'eh calmed us down, and said that he was a good, well-known friend of hers, and will not do us any harm. I gave him my last 150 rubles and asked him that he should not do anything to us, and take pity on the child.

The Christian went away, and an hour later, shooting started in the forest, over our heads. Our Sender'l became frightened, and began to cry intensely. And as soon as one tried to close his mouth, he would cry even harder. We suffocated him, and then the shooting also dies down. We decided to flee as fast as possible even deeper into the forest. In running this way, we encountered Yankl and Lejz'keh, Zalman-Joch'eh's sons, with their sister Chaya-Cherna. I begged them strongly that they should not abandon us, but to remain as one company. They were like God's emissaries for us, and indeed, we were together for the entire time. From that day on, the frightful life in the forest began for us, never knowing what a new morning would bring for us. We survived the forest for a bit under two years, with other Belica Jews who had remained alive.

My brother, David, and great-aunt and her daughter were killed in the Second Great Slaughter. My brother Shlomo and his wife Bash'keh and Faygl Ben-Zion's children were killed by a Christian, where they had hidden themselves.

My wife and I and my son, Sender, as well as my brother Lejzor with his wife Perl'eh survived living in the forest. The youngest brother Asher, survived the war as a soldier with the Russians. We all live in America, in New York.

In the Forest with Partisans

Kh. B. Shaziv

Zhetl is '*Judenrein*'

The mass-*aktion*, to exterminate all the hapless Jews of the ghetto, began early in the morning. The people awoke in the morning from the shooting and the murderous noise. The panic became great, an alarm, fleeing, with running back and forth and there is no place to hide. The yards and streets are full of men, women and children, all confused, and [still] sleepy. Frightened, everyone is pushing one another, with pale faces, to get nearer to the ghetto gate or the high barbed wire, looking for some way to run away from the slaughter.

Others attempt to break through the cordon of the thick guard, that had surrounded the ghetto, and flee into the forest, or into the corn of the nearby fields. a group of young people, boys and girls, broke through the cordon, but intense gunfire erupted in the direction of those fleeing, and tens of those young lives from the Zhetl ghetto fell.

The murderers did not enter the ghetto until nine o'clock, contenting themselves with shooting from the other side of the barrier. When they received the order to go in, they broke down the high barriers and burst through like wild animals into the Jewish houses. The murderers drove everyone to the marketplace, and there, they sorted out 220 craftsmen, among them 18 women, who were later sent off to Novogrudok in the labor camp. Another 100 men were sent to work in Smolensk and Vitebsk, where almost all of them died of hunger. all the remaining Jews were taken in a column to the Zhetl cemetery, where all of them were shot, a group at a time. This was the first day of the slaughter, and in the following days, they would seize people who had been in hideouts, bringing them to the cinema [building] convey them to the cemetery and shoot them there. In the course of seven days, the murderers made Zhetl '*Judenrein*,' but leaving one female dentist and three leather craftsmen.

Forty Souls in One Hideout

At the time that the slaughter commenced, the residents of the house went down into the cellar that had previously been prepared, and had previously provisioned in the event of a slaughter. The entrance into the hideout was from the yard, near the pen for a small white goat, the one asset in the ghetto, that provided suck for the infants. At the side of the entrance, a pipe had been built in to permit a little bit of air to get in that could be breathed, during the time it was necessary to sit there. The entrance to the cellar was external to the house, so that it would be possible to flee, if the entrance were to be discovered, or in the case that an incendiary bomb will ignite the house itself.

It was in this very cellar that forty souls crammed themselves in, but there was only room for twenty-five. The crowding was substantial, the air – dense, and the little children began to cry and scream. One little girl was immediately suffocated, not having any air to breath. Her parents, who also could not sustain themselves, went out, and hid themselves in the attic. The Christians, who were plundering the houses took not of them, and turned them over to the police, and they were shot on the spot. From the cellar, we heard the cries at the

time they were beaten, and thrown down from the attic to the ground. The murderers heard the cries coming from the hideout, and attempted to find the entrance.

It was so hot [and stifling] inside, that everyone had to undress to complete nakedness. No match could be kept lit in the stifling density of the air. The women would fall faint and there was not a drop of water with which to revive the4m. My father went deaf, and could not hear a word. A few days went by this way, and we could not see any possibility of saving ourselves, apart from remaining alive in this dark cellar. My brother and I would go outside each night, and bring back something to eat, and water, from the destroyed neighboring houses.

One day, before dawn, my father, brother and I went out to fetch water, because our mother was feeling bad. My brother went into the house, my father – for his need, along with me, went into a neighbor's house. There, I found water, and returning to the hideout, I saw my father standing in the gateway talking to a Byelorussian policeman. The policeman was asking him for documents, and ordered him to go with him to the cinema building. My father began to plead with him, and told him that he worked in a nearby factory, and promised to bring him a pair of boots. The murderer released my father, who immediately went off and brought my boots. The murderer took them and left, and it was already daylight outside, when the policeman turned back with the boots and called out: 'take your boots, they are too small.'

My brother overheard this, and he immediately entered the hideout and we closed ourselves in. Later on, a group of S.S. troops arrived, and sought the entrance to the cellar. They were not able to find it, and so they posted a special guard to watch over the cellar area, and find us. We were all seized with a terrible fright. We took counsel and decided that we would flee during the coming night. In the meantime, a woman from Belica went out (Malka Kremen) to bring back something for her child to eat. The guard detained her. She bought her way out of this for a little golden watch, and came back into the cellar.

There were five little children in the cellar, who decided that no matter what, they were going to leave that night. We discussed that, in the event that it will be still, meaning that the posted guard is not there, at that time, we all must leave, and rejoin at a previously designated spot outside of the town. We waited until midnight, and at that time, the five youngsters took a heartfelt leave of their families, hugging each other strongly, kissing and crying, as the heart was telling them this could be the last time they would see one another.

Five Young People Flee to the Forest

On the night of Monday, into Tuesday, August 11, 1942 after midnight, the five youngsters left the yard, and breathed the fresh summer air. the night was very still, and every move of the leaves in the trees was audible. After waiting for a few minutes, they quickly ran through the streets, and came to a garden, where they lay down and caught their breath. They then arose, and went off in the darkened gloom of the night, until they arrived at the barbed wire fence. One after another, they got through to the other side of the ghetto, tore off their yellow, bloodied badges, and quickly began getting away from the place. After ten minutes of walking, they found themselves already to be outside of the city, entered a corn field, and began to wait at the previously designated place. After waiting fro several hours, in strong impatience, it began to dawn. They

went off to the nearby woods, and spent the day there. At nightfall, they went off to a peasant that they knew. They entreated him strongly to go into the *shtetl*, and see what was going on.

On the following day, they sat in the same woods again, about 4 km from the *shtetl*. Suddenly, they heard the sound of machine gun fire, and they understood that an assault was taking place against Jews fleeing from the ghetto. Towards evening, the peasant returned from the *shtetl*, and related that he did not encounter any of the families in the cellar, and that they had all been captured, led off to the cinema building, from where they would be taken to the place of the slaughter. The five young people thought about going back into the city, on the hope that perhaps something will enable them to save their families. However, the Christian said that he was not really sure they would be held until tomorrow evening. He was almost certain that they would be taken to their deaths early the next morning. On that morning, he, again, went back into the town, and that night, they came to him yet again, to get news that they had been taken to their death on that day. The sole young person from Belica (Fyv'eh Lozowsky) in the group who had saved himself at that time, later told that my mother pleaded with the thieves, that they should at least release the youngest sister, and not send her to death., but nothing helped.

On August 17, 1942 the five young people arrived in the Ludichi Forest. At night, they would go out into the filed and pick potatoes, and procure a bit of bread from the peasants in the village. One time, they went out at night, and in a village not far from the forest, noted the presence of a group of Jews from Zhetl, who were going in the direction of the village. The Jews told of what was going on, and who had managed to save themselves, and were also to be found in the same forest, not far away. They also told that Chaim-Leib Boczkowsky was killed near the bridge of the village of Nesilovtsy, after he had ridden with the murderers into Belica, and shown them the place where he had hidden leather, despite the fact that they had promised him they would spare his life for doing so.

The five young people decided the leave the forest, and go to the forests around Belica, where they had peasants that they knew. One of them was well oriented to reading the stars, and because of this, they did not lose their way. By day, they would rest in the forest, and during the nights – they would go. During two nights, they reached the forests at Zachepichi, exhausted and frightened of the fear of death. On the third night, they arrived at the village of Koroli. Hunger oppressed them severely, and so they passed through gardens, tearing out vegetables to eat. On the morning, they came to the large forest, not far from the village of Zachepichi, and spent the day in that forest. As soon as it became dark, they decided to go to a known peasant at night, in the village of Korshaki and to ask for something to eat. Upon arriving, he brought out a bit of bread, and informed them that they should quickly flee, because he was even afraid to speak to them.

Not far from the end of the village of Zachepichi, they were suddenly noticed, and began shouting at them in Russian: 'Halt! Who goes there?' All of them remained standing out of great fear, thinking that these were surely Byelorussian policemen, who are hunting for Jews that have escaped from the ghetto. 'Let one of you approach us, while the others are to remain standing, without moving,' ordered their commander. The oldest of the five young people went off to them, and saw a group (of 18 men) all with guns in their hands, but not dressed like Byelorussian police. He told them who these five young people were, and then the commander called out: 'All of you come closer, and sit down, we are Russian partisans, and do not be afraid.'

The happiness was great, indescribable, literally having risen alive from the dead. That same night, the Jews

went off to the village of Novoselki, gathered up eggs, bread, butter, milk, and upon their return, build a large fire, and they cooked and fired. The partisans learned to love the few Jews. The commander would always say: 'Eat children, make sure you are full.'

After five days, a group of eleven partisans separated themselves off, and went east, to the front. The Jews strongly requested that they be taken along, but the commander said: 'We cannot take you along. for the time being, remain here, with the second group.' We had enough to eat, because we were secure with the partisans behind our backs, and so the Jews stayed with them. A couple of days later, the second group of seven men also left, and no pleading to be taken along was of any avail. They advised the group to get nearer to the Lipiczany Forest, where many partisans can be encountered. They told them to make a wooden gun, which will protect them from death and get them food.... they took their leave of their charges, left the remains of their food behind, and went away.

Two Young People Look for Their Father

On that same night, two of the young people took off in the direction of the Lipiczany Forest. Along the way, they would enter the homes of peasants and brandish their wooden guns, take food, ask for directions, and continue their journey. After several nights, they arrived at the forest, where there already were several Jewish families, living in huts made of branches or fabric. Also, a fighting brigade was beginning to be organized, made up of only Jewish partisans, under the leadership of Herschel Kaplinsky[83] of Zhetl. the brigade at that time, already stood at 150 men. The two young people from the group decided to join the ranks of this brigade, to exact vengeance on behalf of their nearest and dearest.

The question still stood: where can [real] guns be procured? One of the two went off to the Jews of the Dereczin camp, to buy arms there. Later on, both of the young men went to Zhetl Jews that they knew, to hear news about Jewish people, who had fled Zhetl, and are found in the Dvarec ghetto. At that time, it was told that two girls from Belica had arrived in the forest from the camps where there were Belica families. Belica Jews also began to organize themselves in the Zachepichi forests, not far from Belica. Because of this, these two young people went off to them in their brigade, and received a personal message from their father, and they were told that he is alive and can be found in the forest living alone, not far from the village of Bondary. Previously he had been their with his family, but now he is alone, with Christians he knew.

On that same night, these two young people left to the Zachepichi forest, to find out their father's situation, as well as to be with Jews from Belica. Two armed young men from Zhetl accompanied them, and they traveled for two nights, until they came to a house in the forest – the house of the peasant Szawel, who was a liaison for the Jews (his house was close to the huts of the Belica family groups). The peasant, despite the fact that he was very frightened by arms, did not want to, under any circumstances, tell anything about the Jews. He argued that he knows absolutely nothing. Before dawn, they forced their way into another house in the forest, but here too, the peasant refused to answer any questions about Jews. Only when the sun began to rise, did they observe a column of smoke – a sign of nearby huts. Following the smoke, that went off and reached the huts. Not far from the huts, they noticed Joseph Lozowsky. He brought them to the fire, where

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83 This Brigade is mentioned a number of times in the *Dereczin Memorial Book.*

the escaped remnants from Belica were concentrated, and told them about their father, that for the longer period of time, was to be found with the family of Chaim-Reuven, and later went off not far from Bondary, and is living there alone. Herzl-Zalman's indicated the direction – the way to go, and led them to the principal trail, which led to the village of Nesilovtsy, entering the first house of a peasant known to them, who led them across the rivulet Molczadka. They followed the trail that went in the direction of Bondary. That day, they remained sitting in the forest, and in the evening, when it became dark, they entered the village and went to a peasant they knew. He told them, that their father had come to him a couple of times and had taken bread, and he spent the night in the stable of a neighbor, but he does not know where in the forest he can be found. So they went into the neighbor, and he advised them to wait until nightfall, and perhaps their father would come for bread.

The night passed, but their father did not come. So they made an agreement with the peasant to meet in the forest, and together to search for him, according to the signs. They spent several hours reconnoitering the forest, calling and shouting, but nobody within earshot answered. The same happened for the second and third day. After a couple of weeks of searching, it began to rain heavily. The two young people huddled together, and sat on the cold, wet ground, and the rain fell on them, day and night. A couple of days later, it stopped raining, and they went back to the village, again to the same peasant, who had told them that he heard from the *mieszczany* in Belica, that their father can be found on the Neman River ferry. A week went by, and they did not find him on the ferry either, because when they finally arrived at night, the ferry had sailed to the other side of the river. On one occasion, before nightfall, when they approached the village, the previously mentioned peasant met them and told them that their father was now on the ferry. Breathlessly, they ran to the river, and arriving at the place, they saw many peasants and among them indeed – their father. Tears welled up in their eyes, but they did not dare to say anything for fear of the peasants, despite the fact that their hearts were full of so many things to say and tell during the two months that they had searched for their father.

In the Belica Huts

The father told his children what had happened after they had been captured in the cellar, in which they had hidden themselves, during the mass slaughter in the Zhetl ghetto. That Tuesday, a peasant stole the remaining things from their house, entered the pen, and took away the little goat, which stood on the door to the hideout. The peasant began to push on the entrance because it was ajar to let in some fresh air. He immediately went off to call the police. The murderers then uncovered the hideout, and led everyone out onto the yard, but he was able to hide himself under the wall of the house. One other Jew ran into the house with him, and both hid themselves, at the time that the murderers led everyone else off to the cinema, among them also our mother and youngest sister ע"ה.

On the second day, everyone was led out of the town, and shot (25 Av, in the year 1942). Hundreds of Jews were killed at that time, among them many from Belica: Yitzhak Kamenietsky's wife, Hasia, and little son Alinka; her sister Bayl'keh and son Chaim'keh; Chaya-Gitt'l Lozowsky and three children; Fyv'eh Savitzky's wife Dvora'keh and little daughter Leah'leh, and others.

He alone, our father continued to tell – remained hidden under the wall until the autos moved off, and then

he crawled up to the attic of a neighboring house where he hid himself behind a large mirror. When it became dark, Christian robbers came up to the attic. Fortunately, the robbers did not detect him, and went away. When it became fully dark, he came down from the attic, and went off in the direction of Belica. After two days walking, he came to the Zachepichi Forest. In the village of Zachepichi he met Nachman, who was glad to see him, and took him into his hut together with the family. However, he could not sit and eat their food, being unable to offer them anything in return. Cold nights began to arrive, and he had no clothing which to cover himself, so he decided to get closer to those peasants whom he knew, and was certain that they will help to sustain him. And it was in this manner that he got to the ferry, and there, alone, he managed to survive until they looked him up.

When their father had composed himself after relating his experience, it began to feel better, and the wound healed, all three decided to go back to the huts of the Belica group. At about midnight, they came to the rivulet Molczadka, the weather was already cold, and a minimal white frost covered the ground. There was no boat with which to cross the rivulet, and they had to undress and ford the river naked, in order to bring the boat from the other side for their father. The cold water cut through the skin like knives, and emerging from the other side, one shuddered from the cold, and one's feet burned from the frost. On the second side of the river, not far from the village of Nesilovtsy, they warmed themselves up a bit, dried themselves off, and went on further, until they reached the huts of the group. This was in a wood, not far from the shack of the peasant Szawel, near Mayek, surrounded by the fields of the village of Zbljany, on the banks of the Neman River. Wide meadows stretched out for kilometers along the banks of the Neman. The forests of Dubov and the woods of Bjarozauka.

The huts were concentrated in a thick wood, far from the road. They were made of earth of foliage from juniper trees. There was a fireplace beside each hut, where food was cooked, as well as warming one's cold extremities. Sleeping was on the ground, covered with a bit of straw.

Almost everyone who survived from Belica was found in this group, and everyone was happy with the arrival of three more Jews from Belica that had saved themselves, and began to build a hut for themselves where to lodge. Our father was lucky to be together with us, and not to wander about alone in the large forest. Day and night, we spoke and reminded ourselves of the bloody events, and there was not enough talk. When night came, all the young men got themselves up and went to the surrounding villages to peasants they knew, in order to procure foodstuffs and clothing.

When the rains and snows began to intensify, and it was no longer possible to live under the open sky, we began to build *zemlyankas.*[84] At the end of the year 1942, in a severe snowstorm, Fyv'eh Savitzky ע"ה found an appropriate place in the forest for this, where, in the space of three days, the first *zemlyanka* was completed. A small iron stove was procured from a peasant, for heat, and everyone would revive themselves with the ensuing warmth. In a short time, several additional families joined, and it became something of a *shtetl.*

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[84] Taking its name from the Russian word '*zemlya*' meaning 'earth,' these were partially sunken dwellings, dug out in the ground in the forest, and camouflaged from above with ground cover.

Very often, we would be joined by Jews that had saved themselves from the slaughter at Dvarec, among whom there were two girls from Belica, as well as Rachel Itzkowitz, Shmuel-Shimon Burstein (Shmuel-Shimon, the tailor's grandson), R' Yosh'eh Wolkowysky (Moshe 'Tzal'yeh-Leib's son), and Itcheh-Yankl the tailor's son-in-law. The girls eventually found their families and went off to them, but the three solitary men had no one to who they could cleave, and they built a *zemlyanka* for themselves. R' Yosh'eh knew many of the local peasants in the villages, and would help the two men who were with him.

On July 15, 1942[85], all three of them went to the village of Stoky to procure something to eat. At the time they were coming back, they entered the village of Zbljany, where on the same night a punitive brigade of Latvians came riding in. This guard detained them and asked who they were, and old Yosh'eh replied: We are locals, on your side. The murderers seized them and shot them on the spot. And the Christians buried them in the same place.

The Assault Begins

It didn't take long, and the news came that all of the nearby villages were occupied by Germans and Ukrainians. There was no place to run, because of the cold and the frost, but despite this, we were more secure here than in the ghetto, despite the fact that every day we waited for these bandits, and were also on our guard, listening in on, and watching all the roads around the forest.

On December 20, 1942 machine gun fire was heard nearby, not far from the *zemlyanka* of Chaim-Reuven's family. A great fright seized everyone. Still warm from sleep, everyone dressed quickly, and fled in all directions. The gunfire grew stronger, and when the voices of the feral murderers drew closer, we all went into a hideout, and remained sitting there for the entire day. In the evening, Nach'keh and his entire family, as well as all the others that fled, returned. We were missing: His mother, Vikhn'eh and Chaim Shiliowsky (A son of Velvel from Naharodavicy), who was killed. Nach'keh told how it happened: The murderers, who were using the road, noticed the white laundry that was drying on the little hill and this brought them to the *zemlyanka*; the wild shouting woke them up, and they succeeded in saving themselves; in the *zemlyanka,* only the elderly mother Vikhn'eh remained, and Chaim, who by then, had no time to flee, and they were shot in the *zemlyanka*; afterwards, the murderers threw an incendiary bomb into it.

That evening, after it had gotten good and dark, the cry of a child was heard from the forest. On getting closer, we found Rachel'eh Bayl'keh's (from Naharodavicy) lying on the cold ground, barely breathing. After she had eaten something, and got herself warmed up, she was taken off to her mother in the village of Koski, and there she hid out with a Christian who knew them (the miller of the village).

When the assault was in full swing, everyone took counsel and decided to go to the other side of the Neman, simply, because it was stiller there, and also because there were many peasants that were known on that side.

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[85] This date, given as 15.7.42 in the text, appears to be a misprint, since it is anachronistic to the rest of the narrative.

The following went off: Baruch Krasnoselsky ז"ל, Ber'l Stotsky, Fyv'eh and Luzer-Meir Savitzky[86], the wife of Sholom Krasnoselsky with two children, and Nach'keh Baranchik. We made a plan to meet every night in the *zemlyanka*, and before dawn, again to cross the Neman and spend the day in [relative] peace. The family described here, and the two Savitzky brothers, went off to a small wood, not far from Belica. The weather was wet, and on these nights, we stole into an empty house, or a nearby stable.

Belica Jews, who fled the forests, hungry and bare, told that the murderers had invaded the forest and wrecked everything there. They burned all of the surrounding villages, along with their inhabitants, and blew up the partisan camps and the huts of the Jewish groups – were burned. They killed many Jews, among whom was the Belica woman Rivka Kusielewicz (wife of Yud'l Zalman), as well as two Belica youths – Mendl Halpern (son of Israel-Abraham) and Israel-Itcheh Dziencelsky.

At the same time, many Jewish partisans arrived in the forest, who had lost their brigades, during the period of the assault, and among them were many from Belica young men and women. Exhausted, tired out by tribulations and fear, these heroic young fighters had been completely transformed.

One of them was the son of Vikhn'eh Baranchik, who had been killed, who was called Henokh, and was very impatient to exact vengeance upon the killers. In leaving the ghetto, he was wounded in his right foot, and took a long time to heal, in the difficult conditions of the forest, until he returned to health. He voluntarily went off to fight in a Jewish brigade, and came here with his group. He saved his own life in the forest. But it was fated that this hero would die a cruel death here. Hunger ravaged everyone severely, and the young people were compelled to go to the nearest village of Novoselki to look for something to eat. They had barely entered the village, when the peasants opened fire on them with bullets.

The entire group fled into the forest, but Henokh was hit by a bullet in the right eye. The cries of the dying hero were heard in the forest for many hours, and he died while in great pain. A night after this, his comrades buried him in the forest, not far from his mother's grave.

In those days, Baruch Krasnoselsky's sister-in-law Hen'keh was killed and died a horrible death, together with her two small children. They had come to the forest from the Dvarec ghetto, and lived together with Baruch in a *zemlyanka*, fleeing across the Neman. When the ice started to melt, Baruch, Hen'keh and the children crossed the Neman without incident, and sat in the bushes on the second side of the river. Upon their return, Hen'keh and the children went first, being careful in crossing the ice, and they managed to get across the river. Suddenly, the ice broke, and Baruch, who was bringing up the rear, began to sink in the cold water. He began to shout loudly, and Hen'keh ran to him, to save him, and the water dragged her in as well. The children became very frightened, and ran to help save their mother, and the roiled waters swallowed all three of them. Baruch battled death for a long time, until his hands became stiffened from the cold. Peasants from the nearby village heard his shouts, but nobody attempted to help. After a great deal of effort, he was able to grab hold of a hunk of ice, and he was able to pull himself out of the strong current. He ran to the forest (to Trytszych) where he warmed himself up and came to.

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86 Likely the Eliezer-Meir Savitzky, who appears very often in this volume.

In the Fight for Life

The assault continued, but remaining in this place was impossible. We still anticipated that the Germans will come back into the forests. They, the group, went back to the second side of the Neman, this time Nachman Baranchik went with them. They were dead-tired from wandering around, and also hungry. Despite this, they found the strength to drag themselves to the empty hut of Faramszczyk, which stood at the edge of the Neman, not far from Belica. The snow covered the ground all about, and they spent the night in the little shack. Nachman lit the oven, and they warmed themselves up a bit. Before dawn, they readied themselves to move on further, but later they decided that because it is entirely tranquil here, that it makes sense to spend several days here. Not a living thing appeared before their eyes. Everything around them was white from the snow. The clouded skies would instill a fear in the few lonely Jews.

But it was not possible to remain there for long, because it was very near to the shtetl, and the shack stood in a very exposed place and the forest – quite a distance away. After sitting there for three days, they decided to go back to their *zemlyanka*. At around midnight, they got back to the Neman. The ice was by now very weak, and they were afraid to cross.

But they arrived at a decision quickly. The first of them went across the weak ice with a staff in hand, tapping along the path and it was in this fashion that all the others that followed him successfully crossed the Neman. They dragged themselves back to their *zemlyanka* with the last of their energies.

The assault had ended, and in the beginning of February 1943, it was reasonably peaceful in the forest, and life went by [for what passed as] normally. The Belica residents who had arrived, began to construct *zemlyankas* and furnishing them. Everyone began to provision themselves with inventories of foodstuffs, in order that they be able to quietly sit in place, and ride out the intense winter. The cold got worse day by day. Snows and storms would cover the roads, and it was not possible to see anything in front of the eyes. The winter arrived in its full force. In such frightening and stormy nights, our Jews would risk their lives with great danger to themselves, dragging themselves torn and sundered over the roads, in order to get something to eat. They were cut off from the world. And death stalked them at every turn. But the will to live was even greater...

Among the Jews. who had come from the forest, were Lejzor Mosh'keh's with his youngest son, Moshe'l and daughter Masha. they built themselves a *zemlyanka*, and somehow got themselves settled. The rest of the family members were: the son, Velvel, and the younger daughter Faygl, they went off with another group of young people armed with munitions, over to the other side of the Neman, and 'put things in order' in the forests, not far from the village of Fal'kovichi. There, in that area, there were not any partisans yet, and the group managed to live there very well. On February 12, 1943, Velvel went off with additional comrades to visit his father, and along with them the young Belica boy Abraham Wolkowysky came along, (a son of Leib'keh-Yosh'keh's). Drawing near to the *shtetl*, it was quiet, and they were certain that there was nobody in the *shtetl*. They went off to the Polish nurse, Maria, who lived in the first house of the *shtetl*. The Christian lady received them in a fine manner, and they ate the evening meal at her place.

The neighbors noticed them, and immediately notified the Byelorussian police. The murderers came running

with autos, surrounded the house and began to shoot. The group immediately heard this, and they fled in all directions through a back door. Velvel and Abraham'l were the last to run out, and went in the direction of the fields, where there was a old smithy used by Zelig the blacksmith. They thought to find some protection there from the murderers. The night was a very bright one. Abraham'l shot himself out, and was able to flee from the murderous hands and save himself, while in contrast, Velvel lay in the deep snow, thinking, that perhaps the murderers had not noticed him. However, the peasants had indeed seen him, and they showed the police where to find him. The police shot in his direction for a long time, and came closer to the smithy. Velvel defended himself very heroically, and kept shooting until the last bullet. In this opportunity, he even was able to wound one of the attackers. The end was, that they surrounded him on all sides, and shot him in the stomach. He immediately died from the great pains. On the following morning, the *mieszczany* buried him in the Jewish cemetery.

Old Lejzor did not know about this for a long time. He would often go to the villages to procure foodstuffs, in order to be able, along with everyone else, get through this difficult time. Several days after Velvel's death, Lejzor and his youngest son, Moshe'leh went to the village of Zbljany for bread. On the way back, a heavy snow began to fall, and the two unfortunate people lost their way. They went into a culvert at the edge of the Neman in order to rest, and wait out the storm. Before dawn, when both were deeply asleep from exhaustion, it began to get very cold, and a frost descended. Old Lejzor felt nothing, as to how his feet had become frozen. The father and son dragged themselves through barely alive, for a half a day back into the4 forest, to their *zemlyanka*. Lejzor became severely ill, and they did not have the means to heal frozen feet. There was no doctor, and also no medicines with which to heal them.

With every day, his condition grew worse and worse, until the toes on his feet started to rot away. The man exerted himself mightily. His daughter Masha k"z, who later was also killed, did everything possible to save her father. The crowding and filth in the *zemlyanka* were great, and the sick man became severely weakened. The man suffered a great deal, until after two difficult months of illness and pain, he died. He was buried in the same place in the forest. ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

The Revenge Against the Killers

Life in the forest then continued as it had before. Every night, we would go to the villages to provision ourselves with foodstuffs. The partisan movement began to branch out anew, more than even before the assault. Many times, partisans would come to the forest, and there were many Jews among them. Time flew very quickly. The cold and the snows continued to hold on. At one time a group of partisans came into the forest from the Orlansky *Otryad*. Among them also, were a few young people from Belica. Remaining with us for a couple of days, the group decided that the time had come to settle accounts with our enemies, to exact revenge against the exterminators of the Jewish *shtetl* of Belica.

The group placed itself under the leadership of Y0oss'l Fleischer (the son of Itcheh the butcher), and there also were the Belica youths: Yankl Odzhikhowsky (son of El'tsik Shy'keh's) and Abraham Maggid (the son-in-law of R' Yaakov the cooper). As soon as it became dark, these men set off in the direction to Belica. They had come to Belica with the purpose of killing the gentile Garniak (he was a policeman working for the Germans, and derided the Jews considerably), as well as the peasant Koliesz, who killed the Szeszko

family. It was quiet in the shtetl, and the group quietly rode up to Garniak's home and surrounded the house. A few remained standing on guard, and the remainder went into the house and demanded the robber. As soon as he saw them, he hid himself in a hen coop. The partisans searched the entire house and found him in the coop. They were afraid to get close to the coop, because he could shoot, despite this, they dragged him out alive.

At that moment, he tore himself out of their hands, and quickly ran to the window, in order to be able to flee. The 'post' in the street fired off a round of machine gun fire, and Garniak fell dead on the spot. His family made a great tumult. The partisans paid no attention to this, and each of them put a round into the thief, up to one bullet per gun, and let him lay on the ground. The group confiscated everything that was in the house and let it be known that 'this was done as revenge for the spilled Jewish blood.'

The group left the house and went back into the forest. Along the way, they rode over to Koliesz's place, in order to do the same to him, as they did with Garniak. Koliesz lived 3 km form Belica. He had turned over the Belica Jew, Luzer-Chaim Szeszko (son of David Leib's), with his family, to the Germans to be killed Luzer-Chaim had given him all of his valuables, but Koliesz, 'the good friend' could not wait for the minute when he would be able to inherit everything of Luzer-Chaim's. The impatience of the Christian went so far, that, while still in the ghetto, he brought Luzer-Chaim poison and proposed that he should not wait until the Germans kill him, but rather he should take his own life. After the Second Great Slaughter in Zhetl, Luzer-Chaim and his family were able to save themselves and flee to their best 'friend' Koliesz, where they were supposed to hide out. Koliesz received them in a fine manner, and during the time they were asleep, exhausted and beaten down from fear, the murdering peasant used that moment and ran off to the Neman station and brought the Germans and Byelorussian police back with him. The hapless awakened to the blows, and in great fear, saw the murderers before their eyes. Koliesz stood near them, and responded with a satanic smile: 'It is enough for you to live well, now we will live.' Luzer-Chaim attempted to flee, and was shot while running, his wife and child were taken away to Belica, where they were shot out in the open near the Gmina, accompanied by enthusiastic hand-clapping and resounding laughter from the assembled crowd.

The Jewish partisans decided, therefore, to take revenge on Koliesz. The group took out all the valuables that he had robed from Jews, burned down his house, and took him along with them. The partisans dragged him on board the Zbljany ferry, over the Neman River, tied a stone to his neck, and submerged him several times in cold water. When they had thoroughly tired him out, the partisans let go of him into the water.

At the same time, a group of Jewish partisans carried out a punitive expedition against a peasant in the village of Savichi, not far from Zhetl. This very peasant had murdered a group of Jewish partisans, among whom there was also a young heroic man from Belica, Jonah Odzhikhowsky (Chaim Shy'keh's son). In the middle of a clear day, the group of partisans surrounded his house, took away his valuables, and broke the peasant's hands and feet, and later, they hung him on a fence.

This was the manner in which the young men of Belica took part in the war, carrying out punitive expeditions and taking revenge upon our enemies, and the murderous Byelorussians. After these events, the entire region trembled before the Jewish partisans, and the condition of the family groups became much better.

The Polish Christian, Mr. Bobrownik provided extraordinary assistance to the Belica Jews in the forest. He was the town *'Drożnik'* He was a true friend of the Jews. Seeing how his house stood at the edge of the Neman, apart from the *shtetl* proper, all the Jews would pass by him, and would help themselves from him. He put his own life in danger, and not mindful of this, he did everything he could, in order to help and lift spirits. His name must be remembered and mentioned among the Righteous Gentiles of the World.

Once Again Spring and Summer...

It did not take long, and the winter was past. Spring came rather quickly – then summer. All the surrounding towns were already *Judenrein.* Not a single Jew could be found in any sort of ghetto. The single ghetto that still existed in the entire area was in Lida. All the living Jews from the surrounding towns and villages were concentrated there. A special work camp was organized, that took the skilled Jews under its protection, good specialists and craftsmen. These people held special 'living permits' and worked for the Germans. The area commissar for Lida was not a great sadist, and helped the ghetto. The Jewish partisan group set itself the objective of creating an intimate connection with the Jews in Lida, and bring them, a little at a time, into the forest. The knew and understood that the good conditions in the camp could not persist for very long. Special liaisons (peasants) and emissaries were sent to carry out this mission. The Belica Jews Shlomo Jasinowsky (son of R' Yehoshua Jasinowsky), Yaakov Molczadsky (a grandson of Sarah the paper seller), and Michael Groznik (the oarsman) came to the forest to assess what life was like there. They made the decision to come a week later with their families. Returning to Lida with them were: Rachel Itzkowitz (the daughter of R' Yoss'l Shmuel's the miller)and Luzer-Meir Savitzky, with the goal of creating a larger group of people and bring all of them to the forest. Every day, the partisans would come to the Neman and wait for arriving groups, who were taken across with a boat. The situation had by them deteriorated because of the organization of the 'White Poles,' and the transit across the river became risky, because the 'Whites' concentrated themselves only in the villages along the Neman. They were a reactionary organization, and fought against the Soviet partisans, and against the Germans under the motto: 'For a Free Poland.' But there enmity towards the Jews was especially strong. When they would capture a Jew. they would torture him in all sorts of ways, and afterwards kill him. Their nest was in Belica, and it was very dangerous to show one's self in their area.

The Jewish group in the forest became significantly disturbed, hen after three days of waiting, its people had not yet returned from the ghetto. On the fourth day, the suddenly saw a group of people on the other side of the river, who according to the way they were walking and their appearance, looked like they were Jews. At that time, the following came: Israel Zlocowsky and family, Michael Groznik and his wife, and a few other Jews from Zhaludok and Dzjam'janaucy. Later on, Shlomo Kaplan also arrived, with his wife, Chaya-El'keh and children, and also Taib'eh and the children.

The Jewish group in the forest helped these people settle in. On that same day, huts were constructed, where they could live, and have a place where they could rest up after their arduous journey. After a week's time, they became 'forest denizens' and adapted themselves well to life in the forest. During this time, the 'White' Poles developed quite significantly, and we anticipated that at an opportune moment, they would fall upon the Jews in the forest. The peasants in the villages discussed this sort of thing very substantially. After Passover 1943, the decision was taken in the Jewish group to go off to a second forest.

Bloody Assaults Against the Jews in the Forest

The group went off to the Jacukia Forests on the second side of the small river Molczadka, and set up its camp there. The place selected as the point of residence was called Borki. Nachman Baranchik set himself up not far away, with his family. The place was very good, and was located in a very beautiful location. The forest surrounded the little river with green meadows, from which a fresh breeze constantly blew, with the scent of hay. It looked like a sanatorium location. The weather was very enjoyable, and the summer – at its peak of intensity.

Not far from this location was the house of the forest watchmen. at the home of the peasant Wytczyk Rafalowicz, and the center of the partisan diversionary brigade. The people were very good ones, and supported the group with whatever they could. They were arrivals from the other side of the front and had the mission to carry out diversionary actions in the far rear of the enemy. They called themselves the 'Muscovites' and held that this area was their region.

During several quiet months, the Jewish families that resided here would go visit the groups, who had remained in their old locations. They, too, did not have anything to complain about. Very often, the partisans (Muscovites) would come to the Jews and convey the latest news from the radio, relating important occurrences at the front, interesting events, and sing songs together by the fire. This is how the time was spent, until German punitive brigades came riding into the villages, which had the mission of assaulting the partisans and Jews, and to exterminate them. In the nearby village of Gezgaly, the murderers encountered a group of Muscovites. A bib battle ensued, and the shooting echoed throughout the forest. Everyone dressed quickly, and fled into a second forest. That day, the group spend quietly, and then towards evening, as soon as it became dark, two people went off to the village of Nesilovtsy and informed themselves about the situation at hand. They learned that the murderers had burned down several houses in the village, and rode back to Zhetl, and no victims fell from the ranks of the partisans. After several days, the group decided to abandon this place, and return to the Zachepichi forests, where there still were several Belica Jews.

The following Belica youths were in that same Muscovite brigade: Yaakov Kremen (R' Israel Meiram's son), Yaakov Zlocowsky י"ז (Israel Zlocowsky's son) and Abraham Wolkowysky, who supported the Belica groups considerably, and also kept them informed about previously anticipated, and other possible attacks.

The summer came to an end. It started to get colder, and it began to rain. The group had erected provisional huts in the new forest, beside those of Meir and his family, and Fyv'eh Savitzky and his group. In the meantime, Shmuel Swieticky and his wife Zivia joined up, and so we amounted to about ten people. To these, it is also necessary to add the children of Lejzor Mosh'keh's and their families. This location where we built, was not far from the road, and quite often it was possible to hear the sounds of people driving through nearby. Because of this, the group had to be extremely careful with loud speech, in order that they not be discovered. Reports were widespread about the arrival of Ukrainian police forces in Zhetl, with the objective of launching an assault campaign against the forests. At the end of the month of Tammuz, they cam into the villages. On the *Rosh Hodesh* of Elul 1943, they entered the forest. No sooner had dawn broken, when the sound of a barking dog could be heard, which woke everyone from their slumber. One quickly ran out to the road to see what was going on. He could not run back, because there was a host of murderers already

standing on the road. All he could do was give a hand signal, indicating we should flee. He, by himself attempted to hide himself under the branches of an old untended tree. The attackers ran right by him, in the direction towards the huts, and they did not notice him. Lying there like this, he got through the day, until it became dark.

At the time that the people of the group began to run into the hideout, one of the murderers, riding on a horse, noticed them, and began to shoot in their direction. Part went into the hideout, and part scattered fleeing into the forest. Those who remained inside, sealed themselves in with the door, and remained sitting there for the entire day. When the plunderer saw that there were people fleeing, he chased after them on his horse. The shooting became intense, and he flew past the hideout and went deep into the forest.

After several minutes of sitting in the hideout, the Jews calmed down a bit, and only then first noted that Tul'yeh was severely wounded in a foot, and a hand. He groaned considerably, and was in spasms. All the means at hand were used to try and save him, but nothing helped. After a half hour of severe suffering, he passed away.

As soon as it became dark, they came out of the hideout, and saw the ruin: the huts had been destroyed by mines, and no living soul could be seen... those who remained after the attack, went through the forest in search of other members of the group. A great fear seized them as they walked through the trampled forest. It was in this way that they came to the huts of Meir Eizhik'eh's group. Everything had been thrown about. The huts – burned. The ground all around was on fire. On the way back to the hideout, we suddenly saw a dead body splayed out on the ground. Shot in the head, with hands spread out, it lay in the middle of the road. This was Mash'keh (Masha Kreinowicz, Lejzor Mash'eh's daughter) from the group. The murderers had caught her alive, beat her to death with the butts of their rifles, and later – shot her in the head. Depressed, we those that remained alive, returned to our wrecked huts.

Coming back to the old place, we encountered Ber'l Savitzky and Shmuel Swieticky. All went back to the hideout, took out the people who were inside, and brought them to the fire. We sat sunk in our thoughts, and broken, by this fresh misfortune. In the still of the night, we again heard the barking of a dog, which frightened us a great deal.

Four of the group immediately went off and removed the dead body from the road. They took out Tul'yeh's dead body from the hideout, in order that both martyrs could be buried the next day. The night passed, and as soon as it became light, all those that remained, returned from their hiding places. They told about the events and also how they kept themselves alive. The men went off and brought the two freshly killed bodies to bury them. A little later, the entire group gathered in the forest at an old place, that we had occupied several months ago. It was only at that time, in looking about that we saw we were missing Faygl (Lejzor-Mash'eh's youngest daughter). A number of the group went off to look for her in the forest. They asked for her at all shepherds, and they promised that if they found her body, they will immediately let us know. After three days, she came back herself with a severe wound in a hand. She was suffering intense pain. Her cries and screaming were frightening. We began to try and heal her wounds with our meager means to do so. Several weeks went by, but Faygl returned to good health.

The High Holy Days drew near. It became colder, and in addition, heavy rain began to fall. Every day, reports reached the Jews in the forest about the 'Whites,' who had become strong, and had seized Belica.

The last, and only, ghetto in Lida was preparing for a mass slaughter, and there did not seem to be any way out, as to how the Jews in that place could be rescued. The situation grew worse from day-to-day. Shortly before *Rosh Hashana*, the order arrived to liquidate all the living Jews and make all of western Byelorussia *Judenrein.* On one day, they gathered up the few hapless Jews in Lida, and brought them to the station. There, they were crammed into filthy freight cars, the doors were nailed shut, and the windows covered in barbed wire, and sent away. Later, it became known that they were taken to the Majdanek concentration camp, where they were incinerated in the gas chambers. It was only very few individuals who were able to escape and save themselves. People came to the forest, among them were Mitia Poupko and family, Shmuel Iveniecky and Yaakov Molczadsky and his wife Frieda, from Lida. These very people leapt from the train cars, when the train was already moving at great speed. Many of the new arrivals were severely broken and ruined. Yaakov Molczadsky remained in the Belica group. All the rest went off to different groups. It was not possible to remain in this place for much longer, and we went off deeper into the forest, to a new location, and there, built new huts. Suddenly, we received further news that the 'Whites' were to be found in the village of Zbljany (about 3 km from the camp), and that they were going to cross the Neman, with the intent of falling upon the Jewish groups and exterminate them. It was too late to be able to flee, and the sole salvation was – ti hide one's self.

Exactly one day after Rosh Hashana, 3 Tishri of 1943, the bandits fell upon Meir-Eizhik'eh's group, who still had the opportunity to flee and hide themselves in a nearby grove of bushes. The only one they caught alive, was Fyv'eh Savitzky. He even was armed, but he did not have the time to use it and shoot back. The bandits led him off in the direction of the village of Zbljany, to the place where the old huts stood. They bet him severely there, and demanded that he reveal where the remaining Jews from Belica were found. Not willing to give up his remaining brothers, Fyv'eh led them off to the former huts, knowing fully well and being certain, that nobody was there.

Towards evening, when the shooting subsided, everyone came together in the old location. A few went off to find out what the other Jews might be able to tell them. Suddenly, El'chik-Shy'keh's youngest son came running, Joseph'keh, and related the frightful news that Fyv'eh lay dead in the forest. All the men immediately went off to retrieve him to be buried. He was found severely beaten about the head and face. His hands were twisted around and broken. Near his body, there lay large Dubov pine branches with which the bandits beat him to death, there being no sign of a bullet anywhere in his body.

Several men who brought him to be buried, stood by the freshly dug grave, of the first fallen hero, Fyv'eh Savitzky, enveloped in sorrow and pain.

A quiet keening resonated through the forest, when his brothers Luzer-Meir, to be separated for life, recited the *Kaddish.* His words, in the dark of the night, were mixed in with the rustling of the thick tree leaves.

Anti-Semites of All Kinds in the Forest

That night, the 'Whites' got themselves across the Neman, back to Zbljany. On the following morning, it was all quiet already in the forest. At about midday, partisans arrived from the forest, and brought news with them from the front, to the effect that the Soviets had garnered some very big victories. This meant that it will not be long, and we will again be able to emerge free from hiding. And despite the fact that the tragedy that had befallen Savitzky was still fresh, everyone was nevertheless elated by the good news. The Belica Jew David-Hirsch'l Meckel was with the partisans (son of Yankl the wagon driver). He was the 'quartermaster' for the brigade, and he had come here with the objective of obtaining provisions for the brigade. David-Hirsch'l was an older man already, about 63 years of age. He kept himself in good condition, and took part in battle and in acts of retribution. Towards nightfall, it was quite peaceful, and the group of armed partisans rode off to the village of Zachepichi where they had to procure their products. They spent two hours in the village, until they completed their mission, and traveled back into their forest.

Arriving at the village of Korshaki the group again encountered the 'Whites,' who had wrongly crossed the Neman. The bandits met them with a hail of fire, and the partisans were forced to flee in all directions into the forest, and hide themselves. It was very hard for David-Hirsch'l to run, at his age, and he hid himself in an empty pit used for storing potatoes, and remaining there, thinking that the bandits had not taken note of him, and he will be able to sit there until they went away. But the bandits did see him, and they ran in the direction of the pit, and on drawing closer, they opened a withering fire with machine guns. David-Hirsch'l defended himself heroically, until he fired the last shot from his gun. The murderers surrounded him on all sides and shot him in the head. The bandits let him lie on the ground. This tragedy occurred on 4 Tishri of the year 1943.

On that same night, several men from Belica rode off with the partisans, and they brought the body into the forest, where he was buried near the graves of Lejzor Mosh'keh's children. After this frightful attack, and the fresh misfortunes, the condition of group deteriorated seriously, especially with the arrival of winter.

Winter began to draw near, and it became hard to reside in the summer huts. The group again decided to go off to the other side of the Molczadka and spend the winter there. A good location was found in the Glushitse Forests, and a large and spacious *zemlyanka* was constructed. At the same time, we provided ourselves with the added security of a hideout in the event we were attacked by the 'White Poles,' or other murderers.

In the midst of this, a heavy snow began to fall. The younger people would drag themselves off to a nearby village on such dark and stormy nights, in order to gather up a bit of food, as well as other necessities. Coming into the village entailed risking one's life. Death stalked on all sides. It was necessary to be afraid of Germans, Byelorussian police, 'White' Poles, Ukrainians, and if this were not enough, also – from our 'own' Russian partisans of the Lida Brigade, who, as soon as they would grab a Jew, they would shoot him on the spot. One time, a member of the group came into the village of Bondary, for bread, and these very 'Lida' partisan-murderers seized him, took him to be a German spy, and wanted to shoot him. His good fortune lay in that a Jewish girl from Slonim, named Lyuba, who was the one Jewish person in the brigade, recognized him. She talked them out of dealing with him, thereby saving him from a certain death.

As soon as the first snow had fallen, sleds were made to reach to road from the *zemlyanka.* This led to a fresh tragedy. The 'White Poles' were waiting fro this. So did the bandits from the 'Lida Brigade.' This was so, because they were constantly on the watch fro ways to kill or eliminate the Jews hidden in the forest. It was already impossible to remain in the same place, and the group had to move off in the middle of the winter. Their good fortune lay in the group having received , a few days earlier, a letter from the Jewish hero and partisan Benjamin Baran *(Lamai-Fasuda)* in which he ordered them to leave that place as quickly as they could, because the bandits are massing themselves for an assault. On that very night, the group went off to the Koliesz Forests where the rest of the Belica groups could be found. In the prior location, in Osawiec, only Nachman Baranchik and his family remained in residence.

A couple of days later, the bandits indeed, fell upon their group. To their good fortune, they heard them arriving, and barely were able to flee for their lives. In the Koliesz forest, the group again attempted to construct temporary huts on the ground, to live in, until they could fully prepare a more roomy *zemlyanka.* The new *zemlyanka* was in the Hancary Forests, not far from the road that led to the village of Zachepichi. This location was not good, but no other choice was available to them. The winter was at its peak intensity. the freezing was very great, and the snows fell day and night. The objective that faced the group was: prepare to withstand the winter by gathering stocks of food. The group was supplemented by several additional armed men, and they felt much more secure in the event of an attack, and because of this, it became easier to procure bread and other foodstuffs in the villages.

Every night, the younger people would set out on the road, and bring wagon loads of potatoes, bread and flour from the villages. In two weeks time, the group has accumulated the required inventory of foodstuffs, needed to get through the winter. Following this, the people sat in place, and went nowhere. However, this respite did not last long. When the freezing began to abate, and the ice started to melt, the *zemlyanka* became flooded with water. It was necessary to start building a second *zemlyanka,* on higher ground, in order that it not be flooded by runoff. At first, there was a desire to locate it near the place where Israel Zlocowsky resided with his people, but in the end, the group went off deeper into the forest, and found a second place. As it turned out, Mitia Poupko and his family joined the group at this time. It took four days to construct the new *zemlyanka.* It was comfortable and spacious, but it turned out we could not stay here very long either.

A cohort of Vlasovite soldiers arrived in the villages (troops of the Russian general who had surrendered to the Germans with his army, and fought on their side against the Soviets). These so-called 'Vlasovites' carried out massive assaults against partisan centers and blocked off the villages in the area. They declared: 'Jews and partisans will be found even under the last stone, and they will be exterminated to the last one.'

At the beginning of January 1944, the Vlasovites fortified themselves in the villages, and every day, shot up the forests with cannon fire. It was impossible to go to the villages for produce, and there was no alternative means by which to leave the place.

The Vlasovites Blockade the Forests

At the beginning of the spring of 1944, the group went off to the Lipiczany Forest. The trip along that way posed a very frightful picture: several unfortunate Jews, broken, hungry and exhausted, dragged themselves

along with staffs in hand, over the narrow paths of the large forests. They barely got to their destination by morning: they arrived at a camp of Zhetl Jews, with their groups in the Dzjam'janaucy forests. The camp was indeed known as the 'Dzjam'janaucy Family Camp.' In the nearby forests there were yet other camps. Here, life was still rather 'normal.' Partisans from a variety of brigades would come here to rest themselves after long rides, and would eat and drink with the Jews, for which they would pay well.

The camp had the appearance of a small Jewish shtetl. The Jews, who had previously arrived from the Koliesz Forest, had already arranged for and constructed new *zemlyankas* for their use, in which to live. Ber'l Stotsky, the Poupko family and Molchadsky held themselves together.

The Vlasovite blockade began to spread out. Here, no one thought about it. Here, people felt secure because of the protection of the partisans. Several times, single individuals from the group went off, risking their lives, to the old zemlyanka in the Hancary Forest, and brought back remaining potatoes and flour on their backs. all of this was concealed in a hideout and it would be dragged this way for about 25-30 km.

We received news from the other side of the Neman, that the 'White Poles' are carrying out intense battles against the partisans and the jews. We expected that they were going to end up coming to our forest as well. On the other side of the rail line of the Naliboki Forest, there were large Russian partisan brigades, as well as a large Jewish brigade of 1200 persons, under the leadership of the heroic Tuvia Bielski.

From the news relayed by Soviet radio, we found out that the front was getting closer. We also felt this from the retreat of the Vlasovites. Every day, they would come from the east, and occupy the villages. They blockaded all the villages, and even single houses in the forest itself. The partisans were not afraid of this. They were now strong enough to mount resistance to the enemy. Every evening, Soviet aircraft would come flying over, from Moscow, and drop ammunition and paratroops to bolster the partisan movement in their diversionary campaign. The paratroops would come to the family camps, and relate news from the front. They carried out a large propaganda campaign in the villages, among the peasants. They gave them money and other things. Life in the 'little shtetl' of the 'Dzjam'janaucy Camp' continued to go on 'normally,' until the summer of 1944 arrived.

The Birth Pangs of Liberation

After the Vlasovites had managed to blockade almost to the last peasant house, they then launched 'their work.' They began to carry out a centralized assault in the forest, against the partisans.

On June 13, 1944 the Vlasovites entered the forests with tanks. A rigorous search of the partisan regions began. The noise of the tanks awoke the sleeping Jews in the camp. Everyone fled in all directions into the forest. There was no place where one could hide. During the first days, the partisan brigades mounted a big resistance and it spread out into a wider battle. After five days, the partisans had to relent, and the murderers captured the camps. The partisans retreated from their positions, and fled deeper into the forests.

Part of the Jewish camp hid themselves in the previously prepared hideouts. while others fled along with the retreating partisans. The Belica group got together and went 25 km deeper into the forests, in the direction of the city of Dereczin, to the Szczara River.

The murderers penetrated into the Jewish camp, and whomever they found, they immediately shot in their huts. On that day, there were immediately 11 victims. A group of 12 girls, who wanted to flee and hide themselves in the forest, were noticed. The murderers pursued them, and intentionally drove them toward the Neman River. Many of them ran straight into the water, not wishing to fall alive into the hands of the bandits. Seven of the girls drowned, and the remaining five were captured. They were taken to the jail in Zhetl, tortured for several days, and then burned on the Zhetl marketplace (according to what was told by the Byelorussian Christians).

The movement of the group to the Mockaly Forests was both difficult and dangerous. The murderers directed heavy gunfire at them, and drove them back into the fire. Shooting was going on all around them. The Vlasovites put all of the surrounding villages to the torch. The group dragged itself along for five hours, over roads and byways, until it came to a large forest, where it sat in order to rest.

Suddenly, a hail of gunfire descended on the group. The murderers had gone deeper into the forest. The swamps and bogs reached up to the neck. The murderers paid no attention to this, and crawled through the deep swamps sniffing out and seeking Jews and partisans. Proceeding in this fashion through the forest, they did, indeed, encounter Jewish groups. One time, they seized five Jewish partisans, including two girls, and shot them immediately. After sitting for three days in one location, the group suddenly noted people running by. Everyone became terribly frightened, thinking that these were certainly forward scouts for the Vlasovites, and that the murderers were already to be found not far from this place. But it immediately became clear that these were partisans, and we learned that their hidden brigade was stationed here. We were much gladdened by this. But, in the meantime, we began to suffer from another kind of trouble: the inventory of foodstuffs that the group had brought along with it, had run out in these few days, and we began to hunger. It was not possible to get out for any sum of money to procure something to eat. The little children and the older people suffered the most from this.

For several days, the partisans were already eating horsemeat. Also, the thought had arisen in the group, that since horses were blundering around in the forest, we needed to capture a horse and slaughter it. Two men went off and returned with a rather good-looking horse, and everyone immediately took to the work. It was quickly slaughtered, skinned, cut up, and then there was meat to eat. The neighboring hungry partisans fell upon this like a swarm of bees, and grabbed off pieces of meat into their pockets. In the evening, as soon as it got dark, we made a fire, and cooked the meat, then eating until we were full.

On June 20, 1944, before dawn, as soon as there was a bit of light, airplanes bombed the forest. We arrived at no other conclusion, other than the Germans were bombing the forests. Later, it became evident that it was the Soviets bombing the nearby cities. On that same morning, we fled deeper into the forest. At a certain moment, we encountered another group of Jews from Zhetl, who had hidden themselves in the same forest. However here, in the forest, and around it, great battles were being conducted between the Soviet army and the retreating Germans.

The two Jewish groups went even deeper into the forest. A day passed that lasted a long time, from nearby, we could hear the echoes of the voices of the murderers, and we were afraid that now, just before the liberation, that we should not fall into their murderous hands. It became dark, and we met up with yet another group of partisans, who gave us the latest news, that the Red Army was already in Baranovici. It is only in the forests that the assault continues at full force.

The Belica group turned back to its old location, and encountered many people that they knew from the forest, almost all of the brigades having concentrated themselves in these forests not far from the village of Mockaly. Meir (Eizhik's son) immediately went off there to procure something to eat.

The brigade commander granted permission to go to the nearby village of Mockaly to get potatoes from the peasants. Four men from the Belica group went with a small wagon, through the swamps and water, into the village. The peasants doled out potatoes a little at a time. On the return 'home' these four ran into a Russian partisan of the '*Krasno-Guardiesk Otryad*' – a big anti-Semite, and he beat them severely, took away the potatoes and threatened to shoot them, if they don't flee even faster into the village. The one piece of good luck that these four had was when the Jewish partisan, Jonah Medvedsky, who was together with him, took their part, and beseeched the anti-Semite not to do anything. The crazed peasant was not appeased, and he picked up a large board and delivered a hard blow to the hand, that caused it to turn black. Immediately thereafter, the Jews fled off in fear, through the corn, and returned to the forest. The drunkard could not console himself for permitting the *zhids* to remain alive, and shot after them. However, the bullets didn't hit anyone.

The way back was hard. The four men dragged themselves , wading through the swamps, that came up to the neck. After two hours of this, they came back to the camp exhausted. Hunger oppressed everyone strongly. Death threatened them on all sides. The partisans grouped themselves together and went off and the Jewish families begged fervently that they be given permission to go with them, but the Russians did not even want to hear of it. Seeing this, the group decided it would also not remain here, and set off on the way to the forest.

The way back into the forest was very frightening. We had to pass through the village of Ruda, where the Vlasovites were based. Day and night, they would shoot up the surrounding forests and light up the roads with [flare] rockets, in order to detect partisans trying to get through. But there was no other way out. At ten o'clock at night, the group emerged from the forest. The first ones out were the ones who carried arms. After them came the entire group.

After going for several kilometers, the people were overcome by great exhaustion. Every rustle of the leaves in the treas, would provoke fear. Here and there, we ran into the bodies of killed partisans, and horses – corpses – the victims of the Vlasovites. The untended older trees blocked the way, and tore up the feet. Everyone was bleeding, and the feet burned from the pain. As we approached the village of Ruda, all seemed still. the group needed to ford a brook. Everyone trembled out of fear.

One of the group was the first who got undressed, and swam the little river. It was quite deep, and not everyone could manage it on their own. After this, a second person went into the water, and led almost everyone over to the other side. On emerging from the water, everyone was struck by a strong cold. We

covered ourselves with coats and slowly warmed ourselves up. But because we could not remain very long in such a dangerous location, we immediately arose, and with the last of our strength went off further. When the dawn began to break, the group came to the large forest, not knowing exactly where it was now. Wet, dead-tired, everyone dropped to the bare earth and fell asleep.

Yaakov Molchadsky and one other person from the group immediately went off to find out where we were. After a half hour's time, they returned and said that we were not far from the forest. But because the forest [floor] was very soft, we went off that evening further in the forest. The little children cried and begged for food, and also the adults were very hungry. Before dawn, we reached the old partisan camp, which had been abandoned after the retreat. A number went off to search through the old huts, and found some old pieces of bread and potatoes that had gone to seed, which was a great boon. It was immediately cooked and we saved the children and the old folks with it. Here, at this place, we remained.

Two weeks went by. The assault was still being waged, but not at the same level of intensity. The Soviets attacked, and got closer with every day.

Molchadsky with Poupko reconnoitered the forest to find a better place for us to set up camp. They found a very good spot on an 'island' (or so it was called). Thick trees obscured it on all sides, and it was surrounded by water and swamps. The 'island' was not far from the partisan camp of the *Dzerzhinsky* Brigade. Already on the first day, huts were set up for living quarters, and we immediately began to construct a hideout in order to be able to hide ourselves in the event of an attack. On the following morning, everyone moved over to that location. The former camp of the group was not far from that place, and in the evening, we went there, and removed the concealed bread, potatoes and flour that had been stashed in the hideout, and brought it to the 'island.'

Here, we encountered additional Jews from Belica and Zhetl, who told us how they had saved themselves. They had concealed themselves in the hideouts, when the murderers had entered the camp, and they rode out the tumult there. The murderers found the hideout where Israel Zlocowsky and his family were hidden. To their great good luck, the murderers did not crawl in to drag them out, and so they remained alive. In the evenings, they would cross the little river, and bake bread in the old oven of the partisan camp.

The condition of the group improved, despite the fact that the bandits continued to reside in the forest. A diversionary division of partisans settled in not far from the Belica group, under the leadership of the Russian Captain Severny. There were many people in that division whom we knew.

The diversionary division had a radio, and every day, we listened to the news about the Soviet attacks. Days came when we could start to hear cannon fire nearby. Because of this, the murderers would intensify their predations in the forest, and carry out assaults in the forests. On Sunday July 3, 1944 during the day, we hear gunshots nearby. Nobody could conceive that the murderers had once again returned here, to the forest. Their wild voices quickly reverberated into every corner of the forest. And here they were, close to the huts.

Noisily, the murderers went by the huts of the group, shot in all directions but noticed nothing. They were

in the old camp, and burned the huts there, and went away, using the road, to the nearby village of Dzjam'janaucy. Before nightfall, it became more quiet, and everyone gathered again in the same place. At night, the Soviet aircraft illuminated the surrounding nearby cities and towns with flare rockets, and then immediately bombed them.

The Liberation...

On Friday, July 7, 1994, came that happy day of our liberation. No sooner had the sun risen that day, when several men from the group went off to the partisans of Captain Severny's group. there, the lady partisan Dosya told them that two Red Army soldiers are already in the camp, and that the Soviets have liberated Zhetl, and have occupied the area. The messengers ran back immediately to the group in the 'island' to convey the good news. The happiness was so great, that they wept from joy, not knowing exactly what to do. The best and nearest were remembered, who had not been privileged to witnessed the fall of the murderers. However, it was not possible to remain on this spot, because of the assault of the remnants of the fleeing German soldiers.

The regular Red Army marched ahead at a fast pace, and penetrated deeply into Polish territory. Several days went by since the liberation, and when the situation became clearer, the groups gathered up all of their necessities, which still remained, and went off in the direction of Belica. With this, the tragic life in the forest came to an end – a frightening period entailing two years of suffering. Of fear and death. On the way, we encountered the leading elements of the victorious Red Army. the soldiers were very friendly to those returning from the forests, and showed how to continue further along the way. In a few more days we came upon the ruined, exterminated Jewish Belica. Upon entering the town, the Jews immediately encountered the *mieszczany*, who received them very coldly. They deliberately did not want to recognize any of the people, thinking that the Jewish houses would remain theirs. They were disappointed that the Jews had remained alive. They wanted to be the sole heirs. Their first question was: 'Are you still alive?'

The shtetl of Belica that had existed for generations long, was not recognizable. The places where, just a few years earlier, there stood the houses of Jews, were grown over with tall, wild grasses. The small Jewish community in which a fine Jewish youth prospered, was totally exterminated.

The first sight of the Jewish ruins made a very severe and frightening impression on those who had just returned from the forest. The pain of a gruesome solitude was awakened in each individual, and the question each posed to themselves was: 'To whom are we returning here as survivors? And to what purpose did we remain alive? Were are they all, those who are missing?' And from the second side, also was asked: 'And what else needs to be done? What are we to expect on the morrow. What else will come along? With what can they fill their emptied and pain-ridden hearts?

How I Saved Myself

By Yaakov Kremen

When the Germans Entered the *Shtetl*

We lived in Belica by near the Neman, on the marketplace. There were six members of our family: Our parents, and four children. When the German murderers entered the *shtetl*, I was twenty years old. Together with my sister Sarah, I attempted to flee to Russia, to get as far as possible from the Germans. To our misfortune, we had to return home after several days. Belica had been burned down from one end to the other. My parents were located with my great-aunt Dvor'keh, my aunt's sister. We immediately began to feel what the Germans were. In a small residence, apart form my great-aunt and her family (from whom there are no survivors), there lived also Zerakh son of Abraham and his mother Malka, as well as another family – a sum total of twelve people.

On one of the first days, the Germans assembled us near Reuven Baranchik's house, and they let us know that we have no rights at all, and no worth, and that we must turn over all radio sets and arms to them. Along with this, there was also the order that from Sunday on, we would be required to wear the yellow badges (a yellow Star of David) on a white background. Then they took out the Rabbi and Chaim-Itzik – my uncle (my aunt's brother), the pharmacist Wismonsky, and Shmuel-Herzl Novogrudsky (the baker) and other Jews. They harnessed the Rabbi ז"ל to a wagon, on which there were piled broken pieces from various armaments, left behind by the Russian soldiers. A German got on the wagon and sat there, and order that he be taken to Paracany. On the way there, they fired their guns over the heads of the Jews. Their fear was great. This took place on the second Friday after the Germans arrived in the *shtetl*. That Saturday was a sorrowful one for us. On Sunday, they returned beaten and broken.

Sporting With The Jews

Page 411: *The Three Meckel sisters*

On that Sunday, they woke us up at 5:00 AM and made 'sport' of us. They drove all the men out of the houses over the age of ten, and gathered them near the Roman Catholic Church. There, once again, they told us in the presence of all the Christian residents, who were going to church, that we, the Jews had no rights.

After this, they tore boards out of the fence of the school, and stood themselves in two rows, one facing the other, and ordered us, one at a time to run between them. The beat us with mortal blows, in the presence of our neighbors. One of the, a young man from Lida named Zalman, who had lived with Moshe the Carpenter (Father of Luzer-Meir) died from the beating he received. This is what the first days were like under the Germans, and these – were the first of our troubles. Balabanski, may his name be erased, became the burgomaster of the entire town, and young *mieszczany* became policemen. At night, they would come and conduct inspections in the homes of those that they had a grudge against since the time that the Soviets ruled

Belica. They confiscated all of the horses, wagons and also the cows. We were left literally with nothing. They drove us to a variety of work: Knocking down the walls of houses, taking the bricks and – [paving] the roads. At night we would sleep under the open sky, or in the burned out locations, because we were afraid to sleep in the houses.

One day, after noon, a group of soldier-murderers arrived, and they demanded that Chaim-Yitzhak Kremen and Fyv'keh Menashe Stotsky come with them to gather up a specific number of eggs. After they had procured the required number of eggs, the Germans took them along with them, and shot them at Mshilicy on the other side of the Neman.

Thirty-Six Martyrs Including the Rabbi ל"ז

The Angel of Death became a house guest at every turn. On one day, about a month after the start of the war, and expedition arrived in the *shtetl*, a type of punitive command unit, which had the mission to kill out the majority of the Jewish men. However, while the fear was very great, many were able to flee to wherever they could.

At that time, I was among those who had fled. The Germans rounded up – thirty six Jews, with the Rabbi at their head. The murderers subjected them to a variety of tortures. After that, they practically buried them alive in the small culvert by the Russian Orthodox Church.

"What To Do?"

After this, we gathered at Dvora'keh's house, and we began to assess our difficult situation. We selected a delegation, which consisted of: Israel Zlocowsky, Eliyahu Sokolowsky (the teacher), and my father, Israel-Meiram. We decided that the delegation should go off to Balabanski and talk to him: – to persuade him to offer them help, insofar as assuring that it should become a bit calmer in the shtetl, and that it should become possible to procure bread, to earn something, or to barter whatever valuables remained.

Balabanski received them and heard out their plea, and he promised that from his side, he would not permit anything bad to happen. He ordered that baking be done at the bakery of Shlomo (my father's brother), and those working there, receive a quarter kilogram of bread as payment. He also issued permits to permit work to be done in the villages. In this way, he permitted the transport of potatoes, that everyone then stored up.

The Twenty-Four Hostages

Around the Holidays, we found out that we will be driven out of Belica, because Belica being a *Selsky-Soviet*, Jews are not permitted to live there. We also heard they want to transfer us, while locked up, to Lida, which itself had been burned down, like Belica. In order to avoid this, a large part of the Belica Jews fled,

some to Zhetl, and some to Scucyn, and a small part – to Lida.

This angered the Germans, and they took twenty-four men as hostages, in order to deter those who still remained from fleeing. Thanks to the delegation, which was active, and also to the Jews of Zhetl, a large sum of money was procured, and they went off to Balabanski to get the men released. The twenty-four men were released, and on one was hurt.

In the Zhetl Ghetto

New troubles started with us in the Zhetl ghetto. It was not easy, because in the end, we were the ones who had arrived from another *shtetl.* Despite this, the Zhetl Jews deserve an immense *Yasher-Koach.* They did have means with which to take us in.

We were sent to do a variety of labor. I worked in the headquarters of the gendarmes, as a gardener, up to the First Great Slaughter, which took place in Zhetl on Iyyar 13 (April 30, 1942). During this slaughter, my entire family and I survived alive. Using my work permit, I was even able to rescue Bash'keh and her son, Zerakh.

Between the First and Second Great Slaughters

After the slaughter, I was sent to work in Dvarec. From Dvarec, I came back to Zhetl. I found myself work as a harness maker, in a cooperative. The pressure was very great, because there were already partisans in the area. A little at a time, the young people began to organize themselves. My sister Sarah and I wanted to go off to the forest. She consistently argued, that if one has to die – then one should die free. Indeed, she died before my dear parents and other sisters.

It happened like this: On one night, the partisans fell upon the Zhetl gendarmerie (this was ten days before the Second Great Slaughter, which took place on the 23rd day of Menachem-Av). The report of gunfire woke us up. Sarah began to run to her other girlfriends, and boyfriends with the objective of leaving with the partisans, and going into the forest. Running this way, she was wounded in the kidneys. A few days later, she died, with these words on her lips: 'I am better off, at this point, than you!' Sarah was buried according to Jewish custom at the Zhetl cemetery.

The Second Great Slaughter in Zhetl

The Second Great Slaughter arrived. We were anticipating that it would happen on any day. We went to the assembly point, because I has a permit, and so did my father. Thanks to this, we thought, they will once again prolong our right to live. We were laid out on the ground face down. Autos were brought, and people were

taken to the large pits, which the murderers had prepared in advance, not far from the Zhetl cemetery.

The favored craftsmen were taken to the cinema. There I encountered Yankl and Ber'l. So, from our entire substantial family, there in the cinema, we remained only three. We were held for three days, not being permitted to attend to our bodily functions, or giving us anything to eat or drink.

In Novogrudok

From Zhetl, we were led off to Novogrudok. There, I was separated from Yankl and Ber'l. I was in the *'Sąd Okręgowy'*[87] of Novogrudok. They were staged for exile, and they worked as locksmiths.

I remained alone in the *Sond*, like a solitary rock, dispirited. We were given 120 grams of bread a day, with a small pot of soup.

In Lida

Having nothing to lose, I took an additional five men, and we went to the Lida ghetto, because it was said that it is better in the Lida ghetto. On being in the Lida ghetto, I made contact with my uncle Israel and aunt Taib'eh in Scucyn. I wanted to come to them. However, they did not counsel me. Through Scucyn people that worked in Lida, they sent me food and clothing. In the Lida ghetto, I did not have a stable dwelling place. For most of the time, I was with Yud'l Zlocowsky. It was very difficult to survive in the Lida ghetto, because after the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto, many people from Vilna came to the Lida ghetto. The Germans looked for those who had come in from other places, and those who did not have passports, were shot right on the spot.

It was very hard for me to get settled in the Lida ghetto. On one clear day, I left with Gershon Yankelewsky of Breslau. Had we not left, we would have been turned over to the German gendarmerie.

Back in Dvarec

We went off to Dvarec, because Benjamin Galinsky – aunt Dvora'keh's son was there, my cousin. It was far from easy getting there. We could not use the direct roads out of fear of being discovered. We were able to cross the Neman River fortuitously because of the following circumstance: a Christian came from the village of Bondary, and left his boat ast the shore of the river. I took the log to which the boat was tethered into the boat, and we rode over to the other side. After three days and three nights, we came to Dvarec.

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87 Polish for a District Court.

In Dvarec, with Benjamin, I encountered Chay'keh Chaim-Yitzhak's as well as Tanhum-Aharon, the son of R' Itcheh the *Shammes*. It was very crowded for us, and there also was nothing to eat. Benjamin would take something out of the house, and for it, he would buy something to eat. His family consisted of five people, and to that: three of us arrived and were added.

I must underscore that Benjamin showed us friendship and brotherliness. He shared his last bite with us.

Into the Forest

When I was in Dvarec, a daughter of Lejzor Mosh'keh's came from the forest (her name was Mash'keh) to procure medicaments. She told that the people in the forest have fallen ill with scabies. She asked for a bit of bandages, pitch and fat.

From her, I became aware that my uncle David Hirsch'l Meckel was to be found in the forest, and she took me into the forest – into the Lipiczany Forest.

My uncle received me with satisfaction, and we were together. During this time, there was a massive assault. The Germans drew off sixty thousand troops from the front, and they came into the area and began to burn all of the surrounding villages. After this, they took up residence around the forest. However, they could not support themselves here for very long, and this was our good fortune. They thought that as soon as they will burn down all of the villages, the partisans will all die out from hunger and cold. But, actually, this simply served to enlarge the partisan movement, because many of the peasants, who now had nothing left to lose, joined the ranks of the partisans, in order to avenge themselves on the Germans.

That entire winter, was passed in a constant state of trouble. It had gone so far, that David Hirsch'l wanted to return to the Scucyn ghetto. I, personally, was against this. I told him that the opposite was true: It is necessary to bring aunt Taib'eh with Israel and the children out of Scucyn.

We drew nearer to our own shtetl of Belica, in order to find out what was going on in Lida and the vicinity.

We learned that Israel, and his son Yaakov, were to be found in the Lida jail, and work in the '*Todt*' [labor camp]. I wrote them a letter [delivered] through Bobrownik the *Drożnik*, who was a great friend to the Jews. It was not only once that he put his life in danger on behalf of the Jews. Thanks to him, we had contact with other people from Belica, who were to be found in Lida.

Thanks are also due to Rachel Itzkowitz, Luzer-Meir and Mikhl Gruznik, who brought a group of Jews out of the Lida ghetto and among them was my uncle Israel and his son, Yaakov Zlocowsky. The joy was very great. Our family became larger, and we began to be concerned with the rest of our family. As Taib'eh and her remaining children were to be found in Scucyn, we went off to the village of Zbljany, to a certain Christian (I have since forgotten his name) and he rode to the Scucyn ghetto and brought out my aunt ans her two children from there.

With the Partisans

Being young, and while we had a thirst for vengeance against our murderers, Yaakov and I decided to joint a diversionary action group, which had come from the other side of the front. This was the *Oktyabr Otryad*, of the *Pervomayska* Brigade. The *Otryad* was under the command of a Captain (Kovalov). The second in command ('Штабной') was named Alexander Garelick.

We were not any less committed than the other non-Jewish partisans, but quite the opposite, we even more fired up. We fulfilled all missions that the others assigned to us. To my account, I have four derailed trains. Also, my cousin, Yankl Zlocowsky also carried out all of his missions, and maybe more. We were in the partisan movement for more than two years.

Liberation

The Red Army liberated us in the month of July 1944. Our entire brigade was assembled in Minsk. there we received recognition and we celebrated the victory of liberated Byelorussia from the Nazi bandits.

On the Front

We didn't gad about idly for very long. Voluntarily, we presented ourselves for service in the Red Army. There, we took further revenge for our beloved martyrs.

I and my cousin, Yaakov Zlocowsky, were together for the entire time. We arrived in a school for non-commissioned officers, where we trained together for several months. We were given military ranks. We did not disgrace our roots. Quite the opposite, we were always the role model for other nationalities.

After the non-commissioned officers school, we went to the front. We were together in one division, but each of us in a different battery.

We fought, starting in the north of Warsaw. I, personally, got to Grudziądz' Rumenica – the one-time Polish-German border. There, I was wounded in the right hand, something I suffer from to this day. When I was wounded. I requested that they call my cousin Yaakov. My good comrades fulfilled my wish, and it was then I parted from him forever.

My Cousin Yaakov Zlocowsky Falls at the Gates of Berlin

I was taken off to the hospital, and Yaakov proceeded ahead. He fell on May 2, 1945, at the gates of Berlin. My heart weeps for him more than for anyone else. He was all of 24 years old.

From the Hospital Back to Belica

I lay in the hospital for eight months. This hospital was located about 600 km from Moscow in Saransk. After leaving the hospital, I came back to Belica, where my uncle Israel and aunt Taib'eh waited for me.

Away...Away...

We began thinking about leaving Belica forever. It did not take very long, and we went away to Poland.

We didn't tarry long in Poland, and by illegal means, we arrived in Austria. We spent three years in Austria in the camps. In Linz (Austria) I got married, and my wife and I waited for the ability to travel to the Land of Israel.

Today we are in the Land of Israel, where we, the surviving remnants, raise our families once again, with the single wish, that future generations should learn from our tribulations and, God forbid, not have to withstand such severe testing.

The Death of My Dearest

By Sarah Baranchik (Fleischer)

Page 419: *Beside the New House of Chaim-Reuven Baranchik*

Page 421: *Chaim-Reuven Baranchik & The Family*

The house of my father, Chaim-Reuven Baranchik ז"ל, was the last in the *shtetl* on the way to the Neman. Because of this, it served as a gathering point, and a resting place, all the years, for all those who were walking in that direction. And in the last years before the war – as a meeting place of the pioneering-minded youth of the *shtetl,* to which the children of our house belonged.

Seeing that, since the First World War, when he was impressed into forced labor, the fingers of my father's hands were frozen off, my mother Vikhn'eh ע"ה, carried the entire burden for our support: she did agricultural labor, carried on the commerce with the peasants of the area, and would serve the guests who would travel by into our eatery.

We were six children, the youngest brother being Henokh.

When the German order was issued that the Jews of Belica must leave the *shtetl,* and travel over to a larger city, like, for example, Lida, our family, the Baranchik family, decided to travel to Zhetl: we had many friends there and Christian acquaintances in the shtetl and surrounding villages. We retained the services of a Christian with a wagon, taking along only the needed possessions, and the remaining possessions, we gave to other Christians for safekeeping in their possession. (We took in Christian neighbors in the two houses that we owned).

When we arrived in Zhetl, there was not yet a ghetto. We went to live in the house of our friends – the Bussel family. When the ghetto was erected, we were given a dwelling together with several other families, with up to eight people in a room.

When the first order was issued, that all the Jews must assemble at a designated assembly point, we wanted for our parents not to go, but rather to conceal themselves in a bunker that we had previously prepared. However, our mother said: If the children are going – we will also go. And so, all of us went out to the assembly point. My father went out with Frad'keh and Gershon, and my mother – with Henokh and Hasia; Nachman went with my sister Sarah (Nachman had a work permit). During the *selektion,* my father was separated out and put with the group designated for extermination. A policeman also wanted to take Sarah to that group, but a second policeman ordered her to stay, and so she remained alive.

My father, feeling that he was going to his death, said: 'I am going to my death, but I hope that my young children will yet avenge our blood.'

The group designated to die was shot is a woods near Zhetl.

After the slaughter, the ghetto was downsized, and we received a room in a bakery. Nachman dismantled part of the baking oven, and prepared it to be used as a bunker for hiding out during a time of need. [At the time of] the Second Great Slaughter , when the order went out to assemble at the designated place, we hid ourselves in the bunker with about forty people from Zhetl and Belica. Henokh was not in the bunker, and in order to reach us, he had to run through the ranks of the murderers, and was wounded in the feet, but despite this, managed to reach us in the bunker.

The bunker was small for that many people. There was a lack of air and water. Night came, and Hasia wanted to go outside, but Chay-Sarah Meir's did not let her go out, being afraid, lest the location of the bunker be disclosed. After a lengthy conversation, the two did exit the bunker. They brought water, and went back with the idea of going to the partisans, with whom they had clandestine contact. Silently, they passed through the region from the ghetto and left with the idea of going to a Christian that they knew in Zachepichi. After their departure, the remaining people came out of the bunker, all with the same idea.

Henokh was considerably weakened, and starved. Accordingly, he said to Nachman that he could not go any further, and he remained lying in a small wooded area. Nachman pleaded with him to continue going further. In the meantime, a Christian arrived, who threatened to turn them over to the Germans. Nachman took off his watch, and gave it to the Christian. He took the watch, and went away. On that day, they hid themselves among the bushes, and at night went off further.

My mother and Sarah also blundered until they encountered a Christian, who beat them, and wanted to turn them over to the Germans. Afterwards, the Christian recognized my mother and told her to get away from that location as quickly as possible. We both hid among the corn stalks for the entire day, and at night, we proceeded further towards our destination. At the end of the night, we arrived at the Zachepichi Forest. There, Nachman came towards us, but we did not recognize him because of his appearance and dress. We ran away from him, and he ran after us, shouting: 'Mama, it's me!' Then, we turned around and together went into the forest. There, we constructed a cot, and we lay Henokh on it. Nachman tied the ends of the cot together, held on to Henokh's head, and my mother and I carried the lighter part of his body – the feet. On our way, we encountered Zalman Yosselewicz, wearing a sack, badly beaten, and we were with him, until he located his children.

During the first time, we suffered a great deal from hunger and thirst, because we were afraid to show ourselves in the village, so that the Christians not turn us over to the Germans. One time, we encountered a Christian, who was a pauper and a drunk. Later in, he helped us a great deal: he brought us bread and spirits, and a variety of roots to heal Henokh's foot. After that, we gave one of Gershon's outfits to a Christian, and he would give us flour a bit at a time, and bread, but because of a scarcity of water, we could not cook.

Through the forest, we drew nearer to the Neman, where we encountered a few Belica families. Also here, Nachman constructed an earth-bunker under a tree, such that the smoke from the oven would pass through the bare tree. For two months we knew and heard nothing of Hasia, until she conveyed, via a Christian woman we knew, that she is alive, and is in a partisan group. Four months later, Hasia, along with other

partisans, came to visit us. They were wearing German clothes, and we all became terrible frightened and fled. However, my mother recognized Hasia. Everybody came back, except that I had run sufficiently far away, that I could not recognize where the bunker was. For nearly two weeks, I was with a Christian, and in the end, a Christian woman led me out, and showed me the way to the bunker.

Henoch and I went off to see Hasia. In the meantime, the German assault on the forest drew nearer. As my mother was hanging out laundry near the bunker, the Germans got closer to the bunker. Everyone fled the bunker through the second exit, and my mother got close to the first exit. One of the Germans threw a grenade in, and my mother was killed. Chaim also fell among the bushes. When it again became quiet in the forest, we returned and buried the dead. Several weeks passed before all of the living were able to get back together and made a bunker anew.

After my mother;'s death, Henoch went off with a group of partisans to procure bread. Entering the village of Novoselki they were shot at. Henoch was carrying a white sack on his back, and because of this he was a target for the shooting. A bullet hit him in the head, near the eyes, and he fell, and all of his companions scattered and fled. He suffered alone for three days, not speaking, and being unable to see. Christians later told us, that wrestling with death, he dug a pit around himself with his feet. Then the Christians asked the Germans, what they should so with the wounded Jewish partisan. The Germans ordered them to bury him alive.

Henoch was then 16 years old.

A Letter from Home After the Holocaust

By B. Ts. Yevunowicz

Page 423: *El'keh Yevunowicz (Reisner)*

As a solitary Jew from Novardok, I am writing to the Belica landsleit in Israel – about his wife who came from Belica. She was named El'keh, a daughter of Yud'l and Malka Reisner.

The Nazi murderers exterminated El'keh with our little daughter Malka'leh and my entire family: My father and mother, brothers and sisters, and their children. Also, a sister of El'keh, Dob'keh and her husband, stepsister Leah'keh, and her mother – were all killed in the Novardok ghetto together with my family.

May their names be memorialized for all time in the Yizkor Book of the Belica martyrs. And may the German murderers suffer eternal punishment, those who exterminated entire Jewish families for the sole sin of being Jewish.

Take revenge on the accursèd murderers of the Jewish people!

We Were Eight Children

By Herzl, Yankl & Chaya-Cherna Fleischer

(Testimony of Witnesses)

They are two brothers and a sister, the children of Bash'eh bat Eliezer and Zalman ben Yitzhak Fleischer. The other children in the family were: Eliezer, Yitzhak, Velvel, Sarah and Shoshana.

From Herzl's Recollections

Page 425: *Zalman Fleischer*

Until 1914, the entire family of Zalman Joch'eh's lived in Belica, and was occupied with a woodworking business. After the Great Fire in Belica, the entire family went off to Sielc. There too, my parents engaged in commerce involving wood. They owned the ferry and mill in Ruda. During the First World War, my mother died, and left a house full of children. The one who substituted for our mother, was the oldest sister – Chaya-Tcherna. In 1926, we returned to Belica, and once again engaged in the same work, traveling daily to Sielc.

At Purim time, the temporary headquarters for baking matzos for the entire *shtetl* was in our house. We would even send matzos to Warsaw. Our Belica matzos had a good reputation. they also brought an income to our Belica residents and us among them.

In 1927, our sister Sarah emigrated to Argentina, where she is to this day. She has a husband, a daughter and a son, and have a nice family life.

In the thirties, our sister Shoshana made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, and following her – our brother Yitzhak. To this day, they can be found in Kfar-Saba. While still back home, they belonged to the *Halutz* movement, and were in the *avant-garde* of the *shtetl* youth which was drawn to the Land of Israel.

Our more-or-less normal life continued until that summer day in 1941, when the Germans crossed the Soviet border. Immediately, on the first Saturday, the bandits burned down our shtetl. The only thing that remained was the Njacec street and half of the street on which Lejzor the *Shokhet* lived. We lived at the house of Lejzor Green (Uszczer).

The people living there were: Our family, Benjamin Green with Bash'eh with two children, and Mot'keh (Lejzor's brother) with Malka Zerakh's with two girls. All together we were 21 people, all in one house.

After this, on night, we were traveled to the Zhetl ghetto. There, too, it was not good for us. We went off to a variety of work, as for example, in Dvarec dragging stones and building an aerodrome, chopping wood in the forest, etc.

During the First Great Slaughter, which took place on 13 Iyyar, we lost our elderly father, who was already in his eighties. The echo of his recitation of the '*Ashrei Temimi*' prayer every Sabbath afternoon after *Mincha*, still reverberates in our ears, and that – with such a sweet voice, that can never be forgotten by us.

Our younger brother Velvel, and Vikhn'eh, my wife, were the first martyrs.

Until the Second Great Slaughter in Zhetl, which took place on 23 Menachem-Av, we lived in trouble, with 50 or 60 people crammed into one house.

On the day of the slaughter, we lay hidden in hideaways. Our hideout was in the bakery, under the oven. We had previously dug out the dirt and crawled through a small opening that was under the cover (Kotikh). The hiding place was designed for ten people, and we were 25 people. We heard the shooting and the shouting from the Germans and their accomplices. They threw grenades into the houses, tore up the floors, and called for everyone to emerge from their hiding places. We lay like this for 48 hours, in severe overcrowding, and bad sanitary conditions. The first to exit the bunker were: Myself (Herzl) and Meir with the family; Yud'l Kusielewicz with his family, and Zalman the younger boy. Upon exiting, I did not know where to go, because I had no strength. Nevertheless, the inner impetus drove me on. I went through the gentile gardens, and I knocked at the door of a Christian. He gave me a bit of tobacco, because he had no bread. He showed me the way to the Zachepichi Forests.

Along the way, I encountered Christians on their way to Zhetl, to rob Jewish assets. I asked them if they had met up with anyone. The Christians fled without answering me yes or no. On proceeding further, I met an elderly Christian who was pasturing a horse. I got a bit of tobacco from him, and he showed me the way to the forest. It was in this way, more or less, that I dragged myself to the Zachepichi Forest. As I was traversing the forest, I noticed how a person was running past me. I recognized him from afar, seeing that this was Velvel Kreinowicz (Lejzor Mosh'keh's). I called him over and he told me that there are other Jews in the forest, who had saved themselves from the slaughter.

About a week later, wandering this way through the forest, I met up with my brother Yankl, Lei'shkeh and my sister Chaya-Tcherna. this was my greatest joy in life, because I thought that I had been left as the only one from my many-branched family.

Yankl's Recollections

At the time that the Great Slaughter was started. Lei'shkeh came home from prayers and told that the ghetto had been surrounded. I sent everyone off into the hideout, and tried to save myself by other means. This did not work out for me. Running back to the hideout, I encountered Dr. Cohen from Warsaw, who shouted to

me, that I should quickly run away, because [otherwise] I will be shot. I asked him why he too was not fleeing, to which he answered: 'It is here that I will end my seventy years.'

We were in a second hideout which was at Ziom'keh from Vilna. The hideout was dug out in a stall and was camouflaged. There were 19 of us in the hideout. We lay there for three days. Among us, was a woman from Vilna with a child, named Borovow. The child began to cry, and the rest wanted to strangle the child. But since no one was willing to actually do this, but also because the mother did not want to risk the lives of the remaining 17 people, she left the hideout. She was immediately shot, along with the child, without revealing where we were.

From Thursday on, since the slaughter began – until Saturday night – we sat without food, without drink, or a bit of air. When we came out, we did not know whether it was day or night.

In this condition, we fled to Zaset'. Before reaching the village, we split up: I went off first, and the rest lay down underneath the small bridge, thinking that anything could happen to me, but the rest should remain alive. In this fashion, we reached as far as the village of Pogiry. Upon arriving there, I went to a Christian that I knew, who gave me some tobacco and shared the last of the bread he had with me. He showed me the way so as not to run into the Germans, who, together with their hangers-on, were lying in ambush waiting for Jews that had fled. Midway, we saw a shepherd, who was pasturing cows. He showed us the way to the Zachepichi Forest.

Arriving in the Zachepichi Forest, we heard the cries of children. This was little Sender, Yosh'keh-Itzk'keh's Mayewsky. When we met, we all began to cry, and Sender was hungry, which is why he cried the whole time. Yosh'keh proposed to me that I get Sender to quiet down. He wanted to pay me for this. He had 1100 Rubles with him. I did not consent to this. I promised him that we could carry him to a Christian. We began to attempt to quiet him down using other means. We fed him with fresh green peas, and gave him a lot of water to drink. But this did not help. Later on, we gave him a sizeable amount of baked potatoes to eat, and this too had no effect. We caused the child much other trouble, but fated decreed that Sender remain alive, and today he is located in The United States of America.

A week later, in the company of stragglers, near Zbljany, we met up with out brother Herzl.

After this we, our family, dug out a *zemlyanka* in the Zachepichi Forest, not far from Pressl, and lived like everyone else in the forest. We suffered through there until 1943, at which time we moved closer to the partisan groups, because being closer to them was more secure.

Chaya-Cherna's Recollections

It was very bad for us in the last year, because the front started to get near and the Germans and Vlasovites occupied all of the villages. We could not go out for food, and we suffered considerably from hunger, sustaining ourselves literally with grass and berries.

We provided yet another martyr – our beloved brother Lei'shkeh. He was in a partisan group and was killed. We buried him with our own hands in the forest, behind an oak, where other fallen Jewish partisans lie in their eternal rest. For the Belica *Semyna*[88] groups, this was a great loss, because he was very dedicated to all the Belica people, and he was very well oriented towards the forest.

We lived like this until August 1944. The Red Army liberated us. We came back to our *shtetl* Belica, solitary and broken. It was then that we began to sense the great calamity that had befallen our people.

We did not remain in Belica for very long. We sensed the enmity of our neighbors towards us. As soon as a means to get to Poland opened up to us, we went off there, with the hope, that from there, we would be able to travel on further. And, indeed, this is what happened.

From Poland we traveled to Budapest, and from there, to Austria. In Austria, we sat in the camps and waited, for the opportunity to get to the Land of Israel, and to meet with our sisters and brothers. Thanks to God, we lived long enough to accomplish this, and upon our arrival in Israel, we, indeed, were reunited with them. We live in Kfar-Saba. In our present happiness, we never forget our dear and beloved Jews of our *shtetl* Belica by the Neman, who were exterminated in such a terrifying manner.

Meeting People from Belica in the Forest

By Benjamin Baran

Page 430: *From the right, Benjamin Baran ('Lamai Pasuda') and Israel Zlocowsky After the Liberation (1945)*

In the years 1942-44, I found myself in the *A. N. Voroshilov Otryad* (Lenin Brigade), that operated in the Belica vicinity.

A virulent anti-Semitism reigned in the *Otryad.* Apart from me, there were two other Jews: One Leon'keh (Leib'l Wolkowysky), born in Belica and lived in Zhaludok. (a son of Abraham'keh Mun'keh's) and a Jewish girl from Slonim, Lyuba Abramowicz.

The Christian partisans so hated the Jews, that it was literally a risk to life for Jewish partisans and *Semyna* to meet with them in the forest. Indeed, because of this, Jews suffered greatly in the forest, most of them frm Belica, those who were fortunate enough to save themselves from the slaughters, and lived in *zemlyankas* in the forest – on the other side of the Neman – together with their families.

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88 From the Russian word for a small family group.

Jews from neighboring towns concentrated themselves around the Belica Jews. I would sometimes visit these so-called '*Semyna* Groups' where I would feel very good and at ease, as would be among Jews.

On one occasion, it was in September 1943, several Christian partisans, from our *Otryad*, fell upon a *zemlyanka* in the forest. The S. family from Lida lived in that *zemlyanka*. They raped the mother and daughter, and not satisfied with this, they poured out the dough from the mixing trough, and excreted on it.

The commander of the diversionary group found out about this incident, and after a short investigation, took the guilty ones out, and had then shot near the crucifix of the village.

Upon learning about this, the *shkotzim* from our *Otryad* began to circulate in those areas and looked for Jews, in order to avenge their comrades. One time, when I was riding my horse near the village of Gezgaly, I saw how a Belica family, man, his wife, and two children were going in the direction of the village for food. I stopped them and told them that our partisans are circulating in the village, who are only looking for an opportunity to shoot Jews. However, nothing helped, and they stubbornly went off to the village. This gave me no surcease. I allowed them to proceed, but, at a distance, I followed them, in order to see what would happen.

On nearing the village, they were stopped by the partisans from our *Otryad,* who immediately began to shout: 'Ho, here come the plunderers to rob' and the partisans immediately began to search them.

The plaints of the unfortunates did not help, saying that they had come to beg for some bread from the peasants. The bandits wanted to shoot them immediately. I rode up, and immediately began to plead for their lives, saying to them: 'What do you want from them? You can see that here there are two small children.'

The bandits let them go out of fear of me, who could be a witness and testify to what they might have done. They also took into account how I could, at the right opportunity, repay them in kind.

In a second instance, I also had the opportunity to save the *Semyna* Group, in which additional Belica Jews could be found, in addition to the Novogrudok family, and Nachman Baranchik. I learned that the partisans from our *Otryad* were looking for the sled tracks by which they could reach their *zemlyankas*, in order to plunder and kill. Immediately after I heard this, I rode off quickly on my horse to the village of Gezgaly, and sent a written message with a peasant, that they should leave their location as quickly as they can. As soon as they got my message, the Jews left the *zemlyankas*, to a second place, and to their good fortune, there were no casualties. On the following morning, the partisan-bandits did indeed fall upon the *zemlyankas*, robbed and then burned everything. Nachman and his family fled, literally, at the last moment before the attack. In this way, the Belica Jews, for the second time, rescued themselves from a certain death.

My Father's Destroyed Family

By Schraga (Fyvel) Zlocowsky

Our Family Circle

My father's father – my grandfather – was called Zvi-Hirsch and my grandmother – Szprinza. My father has two sisters and five brothers. They are: Chay-Sarah'keh and Eliyahu Stotsky with three children; Henya-Leah and her husband with two children; Shlomo and his wife Mer'keh with two children; Moshe and his wife Sarah with two children; Tan'keh (Tanhum) and his wife Fruma with two children; Joseph and his wife Esther with their son, Isser; Yud'l and his wife and two children. This family, on my father's side was destroyed by German hands.

Now comes the family on the side of my mother, Taib'eh: Her mother Faygl and father Yankl Meckel also had tow daughters (Bayl'keh and Chaya-El'keh) and five sons: Chaim-Yitzhak (died in America); Moshe and Ber'l (killed in the First World War); Ely'eh (today found in America); and David-Hirsch'l (fell as a partisan in the forest with the rank of deputy commander).He had a wife, Chay-Esther, and five children: Pesh'keh, Shifra, Rachel-Liebeh, Yankl and Ber'l – all killed by the Germans.

The family of Mensl and Freid'l Gapanowicz and their five children, also belonged to our family circle: Noah-Abba Gapanowicz and his wife It'keh with two children; Lejzor and wife Szprinza with two children; Itcheh-Moshe and wife with children (lived in Zhetl); Et'keh and her husband Jonah Kutitzky with two children (lived in Vilna); Rivka (lived in Astryna), her two children – Meir and Leah'keh (lived in Belica) – were killed by the Germans (Meir in the first *aktion* among the 36 Jews, and Leah'leh – in Vilna).

The family of Ber'l Radominer, who was the Shammes of the Synagogue, also belonged to our family circle. His wife was called Ed'keh, and their children were: Lipa, Bayl'keh (the wife of the hairdresser Baran), Hash'keh (the wife of the bandleader Yitzhak Kamenetzky), and Bash'keh (the wife of Yankl Kremen, Shlomo the baker's son).

There were seven of us living in my father's house: Father, mother, grandmother Faygl, my two brothers (Yankl and David), and one sister (Chaya) – we all lived a quiet and contented life. Apart from the fact that my father carried on a widely diverse set of businesses, he also participated in community affairs. He stood at the head of the Fire Fighters Brigade and apart from that he took part in other community work: for the Yiddish School, for the *Volksbank*, and *Gemilut-Hesed*, for the children of the poor, for *Bikur Kholim*, etc.

The door to our home was always open to everyone. With all of the troubles taking place in the *shtetl*, people constantly came to my father and he would always help with whatever he could. I remember very well that Friday when the Great Fire broke out in the *shtetl*. the entire shtetl was engulfed in flames, and as it happens, my father was not there at that precise moment. Suddenly we saw that my father was coming with the fire

brigade from Lida. Accordingly, everyone ran towards him with tears in their eyes, a mixture of sorrow and happiness, believing that he will save the *shtetl.* During that fire, only two Jewish homes were consumed, and the larger portion of the non-Jewish houses, and because of this, my father was brought to trial in Warsaw. Thanks to the fact that the Catholic Church was also rescued by the dedication of the Jewish fire fighters, the court absolved my father of any guilt, and recommended he be awarded a silver medal for his energetic and responsible work in the Belica Fire Fighters Command.

I remember my grandmother Szprinza and grandfather Zvi-Hirsch very well from my childhood years in the *shtetl.* I would go running to them through a small side street sunken in snow. I was afraid of the collapsed little house that stood in the middle of this snow-covered street, because it was told in the town that bad people had been buried in the snow there. When I finally arrived at the home of my grandparents, I would climb up on the big oven, and warm myself up, and calm down a bit. My grandmother would never let us out until we finished off all the pancakes with goose fat. Then I would run back through the marketplace, and along the way, would slip and slide a bit near the Bet HaMedrash, where there was a large sheet of ice, and there people would skate on ice skates.

At night, when we would get good an cold, we went inside to the *Bet HaMedrash,* where there was a large warm brick bench (*lezhayka*[89]), where the older Jews would sit and warm themselves, reciting Psalms or studying *Mishna.* My elderly and good grandfather, Zvi-Hirsch, was almost always among them, who would take me on his knee so that I too, could warm up, and listen in on the learning.

I very much loved to listen to the stories of the old Jews in the *shtetl.* My grandfather would tell stories from his time as a soldier in the First World War. Fish'keh Mayewsky, who fought in Manchuria and brought back two medals from there, had stories to tell without end.

On Friday night, after the evening meal, Rabbi Fein ז"ל conducted a lesson, for the general public, on the Pentateuch portion of the week. On the Sabbath, before dawn, my grandfather would be called to go recite Psalms.

From What We Lived, and How We Lived

What did the Jews of Belica live from?

Wednesday, the market day, the peasants would come traveling from all of the surrounding villages, and bring their produce to sell, and afterwards, would buy up their necessities in the *shtetl.* Apart from storekeepers and merchants, the Jews also were craftsmen in town: shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, hat makers, tinsmiths, blacksmiths, etc. I can still hear the ringing of the hammer in the smithy of the old smith Zelig, and his son, Aharon. You could hear that ringing all over the shtetl, at a time that Zelig Bussel with

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89 I have seen this rendered as *lezhanka,* reflecting, perhaps, some difference between Polish and Russian.

his children would beat out the sickles and scythes for cutting wheat in the peasant fields of all the villages in the area.

Thursday was the market day in Lida. Belica wagon drivers and merchants would hitch horses to wagons, or sleds, and travel to the Lida market to buy merchandise.

Purim in the *shtetl* was a joyous occasion. Everyone took pleasure in the drama circle presentation of 'The Selling of Joseph' and afterwards, the children would also put on their own acts: going from house to house to ask for '*mishloakh manot.*' For this, the children would sing: 'Today is Purim, and tomorrow it is over, give me a groschen and drive me out!'

Fyv'eh Yosh'keh's (Lozowsky) would ride around on his big horse on Purim, coming into our yard, come into the house and ask for *mishloakh manot* for the poor Jews in the *shtetl.* Old Sheft'eh with the long beard, would also com into our house on Purim, sat himself down comfortably at the table, and drank a good '*L'Chaim,*' singing a good little ditty, for which my father would always give him a good donation and both kissed each other and wished each other to live until Purim again next year.

Purim barely passed, when we began to get ready for Passover. Fresh shipments of flour would arrive into the storehouses of our business. This, my father was preparing for the temporary baking operations. In Belica, we baked matzos not only for the town itself, but also we sent matzos to Warsaw and Vilna, from which the Belica Jews made an income.

In our house, we got ready for Passover several months in advance. The grandmothers would set up big pots with beets, in order that there be a borscht for Passover for all the families of the family circle. The grandmothers would also brew mead and put up wine, and from time-to-time, the children would steal up to sneak a taste, the most important thing is that no one should see that you were going there with a glass that was *Chametz.*

Passover, before the *Seder*, as was the case before all the other holidays, all of our families, after prayer services, would come directly to our house from the synagogue to say 'good evening' to the elderly grandmother Faygl, who lived with us, and from the other side, my father would not make *Kiddush* in the house, until such time that all of the children would visit their grandmother Szprinza and grandfather Zvi-Hirsch, and wish them a 'Good *Yom Tov.*'

On the Sabbath, after services, the doors of the Bet HaMedrash would be opened, and the congregation would go home. At that time, the children would run towards their fathers and grandfathers and shout out joyfully, '*Good Shabbes.*' To this day, those childlike Sabbath greetings echo in my ears, just like the melody of Zalman Joch'eh's recitation of the Psalms echoes in my ears, between the afternoon and evening prayers. In that time, in our house, my grandmother Faygl would weep out in front of a group of older women the

'Tzena U'Re'ena[90]' and afterwards joyfully pray the 'God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' prayer for a good coming week for the family and all Jewry.

Before the High Holy Days, all the Belica Jews would run to recite the *Selichot* prayers, and to pray for a good new year for the people of Israel. On Yom Kippur Eve, Rabbi Fein ז"ל would hold forth with a very moving sermon in the synagogue, after which the doors to the Holy Ark would be opened, and all would weep together and in a loud voice recite '*Avinu Malkeynu....*'

Immediately after Yom Kippur, on that night, we would begin to get ready for *Sukkot*. On our yard, our father, every year, would erect a large *sukkah*, where the entire family would sit. On *Simchat Torah*, the entire *shtetl* would go to the home of the Rabbi, and escort him with song to the *Bet HaMedrash*. Also, for the entire year, the *shtetl* felt itself to be like one family. If something happened to one, the entire shtetl participated in what occurred – whether in joy or in sorrow.

Two Years of Soviet Rule

This is the way will lived until September 1, 1939, when the war broke out between Poland and Germany. My uncle Yoss'l came on that day to take leave of us, because he had been called up into the Polish Army, and from that time on, we never saw him again. Also, other young Jewish people went off to war, and they never returned back to the *shtetl*.

After the Polish authorities left the shtetl in the middle of September 1939, my father, as the commandant of the Fire Fighters Brigade, took it upon himself to maintain order in town. Nowrocki, the director of the Polish school, Noah-Abba Gapanowicz, together with my father, organized the entire Fire Fighters Brigade into a force to keep order, with arms in hand, until the time that the Soviets came into the town.

The first two year (1939-1941) in which the Soviets were present, we did not live badly, despite the fact that everyone feared what the following day would bring. My father immediately liquidated his business and set up an operation to repair bicycles. Later on, he was selected to be in the leadership of the manufacturing cooperative, which ran a large cooperative store that carried all needed products. The mills, that had previously belonged to the Itzkowitz and Kalmanowicz families were nationalized. Baruch Wismonsky became the manager and the town Jews once again began to bake... only one Jewish family (Lejzorowicz) were sent away by the Soviets, together with many Polish and Byelorussian families...

The Germans Arrive

On June 22, 1941 when the war between Russia and Nazi Germany broke out, the Germans immediately

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90 The Yiddiah *Teitch-Khumash*, or Pentateuch, used by Jewish women, to follow the text of the portion of the week, if they did not have a facility in Hebrew.

bombed our vicinity. The first explosions woke up the entire town at the break of day. All of the young people were quickly mobilized and sent off to Lida. However, the flames from the burning sit of Lida could be seen in Belica (a distance of 30 km), and the tumult was so great, that the mobilized youth turned back to Belica. On that day, up till noon, almost all of our relatives gathered in our house, we ate silently, with heads let down, because it felt like a tragic chapter was starting, despite the fact that no one imagined that the end would be so tragic...

When the first Germans appeared on their riding into the town, the children ran towards them, and looked at them with wonder. However, the shooting started immediately, because the Germans had collided with a unit of Russian soldiers, which had been late in joining the retreat of the Soviets. At that time, I fell into the house of Chaim-Reuven, and hid there, but I quickly felt that the Germans had set fire to the house. So I ran out of the burning house, and ran into Baran's house (later on this was Leib'itchkeh's house), but the Germans went from house-to-house and set fire to the houses. The entire town was quickly engulfed in flames. Then I ran through the gardens and got myself out onto the surrounding fields. Near the Russian Orthodox Church, I encountered my grandfather Zvi-Hirsch with my grandmother, and it was only on the following morning that I found my parents with the children in the village of Stok, several kilometers from the *shtetl.*

When we returned to the incinerated town, we entered into an empty warehouse, which belonged to Noah-Abba and it became the place where we lived. With the little wagon that we children used to play before, we now transported bricks from a variety of places, and built an oven in the otherwise bare warehouse, in order to be able to bake and cook. All the Jews of the town were compelled to get together in the few remaining Jewish houses and warehouses that survived the fire.

After they killed the first thirty-six Jews of the town, with Rabbi Fein ז"ל at their head, the burgomaster Balabanski called together the Jewish representatives and promised them that there would be no more killing. He even gave out permits to go and do work in the villages, and the Jews of the town, indeed, were able to earn a little bit, for bread, which they brought from the villages.

Seeing that the synagogue too had been burned down, and there was no Torah scroll, my father with Yitzhak Mayewsky went off to Sjalec, and brought a Torah scroll from there. We formed a clandestine *minyan* in a side hut owned by Rish'keh Poniemansky (a daughter of Mot'keh the shoemaker), and when the older ones would pray there, the young stood outside on guard.

In the Scucyn Ghetto

After *Sukkot*, an order arrived from the Germans, that all the Jews must leave the *shtetl*. Our family traveled to Scucyn, there our father had family, even if truthfully, we were supposed to go to Lida. For this reason, therefore, when we arrived in Scucyn, my father and uncle were arrested, and taken to be shot. Thanks to the fact that my father had good credentials from the Belica burgomaster, they were released, and permitted to take up residence in the Scucyn ghetto. We were among more than 70 people from Belica there. At that time, my father also did not sit idly by. Together, with a number of other Jews, he quietly organized a general

kitchen for those arriving Jews, because Scucyn had not been burned down, and the local Jews there had foodstuffs. My father, and older brother Yaakov, would, on a daily basis, go out to do forced labor, and we smaller children would lie hidden, while patiently waiting for them to return from work, and possibly bringing back something to eat...

On a Saturday in winter, when we were all in the house and preparing for a midday meal, somebody ran in and shouted that the Germans were in the ghetto and getting closer to our quarter. My father and brother Yaakov, ran out of the house, and managed to get over to the Aryan side. I also ran out after them, but the Germans had already reached our house and began to shoot at me. My young child's feet carried me swiftly in their nature, and as a result, the shots did not hit me. However, about an hour later, coming back to the house, we found my brother David shot and lying on the white snow, along with my grandmother Faygl, and two of our Scucyn relatives – Chaim-Yoss'l and his son, Bezalel Koppelman.

On that bloody Saturday, several German murderers shot many Jews and it was only by a miracle that our mother managed to get out of their hands – she ran away, and they looked for her in all of the surrounding houses.

On Saturday in the afternoon, all of the bodies of those Jews who were shot, were laid onto two wagons, and they were taken to the cemetery. The ground, however, was very much frozen, and it was not possible to dig a grave, so they were left to lie in the wagons until the following day. It was first only on Sunday morning, that a fire was made, in order to soften the earth, and in this way, slowly dug out a common grave. After this, those that were shot were laid in the grave, and they were covered with the earth and snow. My father said *Kaddish* for his son, mother-in-law and two relatives, while the others recited *Kaddish* for their relatives, and black ravens crowed over our bitter fate.

In my childish fantasy, I was not yet able to grasp why the German murderers were shooting at innocent children. After David's death, my father and brother Yankl would go to work every morning outside the ghetto, and I along with my sister Chaya, would wait an entire day for their return. Despite the fear of death and the terror, Jews in the ghetto quietly dreamed that their salvation would yet come. I remember how they would tell the story in the ghetto of the 'table on three legs, held up without nails' that three men had their hands on, and thereby warm up the table, so that if you were to ask 'how many?' one leg knocks out the number. In general 'trios' would get together late at night, in a hidden location in the ghetto, and inquire of the 'table' for how many days longer the nightmare will endure? To this, no one in the ghetto could give an exact answer, whether he had seen with his own eyes, the way the 'table' had knocked out the number of days with one leg, weeks, or moths, until the deliverance...

That 'deliverance' came finally, drenched in the blood of hundreds of Jewish martyrs. The Germans, and their accomplices, on the Friday night and Saturday of the 8th and 9th of May 1942, surrounded the Scucyn ghetto, and no longer permitted anyone to go out. On Saturday morning, everyone was driven out of their houses, arrayed by family in the place of the *Batei Medrashim* and began the familiar *selektion* processes, of sending some to the right (to remain alive) or to the left (to death). Fate had it that we were permitted to live – since our father was listed by the Germans as a locksmith by trade, and we were sent to the right. In that group of 'necessary Jews' they segregated about 500 people, while the rest, approximately 2100 souls, were driven off to the previously prepared pits outside of the city, and there, they were shot, a group at a time.

On that day, with my child's eyes, I saw how the Jewish people were being led to the death pits. Hundreds of men, women and little children went on their last walk, clutching one another, surrounded by a cordon of armed German wild beasts. I saw, with clarity, how my elderly grandfather and grandmother walked along, holding the hands of their youngest grandson, their Isser'keh, looking ahead with proud glances, whispering to themselves, no doubt, the holy words of a final confession. This was the way heroes went to their death, not frightened people, because anyone who has looked death in the eyes in this manner, and went to those pits with their visages held high – such a person had to possess a spark of heroism within them.

My father, and other Scucyn Jews, were occupied that entire night, and for the following days and nights, with collecting the solitary bodies of those who were shot, which lay around strewn along that last way – from the place of the *selektion* to the place of murder – and buried them in the town cemetery, not far from the fress mass grave.

The 500 people who remained alive were drawn back into the ghetto. In our dwelling, my father brought in a Torah scroll, and prayers were conducted three times daily. Fear subsided, since by this time nothing provoked fear anymore, because we no longer had anything to lose. – Death became a weekly affair...

Our father, once again, took himself to his community concerns for others, helping out so long as it was possible, while one was still alive. Since four horses remained in the ghetto, my father arranged for plowing the gardens in the ghetto, planting vegetables ans wheat, and until it grew in, arrange to procure foodstuffs from the outside for a community kitchen. This actually came to be realized, because at the time when waste was taken out of the ghetto, to the Polish side, it was not complicated to bring back in a variety of foodstuffs into the ghetto from the Aryan side. With another little boy (Shmulik) from Vasiliski I took part in this endeavor, because children and young people could more quickly negotiate the areas outside the ghetto, while remaining undetected.

At the same time, our father energized others to sow potatoes, and plant vegetables on the land beside each house. Because of this, the Jews in the Scucyn ghetto in those frightful times, almost never went hungry, including those remnants of Jews, who arrived from the liquidated ghettoes in Radun, Vasiliski, Zhaludok, etc. We took them in with outstretched fraternal arms, and the community kitchen gave out food to every Jew that was needy, that came to Scucyn.

Among those who came from Radun, was the family of the local Rabbi there – a mother and two grown sons and one daughter. The set up a 'school' in there residence, and almost all of the little children in the ghetto would come there before dawn, say their prayers, and then study. The two grown boys studied the Pentateuch with the little boys, and the girl taught the little girls their blessings. It is not possible to imagine this today, that in those terrifying days, when the slaughtering knife literally lay against the throat, which also the younger children felt against their throats, that the will was found to both pray and study. My father played a significant role in awakening this will and strong belief – he had a word of comfort for everyone, and offered encouragement not to lose hope until the very last moment of life. He, personally, hoped and believed, that the day of liberation must come for the Jewish people, and we will yet be privileged to see the revenge taken against the German murderers.

In the Lida *Todt-Lager*

But until we finally got there, we lived through enough troubles. At the end of the summer of 1942, the Germans came into the ghetto and mobilized workers for the Lida *'Todt'-Lager*, which was located on the premises of the prison. My father fell into this group, and with his traveling off to Lida, the kitchen in Scucyn continued to operate only for a short time, until it ceased to exist entirely. Therefore, my father concerned himself to assure that there would be a Torah scroll in the *'Todt-Lager'* in Lida, and before dawn, prior to leaving for work, that the Jews should be able to pray as a congregation. He also brought into reality the concept of a community bath there: upon returning from work, everyone took along a brick, or a bit of loam, and in this manner, using these self-generated means, a bath was constructed in the barracks where we lived, where, silently at night, we would bathe and also wash out our bit of laundry.

My brother Yankl had already been previously mobilized to work in the same *'Todt-Lager.'* At night, he would speak to my father, saying that they should flee the camp and go to the partisans in the forests, and later on, rescue our mother and the two remaining children, who had remained behind in Scucyn. On one night, indeed, three Belica Jews came to them out of the forests: Eliezer-Meir Savitzky, Rachel Itzkowitz, and Michael Groznik, who were good friends of my father, and who led him, and my brother Yankl, out of the Lida camp. Along with the, sixteen additional Jews left the *'Todt-Lager,'* and among them also was Shlomo Koppelman from Belica. Thanks to their escape on that night, this group indeed did live through the war, and part of them later came to Israel. Only my dear brother Yankl, fell in the last days of the war (May 1945) at the time that the unit of the Red Army, to which he had become attached after the partisan campaigns, stormed the Brandenburg Gate in the heart of Berlin...

In the Forest With The Partisans

The danger-laden march, from Lida to the forest, lasted two days and two nights, and the sixteen rescued people and their three rescuers reached – Belica partisans. No sooner had they arrived in the forest, than my father and brother got in touch with a Christian they knew, in the village of Zbljany (He was called Kala) and he agreed to act as a guide for us to the Scucyn ghetto and to then bring us back to the forest. When the Christian came for us (with a horse and wagon), he decided to take only me and my sister, because he argued that my mother could expose us because of her very prominent Jewish features. However, we did not want to travel without our mother, and in the end, the Christian agreed to take her as well (to our good fortune, that day happened to have been a major Polish holiday, and the shtetl was full of Christians from the surrounding villages, and on top of this, a heavy rain fell). Germans rode by us several times, but we sat in the wagon, wrapped in coverings because of the rain... and so it was that at night we arrived safely in the village of Zbljany, at the edge of the Neman River. My father and brother Yankl, as well as my cousin Yankl, and many other Belica Jews, were waiting for us on the other side of the Neman, and immediately absorbed us into the new family of forest people – the partisans.

My brother Yankl and my cousin Yankl, did not want to stay in the forest being idle, champing at the bit to do battle with the Germans, to exact vengeance from them. They quickly joined up with the *'Oktyabr Otryad'* – a fighting partisan unit in the *'Pervomayska* Brigade.'

I can remember, with what happiness, my brother came running to tell my father that the commander of the '*Oktyabr Otryad*' accepted him and his cousin Yankl as fighters, and immediately gave them two automatic weapons. During he telling of this, I can recall with what elation and affection he pressed the automatic weapon to his breast, as if it was his best and most beloved friend.

I Part from My Brother

Before taking leave of us, when my brother Yankl went off with the Red Army, to pursue the retreating Germans, he called me out of the hut, and took me off to the side in the forest, so no one would be able to see. He gave me a pat on the shoulder, and said: 'Be well, Fyvel. Who knows if we will ever see each other again. Keep an eye on our father, mother and sister. I cannot remain here with you. I have to go first and foremost to take revenge upon the German murderers to the end.'

At that time he was barely a child himself, and this is how he spoke to me, one who was younger than he. At the time, I did not fully comprehend what his words to me meant. Today, I understand him better. There are, however, moments, when I think that my brother Yankl is not dead, that he didn't really fall at the Brandenburg Gate in the center of Berlin... I often think, that my brother Yankl is alive, and is wandering to this day, somewhere through the Russian forests, with that same automatic weapon in hand, calling out: 'Remember what Amalek did to you!'

And her, my brother Yankl leaps through the forest, gathering up the Jewish partisan fighters, who have remained in the forest for all eternity, standing them out in ranks and calling: 'Foremost, Revenge!' And here those partisan fighters rest: They have seated themselves in a circle, around a campfire: My brother Yankl sits in the middle and holds forth in his lyrical and intensely sorrowful voice: *Умру, Я Умру Похоронят Меня;; Нихто Не Узнает Где Могила Мая.* [91]

My heroic brother Yankl fought heroically as a partisan and as a soldier on the front, and fell heroically for the honor of the Jewish people, at the storming of the Brandenburg Gate in the center of Berlin.

Family Life in the Forest

After my brother had gone off from us, my uncle, David-Hirsch'l brought an old rifle to my father, so that we could defend ourselves in the forest.

My father would go around to the nearby villages, and bring back food for all of us (my mother, sister Chaya,

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91 *Umru, ya umru, pakharonyat menya; y nikhto nye uznayet gdyeh mogila maya...'*

Translation:" I will die, I will die, they will bury me, and nobody will know where my grave site (is)."

and me). We escorted my father with love and fear, when, by day or by night, he would walk guard around our *zemlyankas* with the old rifle in hand, and lie low in trying to see if the Germans, the White Poles, or the Vlasovites, were getting close to us. I remember how he would shoulder the old rifle, and light up a pipe, cast a glance at me, my sister and mother, and vanish among the trees into the night darkness. Neither the great snows, nor the winds deterred him. Even when the trees would snap from the high winds, our father went at night to bring food for his family. He would go out late at night, and before dawn he would be back, after having visited the peasants that he knew, in the vicinity, and having pleaded with them for a bit of provenance.

In the forest, my mother and sister fell ill with typhus (our entire camp was infected with the epidemic). Only my father's energy which never relented, and was not broken, and remained untouched by the epidemic, were we also able to return to our normal strength, which had been severely sapped by the disease. In that segment of time, my father would run more than five kilometers a night, in order to bring us back a small bottle of milk. My mother was then so weak, that my father had to carry her on his back to the more remote hiding places, at the time that the German planes would bomb the forests.

The times, then, became very dangerous, the front came very close, and we could already hear the reports of the cannons. The army of the traitorous Russian General Vlasov, which had gone over to the Germans. surrounded our entire area, and because of this, all of the partisan *Otryads* were compelled to leave the forest and flee in a variety of directions.

We were weakened after the typhus, and could not flee, and so we remained in our current location along with several other families, who also could not flee. During the day, we would move ourselves from the forest into the surrounding swamps, that were overgrown with heavy growth, and at night, we would come back to our *zemlyankas* in the forest, make a fire, dry out the wet clothing and make something to eat.

I am reminded of one early morning, in which my father had left my sister and I in the forest. He seated us in a ditch, covered with branches, and said that we were to lie still in the ditch (he wanted to spare us the need to lie a whole day in swampy water). However, we two small children were afraid to lie alone in a ditch, and in addition, there was a lack of air, because the ditch was very heavily covered. No sooner had our father and mother gone a distance from us, my sister and I crawled out, and ran in the direction of the swamp. all of a sudden, we heard a shout, and the sound of galloping horse's hooves. These were 'Vlasovites' who had surrounded the forest, and were looking for partisans. But my father, with his instinct, sensed the danger, and ran back to the ditch. In this manner, he ran into us along the way, and immediately moved us to the heavy bushes that covered the surrounding swamps.

In the last days before the liberation, we were left without food. We would gather blackberries in the forest, and sustained ourselves with this. One time, when my sister and I were gathering berries in the forest, a Jewish partisan came upon us, and reported that the Russian army is already quite close, and we will be liberated quickly. Or hearts filled with gladness, see4ing that the day of liberation was actually arriving. Several days later, we saw the cannon fire at a distance, and we heard and saw how Russian tanks were advancing and pursuing the retreating Germans.

Back to the Destroyed *Shtetl*

I will never forget the picture when we emerged from the forest and saw the first of the Russian soldiers. They questioned us about how we were able to stay alive, embraced us, and enlivened themselves with us, giving us chocolate, bread and cigarettes. they took special pleasure with us, the children, literally not knowing what first to do for us. We learned from them that our *shtetl*, Belica, had been liberated from the Germans. All of the Belica Jewish partisans, with the children and women, went off on foot, with their rags on their backs, back home. On a summer evening, a small band of surviving Belica Jews arrived in the *shtetl*.

Nobody came out to meet us. What we were met by, was the giant mass grave of those who were killed, beside the Russian Orthodox Church, and we were greeted by the incinerated Jewish houses. First and foremost, we all went to the mass grave, and quietly wept there. After that, we dispersed, and each of us went to find a place where we could sleep. The remaining unburned houses in the *shtetl* had been occupied by the Christians, and as a result, it was necessary to engage them in an argument. A small number therefore remained in the *shtetl* (a few families) and all the rest went off to Lida.

Temporarily, our family took up residence in Gapanowicz's stable, because Petrya Lubecki (a Belica Christian) was living in the house, whose house was also burned down in the fire, when the Germans had arrived. My father immediately arranged to work in a mill as a mechanic (Rachel Itzkowitz was once again the '*balabusta*' of the mill). I began to work in a government business. In this way, we lived in the shtetl for a bit less than a year, when all by itself, the old sentiment awoke that had been buried deeply in the inner recesses of the soul. All at once, a quiet summons began to spread among the surviving Jews of that area: leave this accursèd earth, soaked in Jewish blood, travel to Poland, because from there, a way exists to get to the Land of Israel.

After we received the letter from the Russian army that our brother Yankl had fallen in battle, we decided to leave the shtetl as quickly as possible to travel to Poland. Our cousin Yankl Kremen traveled with us, who had returned wounded from the front. Late at night, almost in secret, we left the *shtetl*. Once again, nobody was there to escort us, and only dogs ran after our wagon, barking. We sensed that, this time, we were leaving Belica forever.

Legal and Illegal Ways to The Land of Israel

We went off to Lida, and later, in a transport with other repatriated Poles, we came to Poland. We arrived in Lodz, and there we met others from Belica, and arranged accommodations with the Mayewsky family. We were in Lodz for four weeks. During that time, a partisan movement was created that organized groups of partisan families that were sent to the Land of Israel by illegal means.

From Poland, we went to Czechoslovakia, spending three weeks there, and later, on foot, crossed the border into Austria at night. Here we met a large number of partisan families, because in the meantime, the illegal *aliyah* had come to a halt, and we began to settle into the D.P. Camps. My father, together with other

partisans, started up a communal activity, and in this manner, created the Austrian Partisan union (פו"ח), which played an important role in all of the D.P. camps in Austria. The union was represented in the Zionist Federation in Austria, and in all D. P. camp institutions that took up the issue of the Jews in Austria.

Here too, my father committed his entire energy to this community work among the partisans. Also, other Belica partisans took other positions in the leadership of the partisan union.

On March 10, 1949, our family left Austria. In the port of Naples we saw the first Israeli ship '*Galila*' and it was on this ship that we arrived in our homeland.

By Battle and Indirect Means, to a New Life

By Chaim Yosselewicz

After the Liberation

Several weeks after the liberation by the Red Army, our life began to normalize itself. True, it was difficult for us to get used to the idea that we were living on the same Earth, in the same place where our nearest and dearest had been exterminated. It was hard, but no other alternative existed, after having survived, and remained alive.

In the first days, we were concerned about making a roof over our heads, about procuring something to eat, and clothing to wear. The better Christians, and peasants who knew us, began, a little at a time, to help us.

The war was still going on in full force. the Red Army achieved great victories, Every day, the Red Army would bring many captured Germans into the shtetl, along with Ukrainians and Vlasovites.

A POW camp was created in Belica. Former partisans and Jews were mobilized into a cadre of guards for the camp, as well as to conduct assault campaigns against the remnants of the hidden Germans. To this end, the so called 'Истребителний'[92] Battalion., was organized.

All the young people who belonged to this battalion took revenge against the murderers that were captured, especially – captured S.S. troops (may their names be erased), and Gestapo staff. A sentiment of taking vengeance was awakened in each and every person, on behalf of our martyrs. It was also planned to carried out acts of vengeance against the *mieszczany* neighbors, who cooperated with the Germans and spilled Jewish blood.

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92 The 'Execution' Brigade previously referenced on page 250

The *Shtetl* in Ruins

The *shtetl* was entirely ruined. The Jewish houses, which remained intact on the Njacec street, on the street of the *Shokhet*, were occupied by Christians. They were evicted, and the few broken Jewish families occupied them in turn.

There was not a single family that had remained intact. Very few remained from the Belica Jewish community, the majority having been killed in the ghettoes and camps.

We took up residence in Faygl Ben-Zion's small house and attempted to re-build the building, which had been knocked down during the war.

We began to come around a little bit. In those days nothing was done to plan for the future. The war was still on, and bloody assaults continued to take place on the part of the 'White Poles,' against the liberated cities and towns. We were also fearful that they might fall upon our *shtetl.*

In the Military, At the Front

On September 15, 1944, draft notices arrived for all men between the ages of 18 and 45. Immediately on the following day, they were required to present themselves, to the designated mobilization points. All those called, gathered together, and went off to Lida on foot. There, we met many Jews of our acquaintance, from the surrounding towns, remnants of those who remained alive from camps and the forests. Each one of us wanted to take a little more rest after such intense suffering, that we had experienced, and ways were sought to temporarily be released from service.

The craftsmen got work in military factories, and they became 'exempt' from going to the front. We, however, had no such skill, and it was difficult for us to procure any sort of work like this.

Several days later, the prior commander of the Jewish partisan *Otryad* 'Bielski' arrived (Tuvia) and proposed that my brother and I work in his office as employees. He was the director of a brick-making factory and other factories requiring craftsmen, who worked for the Red Army.

At the same time, he assured us that we will be able to remain working for him, undisturbed, and in time, we could become exempt from going to the front.

We accepted this proposal with great satisfaction, and immediately, on the same day, we sat down to begin working as assistants in bookkeeping. However, we were not very long in remaining undisturbed at this work. The Soviets needs as many recruits for the front as they could get. On one day, we were again summoned to present ourselves at a collection point. We went off there, along with the remaining workers from the

factory. We received a medical examination, I was found to be healthy, and able to do army service, but my brother was let go. On October 12, 1944, I was taken away as a recruit in the Russian army, and together with three other Belica young men, I went off to the barracks in Lida. Those boys were: Yaakov Zlocowsky ז"יסר (Israel's son), Yaakov Kremen (Israel Meiram's son) and Neta Odzhikhowsky (Fyv'eh Nissan's son).

No intervention on the part of my bosses was of any help, and I was compelled to go away into the army. We spent a few days more in the Lida barracks, until all the formalities were properly executed.

We were then sent to Baranovici. As soon as we got there, I was separated from my comrades because of my lesser age. On that same day, they were sent off in the direction of Brisk, and I continued to remain for several days in Baranovici. On the fifth day, I was sent, with a group, to Bobruisk (Eastern Byelorussia). We were taking into an old, big fort, with large, long barracks. It was here that I first really felt like an army recruit. I was assigned to a machine gun division, the conditions were very bad, and it was very hard for me to get used to the new circumstances. Day and night, we were driven to battle drills under the most severe discipline. The food was very bad, and I would suffer hunger and deprivation. I quickly absorbed the principles of battle tactics, and this lightened my situation. After one and a half months, our entire division was selected and sent off by train in an unknown direction. We were certain, that we were traveling to the front, but after three days of travel, we came to a small station, not far from Minsk. Later on, we were taken to a large military camp, and deployed in the forests. According the plan, each of us was allocated to an active unit. I fell into an artillery division and I was supposed to work as a radio operator. Later on, I was sent to the division HQ. Here, I worked as the telephone liaison between the HQ and the battery. I felt good, and I was satisfied with my work. I oriented myself quickly in all my relationships, and assumed the duties with ease. I got a good name with my commanders, and for this reason, things went easier for me.

A short bit of time later, the order arrived for our entire division to travel to undertake battle, before going off to the front. I would get frequent letters from home, my brother being found in Lida, and worked at the assembly point as a secretary. My father lived in Belica, where several other Belica families were to be found. In the vicinity, remnants of the 'White Poles,' could still be found, and they continued to prey on the villages. They would frequently fall upon the *shtetl*, as well as upon Soviet posts.

At the Front

On November 15, 1944, we left, in full battle readiness to the place where the previously mentioned maneuvers were supposed to take place. The location made the impression on us of being a real section of the battle front. But later on, I acclimatized myself to it, and the cold and heavy snow no longer bothered me. We slept under the open sky, and after several days, I tasted what real front conditions were really like.

The noise of the cannonade was deafening, and I began to apprehend what life at the front was really like. I no longer let it get to me, and I learned very well, how to conduct myself at the front, in battle, and nothing frightened me any longer.

Along with all my other comrades, I requested to be sent to the front as quickly as possible, in order to defeat

the enemy. I had a lot of luck, in that none of my Christian comrades knew that I was a Jew – which helped me avoid being subject to anti-Semitic abuses. After five days of maneuvers, we traveled, with our arms, to the front. The 'ardent' songs of the front carried across the fields that were near the location where our echelons passed through.

On December 20, 1944, our echelon left the station in the direction of the front. Every soldier was traveling with a feeling of happiness and hope for a quick victory over the enemy. After four days we came to the small Polish railroad station of Łuków. Our division spent the entire night offloading itself from the train cars, and with the arrival of dawn, we were already waiting for our orders of where to go. That location, was near the front.

At ten o'clock, the order from the Head Office arrived, to board all vehicles with our arms, and to go to the front. We immediately went off. The road was continuously camouflaged through the forest. We saw bunkers that had been dug out, by the retreating German army. On both sides of the road, we saw burned out tanks spread all over, ammunition and automobiles that had been abandoned, by the retreating German army. Also, there were many killed people laying around in the forest. It became readily apparent that a very, very heavy battle had taken place here just a short time ago. The vicinity was completely ruined. the villages – burned down, and the civilian populace were residing in temporary *zemlyankas.* Part of them showed evidence of wanting to be evacuated. The military camps of the Red Army were spread out through the forest, and at every step, one stepped upon the weaponry, and also masses of soldiers. Everyone live in *zemlyankas,* and the tumult and noise of this strong retreat of machinery was deafening to the ears. On riding closer to the front, it was possible to hear the report of gunfire more loudly. By nightfall, we arrived at our designated location.

Our division was assigned to the first Byelorussian front, which was under the command of the renown General Zhukov.

The Eight Army, in which I served, occupied the entire Vistula Theater. The army at that time was positioned defensively.

Following our orders, we deployed into the Sobolyev forests, where, at the same time, we constructed *zemlyankas,* for ourselves, and installed a regular system of communication with the HQ. The place was overrun with Red Army personnel. Something was being readied. Day and night, I would run with the my Katushka weapon on my back, with the telephone in hand, and set up the necessary communication. The noise of the machines, tanks and airplanes was almost unbearable. Yet, a little at a time, we got used to this as well. In the mornings, as soon as it would get light, I was already at the *Pierodovayo* – (command line) – beside the commander, and controlling the communication. I would sit at the observation post for the entire day, and receive the orders from my commander, In the evening, as soon as it would get dark, the German artillery would shell the surrounding points of our operating base.

No official battles had taken place in those days yet. The noise and the swishing of cannon shells and bullets, that used to fly over our heads, instilled fear in everyone. The skies were lit up by rockets and projectiles, as well as the conflagrations from the other side, from the so-called 'neutral zone' (the neutral distance

between the two sets of positions). I worked very hard for a few days, until a fully equipped telephone communication system was installed, and everything was then functioning in the best order. We were preparing ourselves for an attack, and out of sheer exhaustion, we would grab a deep sleep.

The cold intensified, and freezing set in. The place in the forest where we were stationed also became very bad. There were swamps that did not freeze over. We constantly went around with wet feet. This had a bad effect on my health, as well as the health of many of my comrades. The commander of the division suddenly fell ill with a cold, and I had to fill in for him. I had a good command of my work at this time. I would take over a variety of telegrams and orders, and would quickly get in contact with HQ and commanders. Apart from this, as a commander of a detachment, which consisted of five people, I had to send the soldiers off to a variety of posts, to five separate telephone stations. This was one of the most responsible positions, because for ever order not properly filled, there was the threat of a death sentence. This alone encumbered me with the execution of the missions with great responsibility. For my committed and dedicated work, I earned much loyalty from my direct command, and also from the higher battle authorities.

The time went quickly, and I became inured to the hard life at the front. In those days, I thought about nothing, but only about ways – to exact revenge and obtain victory over the German murderers.

On January 2, 1945, in the middle of the night, the Germans opened up with heavy fire. They indirectly began to attack our support points. The order immediately came regarding a counter-attack. '*На Стуиат!*' (*Attack!*) Everyone shouted out. The tumult became great. With an 'Hurrah!' the Red Army troops ran out of the trenches, in the direction of the 'Neutral Zone.' The tremendous machine gun fire, mine throwers and cannons, lit up the entire area. The battle lasted for the entire night, and there were many killed and wounded. Wit the coming of the morning, the shooting became weaker, and later — stopped entirely. We succeeded in driving off the attackers and the attack was interdicted. I took part in a battle for the first time. I sat by the telephone for the entire time, on the observation point, and I carried out the orders of the commander. The life of a soldier at the front became clear to me after this, but I nevertheless hoped to survive and to return to my father and brother.

Blood and Fire

We would have frequent battle confrontations. There were small counter-attacks, but official large-scale battles did not happen. However, it was easy to take note of the fact that we were preparing to launch a large offensive. On January 4, 1945, as soon as day broke, I was immediately sent to the observation point of the forward front line, with an order to create good communication with the cannon positions, as well as wit the commander of the division and its HQ. Immediately upon arriving at the place, the order was carried out. The commander of the division, immediately ordered, that in keeping with the evidence, we should wipe out one of the points which was found in the 'neutral zone,' and was creating damage to subsequent attacks. It was a small house, from which the Germans would constantly shoot with machine guns at our posts. The commander of our first battery received this order from my telephone station – and it became possible for the commander to wipe out this dangerous point. The commander of the division personally thanked me for my work.

The Germans at first did not respond, and waited until evening. As soon as it became dark, they began to fire their artillery at our positions. After several minutes, they attacked our posts, and they passed through the 'neutral zone.'

They met our posts with heavy machine gun fire. After an order from the Chief HQ, we launched a counter -attack. A bloody battle spread. The German infantry units put up a strong resistance, and only with the help of tanks, were we able to penetrate their bunkers. The Germans drew back to the small Polish village of Warka. I sat by the telephone and filled out all of the orders of the commander precisely. Our cannons did not stop firing. Many dead and wounded littered the battlefield. The noise of the machines and tanks and the cannon fire blended into a wild tumult. The sky was red from the surrounding fires, behind the front. On the following morning, it quieted down, and I began to make arrangements for communications in our new location. The Germans fortified themselves in a nearby village. Our battery assembled itself in the forest, and everyone attempted to dry out their wet things by a fire, exchanging details about the battle. We also sang and played songs from the front.

After this battle, rumors spread among the soldiers that very quickly, a major offensive is going to be launched against the German troops, carried out through the First Byelorussian front. I was a bit frightened by the responsibility, which fell on me during the big battles, but I hoped that I would be able to fulfill my mission, as I had done to date.

January 8, 1945 was the day of the assault. During the entire previous night, preparations were made for the attack. We waited for it to get light. As soon as day broke, I received the order 'Be Ready!' The first large rockets appeared in the sky. Immediately after that, along the entire front line, there was an awesome report of fire from all manner of weaponry: cannons, mortars, and from the famous Russian Katyushas. The reverberations of the shooting carried without respite through the air, as if it was tearing it apart.

The Telephone Stops Working...

Communications were working well. I was in contact with all of the telephone stations. There were no cut lines, and we waited for the 'Attack!' signal. At seven o'clock, we heard the sound of a 'Hurrah' on the gathering place – the Russian sign for an attack, and the attack began along the First Byelorussian front. The mass of attacking soldiers came from all sides, who ran with their arms in the direction of the neutral zone. The shooting became intense. the cry of 'Hurrah,' 'Attack' reached up to the heavens. The enemy met our soldiers with a strong resistance. Intense fighting broke out all over. All manner of our weaponry was fired in the direction of the enemy's bunkers and fortified points. My work at the telephone consisted of relaying the necessary orders and telegrams. Our cannons were firing without stopping.

On the battlefield, there were already many killed and wounded. The infantry fought stubbornly, in order to be able to break through the German support points. The communications functioned without interruption fora half day. Suddenly, the telephone stopped working. The commander ordered: 'Quickly re-establish communications,' and I ran out ahead, with my rifle in hand, and with great difficulty reached the ranks of the /// line. A hail of gunfire rained over our heads, The whistling of the bullets frightened me. Paying them no heed, I looked for the break in the cables. It was far from easy to find this, but I was able to locate the

break pretty quickly, and to repair it. In this way, contact was renewed with the cannons, which were putting out the cannonade. I ran back to the bunker, to my work. We had the good fortune of being able to break through the German fortifications and our units were able to get into their trenches and bunkers. Tanks and other vehicles stretched along after the attackers.

Our attacking soldiers ran ahead with the cry, '*За Родину, за Сталина*' (For the Motherland, for Stalin).

Following the order of my commander, I quickly packed up all the gear and ammunition onto a vehicle, and we rode off ahead with the attacking army. The Germans retreated as far as the small river Radomka, in the direction of the Polish city of Radom. In order to ford the river, the commander ordered us to unloaded ourselves as quickly as possible, and to again take up a position, and establish communication with the cannon positions. I did this quickly, dividing the work among all of the soldiers attached to my division. I dug myself a '*Oatcake*' (an open small bunker) put the telephone there, and secured myself from possible gunfire. The place was a very bad one – a very smoothly plowed field. From the other side of the river, everything was as visible as if in one's hand. After a short while, the telephone was working and we had communication with all of the telephone stations.

The shooting had spread out. Individual units attempted to ford the river, but the Germans constantly enfiladed those attempting to cross. Again, a battle was joined. Mortars began to fall on all sides, and many tens of soldiers were wounded. The enemy attempted to reach our attacking soldiers by single cannon shots. Our howitzers responded with fire, and a counter-fire of shooting ensued anew. I remained in contact, my commander through a second line, got in contact with me, and immediately ordered me" 'quickly repair the break, and get in contact with out cannons.' I sent one of my assistants out, in order to fulfill the order. No sooner had he Gorten to the pace where the break was, when he was met with a hail of bullets, and he was immediately killed. When a bit of time had gone by, and I heard nothing from him, I went out with one of my comrades, in the directions of the front line. A bit of time went by, and I still had no communications. Because of this, I was very scared. As soon as it got quieter towards evening, my comrade and I set out along the way to the forward front line, in the direction of the cable break. I ran and fell, got myself up, and again fell, and exerted myself so that the enemy would not see me. My comrade ran ahead of me, and I began to raise myself on my knees. I could not feel my feet for the cold, and also – not the hands. After crawling 'on all four' for fifty meters, I dragged myself over to a small ditch, and remained laying there. My comrade had gotten further than I as. The shooting again got closer to us. I snuggled up to the ground. As soon as the shooting moved off in a different direction, I stood up, and running for several meters, I found the break. Out of great happiness, and overcome with emotion, my hands were shaking, and there was nothing I could do.

My hands were frozen, but my entire body suddenly became warm. I quickly repaired the break, and immediately established contact with my commander. He was very pleased and he thanked me through the telephone: 'Молодец[93],' he said, 'for this you get a medal.' Our cannons again began to fire. the commander ordered me to return to my bunker and leave the forward front line. I stood up and attempted to run to my comrade, in order that we both might return to our bunker. The shooting kept up for a long time. A half a day went by like this. Our soldiers lay occupied, and waited for new orders. The choking odor of burned dead bodies was carried to us on the air.

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93 *Molodets* (Young Man)

I was pleased with the thought, that had occurred to me in a particularly difficult moment, that I had fulfilled my mission to re-establish communications. And suddenly, once again came the shout of '*Hurrah.*' Our soldiers went off again on the attack, bullets whistling over their heads, and the whole sky was lit up as if it was in the middle of a clear day.

I Become Wounded

Running back to the bunker this way, the shooting was once again directed towards me. I once again fell to the ground and began to crawl on my stomach.

Projectiles began to land not far from me, and then exploded. My comrade was already much further along than I, and the shooting missed him. My heart gave me a premonition of no good. The enemy detected me, and shot continuously at my side. Suddenly, a projectile fell near me, and exploded, about eight meters from where I had dropped down. The report deafened me, and I lay senseless, and I felt nothing as I was wounded at that moment. When I gradually came around, I began to feel a burning in my stomach and a sort of pain all over my body. I listened to the cries of other wounded soldiers, who also lay on the field. They pleaded for help. I began to look for the place where I was wounded, and could not find it. I understood that I could not move, and that I am severely wounded.

I got very warm, and I felt that I was lying in a pool of blood. My hands became paralyzed and I could not move them. I sensed an acute pain in the left palm of my hand. I attempted to get up on my feet, but could not. The pain became unbearable. I lost my belief that I would stay alive. I began to shout, but immediately stopped, because my mouth was full of blood. Now I felt that I had been wounded under my left ear. With my last bit of strength I attempted to shout in the stillness: '*Спасей*' (Rescue , help!). The attacking Red Army soldiers were already far away from me. I could still hear solitary gunshots. Apart from the wounded and dead, one didn't see a living thing on the field. Many of those who were wounded lightly, went off on the road. A half hour went by, and no one came to help me. I felt, that I was running out of blood, and my reserves of strength were being sapped by the intense pain. 'Here is my end,' I thought.

And despite this, I, once again, began to think about being rescued, and I recalled my comrade, who had gone off to the unit. Perhaps he will call upon someone to help? Or, perhaps he too, had been wounded, or perhaps killed? Suddenly, I heard footfall. I was very happy. The man stopped beside me. Once again, I called for help: 'Drug (friend) rescue me, I am passing out.' I recognized my comrade, He became confused, seeing me wounded, and didn't know what to do with me. I said to him, that I am severely wounded in the stomach, and I am burning from the severe pain. He quickly took off my over garments, tore them up, and bandaged me. He ran back to the unit by himself, leaving me naked on the field. He covered me with his coat, and went off.

I began to shiver from the cold. My entire body was wracked by fever. 'Who knows if I will be able to withstand this?' – I thought to myself. The wounded, once again, began to ask for help. A medic appeared. He went up to me, and lifted me up carefully. He took everything off of me, and re-bandaged me. He left a note in my hand, on which was written: 'this soldier was wounded on the battlefield.' The medic went away. It was late at night, and very, very dark. I became very cold, and no longer felt any pain, I had become very weakened and didn't feel anything anymore. Doubtless, a good several hours went by, until an ambulance

arrived. I was put on the gurney. There were many other wounded. Among the soldiers, who put me in the ambulance, I saw my comrade and my commander. 'Fima,' – he said – '*Ничего*, молодец, *Ты Попровшся Скоро и Будиш Здров.*' (It is nothing, young man, you are brave, you will recover quickly and be healthy). My comrade mourned me intensely and said: '*Жалко ХорошогооБоица*' (It's a shame to lose a good soldier). I was brought to the medical section of our division.

From Hospital to Hospital

In the medical section of the division, the doctor personally attended me, and immediately changed my dressings. He confirmed that the wound was severe, and that they must immediately operate. At that same moment, a freight truck rode up, and I was taken away, accompanied by the doctor. After riding for about an hour, we came to a place, where the nurses with the doctor, carefully took me off the truck, put me on a gurney, and brought me into a *zemlyanka*, which was dimly lit by electric lights. This was the operating room. I was placed on the table, and immediately operated on. The operation lasted about four hours. My intestines were torn in two places. My left foot and spinal chord were also severely hit.

I first began to feel the frightening pain on the following morning, but I could not say a thing, and could not turn myself over on a side. I was treated only with injections of glucose. My entire body was swathed in large bandages. I would often faint from sheer weakness, the doctors recognizing that I had lost a great deal of blood, and they ordered the nurses to administer as many blood transfusions as possible. After the blood transfusions, I would feel better. I could not eat for two weeks, and I could not even take a bit of water in my mouth.

I found myself in a small field hospital, which was set up in the *shtetl* of Sobolyev. In this hospital, I underwent another operation during which they removed shrapnel from the wound that was under my ear. I began to come around, and began to feel better. I began to sat up a bit, and day by day things became easier for me. However, I did not yet entertain the possibility of getting out of bed. My weakness would exhaust me severely. After two months of lying in the hospital, I was sent over to Lublin. Because of my weakened state of health, I did not remain in this hospital for very long, and I was sent over deep into Russia, to the Ukrainian city of Dnepopetrovsk (formerly Yekaterinoslav), and here, in this hospital, I remained under special the care of a doctor. I immediately wrote a letter to my father and brother. They had no news from me at all. My health began to improve, and I began to hope that I would return to health. The lady doctor, who attended me, made strenuous efforts to cure me, and promised to get me on my feet. She would concoct a variety of things for me to do, in order to occupy me, and that I not be bored. I would also get books from her to read, which gave me great pleasure. The food was very good, and had a very good impact on my state of health. The wounds took a long time to heal. The only think that had not healed was my right foot. I was operated on it twice, but it did not help. The lady doctor had me set up for yet a third operation.

In the meantime, I began to get letters from home. They wrote me that almost all the surviving Jews of wester Byelorussia have traveled off to Poland, as Polish citizens, from where they arrive in the Land of Israel. This news moved me greatly, and I did not know what I should do. I had to go through an operation again, which would deprive me of a couple of months. It was already the first period of exodus from Byelorussia, and without me, they also did not want to leave. I wrote back home about this, and my brother came traveling to

me immediately. My brother, Moshe, came quickly to the point, because otherwise, we were threatened with having to remain in Russia. The time to travel to Poland was a very short one. I went to my lady doctor and told her exactly what my situation was. I strongly pleaded for her to help me. She had no particular desire to let me go. Later on she did this, but on condition that I sign myself out, and that she is not responsible for my unhealed wound. I accepted this happily. she led me through all of the formalities, not demanding any signatures from me any longer, and I traveled home with my brother...

Home...Home... and Away from Home

The trip to Belica took exactly one week. We traveled through Kharkov, in the direction of Minsk. On the way, we traveled to our father's older brother, Zelig who was residing in the small Russian town of Zlinka. Our uncle had saved himself from the murderous hands, and had remained the only survivor. He worked as a pharmacist in the *shtetl*. Our meeting moved my brother and I very strongly. He told us about everything he had been through during the war, being already of advanced age. We made a very fervent proposal that he should come with us and immediately travel to Poland, from where we would continue further. However, he did not want to do this because of his children, who had to remain in Russia, and would later have to put up with a great deal of unpleasantness. Remaining with our uncle for two days, we took our leave of him, and we traveled off and arrived in Lida. Our father was still living in Belica, and was almost the only Jew left in the entire *shtetl*.

After remaining for a couple of weeks in the destroyed house, we traveled off by special transport to Lodz.

To this day, the following remained living in the destruction of Belica: Yud'l Baranchik (Eizhik'eh's son) with his family, and Abraham'l Szereszewsky (grandson of Israel the dyer), who came back late from the Red Army, and no longer had the possibility of leaving for Poland.

Lodz, Bratislava, Budapest and Bad-Gastein (Austria)

Two weeks before *Rosh Hashana*, we arrived in Lodz. The external appearance of the life of the Jewish community there made a goos impression. We had, for a long time, not seen such a concentration of Jews in one place. Many Zionist movements were already active among the various groups. An 'escape' committee was formed, which organized the removal of Jews, especially the youth, from Poland, with the objective of bringing them to the Land of Israel. The 'escape' committee consisted of a group of idealists, who not only once, would put their own lives at risk, in leading groups of Jews over the borders.

We did not want to stay in Lodz for very long, and after six weeks, we, and a group of Jews traveled to Cracow. We waited for our visa for two weeks in Cracow, and after that we were sent to Katowice. A lady worker for the 'escape' committee waited for us at the train station – a young girl. She received us and put us up in a hotel, where we spent the night. The same young girl returned to us on the following morning, and put together a group of six people. She gave us instructions on how to behave as we went further on our way. We became Greek Jews, who are traveling back to the camps, to our homes. Our group leader had obtained

a special document and we were to speak only Hebrew, feigning ignorance of any other language. She merely said to us, that we were traveling to Bratislava (Slovakia) and upon our arrival there, we will receive further instructions. From the train station in Katowice, we rode to the Polish-Czech border. By dawn, we arrived at the border station of Zebrzydowice.

The station employees knew the 'customers' quite well by now, and they didn't speak with us for very long, but sent us off to the border guard. In the guard house, we were searched, and immediately taken over the borderline. There, we waited for the Czech train, which was supposed to take us to Bratislava. We must have looked very pathetic while we stood there with our packs, in the rain, and every passing soldier laughed and made fun of us. The train arrived at nightfall. We boarded it, and seated ourselves, and waited for departure. Prior to departure, we went through another check by the Czech guards. We spoke among ourselves only in Hebrew and presented ourselves as Greek Jews. We had a phrase: '*Ani Greco.*' After a 24-hour cycle, we arrived in Bratislava, and according to the address we were given, we went to the Hotel 'Yellin.' There we encountered many Jews, who were waiting to be able to travel further on. The hotel had the proper Jewish appearance...

We celebrated the last days of *Sukkot* in Bratislava, and immediately after the holiday, we were sent off to Hungary in a transport. After riding for two days, we came to the small border town of Komarno. We walked on foot from the station to the border point. It was at night, and in the heavy darkness, the driver of transport set us into a long column, and we walked one behind the other. Tired and broken from wandering, 500 people, among them women and children, dragged themselves over the small, dark forest paths. This image reminded us of the past terrifying times. We were forbidden to utter a word. The small children cried from exhaustion, from sleeplessness, and from not eating. The older people and the women, dragged themselves along with the last of their strength. The only thing that kept everyone going, was the hope of achieving the objective. Late at night, we arrived at the point. Here we remained and slept. Very early the following morning, our leader came to us, and told us to be ready to cross the border. At eleven o'clock, we came to the Czech-Hungarian border, by the Danube River.

The Czech soldiers searched everyone. After this inspection, we again fell into a column, and went over the bridge. We came to the Hungarian border guard. The group leader spoke a good Hungarian, and he conversed with them, and he told us to wait until the commissar would arrive. All of us lay down on the ground, and waited for the commissar. At about midday, he arrived. After a long conversation with him, he did not permit us to enter Hungary, and demanded, that we turn around and return to where we came from. The Czech guards did not want to let us back in, and we remained standing in the 'neutral zone.' The group leader used hand signals (viz: smoke and mirrors) to indicate that we were Hungarian Jews that were returning 'home.' They went into his office, and as it seems, they arrived at an understanding... [because] immediately afterwards, we crossed the borderline, and found ourselves on Hungarian soil. We went off to the train station, and there we boarded freight cars, and traveled to Budapest. This is how we illegally crossed the borders from one country to another. But this was just the beginning of a further journey of wandering, before we could attain our goal.

In Austria

At about midday, our transport arrived at the main station in Budapest. Representatives of the 'Joint' and '*Braykha*[94],' were already waiting for us. In especially prepared tramways, we rode off to the point where we had to remain for a few days, just to rest up. After a few days, we came around a bit. The leader of the '*Braykha*' gathered the entire transport together in a large hall, and instructed us on how were to behave. We were Polish Jews there, who are returning there from the Austrian concentration camps. On the third day, we traveled to Vienna as if we were Jews returning from a camp. We boarded a Soviet military train, and together with the Red Army soldiers, we arrived at the *Ost-Banhof* in Vienna. The leader with the transport took everyone down from the train, and stood us out in a column. It was before dawn and, in the early light of day, we went off through the Vienna streets in the direction of the familiar 'Rothschild Hospital.' We walked for several hours. The women and children barely were able to drag themselves along. They were tired out from walking, and from not sleeping. My father, too, was proceeding on the last of his energy. When it became very light, we arrived at our destination. The hospital building was heavily damaged by bombs. Inside, it was dirty. People wandered about in the yards, in the corridors, and under the stairs. It was late fall, and people were sleeping on the cold ground. Everyone was anticipating the next leg of the journey. We were in Vienna for one day and in the evening, we were again ready to travel on further. Everyone of us obtained a document from the Red Cross as an Austrian Jew from the American Zone. At eight o'clock in the evening, our transport went to the '*West-Banhof*' (French Zone). At the station, train cars were ready to take us on our journey.

In the middle of the night, we traveled in the direction of the American Zone. We rode for several hours, until we came to the border of the Soviet-American zones, The Dunai was the border and the posts stood on both sides of the bridge. The Soviet guard quickly went through the train and let our transport through. The train moved, and we rode off in the direction of the city of Wels, where there was a Jewish camp. At Wels, the camp commandant did not receive us, because of a lack of space, and we rode off to a second camp (Lambach). Debarking from the train, our *Braykha* leader again arranged us in a column and took us off to the camp on foot.

We dragged ourselves along for several kilometers through a field and forest, until, with the last of our strength we arrived at the camp. We immediately lay down on the ground, in order to rest. Our *Braykha* leader went into the camp and negotiated with the camp commandant about us, to permit us to be taken into his camp. After a 10-minute discussion, he came back, and we entered the camp. It was immediately noted, that this had been a concentration camp. The camp was still surrounded by barbed wire. Along with the Jews, there were also to be found criminals of a variety of nationalities, confined for their criminal activity on behalf of the Nazi regime. A permanent guard stood at the gate, which also maintained order in the camp. Access to leave, and go into the city, was only possible by a special pass from the camp commandant.

The conditions were difficult ones, and oppressive. After eating, it was required to stand in line together with all of the criminals, who previously had beaten us, and suddenly had become refugees equal to us. They would laugh at the Jews and continue to make sport of them.

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94 The Hebrew word for 'escape,' referring to the 'Escape' committee.

We encountered people we knew here, who helped us to settle down. We did not lose our hope and began to accustom ourselves to the new circumstances. Jewish-American soldiers would often come by and visit with us.

It was September, and the cold was intense. First and foremost, we did not have clothing to wear. It was very cold to have to sleep at night on the boards in the barracks. A special American commission came riding into the camp on one day, and contemplated the conditions under which we were living. They promised us that this would not last very long, and we will be taken out of there. Among the committee people was Rabbi Bonen. He told us that 'Truman had ordered to accommodate the few Jewish refugees in the best manner possible.' After several weeks, we were sent off to the new camp at 'Bad-Gastein.'

We were in the Lambach camp for three weeks, during which an order arrived from the senior command at American HQ, to mover us to Bad-Gastein.

On October 13, 1945, American soldiers came and took us away in military buses to Bad-Gastein – the world-famous Austrian sanatorium. We were brought into a Garden of Eden. Each individual was settled in a comfortable hotel facility that had previously been used by foreign guests of the sanatorium. The rooms – finely appointed with furniture, roomy and heated. This was our true rest from all of the suffering and exhaustion. Every one of us settled themselves in well. Several other families from Belica were in this camp. Later on, we became aware of additional Belica families, who were living in the camps, not far from us.

Almost all the surviving Belica Jews were concentrated here. One was not far from the other. Several of the families found themselves in the camps in Germany.

Winter drew close. I suffered a great deal from the wound in my foot. But since it was not possible to operate on me during the winter. I did not want to lose the free time and taught myself sheep farming. As soon as it got warmer, I ent off to the hospital, in order to get the wound healed and to be rid of it.

In between, the *aliyah* from Italy got started. Many people traveled there, with the objective of being able to get to the Land of Israel. I exerted myself to have the operation more quickly, in order to make *aliyah* together with my father and brother. In several months I returned to complete good health.

On August 15, 1946, an *aliyah* took place from Belgium, and my brother Moshe went along on it. We figured that it would not take very long, and we too, would make *aliyah.* My father and I remained where we were. The situation in Bad-Gastein got worse in all respects. I was compelled to look for work in order to earn something. I became secretary of the hotel committee, Out of my earnings, I was able to cover the expenses for our day-in and day-out needs. Before this, my brother, from Belgium, went on *Aliyah Bet* with the ship *'Theodore Herzl'* and arrived in Cyprus. We also began to contemplate making *aliyah.* Rumors also spread about the liquidation of the camp at Bad-Gastein, and we decided to travel away.

Nobody saw any other alternative available. Together with us, many people also made the trip to the *aliyah-*

camp: Solfelden. It was precisely from this place, near the French Zone border, we were supposed to travel to Italy. A couple of weeks later, a transport was allocated to us, with which we traveled up to the French Zone. At the border, we were inspected by the French and it was established that our documentation was false. Because of this, we had to debark from the train cars, and ride back to where we had come from. Our transport was in contest with the guards for the entire night, and did not debark from the cars. Before dawn, guard soldiers occupied our cars, locked the doors, in order that we not flee, and sent us back. On debarking at Solfelden, the American police arrested us again. After extensive negotiations with the commandant of the camp, we were let go. On that very same night, we gain rode off using the same train, to Innsbruck (French Zone). That was the point from which we were supposed to begin the next step in our journey. This time, it worked, and before dawn, we arrived at the destination. Two of the 'cadre' from *Braykha* were waiting for our transport with a special vehicle, which immediately took us to the point of departure.

The so-called assembly-point, Gnadenwald' was a small hamlet, about 30 km from Innsbruck. From this point, on a daily basis, transports would depart, crossing the border illegally into Italy. We had to wait three whole weeks for our column to proceed further. The conditions at this location were very difficult. The overcrowding was great, and the arriving people would simply loll around on the ground, in the corridors, and on the street. In the first contingent to travel, were families with small children and pregnant women.

On a certain day, as soon as it had gotten dark, the *Braykha* leader ordered an assembly of our transport. He gave us specific instructions on how to act during our trip. We were about 40 people per vehicle, and we rode in the direction of the borderline, and the distance to that line was about 70 km. We rode for four hours. The women and the weaker men fared badly during this trip. At one moment, the auto came to a stop in a very large and thick forest. It was dark all around. We all descended from the auto and arrayed ourselves in a column, and went on our way for a long time. This lasted about an hour, until we came close to the region of the border guards. The leader of the *Braykha* ordered us to sit on the grass, and not to speak.

The mothers, carrying small children were very tired, and the little children began to cry. After a few minutes of rest, we arose, and began the illegal crossing of the border. Having gone forward for a bit, we approached a tall hill. It took us a long time to negotiate the hill, and then entered into a swamp. Here, again, we remained sitting, very tired, and with no strength left to go on any further. We were already on Italian territory. I led my father under his arm, and what little possessions we had, I held in my second hand. I, myself, was already tired from walking. Behind me, and elderly woman was walking with the last of her strength. she was unable to proceed any further, and remained sitting, exhausted. I let my father go on ahead of me, and gave the woman a bit of water. This revived her somewhat, and we continued onward. I pursued the group. the woman barely was able to drag herself along. 'This is how I am being exhausted in my old age, and I probably am not going to make it anyway' – she cried out in the forest.

The *Braykha* leaders got angry. They asked us to keep quiet, because this is the worst location through which we have to pass. We forded a small brook. It became wet and cold in the feet. This did not stop us, and we pressed on further. Suddenly I heard a few shots over our heads. We were ordered to stop. Immediately a few other shots rang out. We were surrounded on all sides, and illuminated with electric lamps. the light from the lams cut through the darkness of the night. Each of us began to tremble with great fear.

The little children began to cry. Italian border guards approached us. They arrested us, and took us to their

station. The soldiers treated us very well, taking the young children in their own hands, and carried them to the destination to which they were taking us. Our leaders assured us that we need not be frightened, because they were used to this already. We came to the station post. There, we were all registered, and we remained under their oversight, as arrested persons. We had to wait until the arrival of the guard commissar, who has to make the decision as to what to do with us. Dead-tired, from the hard journey, people immediately fell asleep on the bare ground.

In Italy

Page 470: *The Three Meckel Sisters*

In the morning, the two *Braykha* leaders made telephone contact with the 'Jewish Committee' of the nearby city of Merano, and relayed the situation in which we found ourselves. At noon, a representative of this community came to us, and brought us food. He said to us, that we are going to be released immediately. We sat for three days on the border, and every day we were brought food. On the third day, in the evening, under a special Italian police guard, we were taken back to the Austrian border. But we had no sooner been taken out of the police station, we were turned around in the opposite direction. Their even escorted us to the nearest point. After a few hours, following the forest, and over high hills, with the last of our energies, we arrived in the hamlet.

A member of the *Braykha* was already waiting for us there, and took over the leadership of the group.

In the deep silence of the night, every step of ours risked awakening the light sleep in the little town. But even before we had arrived at our point, dawn began to break, and it became light enough to see. The man from *Braykha* led the largest part of the people into a stable, where they were supposed to spend the daylight hours, and to continue the journey at night. My father and I fell into a small old hut, where we were taken along with our group. In the evening, two fo the *Braykha* men came to us, and gave us further instructions. We received money from them, to be able to take the train to Merano. In the middle of the night, exactly at twelve o'clock, we went out on foot to the train station.

We went 13 km. As soon as it became daylight, we left on the train, and at 8 o'clock we had already arrived at our destination. Another *Braykha* man awaited us on the station. He gave us the address of a location, and showed us the way we had to go. It took a couple of hours to make the trip, dead-tired, we fell into the *Braykha* house. We were immediately given food. Right after that, everyone fell asleep. We spent that day in Merano, and on the same evening, we traveled off in a Pullman-car, to Milan. The trip lasted an entire night. Before dawn, we were able to see the beautiful Italian landscape. People live there, and have no knowledge of our troubles, who is to know if we will yet live long enough and be like other people again? – that was the thought that raced through my mind.

At ten o'clock in the morning, we rode up, in a special auto, to the famous gathering place of the daring, those who came from Austria: – 'Via Uniona 5.' Our entire transport was registered. We received ration cards. Tired, and aching from wandering and lack of sleep, each one of us desperately wanted to sleep, but

there was not enough space. Also, here one could see very strongly, the frightful tragedy of our unfortunate people: hundreds of people pushed one into another, in an overcrowded courtyard. the corridors, all the places under the stairs of the buildings, all the rooms, and all the space in the yard, were chock-full of people. There was not even any place to stand. Children wandered about on the bare earth. The filth was great. People lived for months under these conditions.

During the first two days, we underwent medical examinations, and also carried out all of the formalities... already in the first days, I had made contact with our *landsman* Zerakh Kremen, who had arrived here previously, and was settled in a *kibbutz*. He immediately cam riding to us, and took us to him. He helped us get settled. Thanks to him we were able to come around.

The kibbutz was located in a small town, Castro-Lombo, not far from Milan, in a very beautiful villa. This proved to be our real resting place, after the long and arduous journey. We spent six weeks in the *kibbutz*. Later, when Zerakh was transferred to a special post in Rome, we, my father and I, not wanting to be separated from Zerakh, also moved to Rome.

In Rome, we lived in a kibbutz by the name of *Mordechai Anielewicz*[95]. At the same time I studied to be a radio technician in an Italian trade school. After completing the course, we readied ourselves to make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

At the end of 1948, we finally arrived in the Land for which we longed: in the Jewish country that had been liberated with blood in battle.

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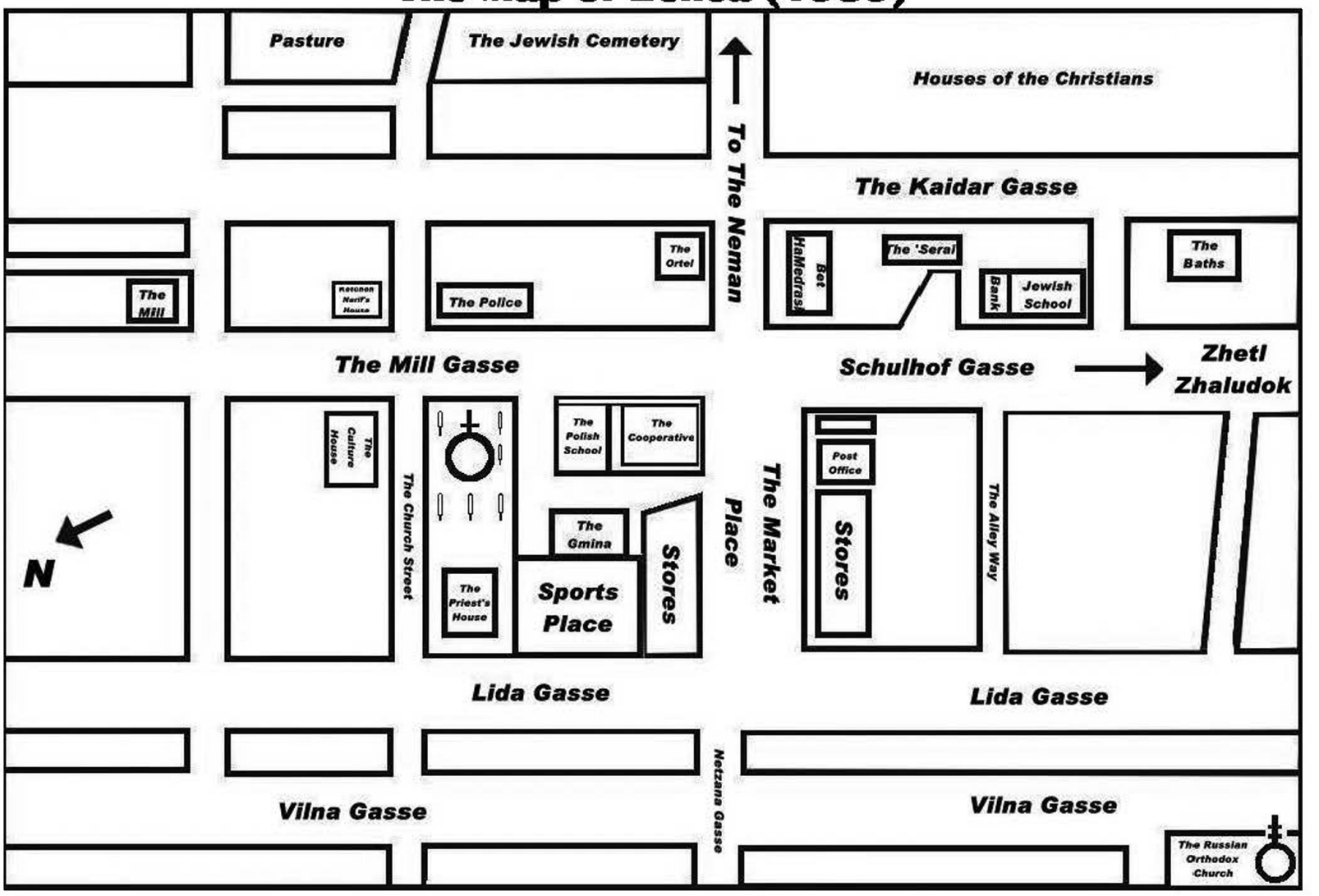
95 Mordechaj (Mordecai) Anielewicz (1919 – May 8, 1943) was the commander of *the Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa* (English: *Jewish Fighting Organization*), also known as ŻOB, during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising from January to May 1943.

Part Four

חלק רביעי

פערטער טייל

The Map of Belica (1939)



The Rabbi, R' Joel Baranchik זצ"ל

By Y. L.

(Excerpted from 'The Jews of Latvia', *Sefer Zikaron*, published by the Union of Lativa and Estonia in Israel, Tel-Aviv 5713)

Page 473: Rabbi R' Joel Baranchik with his Grandson

In the city of Riga, the persona of the Rabbi R' Joel Baranchik stood out among its rabbis and sages, who was a scion of Belica beside Lida, in the Vilna Province. He was the grandson of R' Shlom'keh of Lida, one of the nobility of Jewry, who achieved both great scholarship in Torah and prominence (a grandson of the *Gaon* and *Hasid* R' Shlom'keh of Nickelsburg) and known in Yeshiva circles as 'Joel *der Belicer*', and it was said of him: He has the spark of his maternal grandfather R' Shlom'keh.'

He received the core of his education at the Yeshiva in Navahardok, being one of the outstanding and venerable pupils of the Gaon and Tzaddik, R' Joseph-Yoizl Hurwitz (his teacher saw in him a student-peer). He was an imposing figure of a man, tall and uniquely gifted: accomplished in Torah and Musar, a righteous man, dominating with fear of God, and deeply cognizant of real world issues; he was an outstanding explicator, and pearls would drip from his mouth, he had a reverent presence, and eyes that radiated wisdom; he was an man of honesty and good will, an accomplished leader of worship, with is pleasant voice and heartfelt intonations.

He developed a reputation in Yeshiva circles for being an inspirational speaker, and he was among the first of the speakers at the gatherings of the yeshivas of 'Bet Joseph' from its root in Novardok, and wherever he appeared he made a great impression. He dedicated himself, with all his ardor and will, to distant battles to return the hearts of sons to their fathers, and it was within his capacity to lecture on '*Musar*' for three consecutive hours without flagging. With the magic of his lips, and with is words carved from tongues of flame, he held his listeners in thrall, and sometimes moved them to tears, and many returned to good ways by the effect of his hand.

During his youth, he was an overseer in the Yeshiva of Amcislaw, where the *Gaon*, Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman (The Holy One) served as the Headmaster. Under the direction and with the support of the great teachers of his generation, and his directors, the '*Chafetz Chaim*' and Rabbi Chaim-Ozer Grodzhensky (May the memory of these righteous be for a blessing), he established a seminary of students in Grodno, and some time after this, he served as the spiritual leader of the Yeshiva at Kleck. Under the direction of his great teacher, Rabbi Joseph-Yoizl Hurwitz, along with the activists of the '*Tze'irei Agudat Yisrael,*' he founded the gymnasium, '*Torah v'Derekh Eretz*' in Riga, and served there as the Rabbi of the '*Tze'irei Agudat Yisrael.*' He gave lessons at the *Ulpan* '*Yagdil Torah,*' and at the *Torah v'Derekh Eretz* gymnasium, on a regular basis on Saturdays, and on festivals, and on the High Holy Days, he would speak before *Tze'irei Agudat Yisrael* to arouse them to Torah and the fear of God.

He raised a generation of God-fearing people of integrity. And all of his students who heard his offerings, loved and respected him, just as *Hasidim* did their *Rebbe*. He was among the leaders of the conclave at the Yeshiva of Novardok, that took place on Friday – 11 Kislev 5690 [December 13, 1929] at the Yeshiva of Mezerich. One of his important speeches was publicized in the collection '*Or HaMusar*.'

The father-in-law of R' Joel Baranchik was R' Bezalel ben R' Dov Samrik, one of the first of the teachers in the 'enlightened Heder in Riga, and one of the sainted members of the Yeshiva of Hebron.

About My Father

By Rili Kamenetzky

(On the Thirtieth Day of His Passing)

Remarks published in the Journal of the Workers of the Jewish *Sokhnut* '*Maba*' (April 1964)

Page 475: *Issachar Kamenetzky*

You sit and look with a constrained gaze, as if it is for only your eyes, gazing over the forward way, into the abyss of darkness of the unknowable, that which is beyond sensing – into that silent abyss of that which is no more.

The wound is entirely too fresh, to grasp the magnitude of the repercussions of the pain. It is still not possible to grasp and understand that a fact has been established thirty days ago, and it is necessary to get used to it, to accommodate one's self, and carry on forward. The matter is beyond comprehension and rationalization – emotion, the senses and everything about you, all of you are dedicated to a search that is not withing grasp, reaching for the one who has gone, whom you no longer perceive in the depths of your consciousness. The missing deceased person fills the ambience with his absence and with a dumbfounding silence, being orphaned shouts for veery wall and corner, that has served as an inseparable part of his precious presence, whose absence now you sense and inhale in all 248 extremities of your body.

Occasionally, in times of emotion, while secretly turning the pages of past correspondence – the heart tightens, and then expands with the love of the yearning emotion and from a number of odd , but meaningful words, that were sent from long distances to her husband, the mother, longing and expressing herself in the idiom of a foreign land. You ponder, and think to yourself, that you were privileged to hear from the beating of this great heart, ensconced within his warm breast. And you will say, he is not from among the ordinary people, he must be from a line of heroes, a cedar that will not cease to exist, who will not bow his head, who suckled from the love of humanity and his faith in it. His shadow influences in offering help, encouragement, and putting his shoulder to the task of public service. There is no personal stress, personal difficulty – was pushed aside in the face of important questions, endlessly -- the political situation in the country, the deterioration in the welfare of anonymous children, the war of independence in its full force, w3hen he was

ordered to stand aside with his hands tied. Where will the pain burst forth? Where is the pent-up personal cry? When will the self-restraint let go? – You will find this in the healing power of deeds, in work, encouragement, you will find it in educating and in giving direction, and in the carrying of one's head high, and in the glory of independence.

Occasionally, you will look for a recitation of shortcomings in others, but you will not find it. You will look for the casting of blame, and not find it. You find yourself alone, the one responsible for your own actions, and accept that judgement in its simple stark sense, as the least of evils. You find satisfaction in the minimal carrying out of the good, like a requirement. So this is the foundation, the foundation of character that accompanies you for the length of your days.

A man of the book, you think in your soul – how many words and how many conversations were had on the subject of whom and what to read.

You find his fundamental involvement and see how he hunches over the book of his books with his body, with his spouse, or in the company of neighbors and friends, those who are the lovers of the book, who come to warm themselves in the light of Torah – the *Tanakh* study group.

You see and sense that this is the best of his worlds, this is where he found himself, immersing himself in his own sea , in a fountain of wisdom, with which he is completely fluent, in which he can swim like a fish in water. And this is not simply happenstance, but rather just happens to be a fundamental trait, a basic trait, which reaches down to the foundation, to the main point, to the extract, and to the base. Thus can we say that he returned to the full exploitation of the essence on the source of sources, extracting and extracting, without slaking his thirst for the essence and the basis of his faith, upon which he finds himself, and his affinity for the nation and the heritage, upon which he builds his world - the book of books.

Not the spark on faith, and also no feelings about the traditions of his people, but rather in its simple literal sense as it sounds, a spark right to the essence, to the point of purity, to the untrammeled, to the primordial foundation, the language – the song – the prose – the lesson – the faith – the ideal, all these inflame his soul until you stand awestruck by the intensity of his faith, his power, his zealousness about the one thing that is never parted from him.

An Example of His Dedication and Love

By Bezalel Isaacson

He comes from the little town of Belica in the Vilna vicinity. About forty years ago, he came to the town of Radaskovicy, which also was in that vicinity, as a teacher in the '*Tarbut*' Hebrew School. With is arrival, an intellectual force was added to the school and to the entire town, in the direction of education and culture withing the school walls, and also by his association with the endeavors of the select of the area, in all of the many issues of the community, in every initiative and movement, Zionist and *Halutz*, to the expansion of the use of Hebrew, and of culture among the youth.

In a few short years, he made aliyah, leaving behind him a well worked field, blessed in Torah and good deeds, and before him – the Promised Land, that enchanted every youth and adherent of the nation. And his initial steps in the Land were not easy. Several years went by before he was able to situate himself in a profession of his liking, direction, in serving as a teacher in evening classes for adults in Jerusalem. He even developed a course of his own in the instruction of adults, and published a textbook, called '*Petakh*' that was distributed among his many students. His personal virtues and attitudes endeared him to all of those who knew him and were his friends, which he acquired over time. His approach – a straightforward and pleasant approach, his lofty methods, his intelligent knowledge of or national and cultural sources, his understanding ans his readiness to participate in our national community activities – all in the end, brought him to a respected standing as the head of the journalism department of the Jewish *Sokhnut* in Jerusalem.

For fifteen years, literally to his last day, he performed his duties consistently with dedication and love – his own personal virtues – in his responsible position as the head of the press office; in good spirits, and one who derived satisfaction from a job that he adapted to himself, and also suited him, as a liaison between the public at-large and the Jewish Agency - with grace, taste and knowledge, to the satisfaction and high regard of all those who came in contact with him.

In his personal life, he stood out as a beloved man who was gracious to all about him., someone who had fundamental ideas of his own, about everything that was being done around him, following his own straight and sometimes bent line of his own, as a man of the labor movement, to which he had attached himself in youth, and in which he spent all of his life in the Land, educating the embers of his family in this spirit, and he had enormous satisfaction in seeing his son go off to be one of the founders of a *kibbutz*.

This good friend and companion has left us in an untimely fashion, whose inspiring smile looked out from his eyes, that have suddenly been closed forever.

From a Letter At the Memorial Gathering at the End of Thirty Days

By Yaakov Tzur

From the days during which I worked with I. Kamenetzky ז"ל, a memory of honesty and purity remains in my heart, unbounded loyalty, and a boundless dedication of a man, who saw himself for his entire life as the servant of a movement. Never did he lose his sacred cognizance of the role that he was fulfilling – all of which was seen in modesty in the public domain.

These are rare qualities in our time, and for this reason, he was treasured by his friends and all who worked with him.

From a Letter of the Parliamentary Journalist of the Newspaper '*Haaretz*' to the Public Relations Department of the Jewish *Sokhnut*

By James Yaakov Rosenthal

I mourn our good friend and dear associate I. Kamenetzky ז"ל. He was not well-known generally, and did not seek satisfaction in the larger public domain, but it was rather sufficient for him to discharge his obligations with a faithfulness that knew no bounds or end. His achievement was to earn the allegiance of those who came in contact with him, through his works, which bore the stamp of a dedication through tranquility, balance, essential and spiritual, and attention to detail. When I would enter the building of international institutions – from time to time, I was seized with a wellspring of homey feeling and a sense of continuity. Consecutive, traditional and pertinent, and when I would see the face of I. Kamenetzky, as he was preparing things, or as he completed technical things – and everything in service of the general public, for most of the journalists. Who did not derive benefit from the better part of his attention! According to a saying, the best of the women is the one who is least known, since she is not mentioned – it is understood that this exceptional man of Musar, life and work, this saying very beautifully applies to our dear friend who os no longer with us. He was decidedly 'not modern,' because he didn't inflate himself, nor did he seek publicity or fame for himself, even within the system in which he worked – but rather in the raising of his work he attempted to achieve harmony with whom he served. And so, as an example to the public services, and those whom he served, he remains always standing before my eyes. With modesty and affection, as befits him, according to his character, I will honor his memory.

My Relative, and Friend, Issachar Kamenetzky

By Moshe Yosselewicz

He was taken from us without warning, while still full of energy and a desire to work. It appears to me that he never had the time to think about himself, because his work always waited for him, and he did it with a loyalty into which he invested his entire energy.

He worked in the Public Relations Department of the Jewish *Sokhnut,* and held a responsible position there. In the course of his work, he would frequently come in contact with international representatives of Zionism both in the Land and in the Diaspora. Accordingly, he served as a liaison between the Jewish *Sokhnut* and the leader in the world of journalism, and to them, he would bring the message of the *Sokhnut* and Zionism. Accordingly, the elements of this undertaking fit well with the character of Issachar who while still a youth, had immersed himself in it while in his parents' home, in Belica, that being the concepts of the Zionist movement, and the national rebirth, the love of the Land of Israel, and the Hebrew language.

He learned the Hebrew language from his father, Chaim-Noah ז"ל, who was a teacher in Belica – a rare education at that time – along with *Mishna* and *Gemara.* And when he went out to work for a living, he too, became a teacher of Jewish children in the towns of Byelorussia.

At the beginning of the decade of the twenties, he made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, with the *Halutz aliyah,* and lived for a number of years in Hadera. After this, he moved to Jerusalem. In the eveni8ng hours, he would teach Hebrew to the newly arrived immigrants, and in this connection even published a textbook that he wrote himself.

His first years in The Land were difficult. These were years of want, of pogroms, and of a struggle for existence. However, a love of the Land of Israel, coupled with a faith in the redemption of the Jewish people, which totally suffused him, gave him the strength to overcome these tribulations. And among others, weak in faith, lacking in character, who would leave the Land, he would bore into them, and infuse in the hearts of others a hope for the resurrection of Israel.

*

After the Holocaust, the remaining Jews from Belica began to gather in The Land. A well-defined number of people from Belica had already been living here from the period even before The Second World War – they had arrived as *Halutzim.* Most of us had relatives here. From the part of Issachar and his family, it was natural to host those remnants of the families of ours, in his house, and he supported us until we were able to get a home of our own.

In the first weeks already, we began to think about a meeting of Belica émigrés, and because of the effort of a number of comrades, with Issachar at their head, the first meeting took place in Hadera, where the largest concentration of people from Belica was located. This meeting, and at the other annual meetings, dedicated to the memory of the martyrs of our *shtetl*, the idea crystallized about a book as a permanent memorial to their memory.

Despite all of his many other responsibilities, Issachar assumed the role of assembling the content, editing it, and organizing the book itself. To this end, Issachar invested a great deal of thought, and dedicated a great deal of his time to working over the raw material, that was written by all of our friends, and even had gotten to the point of having set the chapter headings for this book.

From 1954 onwards, my home was located in the *Karit-HaYovayl* neighborhood of Jerusalem, near Issachar's house. And apart from being relatives, we were good friends, and not only once did I benefit from his good advice and his wise counsel.

At different opportunities we raised the subject of this book, getting on with assembling the content, its editing and arrangement. And here, when the matter was finally beginning to take shape, and the publication of the book was almost a fact, suddenly Issachar was taken from us, and he was not privileged to see this book appear in his lifetime.

We are diminished by losing him, and we will not forget him.

Baruch Krasnoselsky ז"ל

By Z. K.

Page 480: *B. Krasnoselsky*

He was a quiet person and modest; he engaged in the grain trade; he came from one of the deeply-rooted families in Belica. After leaving the shtetl during the expulsion – he went with his family to Zhetl, went through the First and Second Great Slaughters, lost his wife Pearl and his entire family. He fled to the forests around Belica, and there he lived through the nightmare of the war among the partisans.

After the war, he went off to Poland, were he married anew, and began to raise a family. Later on, he made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, settling in Kfar-Saba, and started to settle in anew. Death, however, suddenly tore him away. ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Our Dear Israel Zlocowsky ז"ל

By E.M. Savitzky

Page 481: *Israel Zlocowsky*

Page 482: *Israel Zlocowsky speaks on behalf of Keren Kayemet L'Israel at a Meeting of Survivors in Austria*

Our dear Israel Zlocowsky was taken from us suddenly, in the middle of his dedicated work to preserve the memory of our shtetl and its martyrs, in '*Pinkas Belica*,' that is being published by our Organization of Belica émigrés in Israel, and America, that bare remnant of our *shtetl* – which has been orphaned with his death, and we have lost a loyal friend, and a dedicated and active worker.

While yet a young man, he had given himself over in our *shtetl* to community work, with loyalty. He sunk his energy and strength into all the institutions of the community in the *shtetl*, and he was especially active as the head of the fire brigade – and in this way, maintained vigilance over the meager assets of the townsfolk.

He stood out for his sacred endeavors during the days of the Holocaust. Even in those dark days, he would concern himself with his acquaintances and friends, and all of his needy brethren. With is warm heart, and his profuse love for all humanity – he worried for the weak, so they not suffer from hard labor, a lack of clothing - to assure they were dressed and covered, to the ravages of hunger == to feed them bread. Not only once, did he put his own life in danger in order to help others, to rescue them from the unclean hands of the murderers of our people of all types.

When the decree against the Jews of the town arrived, that they must leave it, he and his family did not leave until he had arranged for wagons to convey those families that had remained after the incineration of the houses, who had no roof over their heads first, and the means for them to sustain themselves. He left the shtetl last, and went with his family to the ghetto in Scucyn. There too, he dedicated himself to community efforts, looking for, and finding ways to ease the distress of his brethren. He was one of the founders of the 'community kitchen' for those who were left without anything, and concerned himself with assuring that no person in the ghetto would go hungry.

When it became evident that there was not a shred of hope to remain alive in the ghettoes, he slipped out of the hands of the Nazis with his family, and fled to the partisans in the forest on the banks of the Neman. In these forests too, he was active in the affairs of the group, and sought both ideas and means by which he could protect the remnants in the forest, so they would have the strength to withstand the tribulations until the liberation from the Nazis would arrive. And, even after the liberation, we saw him engage in activity in all aspects of life that was beginning to re-form anew among the survivors of the Holocaust, in our *shtetl*, and its surroundings. He did not rest, nor did he remain silent until the remains of the Jews who were murdered in the forests, fields and roads, were brought to a proper Jewish burial. And when the survivors of the Holocaust began to leave the places where they had lived, he also took up the wanderer's staff, in hand, and went with his family to Poland. From there, he continued his peregrinations, in the clandestine routes that led to Austria, and reached the D.P. camp at Bindramichal adjacent to Linz. Here again, he was among the first to engage in community work, and invested his entire energy to organize the life of the survivors on their way to their historic homeland. And so he became a way station for every transient, and for everyone who required help and support, to familiar and unfamiliar people alike.

In Austria, he was one of the founders of the פח"ח organization (Partisans – Soldiers – *Halutzim*) and the spirit of life in the center of the organization. He was active in the same way in the Zionist Federation, in leading the KK"L, and all the community Zionist institutions that conducted activity withing the survivor community.

In Israel too, he stood out for his community activism, in his place of domicile in Netanya, and accordingly became the very first in all community endeavors of the organization of the émigrés of Belica in Israel. He gave of his time and energy, his heart and soul, and his entire capacity, in order to see the publication of *Pinkas Belica*, but was not privileged to see it appear. His name and memory will be preserved in our midst as a blessing, together with the names and memories of all those pure and holy souls to whom this memorial book is dedicated.

My Father

By Schraga (Fyvel) Zlocowsky

Page 484: *Israel Zlocowsky, His Wife Taib'eh, Daughter Chaya and Son, Schraga (Fyvel) Beside the Memorial Slab, in Memory of the Jewish Martyrs in the Ebensee Concentration Camp (Austria).*

Page 485: *From the Left: Israel Zlocowsky and Wife, Shmuel Shimonowicz and Wife – Two Surviving Belica Families During a Meeting in Austria (1948).*

In Israel, my father found his true calling as a working man. His normal work day lasted from 10-12 hours, and always with his characteristically loving smile on his face. He would say: the power of the tailor lies in the needle, and with me – the locksmith – in the hammer. So long as the hammer is being banged by my hand, I know that I am alive. Indeed, he held the hammer in his hand until the last day of his life.

He was not only *my* father – he was a father to hundreds ans thousands of Jews: in his hometown of Belica, and after that, in the ghettoes of Scucyn and Lida, later on in the forests with the partisans, and even later than that, in the D.P. camps of Austria, and in the end – in the final location of his life, Netanya. Hundreds of local residents and tens of friends and acquaintances from all over the country – accompanied him on his last journey, came to the thirty day commemoration, at his fresh grave site, and to the memorial service in the synagogue named for those who rose up in the ghettoes and were partisan fighters, which he built with his great force and energy, and considered his greatest pride of the last years of his life.

From the moment that I began to walk as a child, I followed, and ran after, my father until the last moment of his life. But it was only here, in Israel, did it really penetrate and did I understand the greatness of his soul as a father, a Jew and a *mensch*. Because, it was only here in Israel, that I achieved the maturity, and the level of comprehension, to assess a person and his accomplishments and it was in this way that my father's entire life's experience was laid out for me anew in its full force and color. I discovered in him not only Jewish creativity and human heroism, but I also saw before me a father who was a jewel – a teacher and an educator, a comrade and friend. The essential thread of his character – a heartfelt simplicity – the leitmotiv in his relationship with all people – enchanted me as well, his youngest son.

It is in this way, that I will always carry him in my heart and soul – *my* father.

My Father and Mentor, R' Zalman Yosselewicz ז"ל

By Moshe Yosselewicz

Page 486: Zalman Yosselewicz

Magnified and Sanctified Be The Name of the Lord.

These are the words with which the *Kaddish* prayer begins, that is recited for the deceased, a prayer that sanctifies God's name, that conveys the righteousness and praiseworthiness of all His deeds. And this prayer is said for a person whether he has lived to a ripe old age, or whether he has been taken from us in the prime of life.

My father and mentor was privileged to depart this world at a ripe old age, almost attaining fourscore years.

The center of his life was led in a period of much upheaval in the affairs of nations, and was woven into the whirlwind of the great Holocaust that befell the Jewish people. Despite this, he was privileged to see the rebirth of the nation in our renewed country in the Land of Israel, and he was enveloped in the first waves of the *aliyah* of survivors – he and his two sons, the sole survivors of a multi-branched family that was exterminated in the Holocaust.

He was born in Belica in the year 1889, ro his parents, Abraham and Zelda, who earned a living baking bread, and engaged in the grain trade (his parents' home was in the center of the marketplace). From childhood on, he began a path that rooted him into the life of the shtetl, and for his entire life, he was like an inseparable part of it, every aspect of his life reflected the life of the shtetl itself, and its people of the past century.

As a youth, he studied in Heder, and afterwards, he joined with the group of young people who followed the principles of socialism of that era. When news of the Zionist movement reached Belica, my father followed R' Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky, who was the head of the Zionists, but my father also continued with his allegiance to the socialists that fought against the oppressive police of Czar Nicholas [II].

About a year before the First World War, he was drafted into the Czarist army, and returned home after surviving the tribulations of the war. He found the *shtetl* disrupted and impoverished, after all the changes that had befallen it, under the rule of the captors, the Russians, Germans, Bolsheviks, and the 'first' Poles, all of whom extorted the Jewish residents. With the entry of the Poles into the town, in the absence of a permanent authority, bandits fell upon the Jews in the town and they murderers four men. They entered my father's home and demanded 10,000 rubles, as ransom for his life. After finding that such a sum was not available, they took my grandfather out, R' Abraham, and made ready to murder him. However, my father, Zalman, offered his life in place of his father's, grabbing the end of the rifle in the hands of one of the bandits, and in this way, caused him to retreat. This incident remained deeply etched in the soul of my father for all of his life, and he would return and re-tell the incident to his children, his friends, many times.

In the year 1922, he married, and devoted himself to the establishment of a family. His living lay in the ownership of a small pharmacy, and after than in an ironmongery. There were three sons and one daughter in our family, and my father did everything in his power to give all of them the best possible education. He gave of his own personal energy and time to our education, being active in the establishment of the Hebrew School and afterwards in assuring that the required funds would be raised to pay the teachers and secure the school.

He was also an active member of the management committee of the Jewish bank, and a officer of the local municipality, and devoted himself to developing instances of support in the midst of the Jewish populace. Because of his integrity and desire to help the public, he was well-received and respected both in the eyes of the Jews of the town, and also in the eyes of the Christians of the entire area. They would come to ask for his advice and help, especially in instances where there was illness involved.

When Belica was included in the area under Soviet control (September 1939), and he was compelled to find other means of making a living, my father did not find a place in the new order of things. His pharmacy ceased operation, and all of his medicaments were taken away from him, and after the remainder of his wares were sold off, from the ironmongery – his source of income dried up entirely.

In June 1941, when the Nazis penetrated into Belica, my father's home was also torched and burned down. His experience during the years of the Holocaust were not materially different from that of the other remaining families in Belica. After the expulsion to the ghetto in Zhetl, and the two slaughters that took place there, my father and two of his sons were left alive, who after many wanderings, reached, as was said, The Land, on the waves of the first *aliyah* after the establishment of the State of Israel.

Here, my father lived with his sons, who settled down into work and raised families. Towards the end of his life, he derived a great deal of *nachas* from his sons and five grandchildren – a recompense for what he suffered during the Holocaust period. Here, he also dedicated a lot of his time to the writing of his memoirs about Belica, whose people and history, from the end of the previous century onwards were well remembered by him. This material is largely presented in this book that we have before us.

My father was an observant man for his entire life, and therefore, he felt privileged in seeing The Land built up, and Jerusalem liberated and united. When he fell ill on the eve of Rosh Hashanah 5728, I traveled with him to pray at the Wailing Wall, and his reaction to this at the time was very emotional and moving.

On 28 Heshvan 5728 [ ] he passed away.

His name and memory will remain guarded by his issue and among all those who knew him, and his friends, the émigrés from Belica – in sorrow and deep affection.

My Brother, The Martyr

By E.M. Savitzky

My brother, Fyv'eh Savitzky ז"ל, who was horribly tortured in the forest of Kaletya by the White Poles in the year 1943.

Holy brother, I hear your voice,
I do not know if from the hill or vale,
I sense the echo all about, over all
From the heavens, deeply, I sense its impact.

And suddenly in a distressed hour
I detect your breath certain and clear.
You ask: 'My brother, are you here?'
I feel the tremor of the reverberation on reality.

And with great simplicity, you speak further:
'My brother, I will relate and share
How I took account of myself
Minutes before I needed to expire.

Remember we heard three shots:
All of you scampered off like rabbits
But only I remained alone
Why? I do not understand to this day.

Confidently I approached them
Thinking, that I will encounter my own along the roads
The smile of a representative met me
Sensed it all, ended, not a step further...

The took of my jacket,
Removed the pistols from my belt,
Tore off the boots from my feet,
Turned and bent my arms behind me.

They began to torture me murderously, beating,
Demanding to be told and shown where my brethren sit,
But I was stronger than them,
Smiled at their satanic shouting.

Dog's blood began to boil
Feral wildness, as if insane,
Foam began to drool from their lips like serpents,
A hail of staves broke my body.

In pain I bit my lips,
Gritted my teeth and locked my mouth,
Smile with a serpentine grimace,
Laughed at their staves, joked about their bullets.

Then I felt, and embraced
\The shiver of trampled grass,
The shiver of an autumn evening's twig,
The fever of a leaf in the grave.

The shame of bent-over trees,
The wail of cut off roots,
The sigh of roiling pools, lapping waves,
The groan of the twinkling stars, dying flames,

Mutterings from the dumb, dark earth,
A silent prayer from the tearful heavens,
The sorrow of the lowing, the congealed *Moo, Moo*,
Of a cow being led to slaughter.

And the brush of the wind,
That constantly wept
Blew, shook and whistled,
Carried its expressed reply
Like a child weeping without cause.

Do you want to know, grasp, understand?
It is futile, too young, too young!

Here, my brother, this I will tell you
So that you apprehend and understand.

And I then lay still
They? – They left ashamed.
And in this way I was victorious
On their road of victory...

A holy brother, your trembling is everywhere, overall,
From the deep heavens, I take your meaning.

Eve of Rosh Hashana 5706

Belica Émigrés Who Died in the Land of Israel

(A List)

Serial	Last Name	First Name	Father	Mother	Hday	Hmo	Hyr	Day	Month	Year	Interred At
2	Aloni (Rudnick)	Brurlah	Rabbi Joseph		27	Tevet	5728	28	January	1968	Tel-Aviv
3	Baranchik	David	Joseph	Gitt'l	7	Elul	5708	11	September	1948	Hadera
4	Baranchik (Zlocowsky)	Chaya-Sarah	Joseph	Felga	18	Tevet	5714	24	December	1953	Hadera
9	Feigin (Halperin)	Chana	Israel	Rachel	15	Iyyar	5710	2	May	1950	Kfar-Az"R
1	Itzkowitz	Rabbi Shmuel-Joseph	Noah-Zalman	Leah	3	Adar II	5704	27	February	1944	Hadera
10	Kamenetzky	Issachar	Chaim-Noah	Rachel	7	Shevat	5724	21	January	1964	Jerusalem
11	Kaufman	Chana	Mordechai	Hinde	28	Tevet	5726	20	January	1966	Pars-Chana
13	Krasnsoelsky	Baruch	Gabriel	Rash'keh	5	Tevet	5714	11	December	1953	Kfar-Saba
12	Kusielewicz	Yehuda	Zalman	Gitt'l	14	Adar I	5719	22	February	1959	Ness-Tziona
8	Lejzorowicz	Szprinza	Chaim	Bluma	1	Av	5716	9	July	1956	Akko
5	Wismonsky	Shlomo	Rabbi Moshe-Dov		24	Tammuz	5722	26	July	1962	Jerusalem
7	Yosselewicz	Zalman	Abraham	Zelda	28	Heshvan	5728	1	December	1967	Jerusalem
6	Zlocowsky	Israel	Hirsch-Zvi	Rachel	14	Adar I	5727	24	February	1967	Netanya

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Committee Activities of the Organization of Belica Émigrés in Israel

By Dov Kaufman & Moshe Yosselewicz

Page 494: *During a Memorial Gathering of the Belica Émigrés in Israel in the Synagogue Named for the Martyrs and Ghetto Fighters in Netanya*

(Two Photographs)

Page 495: (Top) *Sitting from the right: The Poet, Y. Feigin (author of the poem 'Tefila BaYa'ar on P. 239), his wife Chana, and her brother Nachman of the family of R' Israel Halperin;*

Behind them: Their Sister Sarah, and Her husband (Ligomsky)

(Bottom): *From the Left: Leah Garberowicz-Halperin (arrived in Israel after the Holocaust) Beside Her Father R' Israel Halperin and his Grandson Abraham'l.*

Page 496: (Top): *During a Gathering of Belica Halutzim in 1934 in Hadera*

(Bottom): *During the Visit to Israel by Shmuel Shimonowicz and His Wife from the United States*

With the forward push of the Nazi German troops, into the heart of Soviet Russia in 1941, the communication between the Belica émigrés in Israel and their families in the zone that had been captured, was entirely cut off. A great fear seized the scions of the shtetl in Israel, regarding the fate of their dear ones during the years of the Holocaust, but the results and extent of the Holocaust in its entirety, and of the destruction of Belica and its community there, only became known as the end of the war drew near. Reliable news regarding the fate of the people of Belica and the community there, were assembled and brought to the Land of Israel by Zerakh Itzkowitz, who was one of the volunteers in the Israel Brigade that fought in Europe. He encountered the first of the survivors from the Jewish communities of our area, in Germany. From them, he became aware of the details of the extermination and destruction suffered by the Jews of Belica, and also about the rescue of individuals of our *landsleit*, who had hidden in the forests, and joined the Jewish partisans.

For most of those people from Belica who survived, the goal was to reach the Land of Israel, and only very few turned to try and go to the United States, if they had relatives there. Despite the fact that the circumstances of the settled members of our shtetl in Israel was distressed, the first aid that was given to the first of those who arrived here – was from the hearts of brethren, with the wishes to get assimilated as quickly

as possible. At the same time, in Israel, we became aware of the establishment of two assistance committees of the Belica émigrés in the United States (one of them headed by Zalman Rubin, and the second by – Sarah Kaplan). In the spirit of trying to unify the efforts, and the good will to centralize the activities, a united action committee was established, whose goal was to deal with the new arrivals from our *shtetl*, and to provide them with assistance on a joint basis with these American committees that were named above, who began to send us financial aid for the *olim*. The members of the action committee were: R' Shmuel-Joseph Itzkowitz, Dov Kaufman, Dov Grodinsky, and Zerakh Itzkowitz.

During the years 1948-1950 most of the surviving individuals who were scions of Belica, arrived in Israel, and they settled themselves in different areas and branches. Out of the need for assistance, previously mentioned, and after the details of the destruction of the community of Belica became clarified in the fullness of time, and a list of all its martyrs had been compiled, who had not had the privilege of receiving a proper Jewish burial, the idea arose to publish a '*Yizkor Book*' to preserve their memory. Therefore, in one of the meetings of the previously mentioned action committee (after the Passover holiday of 1952), to which Issachar Kamenetzky and Israel Zlocowsky were also invited, it was decided that: An annual memorial meeting would be held by the Belica émigrés in Israel, on 23 Av, which was the day the Zhetl ghetto was liquidated, and where many Belica Jews were exterminated. At that same meeting, it was also decided to establish a 'Book Committee' whose mission would be to encourage all friends to put down their memories on paper, and to gather material for a book, and afterwards to assemble and edit it, in anticipation of publishing it.

At the same time, a detailed list of the martyrs of out *shtetl*, along with indications of dates and places where they died, was prepared by the survivor from our *shtetl*, Yaakov ben Israel-Meiram Kremen. Since it became clear that the publication of this book would take a lot of time, because of the difficulty in preparing the material and the raising of the needed resources, it was decided, for the time being, to publicize the previously mention list, in a memorial ledger and in this ledger, to also incorporate the names and addresses of all the émigrés from Belica in Israel.

At every one of the annual memorial meetings afterwards, the questions concerning issues surrounding the production of the book were raised: the question of what language in which to publish it, questions regarding the type of content, and also the financial questions, etc. It was decided – part of the book would be printed in Hebrew, part in Yiddish, and with an English introduction. Issachar Kamenetzky took on the role of centralizing all the material, to edit it, and organize it. Every Belica family was assessed an annual sum of 12 IL for the book fund, and in this way, we renewed out contact with the *landsleit* in The United States.

In order to encourage the work of gathering the material, and the writing of memoirs, and to accelerate the financial work, the Book Committee was expanded, and the following were added to it: Zerakh Itzkowitz, Dov Grodinsky, Israel Zlocowsky, Chaim Yosselewicz, Abraham Maggid, Elazar-Meir Savitzky[96], Herzl Sokolowsky, Dov Kaufman, Issachar Kamenetzky, Yaakov Kremen, Zerakh Kremen.

We especially need to underscore the efforts of Issachar Kamenetzky ז"ל, who worked and labored to

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96 The text shuttles back and forth, but seems to favor Eliezer-Meir as his correct name.

assemble material, edited and organized the first of the drafts for the publication of the book, as well as the efforts of Israel Zlocowsky ז"ל, who did not stint in giving of his energy and time, for the collection of lists and pictures from the Belica people in the entire country.

In a similar manner, we must recognize as praiseworthy, the efforts of out *landsleit* in The United States, at the head of which was Mr. Shimon Baker (Buczkowsky) who gave not only of their time and energy to hasten the publication of the book, but also provided writings, developed lists of pictures, donated and helped gather donations to assure the resources would be available for publication.

The thanks of the publication committee is extended to all of those who participated in the collection and organization of the material, and in the publication of book. May this Memorial Book be a memorial pillar to all the martyrs of our community and shtetl, Belica, whose Jewish world was destroyed, and will never rise again.

A Belica Family in America

By Minnie Heinz (Menucha Kreinowicz)

Dedicated to the Memory of the Only Jewish Doctor in Belica – Ber'l Kreinowicz ל"ז

Page 500: *The Belica Landsleit in New York*
During the Visit of Mrs. Taib'eh Zlocowsky in the Summer of 1966

Page 501: (Top): *Esther-Gitt'eh Novogrudsky with Yehuda's Daughter Tzid'keh and a Grandchild.*

(Bottom): *Yitzhak Novogrudsky*

Page 502: (Top, L to R): *Joseph-Schraga Savitzky, Chaim-Yitzhak Meckel*
(Bottom (L to R): *Minna Deutsch (Stotsky), Jekuthiel Kaplinsky*

Page 503: (Top): *During the Bar Mitzvah Celebration of Howard Stotsky (Stone)*
(Bottom): *During the Bar Mitzvah Celebration of Y. Shimonowicz (Simon)*

When my father, R' Moshe (Maw'sheh) Kreinowicz was 25 years old, he found himself in a rather difficult situation: apart from his own worries, he had the additional burden of caring for his younger sister, Tsin'keh, who was still a very young girl, when their parents died. Their other brothers were already married, and spread all over the world.

It was first after Tsin'keh, who considered herself to be an only daughter to her parents, got married at the age of seventeen, did my father allow himself to think about himself. Since he was a young man who was educated, having a command of Hebrew and Yiddish and also Russian and German, he became a teacher with a rich settler in the village of Peskovtsy. There, my father studied Torah with the small boys, the grandchildren of the settler. But the girls of the family would also listen in on his lessons. And from this, it happened that a marriage was arranged for him, with a girl named Faygl, who was a daughter of Yankl Yarmowsky, a well-known *Hasid* from Slonim.

My father, Maw'sheh, later in life, took up delivering mail from Sjalec, or the Neman Station and lived for his entire seventy-one years in Belica. He passed away like a *Tzaddik* – expiring while reciting the *Shmoneh Esrei* in the *Bet HaMedrash*. It is noteworthy, that my brother Velvel ל"ז, who lived in Atlantic City, also died in synagogue, when he was reciting *Kaddish* for his wife...

Maw'sheh and Feiga Kreinowicz raised eight children – five sons and three daughters, The youngest son was my brother Ber'l, or Dr. Bernard Krein – as he was later known in America. My mother ע"ה would say of him, that he is a 'bright lad' – that everything he would undertake would always turn our quickly and good.

My brother Ber'l came into the world speedily. He was practically born in the field. This happened while my mother was overseeing the work of village peasants who were digging potatoes in the field, in exchange for manure that we gave them from our stable for their fields. She was barely able to get home, when my younger brother first saw the light of day...

For all his years, Ber'l conducted himself as his mother indicated he should, starting from his childhood. He worked more quickly and better than all of the others of his age, or profession. From his earliest years, he was considered to be the best student by all of his teachers, in whatever he applied himself to. His marks in school were always the highest, and he showed exceptional talent in the subject of mathematics.

When my brother Ber'l was still a very small boy, our mother became severely ill with rheumatism. Pitiably, she had to spend an entire year flat on her back, and two of her children, who were not yet going to *Heder*, were required to tend her. One of them was Ber'l, and his one desire at that time, was to become a doctor and cure his mother. When our mother died in Belica in 1922, Ber'l had just received his diploma in America as a Doctor of Medicine...

Ber'l came to America when he was sixteen years old. He brought with him a baggage of Torah and knowledge, because he had previously studied at the famous yeshiva in Lida, of Rabbi Reines זצ"ל and excelled there in an outstanding fashion. This young immigrant from Belica completed the entire curriculum of an American high school in less than three years. It did not take him much longer to study at a supplementary school to be able to gain an appointment to attend medical school, which Ber'l finished in one year.

He practiced medicine in Atlantic City for more than twenty-five years, a famous American resort city. It was not only one person, who would say that were it not for the medical care given by Dr. Bernard Krein, who stood out and was loved also for his gentle personality, they would have passed on a long time ago...

My brother Chaim-Mot'keh (Max) was the first member of my family to come to America from Belica. He later brought the rest of us to The United States, one after another: Ber'l and I. My brother Eliezer. My sisters: Breineh and Sarah-Esther (who was a rather pretty blond little girl), remained in Belica.

Chaim-Mot'keh was not happy with New York, and moved to the town of New Britain, where our uncle Asher lived, who was our father's youngest brother (he was like a father to us). After this, we all moved to Hartford (a larger city) were we had better job prospects, and to get an education at the same time (we lived there for five years).

When my brother returned as a military serviceman frm Europe, after the Second World War ended, our uncle Herschel Yarmow (Yarmowsky), our mother's brother, convinced him to relocate 'with me' in Atlantic City. It didn't take long – Velvel became a successful businessman in that city. A bit later, Ber'l came there, who practiced medicine there until he passed away.

My brother Hillel had a business in the same city. all of my brothers participated in community affairs and were greatly loved by the entire populace – Jews and no-Jews alike.

Ber'l became a doctor thanks to his own abilities, and he worked very hard to attain this goal. During his university years, he would work summers selling brooms and other household items among the same buyers who knew him from his high school period, when he would deliver newspapers. Later on, he worked as an assistant 'plumber' for my brother Velvel, earning a lot more, and also had a stipend. The money that he had borrowed from a variety of sources while he was studying medicine, he paid back after he became a doctor, and began to earn a living at it. He married his *'bashert'* wife, Miriam Siever, when he began his medical practice in Atlantic City.

Ber'l was a prominent member of many Jewish organizations, and was active in the Zionist movement. During the Second World War, he enlisted in the American army, but he was quickly discharged because of his frequent heart attacks. After the war, he devoted himself to his private practice, forgot about his heart ailment, and again got into the full swing of things. But the illness assaulted him quickly again, and in the end, it got him, when he was barely 56 years of age.

Ber'l was very good and approachable, always ready with a good piece of advice, and with everything that he could provide that was helpful to his brothers and sisters. It is not hard to convince one's self that the eradication of those nearest and dearest to him, in Europe, accelerated his heart disease. He fell mortally ill after the nurses gave him a letter, with the sad news that our brother Eliezer, and the two sisters Breineh and Sarah-Esther, were brutally murderers by the Germans.

Thus, along with all of Jewish Belica, the only Jewish doctor from our home town also left his world. Despite the fact that he died in America, the Jewish images of Belica were deeply baked into his heart up till the moment it stopped beating.

The Shimanowicz Family

By M. Y.

Our little *shtetl* of Belica always stood out for the modesty and simplicity of its residents. For generations-long, Jewish families derived their sustenance from hard work, and of supporting themselves without any help from external sources. Each family severally, and all jointly, were bound together like a large family. Every individual always helped the other with what he was capable of providing. It was in this way, that a total harmony reigned among the 130 families in the *shtetl*, who kept themselves together until the great calamity of the extermination.

One of these self-effacing families in the shtetl was the Shimonowicz family, at the head of which stood the father Shmuel (in the shtetl, he was called 'Mul'yeh his wife, Cherna-Baylah with their five children. Everyone in the shtetl knew who 'Mul'yeh was, because he was always engaged with them, joking with them, and played, if he was only free of work from his work at the restaurant on the marketplace. 'Mul'yeh was active in the Fire Fighters Brigade, and the other institutions of the *shtetl*, as well as offering assistance with what he could to someone in need. He was beloved by everyone for his good character, and also his children, who inherited his good traits.

Moshe, the eldest son, took to learning a trade, and ended up being quite a good locksmith-mechanic. Were it not for the war, he would have certainly become an accomplished mechanical expert, but regrettably, he did not live to accomplish this, being killed by bestial hands in Dvarec. The other members of the Shimonowicz family survived the war, and later emigrated to America to live close to 'Mul'yeh's brother and his family.

The younger son, Hirsch'eh (in America, called Richard) is both a fine and interesting man, who all hold in high regard, and are proud of him. Since the creation of the State of Israel, he is in constant contact with many institutions and societies that convey assistance to our country.

The Shimonowicz family, and especially Hirsch'eh who with all means and opportunities, supported and helped to speed up the realization of this *Pinkas,* played a great part in realizing this *Pinkas Belica,* never refusing to do anything needed. All the Belica people in Israel, and especially those on the organization committee, value Hirsch's activity very greatly that of his wife Bracha, and the entire Shimonowicz family. We are very thankful and are proud wit this expression of goodness and dedication which have their roots in our one time small *shtetl* of Belica.

Simon Baker Appointed Consultant to Mayor Lindsay

The Morgen-Zhurnal

Photocopy of a Notice In the *Morgen-Zhurnal* October 14, 1966

Page 505: *Simon Baker*

The Office of Mayor John V. Lindsay made known that Simon Baker has been appointed a consultant to the Mayor in Public Affairs and Public Relations.

A well-known journalist, who is fluent in seven languages, Mr. Baker has visited many parts of the world, where he locally researched the problems and systems in public life. He also performed fundamental research of a variety of municipal offices of the City of New York. His opinions and studies have been published in *Der Tog Morgen-Zhurnal*, as well as in other publications for whom he is a correspondent.

In commenting on Mr. Baker's appointment, Mayor Lindsay said: 'I am pleased to have a man with the talents that he has, as a consultant.'

Born in Poland, Mr. Baker emigrated to America in 1952, from France, where he had studied journalism and political science. Before this, he had received higher education in general studies and Yeshiva studies in Europe. e became a naturalized American citizen at the end of 1957.

Mr. Baker lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Roberta, their son Aryeh 8, and two daughters, Breineh 6, and Masha 5 years of age.

Once Upon a Time There Was a Small *Shtetl*....

By Shimon Baker (Boczkowsky)

Page 506: *From the Right: Shimon Baker (Boczkowsky) and his little son, Aryeh, during his visit in Israel (August 1967) after the Six-Day War; Here they are shown pictured with Gen. Yitzhak Rabin, the Head of the Israeli General Staff, after Sh. Baker had conducted a special interview with him for the New York-based 'Tog-Morgen-Zhurnal,' where he has been employed since 1953.*

Here, we present his writeup about our little *shtetl* of Belica, first appearing in *Tog-Morgen-Zhurnal* in the year 1958(Ed.)

Tens of thousands of Jewish settlements were destroyed down to the root in the last war.

No longer do the typical Jewish cities and towns of Poland, Lithuania, Byelorussia, and elsewhere exist – The cut off living source, from which European and World Jewry suckled its nourishment.

The larger, and more compact of the Jewish settlements will in some way be remembered. The names of the large cities themselves, will aid in recollecting the broad and widely-branched settlements, that developed there, and put down deep roots. A worse situation exists with the 'one time' Jewish, small towns and hamlets.

And there, in precisely those tiny towns, a full and variegated Jewish life was carried on, and it was a wellspring of Jewish treasures and creativity. The old style *Bet HaMedrash* would put its own stamp on the way the *shtetl* developed.

Who will preserve this for posterity?

*

Belica – this is the name of the *shtetl* where I was born. It was a small town, which numbered not more than 130 Jewish families with 700 souls, among a population of Christians double that size.

As said – a small town, but how strongly it was shot through and through with Jewish spiritual values. Each Jewish home presented a slice of Jewish life.

The material circumstances of the Jews was never substantial. They undertook primarily small business trade, and there were also craftsmen. The principal source of income was the market, which would come together every Wednesday, and to which the peasants from the surrounding villages would come.

The sole and solitary *Bet HaMedrash* would, during the High Holy Days, accommodate all of the Jews, who had come to pray for a good year. Also, the women's house of worship, in the high reaches of the '*Salkeh*' was occupied by the older women, and young girls, who would come to hear the sounding of the *Shofar.*

As was the case in all Jewish cities and towns, the time between the afternoon and evening services were used to engage in group study a page of the *Gemara* ,in the *Bet HaMedrash.*

There was also a *Hevra* that studied *Mishna* which would often make a celebration at the conclusion of a volume [sic: a *siyyum*], accompanied by drink and confections.

The *Volksbank* was also of great importance, as was the *Gemilut-Hasadim* Bank under the direction of the old Zionist veteran, Chaim-Noah Kamenetzky ז"ל.

*

The Jewish personalities of my home town, where are they today?

Where is old R' Zalman Fleischer, who with such fervor would recite a chapter of the Psalms before the afternoon service on the Sabbath? And where is my uncle, R' Lejzor, who would get up on Saturday before dawn, in order not to be late for the 'first *minyan*?' What happened to the leader of prayer, R' Shfatyahu who for long weeks before the High Holy Days, 'rehearse' the melodies of '*Hineni*' and *U'Nesaneh Tokef*?'...

Where are those scholars, who would descend from the Yeshivas in Baranovici, Volozhin, Slonim and Lida, who would get drunk during the *Simchat Torah* festivities, at the home of that beloved Jewish man, and great scholar, R' Shmuel Joseph Itzkowitz?

And where is my Rebbe, R' Abraham-Zvi, who was the first to begin to learn with me about the disputations between Abaye and Rava? A man who does not declare a loss, has he abdicated his claim to the item, or not?

And where is my father, that great *Gaon*, known under the rubric of 'The Genius of Suprasl,' and from the Yeshiva at Mir, who would learn a page of *Gemara* with me by the light of a melted candle on the stand, in the silent stillness of the *Bet HaMedrash*?

And where is the Rabbi, R' Shabtai Fein, that great and wise Torah scholar, who would painstakingly revisit the difficult underlying issue of 'half slave and half free?' Also R' Nachman is no longer there, who would repeat the '*Shema Yisrael*' several times, with feeling.

And what has become of the settlers in the surrounding villages, who would come on the High Holy Days into the *shtetl*, and pray, while donning a *kittl,* with such great conviction?

Where are the town hot-shots, and the just plain ordinary Jews, who would spread out sitting on the '*lozhanka*' in the *Bet HaMedrash*, and tell stories about those former times under Czar Nicholas? And where are the Jews who sat to the East, and engaged in political discourse?

Where is R' Pesach with the pointed beard, whom the 'ruffians' would bombard with little pine cones on *Tisha B'Av*? And where is R' Fish'keh the 'Chinaman' who, with bated breath, would tell stories about how he was a King in Manchuria?...

Their lives were cut short along with those of the six million martyrs, pure and holy, who were killed by murderous Hitlerism. Together with their lives, my birthplace in Belica was also brought down.

Once Upon a Time There Was a Small *Shtetl*....

1. Sislevich is the Yiddish-preferred pronunciation for the *shtetl* of Svisloch, beside Volkovysk

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