ספר דרצ'ין

The Dereczin Memorial Book

A Book of Remembrance
Honoring the Communities of
Dereczin, Halinka, Kolonia-Sinaiska



Publication Committee

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The Zelva Memorial Book
The Book of Remembrances

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Dedication

Mayn Shvester Khaye
(My Sister Khaye)

Poem: Binem Heller (1906 - 1998)
Music: Chava Alberstein
Arrangements: Klezmatics



מיין שוועסטער חיה

דיכטונג: בינעם העללער
נגון: חוה אלבערשטיין
ערכה: קלעזמאטיקער

Myn shvester Khaye mit di grine oygn, My sister Khaye, her eyes were green,
Myn shvester Khaye mit di shvartse tsep – My sister Khaye, her curls were black –
Die Shvester Khaye, vos hot mir dertsoygn, Sister Khaye, it was she who raised me,
Oyf Smotshe-gass in hoyz mit krume trep. In the house on Smotshe Street with crooked stairs.

Di mame iz avek fun shtub baginen, Mother left the house at dawn,
Ven oyfn himl hot ersht koym gehelt. When the sky had hardly lightened.
Zi iz avek in krom arayn fardinen She went off to the shop to earn
Dos bidne-drobne groshinke gelt. A wretched penny's worth of change.

Un Khaye is gebliben mit di brider, And Khaye stayed with the brothers,
Un zi hot zey gekormet un gehit, She fed them and watched over them,
Un zi flegt zingen zey di shayne lider, And at evening, when little kids get tired,
Far nakht, ven kleyne kinder vern mid. She'd sing them pretty songs.

Myn shvester Khaye mit di grine oygn, My sister Khaye, her eyes were green,
Myn shvester Khaye mit di lange hor – My sister Khaye, her hair was long –
Die Shvester Khaye, vos hot mir dertsoygn, Sister Khaye, it was she who raised me,
Iz nokh nisht alt geven keyn tsendlig yor. She wasn't even ten years old.

Zi hot geroymt, gekokht, derlangt dos esn, She cleaned and cooked and served the food,
Zi hot getsvogen undz di kleyne kep. She braided our little heads.
Nor shpiln zikh mit undz hot zi fargesn – All she forgot was to play with us –
Die Shvester Khaye mit di shvartse tsep. Sioster Khaye, her curls were black.

Myn shvester Khaye mit di oygn grine, My sister Khaye with her eyes of green,
A Dytsh hot in Treblinka zi farbrent. Was incinerated by a German in Treblinka.
Un ikh bin in der Yiddishe medine, And I am in the Jewish State,
Der samer letster vos hot zi gekent. The very last one who knew her.

Far ir shrayb ikh oyf Yiddish myne lider, It's for her that I write my poems in Yiddish,
In teg die shreklekhe fun undzer tsayt. In these terrible days of our times.
Bei Gott aleyn is zi a bas-yekhide, To God Himself she is an only daughter,
In himl zitst zi bei zayn rekhtn zayt She sits in heaven by His right side.

★★★

All of us have a *Shvester Khaye...*

Table of Contents

Foreword.. by Yekhezkiel Raban i

The Translator's Foreword. by Jacob Solomon Berger iv

A Silent Kaddish for Our Dearest. by Abraham-Kadish Feder vi

To Our Dereczin Brothers & Sisters in The U.S. Greetings & Blessings! by Malka Alper iii

On the Occasion of the Publication of the Book... by David Rabinovich (ז"ל) ix

Once there was a Town.... 1

Dereczin of the Past. by Chaim Rabinovich 3
They Exalted the Name of Dereczin. by Chaim Zvi Miller-Sinai 9
My Grandfather Occupying the Rabbinical Seat of Dereczin. by Eliyahu Herenson 3
The Dereczin of My Youth. by Shlomo Yudson 25
Three Tales from Dereczin of Yore. by Shlomo Yudson 30
The Sinai Colony. by Chaim Zvi Miller-Sinai 39
From the Mouth of My Mother, of Blessed Memory by Yaffa Prozbol 46

At the Dawn of the Twentieth Century. 47

In the Days of Change and Transformation by Jacob Kobrinsky 49
A Torah Scroll. by Fanny Boyerman-Feder 51
Rabbis, Scholars and Teachers. by Malka Alper 54
Our Town at the Beginning of the [Twentieth] Century. by Naftali Ben-Dov 56
Haskalah, the Bund, Self-Defense. by Chaim Rabinovich 56
Sent Off to Dereczin. by Ray Raskin 65
Stormy Years. by Joe Silkovich 67
Once Upon A Time..... by Feiga-Leah Abramovich 69
Memories from My Father's Tavern. by Dvora (Dvosha) Kress-Beckenstein 71
Bitter and Sweet Memories. by Nahum Bliss-Bliznansky 72
Jewish to the Last Breath. by Moshe Kwiat 72
Those Pious, Upstanding Jews by Esther Nissenbaum-Bricker 75
A Night Ride on the Coach. by Malka Alper 76
A Teacher in Dereczin. by Hannah Novick 77
From the Last Will and Testament of *Simkheh* the Storekeeper. 79

In the First World War. 81

The Years of War & Occupation. by Chaim Rabinovich 83
In the Vise of the War. by Malka Alper 87
Under the Yoke of the German Occupation. by Jacob Rabinovich 89
The Food Committee. by Mattityahu (*Mottel*) Abelovich 91
A Charity Soup Kitchen for the Needy. by Malka Alper 92
War Chitchat. by Malka Alper 93

Personalities & Their Achievements 95
David Alper 97
My Brother, *David*. ..... by Malka Alper 97
Our Unforgettable Teacher. ..... by Liza Katz-Bialosotsky 97
The *Alper* Family. ..... by David Rabinovich 99
David Alper, Our Teacher and Principal. ..... by Asher Shofet (Negbah) 100
He Who Is Not Forgotten Is Not Dead by Naftali Ben-Dov (Dykhovsky) 102
Rabbi Chaim Zvi Sinai-Miller 103
Our Father's Way. ..... by Khemda & Israel Artzi 103
A Figure of Shining Light. ..... by Malka Alper 104
My Mentor and Teacher. ..... by Kalman Abramovich 105
I Was Proud to Call Him 'Uncle'. ..... by Gustav Sharon (Johannesburg) 106
Chaim Lansky 107
A Difficult Childhood, A Hard Life. ..... by Jacob Rabinovich 107
Lansky In His Town. ..... by Malka Alper 109
A Poet Under Duress ..... by Joshua Gilboa 113
My Friend *Chaim*, The Dreamer. ..... by David Rabinovich 115
The Role of Home in *Lansky's* Poetry. ..... by Abraham Kariv 116

The Last Generation 119
I See Her, Dereczin. ..... by M. Izaakovich 121
Our Synagogues. ..... by Jacob Rabinovich 122
Dereczin In No-Man's Land. ..... by Chaim Rabinovich 123
During the Stormy Days. ..... by Malka Alper 124
Memories From Those Days. ..... by Jacob Rabinovich 127
A Jewish-Polish Kitchen. ..... by Malka Alper 129
Planting and the Harvest. ..... by Schraga-Fyvel Einstein 130
Between Zion and Revolution. ..... by Malka Alper 134
Following Upheavals and Pogroms. ..... by Moshe Sedletsky 136
The *Tarbut* School ..... As Told By a Group of Students 138
My Father, The Last Rabbi of Dereczin. ..... by Meir Bakalchuk 140
The Holy Rabbi, *Gaon* of Dereczin, *Bakalchuk* זצ"ל. ..... by Rabbi Chaim Grinberg 142
The Yavneh School. ..... by Nekha Petrukhovich 143
Betar & Tzahar In Our Town. ..... by M. Bakalchuk, A. Beckenstein, K. Abramovich 144
In the Service of the Dereczin Community. ..... by Eliyahu Herenson 147
Visiting the Sick & Overnight Sick Watch. ..... by Nekha Petrukhovich 151
Our Town in the Thirties. ..... by Isser Lev 152
Hatred of the Jews on the Eve of Destruction. ..... by Malka Alper 153

Memories 155
This Is How We Lived in Our Town. ..... by Haya Kreslansky 157
My Grandfather, זצ"ל ..... by Tzirel Kamenetsky 160
Under the Bolsheviks. ..... by Mattityahu Abelovich 162
The Budding of Zionist Socialism in Dereczin. ..... by Naftali Ben-Dov 163
The Origins of the *HeHalutz* Branch. ..... by David Rabinovich 164
My Grandfather & Grandmother, ז"ל. ..... by Dov Gorinovsky 164

The Holy Sabbath In My Father's House. . . . . by Sarah Basevitz-Slonimsky 165
Festivals and the High Holy Days. . . . . by Malka Alper 166
How Could One Possibly Forget!?. . . . . by Dvora Smith-Shelkovich 168
My Birthplace, Dereczin. . . . . by Shayndl Wilenczyk 169
My Grandmother & Grandfather. . . . . by Sarah Teichman-Levinger 170
Festival Time in Town. . . . . by Chaya Beckenstein-Pilzer 171
My Husband's Family. . . . . by Nekhama Petrukhovich 172
My Scholarly and Enterprising Father. . . . . by Shimon Abramovich 173
How I Took Leave of My Home. . . . . by Miriam Pechersky-Slonimsky 174
And This Is How We Emigrated to The Holy Land. . . . . by Esther Dlugolansky 175
My Last Sabbath in Dereczin. . . . . by Saul Gorinovsky 177
My Little Town, Halinka. . . . . by Mina Liebreider 177
Enlivenment in Town - An Autobus. . . . . by Chaya Beckenstein-Piltzer 179
A Comical Event. . . . . by Shayndl Kamenitzer 179
A Master of the *Tanach*. . . . . by Meir Ziskind 181
A Fire in Town. . . . . by Leah Eliovich-Yatvitsky 182
I Met With My Very First Teacher. . . . . by Rachel Alper 183
My Family That Was Wiped Out. . . . . by Shoshana Shapiro-Nozhnitsky 185
Dereczin No Longer Exists. . . . . by Dora Birnbaum-Rothstein 186
A Visit to My Hometown. . . . . by Rukhamah Ziskind-Abelovich 188
I Was a Witness to a False Accusation. . . . . by Leah Shlechter-Shapiro 189
My Brother *Leibeh* . . . . . by Leah Elyovich-Yatwitsker 190
My Father's House on the *Schulhof* . . . . . by Liza Katz-Bialosotsky 191
The Pain of Memories. . . . . by Rivkah Saglowitz-Dykhovsky 192

The Destruction. 193
My Town Dereczin. . . . . by Katya Klebnik-Bialosotsky 194
This Is How the Jewish Community of Dereczin Was Destroyed
. . . . . by Masha & Abraham-Hirsch Kulakowski 195
The Fate of the Feldman Family. . . . . by Rachel Efrat-Feldman 03
The Germans Have Arrived. . . . . by Sara Wachler-Ogulnick 204
From the Hideaway into the Forest. . . . . by Yehudit Yankelevich-Lantzevitzky 205
Barely Escaping With Our Lives to the Forest. . . . . by Pesha Feinsilber 206
We Were Slaves. . . . . by Y. Reich 211
How *Tzippel Beckenstein* Committed Suicide. . . . . by Pesha Feinsilber 212
I Was A Refugee in Oppressed Dereczin. . . . . by Shmuel Bernstein 213
Escaped from the Slaughter. . . . . by Gutka Boyarsky-Salutsky 231
Out of the Mass Grave. . . . . by Musha Novitsky-Grachuk 231
The Destruction of the Dereczin Jewish Community. . . . . by Sh. Nieger 234
The Bloody Tenth Day of *Ab*. . . . . by Tsirel Kaminetsky-Friedman 235
From the Memories of a Refugee. . . . . by Y. Krimolovsky 237
The Fate of My Family. . . . . by Chaya Levin-Glicksfeld 239
During the Days of Slaughter. . . . . by Katya Bialosotsky-Khlebnik 242
This Is How I Was Saved On the Day of Slaughter. . . . . by Sarah Wachler-Ogulnick 244
Remaining the Only One. . . . . by Avraham-Yitzhak Medvetzky 246
The End of Halinka. . . . . by Mina Liebreider 247
Tribulation, Torture and Death. . . . . by Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky 248

Only I Remained from My Entire Family. . . . . by Chaya Einstein-Osterovitz 252
I Saw All This With My Own Eyes. . . . . by Nekha Petrukhovich 253
To the Entire World. . . . . by Regina Rabinovich 255

In the Forests. 257
Two Years in the Partisan Forces. . . . . by Masha & Abraham-Hirsch Kulakowski 258
The Only Imperative – Take Revenge. . . . . by Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky 264
Hunger and Death in the Forest. . . . . by Tsirel Kamenetsky-Friedman 270
Dr. Yekhezkiel Atlas – The Partisan Doctor. . . . . by Dr. Y. Rockover 272
With the Dereczin Fighters in the Forest. . . . . by Shmuel Borenstein 276
The Whole Family Lost in the Forest. . . . . by Gutka Salutsky-Boyarsky 287
I Saved Myself Along With My Children. . . . . by Kayla Azaf 290
In the Partisan Camp. . . . . by Yehudit Yankelevich-Lantzevitzky 293
Two Out of the Entire Family by Moshe Kwiat 294
We Were Saved from a Terrifying Trap. . . . . by Masha Kulakowski 296
My Life in the Forests. . . . . by Haya Beckenstein-Pilzer 298
In the Forest With My Brother. . . . . by Musha Grachuk-Novitsky 302
Anti-Semitism in the Forest. . . . . by Moshe Kwiat 304
With the Partisans. . . . . by Abraham-Yitzhak Medvetsky 304
My Sister *Ruzha* Falls in the Forest. . . . . by Katya Khlebnik-Bialosotsky 305
The Zionist Dream in the Thickness of the Forest. . . . . by Masha Kulakowski 307

They Fell With Their Guns In Their Hands. 309

Wandering. 321
Uprooted with the Maelstrom. . . . . by Meir Bakalchuk 323
From The Foreign Land to the Homeland. . . . . by Rivkah Becker 330
Torn Out of the Pulpit at Sinaiska. . . . . by Rabbi Israel ben Ch. M. Kaplinsky 331

On the Ruins. 333
Back in Dereczin. . . . . by Sarah Wachler-Ogulnick 335
No Where to Return. . . . . by Chaya Beckenstein-Pilzer 337
On the Ruins of the Dreams of My Youth. . . . . by Masha Kulakowski 337
From Forest Bunkers to Mass Graves. . . . . by Malka Bulkovstein 339
Orphaned, Abandoned, and Hopeless. . . . . by Moshe & Israel Kwiat 339
A Kosher Passover Among the Ruins. . . . . by Nekhama Petrukhovich 340
Among Ruined Streets and Lanes. . . . . by Meir Bakalchuk 340

Derecziners in America. 343
The Founding of the "Derecziner Society". . . . . by Joe (Jonah) Silkovich 345
The Work of the Dereczin Relief Committee in New York. . . by Abraham Kadish Feder 346
In Memory of Our Friend, *Nathan Bliss*. . . . . by Jonah Silkovich 349
Derecziners in America. . . . . by David Rabinovich 350
Sarah Slotnick-Yanofsky, ז"ל. . . . . by Malka Alper 352
Her Son, *Meir*, ע"ה. 353

Dereczin Kinfolk in Israel 355
Relief-Work of the Dereczin Kinfolk in Israel ..... by Malka Alper 357
From Sinaiska – To the Land of Israel ..... by Esther Dlugolansky (Petakh-Tikvah) 358
Yaakov Izaakovich, A Chess Fanatic Among the Blind ..... by Moshe Guter 359
What I Learned from the Mouth of My Mother ..... by Yitzhak Wachler 360

In Memory of Deceased Dereczin Landsleit 361
Remarks in Memory of *David Rabinovich* ז"ל ..... by Kalman Lichtenstein 361
My Father, of Blessed Memory ..... by Ilan Rabinovich 362
Elkeh Lichtenstein ..... by Malka Alper 363
At the End of the First Year ..... by Miriam Musikant 364
Elkeh Lichtenstein of the *Dykhovsky* Family ז"ל ..... by David Rabinovich 364
A Portrait of the Late *Chava Sharar* ז"ל of the *Salutsky* Family ..... by Menahem Rahat 365
A Portrait of My Mother, *Bluma*, ז"ל ..... by Khemda Artzi, of the Sinai-Miller Family 366
In Memory of my Mother *Shoshana Gutman* ז"ל ..... by Israel Gil-Or (Gutman) 367
A Portrait of My Mother *Dina Levitin* of the *Sinai* Family ..... by Naomi Mizrahi 367
Rachel Eichenbaum-Walansky ז"ל ..... by A. 372
Shimon Lusky ז"ל ..... by M. A. 373
In Memory of *Reb Mordechai Zolotkovsky* ..... by Abraham Baysman 373
Ze'ev Ogulnick ז"ל ..... by M.B. 374
Moshe Izaakovich ז"ל 374
My Sister *Shoshana* ז"ל ..... by Y. Izaakovich 374
[*E*]*lazar Rosenberg* ז"ל 374
*Beba, (Nekhama)*Wife of *Reb Yoshe Rabinovich* ז"ל 375
Eliyahu, son of *Reb Yoshe(Joseph) Rabinovich* ז"ל 375
Ethel (Esther) daughter of *Joseph & Beba Herenson-Rabinovich* ז"ל 375
Our Sister *Rachel Alper* ז"ל ..... by Malka Alper 375
Rachel had Many Facets ..... by Amiram 376
With the Memory of *Rachel Alper* ז"ל ..... by Meir Bakalchuk 377
Rachel Daughter of Dereczin ..... by Y. Raban 378
Liova (Aryeh) Greenwald ז"ל 379
Nachman (Nakheh) Goldenberg ז"ל 379
Alter Lobzovsky ז"ל 379

Memorial Pages 381

Necrology: Martyrs of the Community of Dereczin 395

Dereczin

דרצ׳ין

Foreword

This Memorial Book, which is presented by the committee of its creators to those who come from Dereczin, Kolonia Sinaiska and Halinka, who live in Israel, the USA and other countries where Jews have settled, has been conceived to serve as a memorial to the martyrs of the communities who were shot, slaughtered, asphyxiated, burned, and buried alive, in the fields of our town, and to those who fell in battle against the cruel and murderous oppressor in the forest around it, with their hands still holding the arms of vengeance, their hearts yearning for the deliverance of their people – and who themselves were never brought to rest in a proper place of Jewish burial.

From one perspective, the book is about the hallowed community of Dereczin and the residents of its environs – about its history, its conviviality, its deeds and accomplishments, from its very beginning to the time it was erased from the face of the earth. Hundreds of years of Jewish life, about all the happiness and suffering that are imbedded in the life of a Jewish *shtetl*, in the Pale of Settlement of Czarist Russia and the corners of anti-Semitic Poland, are reflected in the pages of this book. All this is told, in order that we shall know, we, our children and our children's children, about that which was, lived, and worked – and was then cut off.

★

Tens of people who came from Dereczin wrote this Memorial Book, simple people whose job is not writing, but the memory of their shining childhood and youth in their tranquil town, and the memory of their loved ones, who were annihilated in its streets, fields, and forests during the years of the War and Holocaust – all these things did not give their souls peace until they put down their memories on paper, their meditations, and the stories of their suffering and what they went through. It is they – they who brought the stones for the erection of this monument.

The Book presents the simple story of Dereczin, in the character that was put down in its pages and with its intent. The Book does not pretend to aggrandized historical sketches and synthesis of all the incidents that are described within – not with regard to the history of the town, not concerning the organizations of its community and their works, not with regard to the annihilation of the Jews during the years of the Holocaust, and not even in connection with the energetic, stubborn and audacious exploits of the sons of Dereczin against the Nazis. This is a collection of stories by many Dereczíners, and every one of them wrote from memory that which he or she saw with their own eyes from their perspective, from his street and from his parents' home. This is the source of differences in how things were seen, and how they are described.

We were not concerned with alignment to related history in an objective fashion, in picking the subject matter and in approaching its reading, where even to this day, not everything is known in precise detail. We were guided by the desire to permit the words and the writing of all our townsfolk to convey that which they wanted to tell, and all the gaps in their memory.

We have published the words of all the writers in the language in which it was written. The volume of material forced the need upon us to abridge part of the writings, [but we did so] without doing violence to the essential facts and their spirit. And from this, there emerges from all the memories, stories, descriptions, personal and family portraits, a clear picture, and to our knowledge a picture

full of shining light about the life of our town, full of the pain and tears over the demise of its community, and adorned with glory and pride for the heroism of its warrior-sons.

★

Dereczin was a Jewish town, within its walls and in its yards, in its houses of learning and worship, in the way of life of our forefathers, in the spirit that reigned in its youth movements and parties, in its schools, in its yearnings and dreams, during ordinary weekdays as if they too were Sabbath and festival.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the traditional Jewish way of life based on Torah scholarship was dominant, filling its every nook and cranny. From the beginning of our turbulent century it was the spirit of nationalism that set the tone for the youth movements, the parties, and public organizations of Dereczin. Elements of ideology appeared, that catalyzed large parts of the Jewish community in Eastern and Central Europe.

We can freely take pride in raising a banner to the part played by Dereczin in the War of Vengeance of the partisans against the Nazi Murderer. Every historian of the guerilla war of the forests tells about it. There is no doubt that the aggressive spirit of the sons of our town was aided by the nationalist education they received, and by the fundamental spark of allegiance to their people and its aspirations for redemption.

★

Years have passed since the days of the Holocaust and the War. Several years have also passed since we first met to gather the materials for the Memorial Book, and to start the work. The task was not easy.

In conveying the Book to the hands of those from Dereczin, Halinka and Kolonia Sinaiska let us offer our thanks to the members of the publication committee for their considerable and fruitful effort – first and foremost to *Malka Alper* who worked without a surcease and involved herself in every detail that was related to the improvement of the Book and its publication; to *Chaim Rabinovich* who drew the history and the past of our town from the wellspring of his wondrous memory; to the committee members, *Meir Bakalchuk, Aryeh Beckenstein*, and the couple *Masha & Abraham-Hirsch Kulakowski*, who lent their hands to everything where they could help, in no small measure to setting up its format, its content and the appearance of this Book.

Words of thanks are in order to the members of the "Memorial Book Committee in the USA" for obtaining material and funding to enable it to be published. The gratitude of the publishers goes to the family of *Jacob Mishkin* in Venezuela, who gave generously to this community memorialization project.

To the fighting partisan, *Shmuel Bernstein,* from whose book, "The Dr. Atlas Brigade" excerpts are incorporated into this Book, to the beloved writer, a townsman *Shlomo Yudson*, from whose book, "Three Worlds," several warmhearted stories about our way of life were taken – the thanks of those involved in the work on this Book is sent.

★

Let us remember at the hour in which we unveil this memorial, *Rabbi Chaim-Zvi Sinai-Miller* ז"ל, who never let go of his dream of a *Yizkor Book* for his town, and to which he dedicated the better part of his will and energy, as an active and enabling teacher, and a Zionist; let us remember *David Rabinovich* ז"ל, who put an immense amount of effort into the preparation and organization of the work, in the gathering of the material, the collection of funds in Israel and outside The Land, to get the book published – these two beloved sons of Dereczin did not live to see the fruit of their labor and effort.

★

The reader of the pages in this Book should silently whisper the pure and poignant Kaddish prayer from the depths of his heart over the distant graves spread out across the fields and forests of our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, dearly beloved, and entire families of which there remains not even a trace.

Let us therefore reverently take this Book in our hands, read it with the trembling that comes with the remembering of the pure souls of the departed, and when we finish reading, press our trembling lips to its pages and its lines, that perpetuate the memory of the martyrs and warriors.

Yekhezkiel Raban, Editor

The Translator's Foreword

By Jacob Solomon Berger

The preparation of this English *Dereczin Yizkor Book* represents another step in my continuing effort to make histories of Eastern European Jewish *shtetl* life more accessible to interested readers who live in the English-speaking world. My interest in Dereczin can be attributed to my maternal family origins in the *shtetl* of Zelva, a scant 15 km from Dereczin.

The two towns both had Jewish communities that were centuries old, until they were cruelly eradicated in the Holocaust. Young people from families in both towns very likely married one another over long periods of time. Indeed, the complete understanding of how these bloodlines mixed is probably lost to us forever, but that the Jewish communities in both towns were related seems indisputable. The rosters of both communities are replete with the same names: *Gelman, Lantzevitzky, Lev, Ogulnick, Salutsky,* and so on. So for me, having already translated The Zelva Memorial Book into English, this step seemed to be a natural corollary to that earlier effort.

Translating *Sefer Deretchin* constituted a different experience for me. In the case of the *Sefer Zikaron Zelva*, the editor, *Yerachmiel Moorstein* ז"ל, accepted a burden of translating all of his inputs into Hebrew. His objective was to assure that the result would be accessible to the Hebrew-speaking progeny of Zelva in Israel. There were some interesting consequences to this decision:

- The resulting text continued to be beyond the reach of those who speak only English as a native tongue. Since more than half the descendants of Zelva emigrants and survivors are in this category, the issue of meaningfully assuring the preservation of memories remained open.

- Three quarters of the Zelva text had started out being written in Yiddish, of which only a handful of pages were so preserved for illustrative purposes. Consequently, the 'feel' of the original writers had already undergone one level of filtration before reaching my hands.

- Even as late as 1980, there was resistance to an all-Hebrew edition by aging members in the Zelva diaspora community, for whom Yiddish was their true *mameloshen*. Without Yiddish, they felt alienated from a text that they would not be able to read, and consequently some were not forthcoming with either material or financial support.

Sefer Deretchin was published about two-thirds in Yiddish and one-third in Hebrew. Having been published nearly twenty years earlier than its Zelva counterpart, it benefitted from the oversight and participation of a still vigorous, though aging, American *landsmanschaft,* and an as-yet-emerging Israeli presence, which itself had strong Yiddish roots. Consequently, creating the *Dereczin Yizkor Book* has been a more personal experience for me, and one closer to the source material. Indeed, the Byelorussian Litvak Yiddish idiom, laced with its Russian words, struck a deep and emotional chord within me, because it represented the voice of those very grandparents that raised me as a child. It instilled a sense in me that the Derecziners too, were my kith and kin.

The two books parallel each other in many obvious ways. The structures of the books are nearly identical. It is noteworthy that Dereczin seemed to resemble Zelva a great deal in its physical layout,

to the point that the Synagogues and *Batei Midrashim* had many of the same names. The striking similarity in town layout raises the intriguing question of whether they were conceived from the same general plan at one time, early in the Middle Ages. Qualitatively the two books are equally rich, but because the Dereczin book is nearly three times larger, there is a greater body of anecdotal detail which enriches the record substantially, and deepens our insight into the daily lives of our collective forbears.

The tragic end of these communities came about somewhat differently, even though the grisly outcome was the same. Zelva was in that part of Byelorussia that was formally incorporated into the Third Reich. It also had a railroad station, which Dereczin did not (in fact, Derecziners would have to travel to Zelva by horse-drawn wagon to have access to rail transport). Consequently, Zelva never had a ghetto. Rather, the Jews were rounded up and transported first to Volkovysk, as a staging point that eventually led them to their final doom at Treblinka.

Just because Dereczin lay outside of the borders of the Third Reich was no basis on which its Jews would be spared. However, lacking the transportation infrastructure, the Nazis appear to have opted for creating a ghetto. After drafting available Jewish manpower into forced labor for digging massive grave pits, they and their local henchmen, summarily butchered the entire Jewish population on the 10th Day of *Ab* 1942, burying them in these very same mass graves. Of the more than two thousand Jewish souls in Dereczin, all were killed, save approximately 200 who fled to the nearby forests where they fought the Nazi German aggression as partisans. Ultimately, only 60 would emerge from the forests, as survivors of the rigors and dangers of partisan existence, to begin reclaiming what was left of their shattered lives. It is this aspect of the history of the Dereczin community that sets it apart, and makes it different and complementary to the Zelva story.

And yet even here, the overlaps continue to manifest themselves. If scores of Derecziners fought in the Partisan *Pobeda* Battalion, there were also the two brothers, *Moshe & Katriel Salutsky* from Zelva who were there, as were all the members of the family of *Ephraim (Foyka) Gelman* and his wife *Alta*, herself a daughter of the Dereczin *Osherovich* family. So who is to say we are not one...?

In preparing this manuscript, I have followed the same disciplines that I outlined in the foreword to the Zelva Memorial Book, so I will not repeat them here. Suffice it to say, I have tried to leave as much flavor of the original writing as is possible.

I also wish to extend thanks to a number of people for helping to make this work possible. First, my thanks go to *Sol Phillips* of Rochester, NY, a scion of the Becker family of both Dereczin and Zelva. It was *Sol* who engaged me on this subject and eventually made a copy of *Sefer Deretchin* available to me. A word of thanks is in order to *Miriam Kreiter*, who translated several dozen pages at the behest of various interested parties. The quality of her work lightened my own load somewhat, for which I am grateful. Finally, I want to thank my 'backup Yiddishists,' *Faygel Garber York* of Monsey, NY and *Mildred Shapiro Ragosin* of Edmonton, Alberta in Canada. Both ladies, born in Zelva, gave generously of their knowledge to keep *dem Amerikaner Yoongotch* from linguistic pitfalls. And when all else failed, our gratitude goes to Professor *Mordkhe Schaechter* of Columbia University for his peerless expertise in clarifying the handful of esoterica that was beyond us all.

Spring, 2000

A Silent Kaddish for Our Dearest

By Abraham-Kadish Feder
Chairman, U.S. *Yizkor Book* Committee
(Original Language: Yiddish)

When I undertook the work of becoming the Chairman of the Committee for the *Dereczin Yizkor Book*, I was fully cognizant how great the effort would be, and even greater the responsibility.

We began working on the *Yizkor Book* in 1964. We had our first general meeting of residents of Dereczin, concerning the *Yizkor Book*, on *Hol HaMoed Sukkot*, with the participation of *Malka Alper*, during her visit to the U.S.

The idea of producing a *Yizkor Book* had already gestated for some time in the thoughts of several Derecziner *landsleit*. We saw, that in such a book, we had the only possibility of preserving the memory of our small town, where we were born, raised, and where we spent the sweet years of our youth.

This, indeed, is the lesson of our *Yizkor Book*. In it, are preserved for all eternity, the happiness and the sadness, the lives and daily occurrences, the tribulations and good things of all our closest ones, until they were led to their demise in a locked ghetto, dragged to their slaughter, and bit by bit, revealed themselves after having escaped to the forests, by doing battle with the enemy, and by-and-large condemned to their deaths in *The Sanctification of the Name.*

Let this *Book* be a memorial to those who were murdered in the pits, and those who fell in battle, and those who were denied the decency of a Jewish burial. Let it be a memorial marker for those who did battle heroically against the greatest enemy ever to arise against our people in the course of its long and distinguished history. For us, and for our children, they will stand as heroes, who defended their honor as human beings and as Jews.

We are indebted to all of those who participated in this undertaking, and who helped in producing this Book, whether with content, or whether with financial support. A special thanks is due to the Derecziner Society, and the members of the *Yizkor Book* Committee. Our dear townsfolk, *Jonah Silkowitz, Tzirel Kamenetsky, Fanny Berman, Ida Sarnotsky, Judith Yankelewick, Guta Boyarsky.* The President of the Society, *S. Bernicker, Rachel Efros, Chaya Pilcer, David Yanofsky*, and finally --the most dear of all-- our secretary, *Rose Siskind* and Treasurer, *Sarah Slotnick*, who worked extremely hard and were dedicated to the completion of the Book.

With the *Dereczin Yizkor Book*, we place an eternal monument dedicated to the sacred memory of all the Jews of Dereczin who were killed and tortured. The book is a tear that we shed, on the scattered and far-flung family graves of our collective brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, friends and comrades, from the Dereczin Jewish settlement, who are no longer with us.

With respect for the Almighty, we will take this *Book* in our hands and we will read it, as if it were a silent Kaddish, in memory of our nearest and dearest.

Kislev, 5727 (November 1966)

Transcription of the English Letter to the Dereczin landsleit (p. 11).

Deretchiner Yizkor Book Committee

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J. YANKELEWICK
LEVIN

Worthy Landsleit,

As you know, the Deretchiner Landsleit in America, together with our Landsleit in Israel are publishing a YIZKOR (MEMORIAL) BOOK for our hometown DERETCHIN.

Deretchin was a small town, but it was rich in culture, Rabbinical personalities and fine people. This will be the only monument for our town, for our dear beloved martyrs who were so brutally murdered during the last war. In this YIZKOR BOOK they will be commemorated.

If you have a picture from streets or houses of certain people of interest in our hometown, which will shed a light on the way of life in Deretchin, please send it to the Committee. Also if you could send us articles describing your life there in school, organizations, World War I and especially from the World War II. Please send it to us as soon as possible and all the material and pictures will be reviewed by the Editorial Board
and whatever they will find of interest, will be printed.

Naturally, worthy Landsleit, a book like this costs about 4 to 5 thousand dollars. Our Landsleit in Israel do more financially for this cause than they can afford, therefore we appeal to you, please do your share, send us your generous contribution for this sacred cause. We thank heartily for those of you who already sent in their contribution.

If you know some Deretchiner who doesn't know yet about this project, please talk to them, also to your children, and see that they should contribute to the Yizkor Book.

We hope that your name will be among the contributors to this everlasting Memorial. Write to your out-of-town Deretchiner friends, tell them about the Yizkor Book. Or send to us their addresses and we will write them.

Please do not delay – We expect to hear from you in a few days.

Fraternally yours

ABRAHAM FEDER, Chairman SARA SLOTNICK, Treasurer ROSE SISKIND, Secretary
Please make checks or money orders payable to:
DERETCHINER YIZKOR BOOK COMMITTEE
and send to:
ROSE SISKIND, 345 West 28th Street, New York 1, N.Y.

To Our Dereczin Brothers & Sisters in The U.S. Greetings & Blessings!

By Malka Alper

(Original Language: Yiddish)

The years are flying by, and already it is 28 years since the destruction of our dear ones in the ghetto and in the forest, from cold and hunger, or on the battlefield, at the bloody hands of the Nazis and their collaborators.

Our Sages of Blessed Memory would say, that with every life that is extinguished, or cut off, it is as if an entire world was destroyed. And here, in Dereczin, so many such worlds were destroyed, as a result of courageous confrontation with the enemy, often barehanded, or with minimal forms of weaponry -- fathers and mothers, little children, grandfathers and grandmothers, young people, sons and daughters, and on and on.

All of us, who trod Dereczin's soil either barefoot or shod, who in their childhood years on summer Sabbath days, would roll down the *Puster Barg* (there, opposite the barracks-palaces), who strolled in the park-like fields on the Zhetl road, or in the *Ager-Sod* [1]-- summertime, in the shade of chestnut trees, and in autumn, when the trees began to shed their yellow-golden leaves, together with the chestnuts, and they crunched underfoot – – –

All of us, who today see this through the lens of [spilled] blood and extermination, remember every minute, and there, in that ground, lie -- not in a cemetery, old or new -- more dead Jews that ever lived during the entire existence of Dereczin as a Jewish community.

In the hearts of each one of us, there is a gravestone, the final memorialization, but according to Jewish tradition we must place such a symbol, a stone, on the grave [itself]. But go -- put such a gravestone on the resting places of our kinfolk, which are spread out over fields and forests, in places that we cannot even access. These places are under the control of those who would hold themselves out to the world as defenders of righteousness and the equality of men --- *Except, of course, the Jews!*

Each of us must keep this [virtual] gravestone before our eyes in the form of a Book, a *Yizkor Book*, in which, with sanctity and love, memories, writings, expressions, stories, and songs, have been brought together, about everything we have lost in our town of origin. In this process, we wish to inscribe forever, the names of those that were killed in *Sanctification of the Name* in the ghetto, and those who died in battle against the greatest enemy of the Jewish people.

Let future generations learn from the pages of our *Yizkor Book* that they are descended from industrious, productive people, who in creating a life for themselves, also contributed to building the land in which they were considered to be second-class citizens; from people who struggled for a better tomorrow for themselves and those around them; for the Jewish people, and for people of other nationalities. Coming generations may read this book. Upon us lies the burden --nay the obligation-- as the Torah says --*and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children* -- show them the pictures, tell them the stories, and do everything feasible to bring them close to the experience and way of life of their forbears.

May your hand be strengthened. Do what you can to make this Book richer in content, more attractive in appearance, and affordable in cost for every single member of the Dereczin community.

With regards in the name of all of us [in Israel]

Malka Alper

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[1] Informal name of the *Agreste Sod*, the formal park in Dereczin (see *Shlomo Yudson's* memoir later on).

On the Occasion of the Publication of the Book

By David Rabinovich (ד"ר)

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Reception for Jacob Mishkin & his wife (p. 14)

No trace of the Jews remains in all the cities and towns of Poland and Lithuania. There was no one left even to place gravestones on the burial places. The one way in which it is possible to preserve the memory of our relatives, and dearly-beloved who were sacrificed, of the beloved and unforgettable home cities and towns, is to gather the memories and writings of those who survived, and to present them in the form of Memorial Books, which portray the history of the annihilated communities and the Jews who were systematically murdered; and also to pass on to the coming generations the story of Jewish resistance in the ghettoes and in the forests -- a story of indescribable heroism, which reflected, after the long bimillenial diaspora, like a bright shining ray off of the heroic national rebirth in our own Homeland.

Large cities and small towns have already published their Memorial Books. It has been some time since the circles of the Dereczin community planned and worked for the publication of its *Pinkas-Dereczin.*

A committee was appointed which assumed responsibility to gather all materials-- memories, writings, photographs, historical material, etc.

A separate difficult, but important task, was to raise the necessary funds to publish the Book. Expert assistance was provided by our fellow townsman, *Jacob Mishkin* from Venezuela. In the early fifties, he made his first trip to the Land of Israel.

Jacob Mishkin joined me and *Chaim Rabinovitch,* and immediately asked in what way he could be of assistance to the Dereczin survivors, who came to the Land after the [Second World] War, and the destruction of the Eastern-European [Jewish] community. We had not, at that time, yet thought about publishing our Memorial Book, and [instead] proposed to him that he establish a credit union that would provide interest-free loans to those from our town who were needy. He immediately allocated two thousand pounds, and we raised another one thousand between us. The credit union continues to function until this day.

A few years later, during the second visit by the *Mishkin* family to Israel, the concept of a Memorial Book had come to fruition in the minds of the Dereczin circle, in memory of our annihilated community. We approached them for assistance in the publication of *Pinkas-Dereczin. Jacob Mishkin* immediately provided three thousand pounds for the undertaking, and his wife, *Sofia,* in a subsequent trip, added her own support in the form of yet another thousand pounds. *Jacob's* two sisters, when they visited Israel, contributed six hundred pounds.

In the ensuing years, we have received donations from Derecziners in the U.S., Canada, Argentina, South Africa, and other lands where Dereczin survivors may be found. In Israel itself, a sum of money was also raised for this purpose.

Photo (p. 12):

Picture of Deretchiner Yizkor Book Committee in the U.S. June 1965

Left to Right

(Standing):

Sam Bernicker, David Yanofsky,[2] *Ida Sarnotsky-Feder, Mrs. Bernicker, Shimon Bernicker (ע"ה), [Abraham] Kadish Feder, Chairman*

(Sitting):

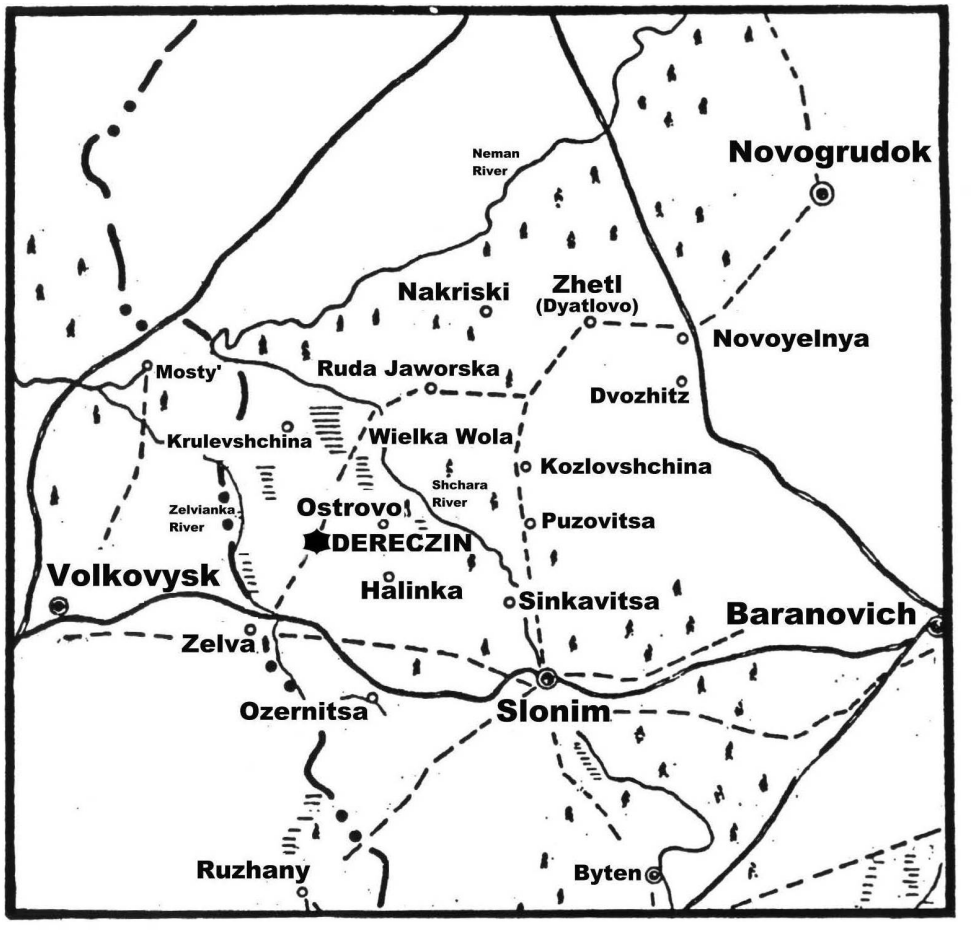
Guta Boyarsky, Rachel Efros-Feldman, Rukhamah Siskind-Abelovitch (Secretary), Sarah-Beilkeh Slotnick-Yanofsky (ע"ה) (Treasurer), Tsirel Kamenetsy-Freedman, Judith Yankelevich-Lantzevitzky

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[2] This is the chosen English spelling in the text. The original Yiddish suggests a spelling of *Yanovsky*.

Once there was a Town....

Map of Western Byelorussia
Showing Dereczin and its Environs



Dereczin of the Past

By Chaim Rabinovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photos: The Sapieha Palaces (p. 21)
Gravestone of R' Yaakov ben Ze'ev Beckenstein (p. 23)
West side of the Dereczin town marketplace (p. 24)
East side of the Dereczin town marketplace (p. 25)
The Feder Family at the grave site of their mother (p. 30, Top)
The Einstein Family at their mother's grave site for Yahrzeit (p. 30, Bottom)
Sholom Mansky, the last of the Starotsas (p. 33, Top)
Soldiers in the Czarist Army: Reuven Shelkovich & his cousin Mottel from Zelva (p.33, Bottom)
A Market Day in Town (p. 34)
Simkheh die Kremerkeh (storekeeper) (p. 35 Top)
Her husband, R' Yehuda-Shmuel Epstein (p. 36 Bottom)
Reb Meir-Shia Wolfowitz the Feldscher and his family (p. 39)
Reb Shlomo 'Kazianer Rav' with is wife & nephew (p. 40 Top)
The melamed, Reb Alter Falakovich ('Reb Alter Deikhess') (p. 40 Bottom)

Between the borders of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, in the opening years of the second half of the Middle Ages, there was a broad, half-desolate land, flat, with much water, marshes and forests, with poor soil, and a sparse population, fortified cities and towns, and poor villages around formidable palaces. These were the broad tracts of what was later to become White Russia, whose boundaries were never precisely set down, and which achieved independence only after the Russian October Revolution, as a part of the Soviet Union's array of fifteen republics.

In the course of the past six or seven centuries, White Russia belonged to several different countries of Eastern Europe, beginning with the Lithuanian monarchy, then to the Polish-Lithuanian kingdom, and remained within Polish borders until the partition. After the partition of Poland, White Russia found itself under Russian hegemony, and remained there until the end of the First World War, in which the Germans occupied almost the entire area, remaining there until the end of the war. After the brief occupation by the Red Army, the entire western part of White Russia is incorporated into the new Polish Republic, and this continues up to the outbreak of the Second World War. The area remains in White Russian hands for barely two years. The Soviet forces are overrun after the invasion of the German military, at which time, the Nazi murderers are in control of the entirety of White Russia from the very first weeks of their attack, and carried out their agenda there, just as they did in all occupied territories of Eastern Europe. In 1944, they retreated from the area, under the pressure of the [advancing] Soviet military machine, leaving behind an impoverished, starved out and plundered land, devoid of almost its entire original Jewish population that inhabited its cities and towns. From that time on, the half-empty area once again reverted to White Russian rule.

The true rulers of these tracts of land were, until the beginning of the 19th century, not the countries which held sovereignty, but the noble families who acquired both the lands and the towns therein, as either [royal] gifts or inheritances, with thousands of hectares of land around them, and they ruled over this and the resident population under their oversight.

Dereczin at the Beginning

Dereczin can be found in the western part of White Russia, near the Polish border. Historians are inclined to accept that the first settlements in Dereczin took place approximately at some time toward the end of the 1400's to the beginning of the 1500's. Dereczin was then built along a commercial road that led from Slonim to Grodno. The town is barely 32km to the northwest of Slonim, and 46

versts[3] north of Ruzhany. The Shchara River flows to the northeast of Dereczin, emptying its waters into the Neman [River]. Dereczin itself, abuts the [Shchara] river, which older maps show as *Zelva*, but later ones took the more appropriate name of *Sapaya,* which in time, became *die Shihpeh* in Yiddish. It is both understandable, and assumed that the name *Sapaya* does not stem from the original times of Dereczin, but from the later [times], when the *Sapiehas* were the landholders of the town and its environs.

Dereczin residents, and along with them, many others who have familiarized themselves with the town, and have thought, spoken and written about it, link the origin of the name of their hometown to the name of the ruling noble *Sapieha*[4] family. From many historical and chronological sources, one could obtain the impression that Dereczin, from the start, belonged to the *Sapieha* Dynasty.

However, if one delves into older books and documents, one learns that Dereczin, along with large tracts of land around it, went through many changes of hand before the *Sapiehas* took control of it.

In the second half of the 1500's, the Lithuanian-Polish King *Casimir Jagiello* gave Dereczin as a present to his faithful vassal *Vasil Kapaczewicz. Casimir's* son, *Aleksander Jagiello*, later confirmed the gift, and formalized this fiefdom, which had already passed by inheritance to *Vasil's* son, *Jaczek Kapaczewicz.*

It might not be so important to set out all these details, were it not for those descendants yet to come, with no direct link to this area, or so think the Jewish historians about the history of the Jews in Lithuania and White Russia, and equally so about Dereczin. Here is an interesting fact about the reign of the affomentioned noble, *Aleksander Jagiello.* In the year 1495, he decreed the expulsion of all Jews from Lithuania. Commerce, and the development of areas under his rule, became so weakened as a result of this decision, that he was forced, eight years later in 1503, to invite the expelled Jews back, and return them to their former places of residence. Once again, they were invited back to fill the emptied purses of the anti-Semitic King. Later, as the Polish-Lithuanian king, he appointed individual talented Jews as finance ministers in his royal bureaucracy. Needless to say, Dereczin Jews suffered too, from the expulsion, and the repatriation during which they rebuilt their wrecked houses, stores, and places of work. For the Lord of Dereczin, for *Kapaczewicz,* he certainly secured a goodly number of new Jewish residents.

At the dawn of the 1500's one has to look for Jewish origins in Dereczin among single families of men-for-hire, who were there at the outset along with a number of Jewish craftsmen.

An interesting fact is established in the historical record about the crisis, which reigned the area covering Lithuania and White Russia, from which the Jews were expelled: In the year 1501, a few years before the Jews were recalled to settle again in these areas, the sister of *Jaczek Kapaczewicz,* the wife of the nobleman, *Michal Sanguszek,* willed a large portion of her estate and serfs to the Church, but this will only became known after her death. Once she died, all her assets once again reverted to her heirs:

> To her son, *Anzhei Sanguszek,*
> Son-in-law, *Semen Bohdanovicz,* Lord of Andiczewicz, husband of her daughter, *Nastasia,* and
> Her second son-in-law, Lord *Ivan Anzhiewicz Poluvinskii,* husband of her daughter, *Nievidana.*

The *Poluvinskiis* later bought out the share of the *Andiczewicz's.* It was bought by Lord *Aleksander Poluvinskii,* the Castellan[5] of Novogrudok, who in this manner, became the sole owner and ruler of all Dereczin and its surrounding territory.

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3 The *verst* is a Russian measure of distance.

4 The *Sapieha (or Sophia)* family is an ancient White Russian-Lithuanian noble family that traces its origins to 1413, in Smolensk, and Polock.

5 Roman Catholic spiritual leader with temporal powers as well.

It is only at the end of the 1700's that Dereczin falls under the control of the *Sapiehas*. The daughter of *Aleksander Hilari*, the Marshalek of the Grand Duchy of Greater Lithuania, married Lord *Jerzy Stanislav Sapieha*, and he received Dereczin and its estates as a dowry in the year 1686.

From then on, Dereczin belonged to this famous noble dynasty, which did a great deal to develop the town as the 'capitol' for the *Sapiehas*. They helped to build a great deal of the housing, in which both Jews and Christians alike were invited to live and work in Dereczin. They also donated building materials to erect stores and synagogues.

Exactly a hundred years after Dereczin passed into the hands of the *Sapiehas*, and possibly to commemorate this important date for the ruling family, in the year 1786, a family palace was built. Over time, the *Sapiehas* moved hundreds of paintings, books, and all manner of precious gems, into their new Dereczin palace from their Ruzhany residence. It was in this manner that Dereczin became the principal residence of the *Sapiehas*. The foremost of the *Sapiehas* who was instrumental in building the palace and the town itself, was the great Hetman[6] and Chancellor of Lithuania, *Aleksander Sapieha*. In 1831, after the Polish rebellion against Russia was put down, the palace, and all of its contents were taken by Czarist forces from the hands of *Aleksander's* son, *Franciszek*. Thus the *Sapiehas* were driven out of Dereczin, but their name endured for many long years in the memory of the Dereczin population, who saw them as the builders of their town.

Jews – The True Builders

Were the *Sapiehas* the *real* builders of Dereczin? Officially, that is what is written in historical books and chronologies. But if one delves deeper, and finds a variety of facts from the later Dereczin legacy, everything becomes clearer, that the true builders of the town were the Jews.

The method by which Poland chose to develop its cities in the Middle Ages is known to us. They invited Germans, and settled them with special rights and privileges to develop industry and commerce. This entailed a substantial migration of German citizens to Poland on the basis of the A.G. Magdeburg Rights. But the German settlements were largely concentrated in the Polish cities, and very few of the Germans settled in White Russia.

The fact is, that in Dereczin, there was a street called *Deutsche Gasse*, which suggests an almost-certain hypothesis about the Germans, that they came, many hundreds of years ago, to Dereczin, very likely at the invitation of the ruling nobility, to attempt to establish somehow, small businesses. It appears that the efforts of the German colonization in Dereczin did not take. In the past decades, there was only one known German family in Dereczin, that engaged in the weaver's trade. With the passage of centuries, the Germans moved away from Dereczin, and the town was left largely Jewish in character and population. After the Germans, and until the last World War, there was only one piece of evidence of their sojourn -- the name of a street.

It is also reasonable, according to the opinion of the historian *Dr. Raphael Mahler,* that German settlers were imported to Lithuanian and White Russian cities after the 1495 expulsion. It is possible that this happened in Dereczin as well. This was negated, however, after the repatriation of the Jews to Dereczin, and the development of the town then fell on the backs of the Jewish populace.

From an old document we know, that in the year 1550, Dereczin, together with Zhetl and Dvorets, belonged to the community of Slonim. It is clear that in every respect, the Jews of Dereczin were already organized.

The first document that tells of Jews in Dereczin dates from the year 1619. From a second document, dated 1766, we learn that the number of Jews in Dereczin at that time was 404 souls. By the year 1847, that number is reported at 542. On 01 January 1878, the total population numbered 2,269 residents, of which 1,725 were Jewish. In 1897 there were 1,887 Jews in Dereczin. Then came the years of the great emigration over the ocean, migration to large urban centers, and *aliyah* to the Holy Land. Consequently, the number of Jews in 1921 stood at

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6 An Eastern European title of authority

1,396, and their percentage of the population also fell from 71% to 61.7% at that time.

In 1897 there were 227 Jewish craftsmen and tradespeople, represented for the most part as follows:

71 - Shoemakers
46 - Day Laborers
28 - Factory Workers

Six families engaged in vegetable farming.

Then comes the long list of organizations and aid societies, which were already established in Dereczin as early as seventy years prior to 1897, and which bear witness to the highly-developed sense of community responsibility for: good deeds, helping the unfortunate, clothing the naked, meting out justice, accommodating guests, visiting the sick, etc.

Even more instructive is the number of institutions established for learning -- a Talmud Torah with fifteen classrooms. The Jews of Dereczin were always concerned, and looked after, the education of their children.

It is therefore appropriate to describe more thoroughly and tell about the establishment, growth, development -- up to the tragic destruction of Jewish Dereczin.

The Origins of Dereczin

As previously mentioned, for many years, Dereczin was the principal residence of the renown Lithuanian-Polish noble family, *Sapieha*. They constructed large, two-story palaces, by the small river, *Shihpeh*, surrounded by a magnificently beautiful orchard park. Large paths cut through the park both along its length and breadth, and along their sides, old, high trees grew, among them many fruit trees. The *Sapiehas* cultivated a special breed of pears, which bore the name of the noble family -- *sapiezhankas.*

Near the park, at the beginning of the town line, and opposite the great palace, where the *Deutsche Gasse* began, was the *Puster Barg*, overgrown with old linden trees.

In the park, and on the *Puster Barg*, the Dereczin Jews, their wives and children, would come to spend the Sabbath days during the summer. There was a legend that circulated in Dereczin, and was handed down from one generation to the next, that the passages of the hill once extended underground from Dereczin to Ruzhany. Both towns once belonged to the *Sapiehas.* The distance from Dereczin to Ruzhany is about 50km. The legend said that the tunnels were dug as a security measure.

The same legend has it that hundreds of years ago, it pleased the ruling noble of the period to construct a small town around his personal residence. To accomplish this objective, he imported thirty Jewish families from Lithuania, specifically manual tradespeople, such as tailors, builders, carpenters, and artisans, and a select few business people. He provided them with construction materials from his forests, and they built themselves houses. In accordance with his orders, an arcade of stores was constructed in the center of the town, in the form of a three-sided plan (the Hebrew letter *Het*), and about thirty stores were located in this arcade. Later, he helped to build the large, walled synagogue, where the old cemetery was eventually located to one side. By the end of the nineteenth century, the lettering on some of the stones in the cemetery were so badly eroded, that it was no longer possible to decipher them. It was estimated that this cemetery was about four hundred years old.

From this handful of Jews, brought to reside in Dereczin, grew the population of Jews in the town grew to a size where it numbered about three thousand souls prior to its destruction [in the Holocaust].

It was often told in Dereczin, that the two-story house at the head of the *Zelva & Slonim Gasse*, was especially built at the capricious whim of one of the *Sapiehas*, who was dissatisfied with the view from the windows of his palace, at the head of the *Deutsche Gasse*, and at the end of *Zelva Gasse*, of two streets stretching in a straight line from one end of the town to the other, cutting through the marketplace. *Zelva Gasse* was the only street where a majority of the population were Catholic Christians, *Mieszczanii*, interspersed with a few Jewish households.

I etched the stories and legends, as well as the raw facts about the olden times of the Jewish community of Dereczin , into my memory from the days when I studies the *Gemara*[7] with the oldest of the Dereczin Rabbis, *Rabbi David Chaim Shmeuns*, a true Jewish scholar, who at the end of the nineteenth century was already a man in his eighties. He would tell us, his students, all manner of things that he had heard from his grandfather, and that were handed down from generation to generation. A portion of his storytelling can be corroborated in the scarce documents and works of historians.

The first Lithuanian Jews, practical folk people, who, in time were able to provide for their material well-being either through their own labor, or through trade and commerce, also concerned themselves with the spiritual nurturing of their children. That is how the Talmud Torah came to be build, housed in the structure between the synagogue and the old cemetery. Other houses of worship were built, two of stone, and one a wooden structure, as well as a separate synagogue for the tradesmen and laborers, the *Hayyat [Schul]*. Some of the townspeople sent their children to study at the Yeshiva in Slonim.

For young (sic: unmarried) daughters, the Jews would customarily obtain from far away, sons-in-law, who were scholars and students of the *Torah*, whom they would financially support for many long years, to afford them the opportunity to pursue their religious scholarship.

It was in this manner, that the study of *Torah*, and the pursuit of doing good deeds became the hallmark of Jewish family life in Dereczin. The town shone with its renown Rabbis, *Gaonim*,[8] and great scholars during all the years of its existence.

The Rabbis of Dereczin

Our memory teems with the names of prominent Rabbis, from olden times, from the past four hundred years, which Dereczin took pride in, and from which it obtained a reputation:

> *Rabbi Eli' Chaim Meizel*, of sainted memory, who later became the Rabbi of Lodz[9];
>
> *Rabbi Joseph (Yosseleh) Shluffer*, who became Rabbi of Slonim;
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> *Rabbi Sholom Ber* , who became the Rabbi of Kletsk;
>
> *Rabbi Joseph Zundel*, Rabbi of Eishyshok;[10]
>
> *Rabbi Leib Bialyblatzky,* Rabbi of Luneh, and who passed away in Dereczin;
>
> *Rabbi Plotkin,* who became the Rabbi of Smargan;
>
> And the last, *Rabbi [Zvi-Hirsch] Bakalchuk,* who was killed by the Nazi murderers, along with the remainder of the Jewish community.

All of the aforementioned rabbis occupied positions of great respect in the rabbinical community.

The procedure of selecting a rabbi used to involve the entire community, especially the leadership. Knowledgeable members of the community leadership would travel to become familiar with the available candidates, and those that stood out as being more accomplished were invited to give several sermons either in the large main synagogues, or some of the other houses of worship. All of Dereczin, merchants, storekeepers, workers and

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7 The Talmud and its commentaries.

8 A title accorded a scholar of exceptional intellectual capacity.

9 Later text indicates that the full first name is Eliyahu. Wrote a *letter of praise* in support of *Beyt Yehoshua*, the second book authored by Rabbi ***Yehoshua Freidin***, Rabbi of Ozernitsa, son of *Tanhum Yitzhak Freidin* of Zelva. At that time, he was Rabbi of Pruzhany (birthplace of the late Rabbi *Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, The Rav).

10 *Rabbi Yossef Zundl Hutner* (1844? 46? - 1919). See *Yaffa Sonenson Eliach's* landmark history of ***Eishyshok, There Once Was A World***.

laborers (who in the daily idiom were called "the mass"), lock, stock and barrel, would come to hear these sermons, and took an active part in the process of voting for the final candidate. The selected rabbi was then received with a big parade, and after the execution of the rabbinical contract, there usually ensued rather extensive celebrations.

The following characteristically rabbinic story about *Rabbi Sholom Ber* is told by his grandson, *Eliyahu Herenson,* the son-in-law of *Rabbi Joseph Rabinovich,* who lived in Dereczin for the longest time, and has lived in Israel since 1932: *Rabbi Sholom Ber* was a great scholar and wise man, and in addition was renown as a unique *Baal-Tefilah* (leader of religious services, perhaps a Cantor). He would always lead prayer services during holidays, and was greatly beloved in Dereczin.

In those days, each town used to also retain a Cantor, who had to be proficient as a ritual slaughterer as well. *Rabbi Sholom Ber*, as an expert cantor himself, did not permit a slaughterer to be retained who could also perform as a cantor. He did not accept remuneration for leading services during the High Holy Days, but over a number of years, he caused the stipend to be applied to build out the rabbinical residence which was on the *Schulhof,* and which served for many years as the *Bet Din* (religious law court).

One time, the community voted to retain a cantor who would also serve as ritual slaughterer -- against the will of the Rabbi. This irritated the Rabbi greatly. As luck would have it, at that precise time, a delegation of Jewish townsfolk from Kletsk arrived, and offered *Rabbi Sholom Ber* the pulpit in their town. As he was in a state of anger with the town, which retained a cantor/ritual slaughterer without consulting him, *Rabbi Sholom Ber* accepted the offer, and left to go to Kletsk.

Later, after the death of *Rabbi Leib Luner*, there was a desire to appoint *Rabbi Sholom Ber's* son, *Rabbi Chaim Shimon* (the father of *Eliyahu Herenson*), but as it transpired, *Rabbi Sholom Ber* himself passed away in Kletsk, and *Rabbi Chaim Shimon* left for Kletsk to take his father's place.

One of the last of the [Dereczin] Rabbis, *Rabbi Plotkin,* took the Rabbinate [of Dereczin] after the death of *Rabbi Leib Bialyblatzky*, called *Rabbi Leib Luner. Rabbi Plotkin* had a broad network of contacts in the higher echelons of Polish society, and when Dereczin went over to Poland, the one time Polish foreign Minister, *Sapieha,* great-grandson of the Dereczin *Sapieha* dynasty founder, upon finding out that the former family residence of his grandfather was being used by *Rabbi Plotkin* as a Rabbinical Residence, summoned him to Warsaw, and sent him as a delegate to America to negotiate for financial assistance on behalf of the new-born Polish regime.

During the time of the first Polish occupation, from which Dereczin Jews suffered much misfortune, *Rabbi Plotkin* used his connections and authority to rescue certain young people from arrest and punishment. A story is well-known of a young girl from Pinsk, who was accused of spying for the communists, and was sentenced to death. *Rabbi Plotkin* put all of his authority on the line, and personally traveled to the prison in Slonim, and rescued the innocent, wrongly-accused girl, guaranteeing to the higher authorities that he -- personally-- was certain of her innocence.

The Rabbis were much more than religious leaders of their community. In olden times, the Rabbi was the leader of the community, both internally and externally. He not only passed judgement on matters pertaining to *kashrut*, but also ruled on a wide variety of matters arising in disputes between the Jewish residents, [he was] the spiritual leader, and the one who provided oversight for the religious schooling [of the children]. He would teach the Talmud to the qualified youth and the Club of men who studied Talmud regularly (*i.e., the Chevra Shas),* giving appropriate sermons in the various houses of worship, and causing his spiritual force to be an influence over all aspects of Jewish life.

The salary of the Rabbis was very meager, and they would supplement their income with sales of yeast for Sabbath Challah and candles. It was the Rabbi's wife, the *Rebbetzin*, who was concerned with these matters, because the Rabbis themselves were preoccupied with scholarly pursuits, and dealing with community matters.

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Jewish community of Dereczin was administered by a system of rotating "Monthly Magistrates." [The town] would select twelve respectable townsmen, each of which would serve [as an executive] for a month. The "magistrates" dealt with all manner of community issues, and also had the right to impose punishment on a guilty Jewish resident, to the point of holding him in "arrest" chained to a post in the corner of the Great Synagogue.

The Rabbis did not confine their judging to disputes among only Jews. More than once, Christians who had serious monetary disputes with Jews, would decline to use the court system of the land, preferring to come to the Rabbi of the Jewish community. In most cases, they were quite satisfied with the rulings handed down by the Rabbis in these situations.

The nobility, in the Dereczin environs, who used to plant specially set-aside fields with wheat to be used for the *shmura* matzoh on Passover, customarily would invite the Rabbi into the fields, in order to assure that the necessary work was conducted under his oversight, and that all matters would be carried out within the letter and spirit of Jewish law. A few of the nobility would also send the Rabbi donations, for *Maot Chittim,*[11] potatoes, assorted vegetables, to be divided among those needy members of the Jewish community for the holiday. The noble landowner of Alexandra, an estate near Dereczin, on every Yom Kippur Eve, would send in a few large bales of straw (hay?) and spread it out in the *Schulhof.* The children would then come, and each of them would gather up some of it, and carry it to their father's house of worship, spreading it on the floor, so it will ease the burden of the worshipers who would be standing for the entire next day in their stockinged feet without shoes on.

The Bet-HaMidrash – A Spiritual Center

The synagogue and houses of learning became concentrated on the *Schulhof.* There stood the large stone-walled synagogue, two similarly walled study houses, and one wooden study house -- this last being the property of the Burial Society. In the foyer of the wooden study house, stood the planks on which the dead would be carried out. To this day, I can recall the fright we used to experience as youngsters about going into the wooden study house, because of these planks.

The study houses, in those olden times, served as spiritual centers, and focal points for the gathering of the entire Jewish population. Apart from the fact that almost all the Jews of the town, and their children, would come to pray three times daily -- *Shacharit, Mincha, and Maariv,* -- tens of students, native and from out of town, and many sons-in-law, who were supported by their wive's parents, studied the *Gemara,* all day long there. These self-same students would eat "days[12]" with the local residents. Every Jew, whether poor or rich, accepted it as a good deed --a *mitzvah* -- and a privilege, to provide such a student with a meal of food and drink, or several such meals, during a week. This is how we dealt with the poorer Talmud-Torah students who came to us from surrounding towns and villages -- they would obtain a place to sleep from the native Jewish residents, and also food to eat without any charge. Jews held that they were responsible not only to have the Torah taught to their own children, but also to provide for those children who want to learn, but [whose parents] could not afford to obtain the services of a Rabbi-teacher for cash. Do understand that there were those among these youngsters who would take meals in two homes. The Jewish community knew about this, but it didn't raise any concern. Jewish mothers used to say: let a poor Jewish child enjoy himself, perhaps he remained hungry from another of his "days." Pious Jewish women, and they constituted the majority in those days in Dereczin, considered it the greatest *mitzvah* to provide food for a poor Jewish child to eat, in order that he be able to pursue the study of Torah.

The study houses were also centers for initiatives aimed at helping the itinerant Jewish needy, who would often come into Dereczin for the Sabbath, or

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[11] Charitable sustenance distributed to the needy for the Passover holiday.

[12] Taking donated meals on a rotating basis. Called *essen teg* in Yiddish.

a place for itinerant preachers who used to come to give sermons -- all of these were provided with lodging and food, along with the cadre of students and yeshiva scholars. The praying members of the congregation would always take such an individual home as a guest for the Sabbath, and there was never an occasion where someone was left without a place to [go and] eat. There was always a worshiper to look after such an individual.

There was also a military garrison stationed in Dereczin, stationed at the former palaces of the *Sapiehas.* There were always 20 to 30 Jewish soldiers in the garrison. The circumstance of the times was such, that the Rabbi would work out an arrangement with the military command to give leave to the Jewish soldiers on the Sabbath. Then, they would attend synagogue, and be able to eat in the home of a Jewish family. It was a special *mitzvah,* and honor, to be able to host a Jewish soldier for the Sabbath.

In those days, before libraries were established, and also newspapers appeared rarely, the study houses served as centers of culture. In the winter season, during the cold months, various craftsmen, small business people, and laborers would gather there at nightfall after work. They used to stretch themselves out on the warm, long *lezhankas*[13], and those who could, would study a page of the *Gemara* , and others -- a chapter of the *Mishnah* . Those less gifted in scholarship would recite a chapter from the Psalms [of David], and afterwards, all would carry on a conversation about all sorts of civil and communal issues, and also listen to all sorts of news that may have been brought from whatever area.

Every study house was built in the following manner: in the center, surrounding the *Bimah* , was a large podium, and around it were long benches -- these were the *lezhankas.* In the winter, they served as warm sitting places, and in the twilight hours, between *Mincha and Maariv*, it was sort of a folk club for the general public. The students would sleep on the *lezhankas* during the wintertime if they had no warm lodging elsewhere in town, as well as wandering and lost paupers who chanced to arrive in town late at night, and had no other place where to spend the night.

It was in the hours between *Mincha & Maariv* that the itinerant preachers [sic: *Maggidim*] would hold forth with their rousing sermons on all manner of religious themes, always touching on general problems in Jewish life in the larger sphere of communal existence.

Almost every such study house had its club for the study of the Talmud [sic: *Chevra Shas*], and its adherents would come together every evening to study a page of the *Gemara* . They would come after a hard day's work, because they were all laborers, smiths, tailors, shoemakers, weavers and storekeepers: they were all good and tired, but in the study house, they took pleasure to sit and listen to the discourse over the Law, to learn a little themselves, and to carry on a conversation with others [like themselves]. These were hours of tranquility that they could find in only one place -- in the study house. There they befriended other Jews, expressed what was of concern to them personally, and listened to the troubles that others had, taking comfort and solace from the soothing words of other sympathizers. This was the way the study house became the physical and spiritual resting place for the Jews of the town. I remember to this day, those evenings in the "New Building" where I would come to study every evening with the *Chevra Shas,* and after that, studying the Talmud with the aged Rabbi, *Reb David Chaim Shmeuns*, a Jew who was a formidable scholar and God-fearing individual. Many townsfolk would come there to study in the evening, among them tradespeople and craftsmen of every kind. When we concluded the study of a volume of the Talmud, we would have a great feast at the home of Reb *Areh [sic: Aharon] Menzheh's.* We would eat and drink, dance and make merry until late at night.

The study house provided the continuity for the Jewish people to remain the "People of the Book."

It was in the study houses that the entire communal life was concentrated. It was there that [public] assemblies took place to discuss various issues; it was during one such meeting that a *Bikur Cholim*

[13] A low stove, with a bench on it, on which one would recline.

society[14] was established, and a practical program was also worked out as to how each and every one of the members would visit and attend someone who was seriously ill; it was there that the *Hekdesh*, or "guest house" was [also] established, where various poor people, or itinerant preachers would have a place to spend the night without charge. The town also had a communal bath, with an attached *mikvah*, naturally, which were located on the same street as the "Guest House," not far from the small river, *Shihpeh*. It was during these town meetings at the study houses that decisions were taken regarding all manner of town affairs.

In between the study houses, there was also to be found a *shtibl*[15] of the Lubavitcher sect, with several tens of adherents [of that movement].

Apart from being the center for both the social initiatives and [the resolution of] communal issues, the study house was the center of Jewish belief, in all the concepts with which the Torah is imbued, as well as the religious and ethical writings of the Jewish people. It was there, that the solidarity of the Jewish community became cemented; it was there that belief in miracles that would lead to the liberation of World Jewry were nurtured, there hope for a better future was strengthened, and there, Jews sat and studied, and dreamt of the coming of the Messiah, and of the Redemption that would come for all the Jewish people.

Older Residents Emigrate to the Holy Land

In those years, the last decade of the previous century [sic: nineteenth century], the ideals of modern Zionism were still not well-known, that is, to colonize the Land of Israel. Observant Jews placed their hope in the coming of the messianic era, and believe that only a Messiah would lead them out of exile and return them to the Land of Israel.

But even at that time, at the end of the nineteenth century, there were a few older Jewish folk who emigrated to the Land of Israel from Dereczin. Naturally, they were not making this journey to undertake building the land, but rather to live out their final years, and be assured of interment in the soil of the Holy Land, in order that when the Messiah comes, and the dead are raised to join the living, that their bones would not have to roll all the way to the Land of Israel..

Over a hundred years ago, *Reb Ber*, the father-in-law of *Rabbi Moshe Rabinovich* (the founder of the well-branched *Rabinovich* family), a fellow townsman from Dereczin, left to go to the Land of Israel with [a family of] eight sons and four daughters, all born and raised in Dereczin. From these twelve children, the son of *Rabbi Moshe, Rabbi Aryeh-Leib Rabinovich* [also] went to Israel in later life, and he was accompanied by several other Dereczin townspeople, among which were, *Reb Ahareh Menzhe's, Reb Avreml Henia's*, and *Reb Itcheh Elateh's*, the sexton of the "New Synagogue," and a number of other elderly Jews.

The Old and New Cemeteries

The 'old' cemetery, it appears, was in Dereczin from the first time that Jews settled there. Its headstones were already sunken in the ground and overgrown with old moss [presumably at the time the author saw them - Ed]. It was practically impossible, already, to read the lettering that had been carved into them. When it was first established, hundreds of years ago, it understandably lacked access from the residential streets, but we recall it sitting in the middle of the *Schulhof*, adjacent to the wall of the stone-wall constructed synagogue, not far from the Talmud Torah and the *Bet-Din* building. The "newer" [sic: contemporary] cemetery, was on the way to Zelva, and further from town. It was opened for use in the early part of the 19th century, and was surrounded by a stone wall. Towards the end of the 19th century, due to the generosity of the tenant farmer of the Alexandra estate, *Reb Moshe Maleticher*, donated before his death, a larger sum of money in order to build up [sic: enhance?] the stone-walled perimeter wall [of the cemetery].

It was the *Chevra Kadisha* that concerned itself with burial of the dead. This work was performed

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[14] A ritual committee whose purpose was to provide assisted visitation to the sick.

[15] A small prayer and study house

voluntarily by noteworthy townspeople, members of the *Chevra Kadisha*, who even had their own study house close to the old cemetery. The support of the cemeteries and payment for the grave diggers was covered by burial funds that the *Chevra Kadisha* raised from the families of the deceased. The process of raising burial funds often caused incidents to break out, since it was the custom to request larger sums from those individuals thought to be capable of giving, but had not been particularly generous during their lifetime. In the end, an understanding was reached with the family of the deceased, and life in the town would return to its normal quiet course, after having been roiled up over a burial fee incident.

The entire town of Dereczin would participate in a funeral. The more prominent among the deceased would be carried all the way to the cemetery; while folk of more modest stature would be taken there by wagon. It was on the *Schulhof* that the deceased would be eulogized, and from there the funeral cortège would wend its long way to the cemetery.

Town Leadership

As told [to us] by the older people, by the middle of the 19th century, oversight for all community matters was handled by a rotating system of monthly "magistrates" that is, twelve selected leaders, each of whom served a specified one-month term during the year. They were also recognized by the Russian authorities as spokesmen for the [official] point of view concerning Jewish life in the town.

Those were the years of the [infamous] forced-conscription ukase[16]. Annually, each Jewish community was required to provide a quota of young boys between 8 and 10 years of age, who were taken away by the Czarist authorities for mandatory army service of 25 years, deep in the Russian heartland, in order that they develop into soldiers loyal to the Czar. They were called "Nikolai's Soldiers."

Needless to say, this gave rise to many injustices. The magistrates were from the more substantial families in town, and they conducted [these] community affairs with a firm hand. Kidnappers[17] would forcibly take the children of poor people and put them in the hands of the Czarist ruling authority. There were instances where children were bought for money from poor parents. The first victims were usually the orphans. Very few of the children remained true to their Jewish faith after spending 25 years living deep in Russia among gentiles. Only a very few would return home after performing this service in the Czarist military. It is in this way, that I recall two such "Nikolai Soldiers" who lived with us in Dereczin -- *Gershon,* "The Greek," and *Shamurka.* The first one used to stand with a gaming table at the marketplace, and also served as an armed guard; the second served as a hired crier for Russian merchants, who every Sunday would walk the streets and announce the schedule for the sale of pigs at the marketplace. They both were estranged from Judaism, but nevertheless they retained their Jewish identity. The greater part of "Nikolai's Soldiers" were lost, or settled deep in Russia, in white Siberia, because as a consideration for their service, they had the right to live anywhere in Russia that they chose to. For the most part, those who did remain in the distant Russian cities and towns, were good and hearty Jews, and those that prospered were generous in offering support to their Jewish brethren.

Starostas[18]

Later, in the second half of the 19th century, and in the beginning of the 20th century, we find in the Jewish towns within the Pale of Settlement, and also in Dereczin, the *Starostas,* who were the representatives of the Jewish community to the various organs of the Czarist government.

For an extensive period, the *Starostas* of Dereczin was the eminent townsman named *Jacob Shayeh's.* I can still recall his children -- skilled and intelligent young people (their house was later occupied by the

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16 Promulgated by the notoriously anti-Semitic Czar, Nicholas I.

17 Called *khappers* in Yiddish, from the word, "to grab."

18 Equivalent of a county sheriff

Alper family, which we know).

After *Jacob Shaya's,* the popular grain merchant, *Leib,* the son of *Moshe Rabinovich* was selected as *Starosta* towards the end of the previous [sic: nineteenth] century. He was selected against his own will, and he appointed *Sholom Mansky*, the son-in-law of *Reb Jacob Rabinovich*, as his secretary. After his official term of two years as *Starosta, Reb Leibeh, Moshe's* resigned the position, and *Sholom Mansky* became *Starosta.* He served until the year 1915, until the time that the Germans captured Dereczin during the First World War.

Mansky was a skilled and able representative of the interests of the Jewish community before the Russian authorities. He conducted his work with much common sense and tact, and not only once was able to assist Jews who found themselves in trouble.

The objective of the *Starostas* was to carry out the family-mission for the town community, providing passport documentation for each citizen, carrying out a formal military registration of the town youth who had to report for military service at age 21, to order with designated Jewish merchants the provisioning of kosher meat, for which a special price was a charged in order to defray the costs associated with government levies against the Jewish community.

Yet another special task that the *Starostas* had to perform was in the time of the *priziv* , that is, the time when he had to present the roster of draft-eligible young men in the regional town [headquarters] at Slonim. Usually, and understandably, these were sad and tragic days for the Jewish families, who used to stretch out their farewells with their designated children -- young Jewish boys, raised in a traditional Jewish lifestyle, with no knowledge of Russian language, limited in their rights as citizens, "stepchildren" of "Great Mother Russia,"-- who went away to serve the Czar someplace far from home for three whole years and eight months. And there, they were in a strange and hostile atmosphere, being unable to lower themselves to the lowest common denominator. It is no wonder that this parting was a tragedy not only for the sons, but also for their parents, sisters and brothers.

Jews, therefore, demanded of the *Starostas* that they research all forms of combinations [sic: stratagems] by which it might be possible to avoid military conscription. Gentiles would accuse the Jews of being disloyal citizenry, cowardly, and being frightened of military service, etc. -- but the deep and true reason why they wanted to avoid military service for the Czar, was the feeling of Jews that they were treated as citizens of a lower rank, having no right to live outside the Jewish Pale of Settlement, being pursued and harassed by the decrees of anti-Semitic rulers -- why, and for whom, should they give up years and personal energies in military pursuits?

Consequently, it was common to inflict a variety of bodily injuries [to create defects], in order to be discharged from the *priziv*. Or, one would emigrate over the ocean, to distant lands, despite the fact that the family would have to pay a penalty of 300 rubles. There were many other stratagems that were used to free oneself from having to serve the Czar.

Many of these things, and the efforts they entailed, were carried out by the *Starostas,* and *Sholom Mansky* was their designee, as the representative of the Jewish community to the Czarist authorities.

How Jews Made a Living

There were three principal thoroughfares in Dereczin -- the *Deutsche Gasse, Zelver Gasse,* and *Slonimer Gasse.* The market square was in the middle of the town.

These streets, and the market, were inhabited mainly by self-employed people, jobbers, storekeepers, saloon keepers. In the center were also found the store complex, 30 in number.

Grain merchants and millers occupied the first houses on these streets. The farmers from the surrounding hamlets used to immediately sell their grain produce to the Jewish jobbers on arrival in town on the market days.

The storekeepers from the complex would service the entire Christian community of tens of little

towns, and the landed estates of the nobility, with a wide variety of merchandise. On market days, the saloon keepers would earn quite a bit from the farmers for a variety of [strong] drink.

There was a significant number of craftsmen in Dereczin, such as bakers, shoemakers, tailors, bottlers, carpenters, artists, milliners, and laborers. We also had a few tanneries.

Tuesday was the official market day. Thousands of Christians form the environs would arrive, binging their produce, along with their wives and children, and bring grain, fruits, eggs, chickens, and other products of the barn, nest, garden and field.

The Jewish craftsmen would lay out their products and handiwork lengthwise along the market square. First, the farmers would sell their produce, and then they would come to buy those things that they needed for their house or work.

From those years, I recollect only one Russian jobber, who came to the market days with a large platform covered with all sorts of merchandise. And also among this, religious articles such as crucifixes, prayer books, etc.

Sundays were a day of business for those many farmers who came from the surrounding towns to go to church, and thereby permitted themselves the opportunity to go out and make purchases and to have a little to drink "in honor of Sunday." Strictly speaking, it was not permitted to do business on Sundays, but the Jews had an "understanding" with the single constable in town, who also needed to "make a living"....

It was often the case that the farmers would get drunk and create a scene. Before journeying back to their hamlets, young non-Jews would fall upon the bakery establishments, and grab bagels, rolls, and cakes. But the Dereczin constable was always on duty, watching, and calmed down the hot-headed perpetrators.

This is the way Jews in Dereczin derived sustenance from trade and labor. Constantly working, constantly fretting, and exhausting themselves in order to make a living. But Jews didn't think only about eating and a roof over their heads -- they also reared and raised children, sent them to be educated by teachers in yeshivas, and later also in the gymnasiums. In former years, Jews were in the habit of subsidizing their sons-in-law, in order that they should devote themselves to [sic: religious] scholarship. Jews gave charity for the poor, fed orphans, yeshiva students, visitors, organized holidays, celebrated happy occasions -- with one consideration: lead a Jewish family life; seize every free moment to hear, or study a page of the *Gemara*, a bit of the *Shas;* a little of *Ein Yaakov*[19]*;* etc. One groaned, and belly-ached, one asked of the Master of the Universe that the Final Redemption come, and hoped for the arrival of the Messianic Era.

Settlers

A separate chapter [of history] is put forth about the settlers that lived in and around our town.

Around Dereczin, there were tens of tiny hamlets and the estates of landed aristocracy. Between two and three Jewish families were to be found in almost every one of these places, who held a *kretchma*[20] as a grant, inherited from their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers. In the [early] times described, Jews were invited to settle in these hamlets, and only those who took over specific undertakings from their parents, were able through protection [e.g. of the ruling classes] to work out rights of residence in the hamlet, and that passed down as an asset from father to children.

These settlers had their gardens and orchards around their homes, with vegetables and fruits, but their principal source of income came from trade with the peasantry. They were typically the only merchants in the town, and they especially took up the sale of alcoholic beverages. Little by little, they diversified their trade, and sold other products to the peasants, that were needed in the house, and for agricultural labor, such as oil, axle grease for wheels, matches, salt, tobacco, etc. For his own field work and commercial activities, the settler had a horse and

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19 A noted Jewish commentary.

20 A large gathering house.

wagon. Also, each settler [typically] had a couple of cows, and raised chickens.

The *kretchma*, a large house, was a place that the peasants would gather, a place where they would get together in the evenings, drink on credit, and the peasant could pay off his debts after the cutting, reaping of the wheat from the fields, and the harvesting of vegetables from the gardens. It was in this manner that the *kretchma* became a necessary source of credit to the peasant.

They would come to drink a little whiskey, talk with their neighbors and the saloon keeper, discuss a variety of town issues and questions, and find out when and where a great fair would take place. Insofar as any news of world-level significance, they would rely on the owner of the *kretchma* , the Jew, who invariably knew more of what was going on in the world at-large than the peasants. Even when it came to matters in the gentile world, the Jew was typically better informed than the peasant.

One should not forget, that in those years towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the Byelorussian peasantry was almost one hundred percent illiterate, led a poor and primitive existence, so that the [Jewish] settler, was in their eyes, a "formidable" individual, and therefore they concluded that he was wise and all-knowing. They related to him with respect and friendship -- except for those instances when an anti-Semite, a priest or an instigator of a pogrom, would tell them once, and then again, that the Jews killed Jesus.

There were instances when a settler would deceive an unwitting peasant. The few instances of this kind would besmirch the reputation of all Jews in the eyes of the peasantry. By and large, these settlers were good people, Jews who adhered to their faith, observing the *mitzvot*, and a number of them were scholarly as well. Not only once, were there times when a learned settler would expound to the peasants on something from the *Gemara*. Often, the peasants would bring disputes that arose between them to the settler, and the Jew would find a compromise, thereby bringing an end to the conflict. It was in this manner that the settler occupied a unique niche in his little town, and the peasants had respect for him.

Most of the time, settlers were referred to according to the town that they came from, and this nomenclature was handed down from one generation to the next: *Moshe Daraliner, Yoshe Milevitcher, Mordechai-Binyamin Natzkever, Moshe-Jekuthiel Vanilevitcher, Avraham-Yaakov Lantzevitzer, Zelik Mankevitcher, Alter Mikhuisker, Leizer Krupever, Zelik Ostrover, Shachna Ostrover, Berel Falizhiner, Israel Uriner, Shmuel Labzovner, Yitzhhak Alekshitzer, Binyamin Rabever, Yochanan Zolotsheyever, Zalman Repnitsher, Herschel Korolevitcher, Chaim Halubiver, Shimon Zamoscher, Shapiro der Kleinvolyer,* and many others.

Two towns were not far from Dereczin: Volya[21] and Shchara, in which the transport of forest products from the Shchara [River] to the Neman [River] had become concentrated. A goodly number of Jewish families lived in both of these towns, who dealt in the forest products business, and surrounding them there lived hundreds of peasants, in the surrounding towns, who brought the logs from the forests to the river, and then driving the lumber rafts down the water.

As a result, in Volya lived *Litman Ohreh's* extensive family, *Simcha Rabinovich* and the children; in Klein-Volya [sic: Little Volya]-- the *Shpiras* [*Shapiros?*]; in Shchara -- *Zalman Shcharer, Leibeh Shtein, Simcha-David.* In the three towns, hundreds of Jewish merchants would gather during the summer, as well as the representatives of the German companies who would buy the lumber from the Jews, which afterward was transported by way of the Shchara and Neman [Rivers] to [the port city of] Memel. There, in those years, the distinguished forest product merchants, *Noah Yosselevitch*, the *Chaikin* brothers, and others were well-known.

All the settlers, rich and poor, adhered to their Jewish tradition in those years. Several neighboring settlers would have a *minyan* for Sabbath services using a Torah scroll that they owned. The larger

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[21] Spelled Wola in Polish. We will continue to use the Yiddish rendition, probably close to the Russian pronunciation, unless otherwise dictated by the context.

part of the settlers had teachers for their children, and those that lived close enough to Dereczin sent their children to school in town.

The more prosperous of the settlers allowed themselves the luxury of having a Torah scholar as a son-in-law, and provided him with continuous support over many years, to enable him to remain in the small town and pursue his scholarship.

The settler families produced Rabbis and Emissaries. The renown Hebrew writer, *Bershadsky* was a son of *Shimon Zamoscher, Domashevitzky, Shimon* himself being a well-educated Jew, and a wise person. A second son of his was well-known as a mathematician, and was retained by the Russians as a land surveyor.

A son of *Yoshe Milevitcher* became the Rabbi of Memel. *Mordechai-Binyamin Novick*, from Natzkev, had grandchildren who were teachers -- one of them, *Hannah Novick*, was a teacher for many years in the school system of the National Labor Farband in the USA, and was popular among the Jewish intelligentsia in New York.

The settlers also produced well-known industrialists and forest product merchants.

In general, the homes of the settlers were wide open to guests, itinerant scholars, and Jews in general. Everyone, through the [kindness of the] settler and his family, was taken care of, and was provided with food, drink and a night's lodging. Itinerant paupers and laborers, who worked in the surrounding towns, always found a warm home [sic: refuge] with the settler's family.

Miscellaneous sextons and religious functionaries would come to visit the settlers from time-to-time, in order to collect contributions for a variety of charitable causes. For the holidays, especially the High Holy days, settlers would come to town, and celebrate the occasion either with relatives or friends.

It was in this manner that the settler was connected to his hamlet and peasants on one side -- and to the town and its Jews on the other; from the hamlet, he had his secular life, his livelihood, and from the town -- his spirituality, his spiritual satisfaction, and his sense of security in a world to come.

Tenant Farming[22] & Jobbing

As was the case with the settlers, the tenant farmers and jobbers also occupied a respected position in the eyes of Jews and Christians.

On almost every nobleman's estate, one could find a Jewish jobber in his employ. He [the jobber] would buy the nobleman's entire milk production, and produce butter, cheese and other [dairy] products. Most often, the jobber, or "factor" would be allocated a house with a yard on the landlord's estate, or not far from it, and together with his wife and children, would produce the various dairy products, especially all manner of cheeses, and sell them in the city, or send them for export. The majority of these jobbers lived on their property much in the same pattern of inheritance as the settlers. The right was passed down from a father to his children.

The jobbers were in good standing with their bosses, the landowners. They made a good living, and retained good teachers for their children. They were the constant intermediaries between the noble, and the merchants of Dereczin and the workmen with whom the landowner needed to do business. The jobbers would recommend a variety of Jewish tradespeople to the nobleman, for whom he had a need, bringing him butchers, and grain merchants, who would purchase from him cows, calves, or grain.

The nobleman, from his part, whether Russian or Polish, treated his jobber/factor as a trusted advisor, with whom he would consult on a wide variety of issues.

There were also Jewish tenant farmers who would rent land and gardens from the nobility for a number of years, for which they would pay an annual rental. There were nobles who took on government and

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22 Undertaken as part of a system called the *arenda*, hence the Yiddish name, *arendaren*, for these people.

military personnel, and ordinary Polish people, who were not particularly skilled in managing their parcels, and thereby suffered chronic deficits. The Jewish tenant farmers generally managed their parcels well, and were able to extract sustenance from their land for themselves, and other dependents of the nobles. The Jewish farmer used to keep a number of cows, and used their manure to fertilize the less fertile fields, and was able to reap good crops of grain. There were tenant farmers who built mills on the land holdings of the nobility, and weaving facilities from which they were able to manufacture finished woolen goods.

In this manner, the Jewish tenant farmers dominated the noble land holdings, and aligned their skills and energies with the needs of the market, and the surrounding Jewish and peasant populations.

Jewish Initiative

If one wishes to summarize the totality of the various Jewish occupations in Dereczin and its environs, one can from the outset establish that there were significant Jewish occupations in the branches of commerce and labor. But if one researches the local industry, and its development over a long period of time, it becomes immediately clear that only the Jewish initiative contributed to the development of Dereczin and the surrounding area, in all branches of production and commerce.

Limited in their [civil] rights, and opportunities for all manner of secular education, and access to the educational institutions of the [Russian] Empire, as well as rights to live in large parts of the Russian homeland, always under the despotic rule of the Czarist monarchy – the Jews nevertheless managed to build cities and towns, were skilled craftsmen and workers, initiating industrious undertakings, developing many branches of industry and commerce. Although the law forbade them from engaging in tilling the soil, they were able to find ways, both direct and indirect, to engage in this work as well, and demonstrated their initiative and skills in this line of endeavor as well.

Thanks to the energies of the Jews, Dereczin was built out, along with its community life, its institutions, with its industrial role for its environs. Jews helped a great deal in the development of the peasant population.

[It was the] Jews who developed markets for the entire production of the surrounding villages, whether the produce of the peasantry, or that of the landed estates. Almost the entire production of consumables, grain, vegetables, lumber, the output of mills, weaving, factories – was in Jewish hands.

A small town like Dereczin, with its couple of hundred Jewish families, serviced the entire area with its tens of thousands of peasants, hundreds of nobles, and provided them with a greater part of their needs. Jewish craftsmen and laborers, shoemakers, tailors, construction workers, blacksmiths, etc., used to go on the road for weeks at a time, to the villages, and carry out all the necessary work needed in those villages, and also in the estates of the nobility. Over the course of hundreds of years, close ties were forged between Christians and Jews in our area. Quite often, even a peasant would immediately know which work he could bring to a Jewish craftsman, who would then carry out that specific work.

When nobody would incite or instigate the White Russian peasantry [sic: to riot, or pogroms], these peasants would conduct themselves in a friendly fashion to the Jews, with whom they shared a great deal in common.

However, it was a little different with the landed nobility. In general, each nobleman had his coterie of Jewish merchants and craftsmen, and he got along well with them. But, anti-Semitism was deeply rooted in the nobility, almost like a tradition, where it was necessary to despise the Jew in general, even when it could not be logically justified. It was only his "own Jews" that the nobleman befriended, and he exhibited loyalty to them more so even that to his close Christian friends and allies.

In Dereczin, there was a Christian physician and a Jewish *feldscher* – the Christians from the villages preferred to be treated by the Jewish *feldscher*, that is, *Shmuel-Moshe Wolfowitz*, or his son, *Meir-Shia*, who were more popular among the villagers than *Dr. Nowicki*.

The official Russian authority in those years in Dereczin consisted of a *pristav*[23] and an *uradnik.*[24] The two were the ruling authorities over the life of the Dereczin citizenry. They were big "takers," and that was helpful in a variety of circumstances. Many [unfavorable] decrees were buried or quietly ignored through many combinations and diversions, aided by these authorities whose "palms had been greased."

Over the course of generations, Jewish communities developed a skilled readiness and a rapid orientation to respond to all manner of situations, which the Czarist regime would impose with regular frequency, and their experience in mitigating the potential tribulations grew, or they would find the means to minimize the impact of these laws and decrees. And even in the event there was a "bad" official, a mean bailiff, or an anti-Semitic governor, the Dereczin Jews would not become flustered. They would offer prayer to the Almighty, and hope that He would rid them of their angry ruler.

The Children Study the Torah

And it was in this fashion, that the Dereczin Jews in those years, and also in later years, toiled for their economic viability, but in doing so, they did not neglect, even for one day, their spiritual lives.
This small-town community had not only the continuing oversight from a permanent Rabbi, [who was also] a scholar and righteous person, who served as the spiritual leader of the Jewish community – but also a goodly number of teachers, in whose classrooms the Jewish children of Dereczin became imbued with the Torah, *Yiddishkeit* and wisdom.

My childhood memories return to me, yet again. By the time we reached five years of age, we were already under the tutelage of a *melamed.* We were a group of boys, and we were instructed by Reb *Avraham-Chaim,* the *dardekei-melamed* [25] whose classroom was in a side street, in a modest house with a straw roof. He would hold us in class for a whole day, drilling us with *'kometz-aleph, oh; kometz-beyz, boh,'* etc. The *melamed* barely earned enough to buy bread and water, but he put his entire life into teaching the children. It was with him that we learned the Hebrew language.

After studying with the *dardekei-melamed,* we studied Pentateuch with *Rashi* commentaries [in the class of] Reb *Alter Deikhess.* After a couple of years of studying *Chumash,*[26] we went over to the class run by Reb *Shlomo* the *Kazianer*[27] Rabbi. Apart from scholarship, Reb *Shlomo,* who counted himself to be fluent in Russian, also was the bookkeeper for the Dereczin Jews. In his class, we already learned *Tanach,*[28] and a little *Gemara.* In this class, we also studied for two years, and from there, advanced to more intense study of the *Gemara,* with the likes of *Rabbi Velvel Meitess* , a Jewish scholar with rabbinic ordination, Reb *Avraham Yitzhak-Meir,* Reb *David-Chaim Shmeuns,* and a variety of other teachers.

In all these classrooms, children studied from early in the morning until dusk, and in the wintertime, in the evenings as well. The teachers used to impress Torah study and common sense into the children, inculcating them with the understanding that a Jew has to have the capacity to learn, be pious and righteous, have respect for their elders, and have a love for their own people.

The teachers, on the Sabbath Day, would visit the parents of their students, and over a Saturday glass of tea, poured from the *lyak,*[29] they would examine their pupils, to see whether they had retained what they had learned during the entire week.

Apart from the *Melamdim,*[30] Rabbis, and their

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23 A bailiff, or police inspector.

24 A magistrate

25 Elementary Teacher.

26 Hebew, for the Pentateuch

27 Possibly refers to the Kazan.

28 Hebrew for the complete Holy Writ, including not only Pentateuch, but Prophets and Hagiographica.

29 Presumed, a vessel of sorts.

30 Religious teachers

respective classrooms, by the end of the 19th century, there were already in Dereczin specific teachers who taught the children Hebrew, Yiddish, and a little Russian. More that the others, I recollect from those years, *Dokhkeh der Schreiber,*[31] a teacher with a magnificent penmanship, and he really taught the children fine penmanship. From some faraway location, a teacher named *Razvilovsky* came to Dereczin, who subsequently directed a school in Warsaw.

In time, the more general [sic: formal] school was founded by the outstanding teacher and pedagogue, *Avraham (Avrohmeh) der Mikhoisker.* This was a school with a more modern approach to the teaching of the *Tanach* and Hebrew language, and it was from here that the beginning of the infusion of the *Haskalah*[32] was initiated among Dereczin's youth.

In those years, a couple of young teachers also appeared from the Vilna community, who undertook to teach Jewish children the Russian language.

But these new influxes of learning, the *Haskalah,* and the study of Russian, were in those years only available to the more well-to-do children who came from families of economic substance. Needless to say, the children who came from families of lesser means, craftsmen, laborers, or just plain paupers, obtained their instruction in the *Talmud Torahs* or from teachers who charged a lesser amount for their instruction.

One has to recall, that in those years in Dereczin, as was the case in all cities and towns in the Pale, a distinct dividing line existed between the homeowners and "people of worth," and the general masses, those of lesser economic status. The *balebatim,* lived on the nicer streets and in the better houses, and in the houses of worship, they took possession of the better seats, near the Ark, and they used to be called for the more "prestigious" readings of the Torah on the Sabbath. When there were community meetings, the *balebatim* would be seated around the long table , while the rest of the *hoi polloi,* Jews of more simple means, would just stand around.

Indeed, the children from these "better families," used to be embarrassed to associate with the children of poorer families, and in those years those were two different worlds, with a tangibly visible difference in class.

This age-old distinction began to break down first at the end of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth, when new, fresh winds began to blow in the Jewish streets and in the larger broadened Russian land.

It took several years until the new thinking, the ideas behind socialism, reached the smaller towns and cities, among them also Dereczin.

A new, modern era then opened up in the lives of Dereczin youth.

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31 A writer, or scribe.

32 Jewish Enlightenment.

They Exalted the Name of Dereczin

By Chaim Zvi Miller-Sinai
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Time marches on, and with its passing, incidents come and go in our memories both from private and community life that caused me a terrifying disturbance. There is apparently no refuge from the ravages of time, and since there is no escape from these memories, we cannot ask for respite from the Lord of Forgetfulness. We must therefore be active in taking advantage, yet now, and immediately, the opportunity to enter our memories into this Book about Dereczin, and her Jewish residents. Let this be the solitary monument that will be raised by the remnant that survived from our town, who were privileged to have survived among the living, and from this marker, the coming generations will be able to read about the experiences of its people, and its history over the course of the hundreds of years of its existence.

Our Sages said: "Everything depends on luck, even regarding a Torah scroll in the sanctuary" – one is used for reading on all occasions, and the second sits in the corner, neglected, and is not used for reading. Millions of people are born into anonymity, and their birth is known only to the most immediate members of their family. And they leave this world equally anonymous, as their influence is felt only within the narrow confines of the immediate family. Only those, who were privileged to be people of accomplishment, thanks to their outstanding talent, became well-known, either as great scholars through the important books that they left behind, the discoveries that they made – preserved themselves in the memories of ensuing generations.

And this is the case with the cities and towns, the towns of the Diaspora, in which the bereaved people of Israel dwelt, and in which the Jewish population was eradicated after the Holocaust. For many of them, no trace will remain in [Jewish] folk memory, unless there was one of the following:

4. A famous individual who was referred to by the people in connection with his city of origin, such as, The *Maggid* of Dubno, The Rebbe of Gur, The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Reb Menashe of Eiliyah. All of these were small towns, and were it not for these noted personages, who knows if anyone would know or hear of them;

5. By yeshivas of note, who brought [the towns] recognition for many decades, like the Yeshiva of Volozhin, which was a center for the study of Torah for more than a hundred years, the Mirrer Yeshivah, and others, which also were in small towns, but thanks to the yeshivas, who in their time were famous throughout the length and breadth of the land of Russia, would draw [students] from the greatest distances, who came to them to study Holy Writ. And their names have also survived in the folk memory of our people after the destruction of the towns themselves;

6. Because of scholarly Rabbis, *Gaonim*, who held pulpits, who during their tenure, published important books, and in the frontispiece of the book, the name of their town appears, and those people who have a fondness for such books, will recall, upon opening such a book, the name of the town from which the author came.

Dereczin belongs to the third of these categories. There was an extensive period, during which *Gaonim* of renown resided there, and during their tenure, became well-known through the important scholarly works that were widely studied, and it was because of this, that the Rabbinate of Dereczin was viewed as a prize pulpit, and a young Rabbi who was appointed to that post could harbor expectations of advancement up the ladder of the rabbinate, higher and higher, such as was the case with the *Gaon Eliyahu Chaim Meizel*, who began his career in Dereczin, and in his later years was the Rabbi of Lodz, and there were others like him that held the [Dereczin] pulpit and then afterwards went on to serve in the larger cities.

The Maggid of Dereczin

However, there was one individual who, one hundred and eighty years ago, to his credit, caused the name of Dereczin to be on the lips of tens of thousands of Jews, even in faraway places, and even beyond the borders of the vast Russian homeland. This was *Rabbi Yehezkiel Feivel*, who was called the *Maggid of Dereczin*. He was born in 1756, [well] over two hundred years ago, in a small Polish town on the edge of the Baltic Sea, to his father, *Reb Zev Wolf*, who was one of the respected residents of that town. While he was still a young boy, his intellectual gifts were already apparent at those times when he would discourse in public, because when he was about five or six years old, he would wrap himself in a *tallit*, and would mount a 'pulpit' of his own making, and would discourse [literally, 'drip'] words as if he were an accomplished lecturer, and as he matured, this skill coalesced in him to the point of causing the listeners to be in awe. At the age of eighteen, he was accepted as a *Maggid* in the town of Dereczin. After occupying this position for three years, he became ill with rheumatism, and traveled outside of the country to seek a cure by taking mineral waters, and when he held forth in the larger cities, such as Prague, Lemberg (Lvov), Brody, and others, the Rabbis and distinguished scholars there, would publicize his wondrous lectures, and would invite the populace to come and hear "The Maggid of Dereczin" from whose mouth, pearls would fall, young in years, but whom the soul of the Lord inspires. Everyone who heard him would wonder, "is it possible that such a person even exists!?" This was the kind of fame and respect accorded him by the distinguished scholars of that generation.

In 1798, he moved to Vilna, where he had the privilege to speak before the *Gaon* , Rabbi *Eliyahu* of Vilna ז"ל, and it was in this fashion that he preached for twenty-four years in all the synagogues of Vilna under the name, "The *Maggid* of Dereczin," until [the year] 1812, when he was accepted as the *Maggid* of Mata, which at the time was considered a prestigious appointment, and he remained there until his passing in the year 1836, for twenty-two years. He was seventy-eight years old when he died[33].

From this story, we obtain an insight into the spiritual and temporal state of mind of the town of Dereczin more than one hundred and eighty years ago, that apart from having a Rabbi and a *Dayan*[34], who served as official clerics, the needs of the community demanded a *Maggid*, and indeed, the most famous of that era.

Up until eighty years ago, in addition to a Rabbi, there was also a *Dayan* in Dereczin. The last of the *Dayanim* was Rav *Michal Berkowitz*, the head of the *Berkowitz* family, from this it is possible to deduce the material circumstance of the community in those days, that it was able to support three families, apart from the expenses for other institutions, such as the Talmud Torah, *Taharat-Mishpocha,*[35] and others.

The Youth of the Town of Bayki

There was another person, who some sixty or seventy years ago, contributed to making Dereczin a household name on the lips of many people, even among non-Jews. I write about him as if he is one vanished, because I do not know his name, and it is in this capacity, as one who has vanished, that I wish to memorialize him in this book.

In my youth, I heard people whispering, that in the village of Bayki, which was in the Dereczin environs, A Jew lived, who had an unmarried son, aged thirty years, withdrawn and bedridden, who was racked with pain, and all too familiar with illness. Simply, afflicted by God, but from another perspective, also blessed by God, because he had a 'gift' that a covenant consummated with regards to his lips: whomever he gave a blessing, was blessed, and whatever he predicted came to be. In the area, he was known as "The Youth of Bayki," but in faraway places, he was known as "The Good Jew of Dereczin" – "*Der Derecziner Guter Yid.*" And they would travel to him from hundreds of miles away,

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33 There is a slight discrepancy here: the computation shows eighty years of age.

34 A *Dayan* is a judge.

35 Family purity.

even non-Jews. He would take no money or donations for this, even though his parents were poor people. On a table in his room, was an alms box to support settlement in the Land of Israel, and all who visited him would drop their contribution in it.

When I grew up, and studied in yeshivot and returned home occasionally for holidays,-- I was not interested enough to know about the welfare of this 'wonder youth' or from what source he drew his capacity and expertise in Holy Writ. Later, when I married in the city of Shavill, which was far from my birthplace, – he lapsed entirely from my consciousness, and I forgot the entire matter. But, after a few years passed, I had the opportunity from a story told by an eye witness to stand at the center of his insight, apart from his other skills.

It was the summer of 1912. I was traveling to Lodz in connection with my business, and at one of the stations between Grodno and Bialystock, a Jew boarded the train, who was of mature years, and he sat down next to me. Here, in our land, we were already accomplished in the habit that was quite common among all the Jews of Poland and Lithuania when they meet during travel for the first time – one starts immediately to ask one another first, "Where are you from? Where are you going? Why?" [One asked about] where he lived, where he was born, and about his family. In most cases, they would arrive at a conclusion that if they were not [directly] related, there was some family connection between them through marriage of relatives.

When this Jewish man had introduced himself, he asked me where I was traveling to, and I answered – to Lodz, it was no longer necessary to ask for what reason, because it was evident that whoever was traveling to the city of the weavers was a merchant of woven goods. Afterwards, he asked me where I lived, and I said: Shavill, he hadn't said enough yet, and he then asked me where I was born. When I told him that my origins were in Dereczin – his face changed, and he became very emotional, as if a wave of memories suddenly crashed through in his head. "Ho! From Dereczin! And how is the *Guter Yid* there?" I had become engrossed in reading an interesting book, and wanted rather to avoid getting involved in a long conversation that would disrupt my reading. Secondly, I had completely forgotten the connection of the *Guter Yid* to Dereczin. I answered him emphatically, "I don't know!" From the tone of my voice, my message was quite clear: leave me alone, and stop talking! But he didn't stop, and with greater force he said: I will tell you something about him, to which I was an eye witness. This will not only interest you, but you will be impressed with it, and it will remain in your memory for many days. And he begins his tale:

He himself was from Volkovysk. In the 1890's, the draftees into the [Czar's] army from the Slonim-Volkovysk area were taken to the Lublin *gubernia,* to centers in Chelm, Krasnystaw and Zamość. He served in the army with a contingent that was bivouacked in a village not far from Krasnystaw. In that village, a Jew owned a saloon where he sold strong drink. This was in the period prior to the release of the Monopoly Decree in Russia. There was a Catholic church there, whose priest was a virulent anti-Semite. For some time, he tried to contrive schemes to get rid of this Jew, and one day, he sent his servant to buy a bottle of whiskey [from him]. When it was brought to him, the priest opened the bottle. He put poison into the bottle, and re-sealed the cork, as it was, and he returned it with the excuse that it was for guests that didn't show up, and that was why he was returning it. The Jew did not pay attention to the appearance of the seal, and when a farmer came to buy whiskey, he gave him the poisoned bottle, and the buyer who drank from it died a painful and excruciating death. It goes without saying, that when this incident became known to the authorities – they came and seized the Jew, handcuffed him and threw him in jail. All his pleading, that the bottle had been returned to him by the priest, who had put a poison in it, in order to incriminate him, was to no avail, and after he had sat in jail for several months, he was released on bail until the day of his trial.

The Jew, who was telling me this story, used to travel back and forth to that location, and he saw the great pain and anguish written on the faces of the man's family, as they waited in the court of law -- and he advised them to travel to see *Der Derecziner Guter Yid.* He told of how other people had benefitted from his advice and blessings under similar circumstances. When he received notice

from the court as to the day of his trial – he took his advice, and departed on the trip. When he got off the train, and asked the wagon driver how he could find *Der Derecziner Guter Yid,* the driver answered that he could be found in the village of Bayki that was nearby. A Jew in Poland sixty and seventy years ago would visit his Rebbe several times a year, and they would accord him all the appropriate protocols: first he would have to approach and 'grease' the *shamash*, and then afterwards give a 'consideration' to the *gabbai*, and then wait, until he had the opportunity to pass his note [to the Rebbe]. Yet here, he was able to enter without all these gifts and payoffs, although he was quite put off by the shabbiness of the place that unfolded before him: a rundown rural shack, whose windows lacked panes of glass, without shutters; in a bed lay a pale scrawny man, a pile of bones. Is this the person from whom he was to expect salvation? Was it worth having made a trip of such a distance? He related the story of what had transpired from beginning to end, and the Youth, after hearing him out, told him to return home, and at the train station in Zelva, he should buy himself a ticket to ride in first class, which he didn't think would cost more than three times the usual fare. This strange answer, which in his view, did not seem to have any connection to the impending judgement, caused the man even further confusion. But the Youth, perceiving his confusion, repeated himself another time, and implored him to follow his advice. Without having any recourse, he did as he was advised, paid more than twenty rubles for the ticket, and entered one of the first class compartments, where he found people there, who by their dress and their facial appearance, were among the important personages of the area. The sun was already tending toward the edges of the sky, twilight time, and very shortly, the hour of the *Mincha* service would pass, and because of this, he immediately rose to pray. His concern over the trial which did not leave him for even a moment, in addition to the thought that he had wasted money and time for no good reason – pained him in spirit and broke his heart. He tarried over his prayers a long time, poured out his bitter discourse to his Maker, and his eyes were a veritable sea of tears. His tears melted the hearts of the people who sat near him, and one of them asked: what terrible tragedy had befallen him that has caused him to weep so? The Jew related the whole story, about the priest who had connived against him, and that in only ten days, he would have to stand trial, and he was terrified by the possible outcome of the trial. These people attempted to soothe him, and they asked for the names of the friends of the priest. The Jew gave him these names exactly, and he wrote them down.

It subsequently became evident that this was a famous Christian lawyer. A few days before the trial, he came to visit the priest in the company of another person. They represented themselves as devoted and faithful 'friends of a friend' of the priest, and that this friend, when he found out that they would be traveling by this village – asked that they stop off to the priest and convey regards from him.

The priest received them with much dignity, and ordered the table to be set for them with all manner of good food and drink. In the middle of this feast, when they were all into their cups, the lawyer confided to the priest about his substantial wealth, that he has several parcels of land and forests, but that all of this is worth nothing to him, because a Jew continues to operate a saloon in one of the towns that belong to him. It was at this junction that the priest saw an exceptional opportunity to reveal his connivance and cleverness and he told him that, in this town too, there was a Jew who owned the saloon, and all these years he sought a way to get rid of him, and he couldn't, however, now, after he told him what he had done – he was certain that [the Jew] had reached his end, and the priest showed him the notice from the court where he was to appear as a witness, and that he didn't have a shadow of a doubt that the minimum sentence that the Jew would receive, would be exile to Siberia for life. After spending several hours, they parted, after conveying their thanks for the warm reception and good advice that they had received.

On the day of the trial these two guests appeared in the courtroom at the time that the court bailiff was reading the charges. After the prosecution completed its case, the legal counsel for the Jewish man began to attack the basis for the charges, and proved that the priest put the poison into the bottle. At the end of his defense, he called the two 'guests' as witnesses, and the Christian lawyer told

everything [that he had heard].

What happened on that day, was as we read in the *Megillah of Esther*, 'and he was upended,' the punishment that he had intended for the Jew was meted out to the priest: hard labor in Siberia.

In this we see the great insight of *Der Guter Yid fun Dereczin* , as our Sages say, 'who is the wise, he who sees the obvious.' He *knew* that in the first class compartment, there would be important people, and among them would be people whose inner drive was to seek the truth and to rescue the pursued from their pursuers. And he understood, that a Jew who awaited such a terrible trial in a fortnight was certainly brokenhearted and driven, and when he would pray – his prayer would be full of deep groaning and endless weeping.

This would pull on the heartstrings of the people around him, and that they would then ask him the reason for his tears, and once the reason became known, it would be possible that one of them, whose conscience would not give him any rest, would be prepared to do anything in his power to rescue him, and indeed, this is precisely what happened.

I asked several older people from the Dereczin and Slonim area if they knew the name of *Der Guter Yid,* details about him, and when he died. To my disappointment, I received no further information. Many people were helped by the advice and blessings of *Der Guter Yid fun Dereczin,* as related by many. It is fitting that he is memorialized as someone who has disappeared, in a book that records the history of Dereczin, as a 'wonder-worker' of a man, even though anonymous, let his memory be blessed.

My Grandfather Occupying the Rabbinical Seat of Dereczin

By Eliyahu Herenson
(Original Language: Hebrew)

From my childhood memories, I recall several dates in the life of the Dereczin Jewish community the texture of its life, and the nature of the changes that took place there in the course of more than thirty years between date milestones.

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At the outset, let me open my remarks by noting the year 1873, the year in which my grandfather, the *Gaon Sholom-Rav Herenson*, of blessed memory, known from one of his publications as the '*Heykhalei Shen*' accepted the summons of the town of Dereczin to assume the rabbinical seat and serve as the spiritual leader of the community.[36] In those days it was not the accepted practice for a community to accept the Rabbi, but rather the opposite. Summonses went out to my grandfather the *Gaon,* as one of the judges and lawmakers, because of his well-known publications in the Torah literature: *Heykhalei Shen,* which consists of questions and answers and fresh viewpoints on matters from the *Shas,*[37] [books] in which he was revealed as an incisive thinker, an innovator, and his book, *Darkhei Noam* [as well] which deal with many issues that are relevant in our time, both in the diaspora and in the land of Israel. My grandfather published his book, *Darkhei Noam* at the time that he occupied the pulpit in Dereczin.

He was one of the well-known *Gaonim* of Lithuania, born in Slutsk to an established family of note, which according to the family tree in my parents home traced its lineage to the royal line of the house of King David. In his youth, he became well known for his intellectual prowess, and at age 19 reached a decision point. It was not his desire to make a career out of Torah scholarship, but his in-laws urged him to pursue the rabbinate.

When he was considering the pulpit in Dereczin, he

[36] The abbreviation, אב"ד, stands for *Av Bet Din*. Also sometimes rendered as אב"ד ד"ק, when the word *kodesh* is appended, indicating a *holy* court.

[37] Hebrew abbreviation for the six major divisions of the Talmud.

reviewed the community, in which there sat before him distinguished rabbis, whose names were very familiar, and who had world-renown reputations, such as the Rabbi *Gaon Eliyahu-Chaim Meizel,* who subsequently occupied the pulpit in Lodz. The Dereczin community was noted as a place where one would find distinguished rabbinic scholars. And so he took consideration of the Jews in Dereczin, which was a small town in physical size, but outstanding and significant in the quality of its [scholarly] reputation, in which there were about four hundred Jewish people [but they were] well-schooled in Torah, and among them scholastic leaders and *Gaonim.*

My grandfather used to say, that it was an astonishing thing that a community like Dereczin felt a need to have a rabbi formally designated as their leader, given that the town had in its midst so many distinguished Torah scholars, many who were teachers of [rabbinic] ordination in their own right – despite this, his explanation to this question was that it was just because of this, that these great scholars could not work out a compromise among them as to whom the Cantor would wait for before beginning his recitation of the *Amidah* prayer in front of the Ark, and that he was appointed as 'official' Rabbi and community leader, in order to avoid undue delay in the conduct of daily prayers.

During my grandfather's tenure in Dereczin, there were three senior rabbinic teachers and *Dayanim* (among whom were Rabbi *Gaon Moshe ben Isaac Rabinovich,* who subsequently taught in Slonim, and the Rabbi, and *Tzaddik* the *Gaon Rabbi Netah*). My grandfather's custom was not to sit continuously in the *Bet-Din* himself, but came to depend on these three scholar-teachers, because he himself was deeply involved day-and-night in providing answers to issues that came from far distances, ands also with the dissemination of Torah to the masses. When he arrived in Dereczin, he brought with him thirty young men who were Torah scholars, and founded a *Kollel-Yeshivah* , under his supervision, in which young men studied, and nearly all of whom went on to become ordained rabbis.

In that era, the majority of the Dereczin citizenry, from all walks of life – merchants, storekeepers, laborers – were Jews of ardent faith, adhering to Jewish customs and law, its commandments, schooled in the *Shas, Ein Yaakov,* and the *Mishna,* and who came to pray at the synagogue three times a day, and placed value on Torah study.

All would come and go in the Rabbi's house which was held in great esteem by the members of the community. In my father's house, they used to tell about a simple, modest Jew, *Zadok* the Milliner, and from the *Hasidim* loyal to my grandfather, that he was responsible for livening up and creating merriment on the holiday of *Simkhat Torah.* Once, a rabbi from another city was invited to give a guest sermon, and after giving the sermon, it didn't satisfy Reb *Zadok*, who summarized his critical opinion of the speaker with the following few words: "*I do not grasp or understand the sermons of our resident Rabbi, Rav Sholom-Dov, but before he finished, I thoroughly grasped and understood the sermon of the guest Rabbi...*"

My grandfather [himself] was a modest man, and did not make distinctions between the great and small, between the rich and poor. He would say that every man is created in God's image, and therefore there is something important (hidden perhaps) in each and everyone's soul.

In 1881, my grandfather took the pulpit in the city of Kletsk, where he was invited by a delegation from that city, who brought with them the contract for the rabbinate of the community.

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Twenty-five years passed. In the year 1906, when the pulpit in Dereczin was vacated, my father, Rabbi *Gaon Chaim-Shimon Herenson,* of blessed memory, was invited to become Rabbi, and spiritual leader of the community, where he served as the Rabbi and spiritual head of the community as did his father, '*Heykhalei Shen.*'

My father was born in Mezrich-Podolski. He, as well, became renown as a scholar while still a youth, and at the age of twelve, he would render judgements on issues under his father's guidance, and from whom he also drank in the study of Torah. My father also did not have an inclination to the rabbinate, and sought a vocation in commerce, however the majority of his time and interest were in matters of Torah scholarship, as well as other

intellectual pursuits, which brought him to become a spiritual leader in the city where he dwelt, in Mezrich.

In the end, he took the advice of his great father, and undertook to study for rabbinic ordination. And this is how he came to Dereczin.

He became a guest in the house of one of the distinguished citizens of the town, *Reb Joseph ben Moshe Rabinovich,* of blessed memory, (who in time became his father-in-law), and then accepted the pulpit. It did not work out for him to stay in the pulpit [at Dereczin] at that time. It was at that time that my grandfather passed away, and my father inherited his post with the community in Kletsk, and he remained in that pulpit.

I recall my father's account of the changes in Dereczin from 1881, at which time my grandfather left that town, until 1906, when my father returned there. In the course of a quarter century, many significant and profound changes had taken place in the customs and the way of life of the Jews of Dereczin. The generation of Torah scholars and men of faith had given way to a generation of the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) and the rise of a new culture in the life of the community.

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Twenty years later, in 1926, I came to live in Dereczin, where I remained until 1933. I will describe those seven years in a separate chapter, specifically dedicated to that.

The Dereczin of My Youth

By Shlomo Yudson

(Original Language: Yiddish)

I do not know if there are Derecziners today in all of the lands to which they emigrated from their hometown (certainly not in the destroyed body of Dereczin itself) apart from one handful who knew the town about which I write here and now. This is Dereczin of 75-80 years ago, and the memory of those years and of that town which to this day, stand before my eyes.

My childhood years stream past in my memory, my life as a young boy in loving, homey Dereczin, until circumstances forced me to forsake my hometown, and move to Lodz, where my father already was living. I knew then, that I would long for Dereczin. And I long for the town of my birth until this day. Believe me that I am not making up a story.

Even as a child, I loved to outline and describe those things that interested me, and it is in this fashion that I depict the harmonious portrait of our Dereczin.

I recall the layout of the principal streets that stretched out from the well-constructed marketplace: *Zelver Gasse,* and the *Deutscher Gasse,* along the length, and *Slonimer Gasse* and *Yatkeh-Gessel,* along the width of the town. All of our streets and byways exuded warmth and "homey"-ness, especially in the sunny summer days, when Jews both small and grown would be seen in the streets.

The one discordant thing that stands out in my mind from those childhood days, was the tall church that stood at the edge of the marketplace on the *Slonimer Gasse,* even though during the middle of the week, one seldom saw gentiles there.

In those years, the concept of a wealthy man in Dereczin was unknown. The population that amounted to more than one thousand souls, consisted of homeowners, who owned their own houses and stores; laborers, who were self-employed, or hired themselves out to others; and a small number of people whose livelihood was unknown, nor was it known from whence they derived their sustenance. Fundamentally, if one saw a Jewish pauper going from house to house, one knew that he was not from Dereczin, but rather someone who had come from somewhere else. And, if occasionally, one saw a man or woman finely

dressed, they were known to be from the *Hof* on the other side of the river, about a verst from Dereczin.

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In Dereczin, in those years, there was no lack of *Heder* schools. We already had a Talmud-Torah, but never had a [fully-fledged] Yeshiva.

The pride of the pious Jews of Dereczin was the remarkable *Schulhof* that consisted of a beautiful synagogue, and four *Batei Midrashim*: the *Alter Mauer*, the *Neuer Mauer*, the *Hiltzener Bet Midrash*, and a *Hasidim Shtibl* at the side. In the midst of this imposing collection of sacred buildings, the Rabbi's manse was located, where the Rabbi [of the town] and his family lived, and also served as a court for adjudicating disputes among the Jewish townsfolk, who would come there with their various complaints and demands – issues that were never in short supply in Dereczin.

In the years about which I write, the spiritual leader of Dereczin was the renown Rabbi, *Rav Joseph-Zundl Hutner*, the author of significant books, who bequeathed yet two more generations of outstanding Rabbis: a son who occupied a prominent pulpit in Warsaw, and a grandson – the son of the Warsaw Rabbi – a formidable rabbinical authority, who together with *Rabbi Meir Berlin*, of blessed memory, worked on the production of a new edition of the *Shas* in Israel.

About the Rabbi of Dereczin in those years, I have something interesting to relate, but [I will do this] a little later, after I complete the portrait of my birthplace, which I have been composing continuously for 75-80 years, as it appeared in my eyes as a child at the time, when Dereczin was [yet] 'in order,' that is to say, and when those born in Dereczin did not yet venture into the larger world [around them]. In later years, when individual Derecziners did leave, and go to faraway cities and countries, a few became well-known, however not always in a good light.

In general though, the Jewish community of Dereczin did produce famous scholars, thinkers and writers, among them the highly acclaimed Hebrew writer *Bershadsky*, who wrote *Neged HaZerem* (Against the Tide), and other novels, that enriched the budding Hebrew literature of the time.

And it is hardly any wonder that Dereczin served an inspiration to spiritually endowed and emotionally sensitive young people. I am, to this day, full of awe and respect for my birthplace, especially as that feeling was strengthened after I had become familiar with other towns in our area, such as neighboring Zelva or Zhetl, where I studied for a time at the Yeshiva. First I have constructed for myself an image of beautiful Dereczin, with all its satisfying twists and turns, its unifying places, and nooks and crannies which hearken back, apparently, to those olden times when the Duke *Sapieha* selected Dereczin as his residence during the years of his rule in Lithuania.

Thanks to the *Sapieha* family, large parts of Dereczin were built to be more comfortable and attractive [than they might have otherwise been], but the project with the greatest impact made by the Duke, which lasted well into our time as evidence of his handiwork and industriousness, were "the palaces," whose construction he sanctioned at the end of the *Deutscher Gasse*, and on the *Puster Barg*, opposite the palaces (about nine years after I left our town, when I returned in to address my issues with military service, the palaces had been transformed to Russian military barracks, from which the odors of a military environment emanated...).

The *Puster Barg*, very clearly intrigued the children and young people of Dereczin. This was a hillock with a large, roomy cellar, with walls and floor plastered over with concrete, with a strong door covered with cement, which according to local stories and legends, led to a long tunnel that had been dug to reach all the way to Ruzhany.

The most attractive location in all of Dereczin was the *Agrest-Sod*,[38] at the front side of the *Deutscher Gasse*, bordered by a solidly built barrier.

It was not for nothing, that this section of Dereczin,

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[38] Seemingly a botanical garden or orchard. Referred to by *Chaim Rabinovich & Malka Alper* as the *Ager-Sod*.

with its old botanical garden, with the palace and the hillock covered with old trees, served as a magnet for the young people of the town, and was a place that they favored for their getting together.

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When one speaks of Jewish Dereczin, it is worthwhile to become acquainted with its spiritual leadership, even though it is of the recent past.

In the rabbinical world, it was once well known that a goodly number of rabbis who were privileged to attain special prestige and recognition, had their start in Dereczin, and that one of the greatest of his generation, *Rav Eliyahu-Chaim Meizel*, who in the second half of his life occupied the position of Chief Rabbi of Lodz, was not the only rabbi to have had his start in Dereczin.

Returning now to more contemporary times, about which I am writing, I cannot refrain from telling my Dereczin *landsleit* who will read this *Dereczin Yizkor Book,* a noteworthy story about an experience that I had as a youngster, in the eleventh year of my life, with the Rabbi of Dereczin of that time, which has become etched into my memory more than any other experience in my hometown.

At the beginning of my tenth year, my father, may he rest in peace, who was known as *Yudel der Schreiber*, left small, Lithuanian, Dereczin and went to Lodz. He sought out, and found better opportunities to take advantage of his extensive knowledge of Hebrew and German. Our (no-evil-eye-intended) large family remained behind in Dereczin, until such time as our father would be in a position to send for us.

His departure, caused a problem for me, the oldest of the children,. I had just finished schooling at the *Zhetler* Yeshiva, and I didn't know what to do with myself.

As a relative of *Rav Joseph-Zundel,* my uncle, *Shlomo Rosenberg*, an accomplished Talmud scholar, and a self-educated rabbi in those years, proposed a good idea as to what should be done with me: as the Rabbi had two sons, the older one, *Leib*, a boy of thirteen, and the second, *Hertz-Mendel*, a boy of my age – both brothers with sharp intellects for learning, my uncle proposed that an accomplished scholar be retained who, during the summer, would study with me and with *Hertz-Mendel* at least a couple of hours a day. The Rabbi agreed to my uncle's plan, and since it was not possible to find an appropriately qualified teacher in the town itself, they brought a rabbi from another town and they arranged for a suitable room in the home of a widow for two students to study for two to three hours in the afternoon.

During the third week of this private tutoring, one day, *Hertz-Mendel* came in excitedly with a request from his father, the Rabbi, that I come to see him after the study session was over.

I began to feel 'peculiar.' A little shy, I always had sought out opportunities to be drawn into a conversation with adults, particularly on subjects that were not specific to children of my age – and who would have thought of a conversation with the Rabbi himself, whom my uncle *Shlomo* held was the very embodiment of the Torah itself! But I understood that my hesitance and shyness would not help me at all, so I fortified myself, and immediately after the study class, I accompanied my friend *Hertz-Mendel* to find out what his father, the great Rabbi, wanted with me.

When we arrived at the Rabbi's manse, my friend ushered me into his father's presence, who sat in a deep chair, with his prominent large head bent over a large folio of the *Gemara,* which he was continuously scanning with his darting eyes.

Feeling that someone was standing nearby, the Rabbi raised his head, and seeing me, he said: "It is good, *Shloimkeh*, that you have come." He rose, and started to head for another room, motioning to me with his hand that I should follow him.

The small room into which the Rabbi led me, was furnished with armoires full of books, with a table which was covered in sheaves of paper, already written on, and various writing implements, and a couple of comfortable stools.

The Rabbi, Reb *Joseph-Zundel* beckoned to me to one of the stools in front of the table, and after I had

seated myself, he took the top written page [from the pile] and he handed it to me, in order to determine if I would be able to read [sic: understand] what had been written.

At my first glance at the handwriting, I thought I saw only clumps of circuitous and random scrivening of Talmudic language, and thereby I felt the Rabbi was standing next to me and waiting for an answer. I did not, however, give up. My [eager] young eyes flew over the text a second and third time, until I was certain that I could read it [sic: decipher the handwriting], and to a good measure understand what the text dealt with as well. But, I still did not understand to what purpose the Rabbi had sent for me. But, at this point, the Rabbi, while still standing, began to speak to me: "Do you think, *Shloimkeh*, that you will be able to read this handwriting, and copy the text so that it will be easier for others to read it?"

"I think so," – I replied, acting like an adult, although I still did not fathom why I was required altogether for such an undertaking.

The Rabbi then knowingly began to expound on what he was thinking, and began to explain: "The handwritten pages that you see on the table are a part of a book that is to be published. As my penmanship is a little difficult [to read], [and] for typesetters in the publishing house to work from, a scribe who studied in the *Alten Mauer* [Bet HaMidrash] until recently would copy for me. Up till now, he has transcribed my handwritten manuscript for my first book, *Hevel Joseph,*[39] prior to its going to press, and of late, he began working on the transcription of my second book, *Hevel Joseph Tanina,*[40] but his circumstances were such that he was compelled to return to his home [sic: in another town]."

The Rabbi went on to relate that he was unable to find anyone in town who could undertake this sort of work, and my uncle *Shlomo* advised him to give me a try, and see whether I will be able to perform the duties of a scribe and copyist.

In order to be certain, right on the spot, that I was capable of copying from his more difficult handwriting, the Rabbi immediately asked me, right then and there, to sit down and demonstrate to him what I was capable of doing (the salary paid to a copyist to transcribe one double-sided page of manuscript was five kopecks).

Finishing with me, after making me aware of certain notations and writings, where there were added remarks made in the wide margins, the Rabbi returned to the room in which he was studying the *Gemara* at the time of my arrival, and I buckled down to my work, not being entirely certain that I would succeed.

It took me a full three hours to transcribe two and a half pages on that first day, into a more legible handwriting. That is to say, that on that first day as a wage-earner, I was able to earn twelve and a half kopecks.

I was not, however, discouraged. I was pleased with my work, and it is entirely possible, I would have done it for nothing.

By the third day, in the afternoon, the work was going much easier, and I transcribed a full four pages, which means that I earned twenty kopecks for the three hours of work. But when it came to the fourth day, we were able to complete our study session an hour earlier than usual, and as it was a beautiful day, and I hadn't been to the *Agrest-Sod* in over a week, I thought that I would want to run over there, for an hour or so, which would still leave me plenty of time for my work at the Rabbi's. No sooner said than done – I strolled off to the *Sod.* Other than myself, no one else was in the area, and it made me feel like the entire orchard belonged to me. I ran and jumped from one place to the next; the springlike air caressed me from every angle, as if to thank me for coming at this special hour, when no one else was in the orchard. Enraptured with such thoughts and emotions, I suddenly realized that

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39 Literally "The Halyard of Joseph." Titles of these books were often allegorical, and may, in this instance reflect the author's sentiment of having 'tied things together.'

40 *Tanina* - A further commentary.

[time had flown by, and] there was no time left for me to go do my work for the Rabbi, and I went home.

The following day after lessons, when I should have gone to do my work for the Rabbi, I felt that under no circumstances could I go, because what sort of an excuse could I give for not having come the prior day? So, once again, I left the *Heder*, and went to the *Agrest-Sod*, thinking that the Rabbi would most certainly have found someone else to take my place. But the following afternoon, *Hertz-Mendel* came into the classroom, and in his monotone voice said again: "*Shloimkeh,* father asked for you to come." Having no choice, after class, I went to the Rabbi's manse, being completely certain that this would be the last time ever that I would ever go to see the Rabbi.

I was, however, quite mistaken. Entering the large room both shamefacedly and slightly lost, where the Rabbi usually sat bent over a large volume, I was astonished to see the Rabbi rise, and lead me right into the small room, all the while speaking to me softly and patiently, his words measured: "*Shloimkeh,* if you mean [by your action] that five kopecks a page is insufficient, I will give you ten kopecks for each page." I was profoundly touched by the sincerity with which the great Rabbi, *Rav Joseph-Zundel* spoke to me, a young boy, who was not yet eleven years old. I girded myself, and swore that I meant nothing by the fact that I had not come to work the past two days; that I had not even begun to think about money,-- but the Rabbi did not permit me to continue speaking, and from that day on, I would receive ten kopecks a page.

The result was that the speed of my work doubled from that day onward, until I earned more than three rubles a week. This continued for seven months, until the last page of *Hevel Joseph Tanina* was transcribed in my handwriting.

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At the end of my recollections, I wish to stress that I have always carried with me, everywhere, [an image] of my birthplace Dereczin in my memory. And as I wrote these lines, that image of my *shtetl* was before my eyes, just as it was in those days, in the light of a beautiful summer day, from *Yoshe der Schmid's* blacksmith shop to the tannery, and *Hekdesh* on the other side of the river, across the width of Dereczin and its length – from the end of *Zelver Gasse* to the 'palaces' and the *Agrest-Sod* on the *Deutscher Gasse.*

Three Tales from Dereczin of Yore

By Shlomo Yudson
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Shlomo Yudson (untitled) (p. 52)

[Biographical Note: Shlomo Yudson, born in Dereczin, emigrated to America early in life, and for many years was an employee of the *Forverts* and *Der Tog-Morgen Journal.* These three tales are excerpted from his first book, *From Three Worlds,* published by Kletsker-Verlag in Vilna, 1929.

I. Fear

I would have considered myself the most fortunate little boy in the town, were it not for the fear, which embittered the choicest years of my upbringing.

As quickly as night would fall, I would be seized by a peculiar feeling of terror. Everything about me acquired a terrifying meaning, and in the air, the essence of the cemetery, funeral shrouds and the cleaning board for the dead seemed everywhere.

I did not fear demons as much as I feared the dead, even though in town they would tell the most terrifying tales of demons and other evil creatures, who burrowed themselves into the *Khotcha's stodola;* in the old wreckage behind the bathhouse, and in *Itcheh Kalman's* travel house; I feared demons no more than any living creature that was capable of inflicting harm or causing a difficulty. The most fundamental fear I had came from the idea of death. Death, for me, was the wellspring of all fears.

If it happened that someone died, I became obsessed for weeks at a time and nights filled with terror. During the day I would stew over it myself, seriously thinking about all those deceased people that I had known while they were alive, as if it really didn't bother me at all. But at nightfall, an ominous silence would envelop everything, a creepiness would pervade my skin; the all-encompassing dark terror would press down over my eyes, and Death would parade in front of me in his white shroud.

– Only one – I would pose the question to myself during the day – why are not the other children afraid? There is *Moishkeh,* who lives right by the very bathhouse, and it doesn't bother him in the least; there *Yoshkeh* lives right by the *moihilkehs,* and he walks home in the wintertime at night by himself; and *Hertz-Mendel,* the Rabbi's son, Can chase cats across the cemetery in the middle of the night, and it doesn't even occur to him to be afraid, and you, almost a grown young man are afraid of the shadow on the wall?

That was during the day. But as soon as it got dark outside, my thought processes became paralyzed. Regardless of what I sought to distract myself with, it didn't help. I think of climbing up a tree, jumping over the pits near the barracks, or playing at war; here, I have practically worked out an entire plan for a maneuver for this coming Friday. – When I come to the end of it, and I want to review it, suddenly, a World of the Dead swims out from my eyes which my emotions have woven out of the darkness.

I would go to bed while others in the house were still awake, in order that the fear not dominate me, and I would awaken in the middle of the night, feeling the dark air against my bare face, immediately covering myself with the blanket, rolling myself up, as if I would feel safer with all my extremities closer to me, and toil at trying to fall asleep again, until I was drenched in sweat. If anyone snored, or coughed in their sleep, this calmed me down, I would draw in a deep breath, and feel more relaxed in heart.

And when I would vigorously address the matter, and attempt to force my mind to get closer to this issue, bit by bit, my fear would entwine itself in something for which I could find no name. It was not that same terror which unwittingly tortures and shakes up the nerves, when one is surrounded by the

dark, rather, a *gestalt* would appear standing before me, clear and distinct, which I did not dare to look directly into its face – Oh my God, Death itself! – I would think, how can one avert this misfortune? How can people live in peace, while at the same time knowing that somewhere or another, Death lurks after them? And at this point, the images of elderly people of my acquaintance loom before me, and my heart sinks. Just, just soon, how much longer can they possibly live? And my fantasy progresses further, and conjures up an image of these selfsame people in a pale deathlike yellow face color, and a tremor crawls across my skin, as I try to find a way to avoid and forget these faces, so that later, after their death, they will not stand so distinctly before my eyes.

But slowly, a time arrived when I felt that to a greater degree, I had achieved a standoff with my fear. Then, discovering the correct reason for my fear, my night demon did not manifest itself any worse than in my day, that is, my fear was not a foolish weak one, but the opposite, [it] was a strong assault from the inevitability of human mortality.

And once, on a nice, mild winter evening, it occurred to me that I should put myself to the test.

Our entire family had their places in the *Hiltzener Schul.* It is understood, that this was also my *Bet HaMidrash* , and was, by my reckoning, the most important one in the town, despite the fact that the Rabbi used to pray at the *Alter Mauer,* and the wealthy man, Reb Moshe [also] in that schul. It was definitely livelier at the *Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash* than at the others, because since the inn had been closed, itinerant people of little means would find their lodging there. There, on the warmed benches, one could always count on seeing a new face, and hear a witticism from faraway places. Today, the "Little Orphan" and Old Man Reshkess would disport themselves by performing their tricks when the townsfolk would present themselves: jumping over barricades, and tossing packages at the students under the *bimah;* taking a mouthful of kerosene and spraying it out of their mouths at burning *havdalah* candles, from which would stream a veritable rain of flame, and other such tricks, and it would truly get quite merry, and one simply didn't want to leave the place.

But counteracting all of these attractions, the *Hiltzener Bet-HaMidrash* had one shortcoming, that offset them all ten times over – there, in the foyer, at the right entrance, the Burial Society stored the board on which it prepared the dead for burial.

Year in, and year out, it stood in the same corner, in the same position, the top fastened to the wall, and the bottom pushed out till it reached the stairs, where they meet the wide door of the *Bet-HaMidrash,* so it would not fall down. Its left side was fastened to the west wall, and gave the impression of a booth standing in an orchard.

At no time did I pass it by that a shudder didn't seize me as if someone had hit on a nerve. It could have been in the middle of the day, in the strongest sunshine, and I still could not open my eyes fully, and bring myself to look at it directly. Even on the Sabbath, or holidays, when it came time for reading the Torah, and when the foyer was full of people, this self-same board deterred me from fully participating. And don't even mention evenings. In the evening, I wouldn't walk past that place even if I would be showered in gold. And if, on occasion, I would notice that the corner was empty, my fear would oppress me even more, because I knew that later, or the next day, it would be back again, standing in its usual place, covered with damp stains.

It was well into [the month of] Adar already. Nights no longer made the same stern impression that they did during the middle of winter. They became somewhat shorter, and with that more bearable, for [my] fragile nerves. The air was full of Gift-Giving, Hitting Haman, and a heartfelt participation in the festivities of the Purim holiday.

Sitting thus, on one of these evenings in the *Bet HaMidrash,* I suddenly felt like someone else entirely, not myself, and I immediately said to myself: today, I'm going home alone! And barely had I uttered this, when an echo replied from the innermost chambers of my being: today, I am going home alone! I could not re-live this moment. Too bad!

I screwed up my courage, and hoped for a miracle.

It was after *Maariv*. The congregation had already dispersed. Apart from the few students, who were tucked in under their stands in the corners, and the few paupers on the *bimah,* there was no one else in the *Bet HaMidrash. Yerachmiel der Tcheshler,* with whom I used to walk to our house, had just left the *Bet HaMidrash*, and I immediately saw, that whether I wanted to or not, tonight I was going to have to be a hero.

A half hour went by, then a whole hour, and I still had no stomach for carrying out my plan.

I thought well about the very last second, when I would have to leave, and I got an entirely ill feeling in my heart, and I wished that someone would happen by, with whom I could at least get as far as the *Schulhof*. But to my misfortune, nobody came, and I lost all hope.

Suddenly, I see through the window, how a person is crossing the *Schulhof* carrying a lantern. I hastily sprang up, and began to sprint to the door, taking large steps, and something is intruding on me, as if I really wanted to get involved just at this moment.

As I approached the door, I felt myself getting warm all over, as if something had grabbed hold of me by the suspenders. – Lost! – I said to myself.

I opened the door wide. A pale red light fell in the bend of the foyer. It fell precisely on the board used to prepare the bodies of the deceased.

I felt my heart sinking inside of me. But – I'm lost!

I left the door open, and quickly sped through the foyer. My eyes furtively glanced at the accursed corner, where the Board stood (like the escapee looks at the wild beast after slipping out of its cage). I trembled in every one of my extremities.

– Close that door, you rascal! – a voice was heard from behind the Board.

I didn't close the door...

Half dead with fear, I barely was able to run all the way home. A couple of days later, the "Orphan" meets me.

Wagging his finger at me while he spoke, the "Orphan" said – If you leave the door to the *Bet HaMidrash* open again while I am having fun with *Beilkeh* the Bath House attendant's daughter, you'll get a 'black year' from me!

2. An Eclipse of the Sun

As quickly as the news of the solar eclipse spread, that is how quickly the whole town began to percolate. No matter where one went, that is all people talked about, and late into the evening you could run into clutches of people in the marketplace, or at *Khacheh's* on the square, talking about this very news item that had been reported in *HaTzefira*.[41] Do you imagine that a solar eclipse was some insignificant event? And when do you suppose there will be another one? In *HaTzefira* it was stated that there hadn't been a solar eclipse since the year 1724.

At the home of *Shmuel, Joseph Nakhass,* the only person in town to subscribe to *HaTzefira*, the doorstep had been totally worn down. People wanted to see what *HaTzefira* had to say with their own eyes about this event, and when a new edition arrived, with a comprehensive article that described a solar eclipse at great length, and in general about these rare occurrences, people were literally transported: Wow! Will we live long enough to see this? An event that occurs once in a hundred years!

I was still too young – a year, no, entirely – to be able to grasp what a solar eclipse was, and even when I had read the article in *HaTzefira*, I didn't extract any meaningful understanding from it. The whole story held me in a dreamlike pensive state. In the inner recesses of my mind, a picture of sorts, comprised of the heavens, of suns, moons, and plain planets did take shape, that rotate through the great void of space, and occasionally get in each others'

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41 A Jewish periodical of the times.

way, but when I tried to grasp this with my intellect, the image began to melt and blur. I envied the adults, who spoke about this event with such certainty, just as if they had it right in front of their eyes.

As the designated day approached, one could see in the various houses of worship, especially the *Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash,* how the students, and ordinary young men from established families, smoking pieces of glass, which was known to be a requirement in order to be able to look through [the glass] at the sun.

Townsfolk provided large vessels of water, a remedy that was thought to be wise to have for any circumstance.

I had already smoked a couple of large pieces of glass, for which I had to break a window in the attic; I had my viewing apparatus ready, and waited impatiently for the event-filled day to arrive.

I simply could not fathom how, in the middle of a bright, clear day, when the sun is red-hot in a clear sky, that it should suddenly fall dark, as if it were night, as if you could bring this on by reading the *Shema.* But the entire world isn't going to allow itself to be played for a fool!

According to the article in *HaTzefira,* the solar eclipse was supposed to start a few minutes after 6:00AM, right after the first *minyan,* and end late in the day. Well, what does one do to get up so early? Many times, I had wanted to get up in time for the first *minyan,* but I could not. And what, really, would happen if I overslept?

The young man from Skidel, the oldest of the students at the *Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash,* proposed a plan for spending the night prior to the solar eclipse, a "vigil," thereby assuring that nobody would oversleep. Everyone eagerly subscribed to this plan, and wherever there was a youngster in town, he [was sure] to subscribe to the vigil.

I was barely able to convince my father to let me participate as well. For this, I had to promise to "listen to my mother" for a least one continuous month.

Finally, the time arrived.

After *Maariv,* the participants in the vigil began to assemble at the *Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash,* and little by little, almost all the young people of the town assembled at that point. Initially, a vigil was also planned for the *Alter Mauer* , but as there were rather few young people there, they had to abandon their plan, and join with the *Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash*

The entire town was already fast asleep. Everyone went to bed early, in order to be able to get up before dawn. The little houses stood silent and lifeless. They looked like they would be absorbed in the shadows of the night. The pale white light of the new moon, which hung like a silver light fixture behind the "Rad" stores, fell on their roofs. From time-to-time, one would hear how *Fyvel 'Krivool'*[42] the old, lame night watchman, would play a note on his flute.

In the *Bet HaMidrash* it was lively. It was immediately apparent that this was no ordinary vigil. Nobody was studying, even *Berel Masmid,*[43] sat in the corner near the Ark, his reading stand pushed up against him, with his hand on the closed *Gemara* volume, and looked sunk in thought about the world. A lot stood around, or sat in little groups, absorbed in conversation about this important moment, that imminently would arrive. Others told ordinary stories, while yet others rode around on the benches, and carried out maneuvers around the *bimah.* I went from one group of people to the next; I got up on the benches and rode around a couple of times. However, none of this really appealed to me. Something about the whole vigil struck me as sacrilegious. I wanted this moment to be one that was quiet. Every person should be alone with himself, and to individually absorb within themselves the divine majesty, that causes the suns and planets to follow those orbits which had been prepared for them in the heavens.

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[42] The Russian word for a thief, used to characterize the job of the individual, who might have to shout, 'thief!'

[43] A *masmid* is one who is continuously dedicated to his calling (i.e. scholarship)

As dawn began to break, the assembly turned to the smoked glass. Each person sought out a spot unobstructed to the east, and prepared themselves for the spectacle. One group went to the rear of the town, to the *Puster Barg*. I would have gone with this group, even though I would have preferred to be alone. However, it was not light enough outside, and I felt uneasy.

As we approached the *Puster Barg*, the day became lighter. The east was reddish, lined with violet-rose stripes, which spread out like a fan to the middle of a mixed green and blue sky. A silvery dew covered the grass, and big drops hung like cold tears on the leaves, peering out anxiously for the day to arrive.

A thin, penetrating mist covered everything. I felt the entire breath of nature. It was so cool, so mysterious!

Ans soon, soon the great, perhaps the greatest wonder of all would occur.

The light became gradually stronger, one could see how it would become lighter and lighter. The surface of the land became wider and more spread out. On one side the hamlet of Alekshits swam out of the mist and on the other, the forest began to appear more distinctly with its deep granite-like coloration. Birds awoke, and refreshed, and not sensing anything special imminent, chirped a welcome to the new day.

Thoughts flitted through my mind:

– One hundred sixty five years have passed since the last time this event occurred, which is about to occur again. Oh, how vast is eternity?! – And as many years will pass again, before once again the same event will occur that is about to occur today. Where will a memory of our existence remain at that [distant future] time? Who will then bring us to mind? Who will remember us?

My heart was filled with heavy and sour emotions. I felt it impossible to remain with the group, and I resolved to find a place where I could be alone.

I thought of going to the *Krenitsa*[44] in the orchard. I thought: if it is possible to look at the solar eclipse in a vessel of water, then it should be certainly possible to look at it in the *Krenitsa?!*

I immediately rushed to that place.

The *Krenitsa* was very deep. Its surface glinted with a quiet sheen. On one side, where the little retaining wall was lower, a thin streamlet ran down, coursed through a washed out pebble bed and clear sand, until it came to the brook, at the foot of the hill. It shone like a peaceful mirror, just as if nothing was going on, as if its continuous flow were an eternal peace. The sky above, and a crooked branch were reflected off its surface.

I sat down on a nearby flat stone ands waited.

Suddenly the tips of the trees were bathed in the pale light of the just rising sun.

And the shine [of the sun] became ever stronger, and the higher the sun rose, the light fell on more and more of the tree branches. The old green oaks were already half in the sunlight. Finally, I saw them reflected in the *krenitsa*. Its color was like freshly poured satin.

And shortly, the image of the sun's orb began to flatten itself out on the left side. The flattening eventually became more distinct, assuming the shape of a half circle. The appearance of the sun continued in this fashion, assuming the shape of the moon, when it begins to wane. Slowly, and a little bit at a time, the sun was entirely extinguished, leaving only a trace of its surface [visible] – a round thin strip of light in the sky. All around it became darkened, just like the night, and a great uneasiness fell over me. I was afraid to move from the spot where I was. I sat petrified. A breeze blew from branch to branch, passing on still secrets of the air. The leaves rustled in the great darkness, and an aura of mystery pervaded the entire orchard.

My skin crawled. I felt as if the proverbial six days of creation had returned, when God says one Word,

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[44] A body of well water. Perhaps a decorative pool of sorts, found in this botanical garden.

and an entire world is created.

Suddenly, a half-circle of light appeared in the place where the extinguished sun had been, and the orchard once more became distinct.

A little bit at a time, the strip of light became wider and lighter, a little bit at a time, the light returned, pouring itself over everything about, until the last blemish disappeared from the sun.

I entered the town by way of the *Deutscher Gasse.* The marketplace and the *Schulhof* were full of people. In the wide street drains, water was flowing like after a heavy downpour. All the water vessels had already been emptied.

3. To the Hakafot

For the entire year, we barely saw the young people in the synagogue, superficial prayers all of them, who came with the objective of getting their praying over with, and then fly off. On the Sabbath, when in the houses of prayer, the portion of reading the Torah was reached, or the beginning of the *Musaf* service, it was usual in *Schul* to fold up the prayer shawls, and rush home. Even on the Sabbath that the New Month was blessed, or on a *Yom Tov*, when the *Hazzan* performed together with a choir, people did not leave any later than from any other synagogues, because the 'core worshipers,' from time immemorial, always arrogated certain 'privileges' to themselves, the style of the *davening* was constantly subject to debate; and no big thing was made out of the *Shacharit* service either. They would send up *Shlomo der Tchesler*, and he would grind through [the prayers] like milling flour, and during *Yom Tov,* whole sections of the *Piyyut* were entirely omitted, to the point where one simply had to take pity on the *Makhzor.* During winter, in the middle of the week, the *Schul* wasn't even opened, because it was as cold as an icebox, and in the summer, it was impossible to get together a *minyan.* Early in the morning, the air was biting cold there, even in the month of *Tammuz,*[45] and when one rolled up a sleeve in order to put on *tefillin*, a chill would pass over the skin of the exposed arm, and cause it to break out in tiny goose bumps. And from the floor, which was below the level of the *Schulhof,* and whose boards didn't quite fit properly together, the cold air of the earth seeped in, and from up above, from the unfinished soffit, a peculiar cold emptiness emanated downwards.

The long, stretched out windows were set quite high in the walls, much closer to the heights than the lower part of the structure, and the sun, shining through them could never reach the congregants. The best one could do, was to look into the window from the south side, at the gray, raw, unfinished north wall, or to shine a lamp from the high, unfinished wooden *bimah,* which was situated in the dead center of the *Schul.* The only place where the sun could reach a person, was in the women's section, which was to the rear and west, elevated, over the foyer. However, it was seldom that there was anyone there for the sun to shine on.

First and foremost, the *Schul* did not have the dedication, and the fundamental courtesies[46] the way the *Bet HaMidrash* had. The schedule was run chaotically, when on one Sabbath, one person would be in charge, and a week later, someone else. It looked communal, but it was only at the time of the High Holydays that one could see who really was running the show.

But when it came to the eve of *Simkhat Torah*, the cold, ordinary appearance of the *Schul* would suddenly vanish, and it was as if a warm, happy, animated breeze, would have streamed out from every corner, and filled [our] hearts with life.

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45 Jewish month in July/August.

46 The author uses the Yiddish word, *balebatishkeit*, for which it is difficult to find an accurate translation!

On *Simkhat Torah*, the *Schul* was the center of life and merriment in the town.

Wherever one could place a candle in a hollowed-out potato, a candle burned; wherever there was a balcony, an attic, or an overhang, hanging lanterns and candle decorations were affixed there, in hollowed out gourds or potatoes, in which lit candles were inserted. They twinkled above like stars in the sky, and the great chandeliers with the large wax candles, and also the four large lighting lamps filled every corner with light.

Every face shone. It was possible to see how full of happiness everyone was. Young and old, observant or not, everyone felt full of life.

It is a custom in town that on the eve of *Simkhat Torah*, services in the *Schul* are led by the Rabbi. This is the one time of the year, that the corner to the right side of the Ark is occupied. And accompanying the Rabbi, comes his whole entourage, and just plain pious Jews from the other *Batei Midrashim*, who otherwise would not be coming to the *Schul*.

On this day, it is possible to see red, blue, white, and all sorts of other colored clothing, that assault the eyes among the monotonous, dark and subdued color of clothing that men wear.

Girls, little, somewhat older, and those of marriageable age, all come downstairs, right alongside the men. True, they don't come any further forward than the *bimah*, but up to that point they mingle with the menfolk as if they were at a songfest.

They come here to see the *Hakafot*[47], to kiss the Torah scrolls, and to take part in the happiness of the evening.

For the young people, it is total joy. Whoever can, tries to get as close to the *bimah* as possible; one divides oneself up into groups, ogling the girls. Others, more bold, have no shame in trying to cop a feel from the girls quite often.

When the time for *Hakafot* arrives, and the girls try to get near to kiss the Torah scrolls, an aggressive young man will sometimes put out his hand to intercept the girl's kiss. The girl blushes, the little boys and youngsters make a big deal out of it, exclaiming, Oh! Oh! Oh! She kissed a boy on the hand! The girl is not, however, scared off, and simply finds her way to a different Torah scroll. And the more the girls press upon the Torah scrolls, the more the boys stick out their hands in order to intercept a kiss, and if this doesn't work, they look for a chance to touch a girl, by the hand, the forehead, or at least by the blouse. These were the most joyous moments for the young boys.

★★

This year, the *Schul* was even more lit up than most years. The new chandelier, donated by *Reb Moshe der Geveer*,[48] hung over the right center of the *bimah*, and all three of its candle holders were filled with half-pound candles, which together provided for a large, central flame. Everyone stood in wonderment at this powerful source of illumination.

– Well, look what we have lived to see in Dereczin! – a young homeowner was overheard to say – a chandelier of this kind should only be suitable for a synagogue in Vilna!

– Not bad – someone answered from the side – We have no reason to be ashamed of our synagogue. I have seen something of the world, but I haven't seen many synagogues like this one.

I used to dedicate my entire attention with the greatest interest to comments of this nature. But this time, I felt like it was going in one ear and right out the other. I hear the names of cities, people, things, and so forth, but I feel that right now, for me they have no meaning. My entire attention is riveted on the *bimah*. Every couple of minutes, I glance over there. It is, however, too early.

– Will she come to the *Hakafot* too? – a question

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47 The ritual marching of the Torah scrolls on *Simkhat Torah*.

48 A rich man

that had been nagging at me for several days already.

My eyelids fluttered tiredly, just as if a weight was continuously pulling on them. My heart beat wildly, and my thoughts were mixed up, as if in a stew.

I hadn't seen *Chaykeh* since the Fast of the Ninth of *Ab*, from that day on, when my child's heart first imbibed its first love, and my mood suddenly acquired a peculiar quality, which enveloped me in nebulous secrets. But from that time on, she didn't leave my fantasizing for one minute. Her pale complexion, her coal-black shining eyes, and her black curly hair, cut short, entranced me; I could not get her red blouse, and her rose-striped short skirt, which she wore at that time, out of my mind. Wherever I would look, I would see *Chaykeh* first, and then she became the reason I would look. Especially her eyes, they didn't let go of me for a minute. – I'd be studying, reading a book, and they would intrude between the lines, between the words, and totally addled my senses. My happiest moments were when I would go to sleep. No sooner would I lie down, than my imagination would begin to construct a picture of a paradise in which she and I were the only living beings.. – we are both sitting in the forest, in the same spot where on the Ninth of *Ab* we gathered berries. We are sitting close to one another, much closer than at that time... and are looking at one another with wide-open eyes. Not the same as then, when our eyes met, and then hastily were lowered to the ground; – I take her hand, and try to imagine in my mind, what it would feel like to hold her soft, warm hand in mine. I take her other hand, and look deeply into her eyes. She looks at me ashamedly, blushes, and shudders confusedly. Her lips part, she wants to say something, but doesn't have the capacity... My ardor grows stronger as a result. "Oh, *Chayelkeh*!" I call out to her lengthily, "Do you love me as much as I love you?" She turns pale. I let go of her hands and throw myself face down on the ground; My eyes fill with tears, and my heart beats so strongly and quickly. My head is so disoriented, and so pained. I try to find a place to lie my head. I put it here, and then there, until I crawl over with it to the hem of her dress. – The smell of the new cardboard box strikes me full in the nose. A fresh stream courses through my heart: I feel as if a new world is opening up for me, with a new life that not long ago I had no hope to aspire to. I literally get hot. – I want to press her to me, to feel her warm, fresh body, to kiss her every part of her body. But I become ashamed of my own thoughts, and I lower my hands in inaction, and I give her a look that asks for pity.

That is the way I used to start this dream sequence, from the same scene. Quite often, I would try to invent new versions, new positions, but naturally feeling, that in this very scene – at that spot in the forest where we really at one time sat together – I could not come up with any variation. I would often get very confused, not being able to come up with a completely original fantasy sequence. And so, I would return to the same, familiar scenario, which I had so well rehearsed, that it seemed to me that we actually lived it, and in this manner I would put myself to sleep every night.

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A loud slap was heard over the *ammud*, and the voice of the *gabbai*, that the "bidding" for *Atah Har'Eta,*[49] was starting.

It started with "three gulden and ten groschen," and gradually rose, ten groschen a turn, until it reached thirty-six gulden. Two of the settler families bought it together in partnership. They allocated four of the readings as follows: to the Rabbi, to Reb Moshe,[50] to two other prominent homeowners, and the rest they kept for themselves. They mangled the Hebrew, and yet the congregants followed repetitively, and smiled at their provincial accents.
Standing with my uncle, and reading with him from one *Makhzor*, I noticed a couple of youngsters starting to move towards the *bimah*. I understood that there must be girls there already. Oh, did my heart start to beat wildly. It told me that *Chaykeh* was certainly there already, but I couldn't decide to go there; I was afraid that she wasn't there yet. It was more pleasant for me to stand here, and imagine that she really was there – so near to me...

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49 The opening recitation of the first *Hakafa*.

50 Presumably *der Geveer*

Finally, I found some will, and went nearer to the *bimah*. I situated myself between two pillars, from which vantage point I could see the entire company of girls, who were all to one side. There were, however, so many, that it wasn't possible to see any single individual clearly. I searched for a red blouse and a rose-colored dress. But, there was none to be seen.

As I came closer to the girls, acting as if I was just walking by, I hear one of the girls say: – *Chaykeh*, look! Here's *Shloimkeh*! I didn't hear an answer, but I sensed the predicament that she found herself, and from which my face burned.

Chaykeh was sitting on a bench with a friend of hers, at the rear of the company of girls. She was wearing a white dress with a folded over black edging on a sailor's collar. The outline of her bosom showed the onset of womanhood. She looked much more attractive than at the time of the Ninth of *Ab* in the forest. Her eyes looked bigger and more sparkling. I looked at her, and she at me, and instantly our glances were diverted to the surroundings.

Oh, if she only knew what I thought of her, especially when I go to sleep, what would she think of me? – A thought ran through my mind that warmed me all over. She knows already that I'm not as shy as I'm made out to be. When I took her hand in the forest that time, she looked at me with an expression as if one said: "*Feh!* This doesn't become you! Today, after such things, what I permit myself to think of her...

I started to get all confused. I thought everyone was staring at me, and they see everything that comes into my mind. Every second was for me an eternity. I didn't know how all of this would end.

Fortunately, one of my friends approached me, and we started to talk about other matters. I felt a little distracted.

This self-same friend knew *Chaykeh* well, and also the second girl that sat with her. He went over to them, and I barely tagged along with him.

A general conversation started up between us immediately, and I detected an embarrassed satisfaction in *Chaykeh's* eyes. I took that into account.

In the meantime, the *Hakafot* had commenced.

The young people at the rear of the synagogue made a move to get closer to the *bimah*. A complete mishmash ensued. Boys, girls, all together. Everyone sorted themselves out in two lines and aligned themselves, deciding who would use their hands to touch the girls, and who the Torah scrolls.

I came out standing in the second line, opposite *Chaykeh*,-- every time my glance met hers, I felt like some new magic enveloped me. I stood in thrall, hoping that she would not look at anyone else in the same way. I began to wish that it would have been better had she not come at all...

I stood as if addled in the senses. Three of the *Hakafot* had already been finished, and I hadn't kissed even one Torah scroll. *Chaykeh* also had not touched a single Torah scroll. Palpably, my restlessness had also made an impression on her.

Suddenly the fourth *Hakafa* procession begins to arrive. Someone had given *Chaykeh* a shove, and she practically fell with her mouth on the Torah scroll. She couldn't so anything else but give it a kiss.

All at once laughing burst out *Berel*, the carpenter's sleepy-headed son stuck his paw under her mouth, and the kiss fell on it.

My mind became inflamed.

– You boor! Lout! – my voice rose up out of my throat. If I had the capacity to at that moment, I surely would have killed him.

Chaykeh reddened, looked at me with moist eyes, and went out.

I thought my heart would break.

The Sinai Colony

By Chaim Zvi Miller-Sinai
(Original Language: Hebrew)
Translated preface supplied by Sol Phillips without attribution)

Dedicated to my gentle daughter, *Dina*, of blessed memory, chaste in thought and deed, who was taken from us in the prime of life, during Passover of 1955.

Ch. Z. M-S.

Introduction

Myriads of cities and towns in the countries of Eastern Europe and in its center, in which the Nazi Asmodeus exterminated the Jews who lived there for centuries, continue to remain in their place. In some of them isolated [Jewish] families still reside. But even those that were completely cleansed of a Jewish presence, where no Jewish foot treads any longer – their names have not been erased, and their existence will not vanish from Jewish memory, since many of them were places renown as centers of Torah scholarship, such as: Volozhin, Mir, Radin, Slobodka, Telz, and others; or that they produced people [of repute] such as: The *Gaon*, Rav Eliyahu of Vilna, Reb Levi-Yitzhhak of Berdichev, Rav Yisrael Salanter, and others; or because rabbis lived there who authored books during their residence, and by virtue of such authorship, the name of the town was preserved through their writings.

Only the place where I was born, a Jewish village comprised of thirty farming families, called "Sinaiska" was completely eradicated from the face of the earth, and from which there remains no trace [memory] at all.

I was jealously possessive of my birthplace, where members of my family lived for more than a century – they plowed, spread seed, planted, and earned their livelihood with the labor of their hands, and there remains no memory even of the beautiful name, "Sinaiska," that only with tremendous energy and effort was extracted from the ruling authority. Now, in the sunset of my life, when I am the only one left, who knows about the undertaking of those who founded the village from its very beginning, I said that I would set down my recollections in these few pages, which I absorbed from firsthand sources, from my father, of blessed memory, from my grandmother, my father's mother , of blessed memory, who were among the original founders of the place. This feuilleton will serve not only as chapter and verse on the village – it will tell of its history to my progeny, and to all those who emigrated from Sinaiska, wherever they are, and from it, they will understand the trials and tribulations endured by their ancestors in subduing and possessing the place, and those of them that live in the Land of Israel will recognize, when they come to it, the difficulties associated with absorption and the conflicts with neighboring peoples in the early days of the settlement of Jews in the Holy Land.

Preface
(Supplied with Translation)

Chaim Zvi Sinai-Miller was born in 1885 in the Sinaiska area of Slonim. He studies in the Yeshivot at Slonim and Volozhin. The following is an account of the settling of this village, and the trials and tribulations of its settlers as related by him.

I was inspired by the great events of the outside world (the Dreyfus trial, etc.). The Dreyfus trial influenced me greatly. I came to the conclusion that the only solution to this problem of the Jewish nation was Zionism: and this became a driving force and an integral part of my life. It was very important that I settle in the Land of Israel.

During World War I, I left Lithuania and went to Poltava in the Ukraine. I talked about Zion ism constantly. We all suffered greatly du ring the [Russian] Revolution. My only goal was to settle in Palestine. From Poltava, I went to Dereczin, where

I was a Hebrew School teacher and taught many students. In 1926, I emigrated to Palestine, with my wife and three children, to a village called Moriah. We were subjected to great hardship there. In 1929, the village was attacked by neighboring Arabs. We were saved by an Arab leader, who lived in a nearby village, whom I had previously befriended. We left this village and moved on to settle in Ramat HaSharon, where I taught Torah.

Note: In Ramat HaSharon, he was a member of the governing municipality and Chairman of the Religious Advisory Committee. A boulevard in this suburb was named after him. There is a plaque on this boulevard, which reads as follows:

"Chaim Zvi Sinai-Miller, may he rest in peace. He was a pioneer of Ramat HaSharon, a man of Torah and keeper of the eternal spark of God, whose light many follow."

The Jewish Settlement of Sinaiska (This is Kolonia-Sinaiska)

In the expanse of White Russia, among the gentile villages and Jewish towns, there was to be found a slightly unusual village. In many ways it was a village like any other village: [it had] barns, stables, vegetable gardens and fruit trees. Surrounding the houses – wooden houses with straw thatched roofs – were fields for growing grain, and fields of pasture; and the farmers – farmers obviously experienced in cultivation, harvesting and threshing. But they have a different appearance: [the grown men] are bearded, their heads are covered, and they don't have the [same] Russian features as the other farmers in the area. These were Jews. On every door a mezuzah was hung, And in the middle of the [village] street, a synagogue stood, built of brick with a slate roof, which in comparison to the wooden houses of the farmers was a beautiful building indeed; and they had their own Rabbi, and also a ritual slaughterer, and they would retain teachers for their children by invitation from out of town. Jews lived here, good and straightforward workers, and they died here. Here, children were born to them, and here they married them off, and with the rest of world Jewry, they awaited the Final Redemption that would come in the future. It was in this manner that the village existed for more than a century, until the Holocaust, a calamity unprecedented since the destruction of the Second Temple. The town was erased from the face of the earth, all the houses were burned down, the synagogue was razed to the foundation, and the land was divided up among the farmers in the surrounding area.

The name of this town is "Kolonia-Sinaiska" which was in the Slonim area, seven kilometers from the town of Dereczin. Even though the name "Kolonia" is a general name, and the name "Sinaiska" – a specific name, it was the accepted practice in the area to refer to the town as "Kolonia" only.

This Kolonia, in which I was born, and among which my ancestors were founders – was established approximately in the year 1835. This parcel was one of the possessions of Prince *Sapieha* , leader of the rebellion against Russian rule in 1831. After the rebellion was put down, and when the prince fled the country to exile, the government confiscated all his property. In those times, there was a plan formulated by the rulers of the state and Czar Nicholas I to convert some part of the Jewish population of Russia into farmers. It is possible that the motivation came from a desire to cause the Jews to become assimilated into the Russian nation, and for related reasons, to transform the Jews into a productive element of the population. Let us, however, leave the clarification of this point to historians. One of the properties of Prince *Sapieha* was allocated to this Kolonia. In those days, in the period of the Cantonists, the *khappers* spread through the villages like beasts of prey, they seized Jewish children, and turned them over to the [Czarist] Army for a twenty-five year tour of duty. A part of them were lost[51] among the gentile population, and a portion died in childhood. Those who adhered to their Judaism suffered terribly. The poet, *Chaim Nachman Bialik,* in his ballad, *Jonah the Tailor,* described that era:

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[51] An interesting choice of Hebrew metaphor: the writer uses the root for 'becoming ritually unclean.'

Like one carrying a nursing lamb,
Or a suckling sheep from the flock,
So the orphan was snatched from a house,
A child from the room.

And the government, in order to attract the Jews to working the land, excused those who became homesteaders and became farmers – from having their sons taken to army service for twenty-five years.

And families who had largely male children, and were perpetually engulfed by the terror of having their offspring grabbed by these kidnappers, they were attracted to the concept of 'productivity' and abandoned their homes, their commerce and livelihood, in order to take up agriculture. They gave no thought to their talent to undertake land cultivation under harsh conditions, with no help from the government or any other organization. And in an area of hostile people who looked with derision and contempt on these Jewish farmers and there agricultural labor.

My grandfather, Reb *Ze'ev* who was blessed with many sons, on whom the fear of kidnaping weighed heavily, was also captivated by this idea. He lived as a man of means in the town of Novy Dvor, near Grodno. He sold all of his possessions, pulled up stakes in order to settle in Kolonia in order to work his [parcel of] land. My grandmother, *Chaya Sarah*, of blessed memory, was gifted with a good memory, and descriptive skills. In my childhood, I very much enjoyed listening to her stories of how this little agricultural spot was established, and how enchanting the place was in its [natural] beauty, there being majesty and glamour imbedded all over. The palace of the prince, where the settlers first came was eye-opening. Large windows, doors made from precious woods, worked with etchings and carving, a spacious orchard with choice fruit trees around the palace. Stables set up with all needs for cows, and even a pool of water to bathe them with. Additionally, with every pail of water that was drawn, you would bring up live fish.

The settlers came from various places, and at the outset, there was no connection between them. When they all came in to occupy a single house, and with every family having a lot of children, this was disruptive to the creation of an orderly community life. This settlement was quite different from the settlement in the Land of our Forefathers. Here, in our land [sic: the Land of Israel] [the concept of] settlement stems from an idealistic objective, of a Return to Zion, from a deeply seated longing of two thousand years to free ourselves from the chains of the Diaspora, to cast away forever the walking stick of the wanderer, to rejuvenate the ancient homeland, to re-awaken ourselves, and to live an ordinary life like any other nation among the nations of the world. Secondly – this marvelous ideal united the *olim*[52] and made a single family unit out of them, 'with one heart and one mind,' before they even became familiar with one another. Third – those who came to possess the land took limitless encouragement from the fact that they were neither alone nor forsaken. Behind them stood the *Makhon*[53] to help them, so they won't fail, with an eye out to ensure their success, and shepherding them along with the blessing, "may your hands be strengthened." But those there, in that settlement, in those days in the wide expanse of Russia – they had no shred of an ideal around which to rally. The fled out of fear of the kidnapers, they went onto the land without any skills or direction. Without any form of help or support, into the middle of a gentile community, saturated with hate and full of jealousy, over the good portion, this beautiful asset, that had been turned over to these Jews. On top of this, there was a completely negative attitude from the Jewish communities in the surrounding area toward these farmers. They were perceived to be prodigal sons, who had abandoned the way of life of Jews in the Diaspora, and were taking up the ways of gentiles by working the soil, and on that count would fall away from the Torah, and its commandments, thereby ultimately assimilating into the larger gentile fabric. They related to them as people of a lower station, and of lesser worth, – they were 'peasants' in their eyes.

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52 I choose not to translate this word as 'immigrants' so it retains its special meaning for those who 'go up' to the Land of Israel, i.e. make *aliyah*.

53 Referring to the agency land cooperatives.

A half century after the establishment of the town, I personally experienced this attitude. I recollect, when I was a youngster, about age nine, I was studying in the adjacent town of Zelva, and the boys in the *Heder* distanced themselves from me. They tagged me with the name, 'son-of-the-peasant' from Kolonia, notwithstanding the fact that I excelled in my studies.

It is understood that under such circumstances, a significant portion of the settlers became disappointed with the hasty step that they had taken, when they had abandoned their businesses, and their homes in order to come here. They gave evidence that they had consumed their remaining resources, and returned, regretting that they had come, and having left behind bitterness and resignation. From all the ranks of the settlers, a small clutch of people stayed behind, whose conviction was focused on staying, and to come to grips with all the circumstances that lay ahead, and they were prepared for every trial and sufferance that lay ahead of them. It was in this fashion that eight families remained, that formed a pact to establish this Jewish village, and these are the families:

1. *Miller* - from Novy Dvor
2. *Becker* - from Knishin
3. *Kresnovsky* - from Sokhobolya
4. The *Spector* family
5. *Stein* - from Brisk
6. *Dlugolansky*
7. *Sirota* - from Yashinovka
8. *Cohen*

They left the palace. Over time, as people passed through, the palace became a guest house, seeing as it was not appropriate for use as a dwelling. For this they selected a parcel that was centrally located to their farmland. This was [also] close to the road that led to the nearby towns. Apparently, those that remained were the ones who were people of means among them, because the money they brought with them was sufficient to sustain them during the time that they built houses, stables, barns, household goods, and work implements, primitive though they were. My recollection is that my grandmother, of blessed memory, expressed herself in this way:

"Mir haben gebracht a gantzen zekel mit gelt." [Trans: We brought a whole sack full of money.]

I don't have any idea exactly how much money this was.

Even before the farmers began to construct their homes in the location of their choice, the Russian [governmental] administration took no interest in them. It [the administration] was aware of the rate of abandonment on the part of many in that area, and thought that even this remnant would not be able to hold on, and in the end they would all leave. But after the houses were built, along with the remaining structures, and the place started to look like a real village – the government took notice of it, and the first thing they did was give it a name, and of all things, after one of the church saints: this colony was designated to be called *Konstantinovka*, after St. Constantine. When this became known to the farmers, they sent a delegation to the district officials and presented their objection, explaining that since this was a Jewish town, they proposed to call the village by the name, *Sinaiska*, after Mount Sinai, on which the Jews received the Torah, which is a light unto all nations. After [many] explanations and entreaties, the regime agreed to their recommendation, and from that time on, the settlement was called *Kolonia-Sinaiska*. It is appropriate to emphasize the nationalistic and religious feelings of the peasantry in those years. The settlers felt that the era of contention and bitterness had ended, to groping along an endless path, and that they were entering on an ordinary life trajectory of a people who worked the land. With hearts full of hope, they approached the preparation of the land for seeding. The land was rich, from among the choice parcels of the surroundings, and it had been left fallow for several years, and was rich with [agricultural] potential. With an enthusiastic attitude, they put in a great deal of energy into their work, in the expectation of excellent crops which will improve their circumstances, and will help them to forget the bad experiences that they had to date.

They sowed their seed with great joy, and a blessed rain came and wet Mother Earth. The fields grew green and were a feast to the eyes, and they thought surely they would see the words of a song of Israel come to fruition: "a crown of the year of your

goodness." But alas! The gentiles from the adjacent villages deliberately let their sheep and cattle onto the green fields of the Jews, and these animals devoured everything, literally ' in the manner of hungry oxen.' These few Jews, who saw their joy turn to sorrow, literally wept when they saw what these wicked neighbors had done to them. They attempted to get compensation, but nothing resulted from this. It was in this manner, that several years went by, of suffering and disappointment, in which they barely sustained themselves with the meager yield from those parcels that were closest to their homes, or the ones that were at a goodly distance. Even when they sowed, there was nothing to reap. The surrounding villages, who covetously cast their eyes on the land held by the Jews, were certain that after the trouble and heartbreak that they were causing them – the patience of the Jews would give out, they will forsake the place, and then the gentiles will be able to move in and take possession of their good fields. But how true are the songs of Israel:

> *"For like arrows in the hand of the valiant, so are our youth;*
> *Fortunate is the individual who has filled his quiver with them."*

The sons of the farmers, who grew up as children of the countryside, in the expanses of nature, were fired up, confident and focused on returning a fitting retribution while still young, being only sixteen years of age. The depredations of their wicked neighbors kindled a vengeful fire in their hearts, and they waited for that day, when they would grow up and feel that they had the might in their hands to take revenge upon the gentiles.

At last, the hour arrived. They spoke among themselves, and arrived at a decision: This is the end of it! From tomorrow on there will be no hoofprint from the herds of these uncircumcised infidels on their land! They fashioned whips of intertwined barbed wire, with a round stone stuck at the end of the whip. Impatiently they waited for daybreak, and very early in the morning, when one could not yet distinguish white from blue, they set out, imbued with an heroic spirit, riding on their horses to the grain fields that bordered on the fields of the gentiles. As usual, they found the herd of cattle grazing in the midst of the grain stalks. The shepherds were dozing peacefully, without an inkling of what was about to happen. Only the barking of the dogs – so they thought – awoke them from their slumber. Only when they saw the youths mounted on their steeds did they become alarmed, and they yelled for help to the villagers who were working the fields nearby. They sped from all sides, and the battle was joined. The gentiles, who were surprised by the strength of the "Young Israelites," and their courage, were alarmed, they became victims of the ensuing pandemonium, and they did not have the will to continue the fight. After sustaining some pointed beatings from the young men, who smote them hip and thigh – they fled. The young men seized the herd, and brought it back to their settlement where they penned the animals up, until such time as they were compensated for the damage caused. The Jewish farmers did not stop at this point. They killed two roosters, and poured the blood on the scratches and lighter wounds that they had sustained, in order to intensify the impression of their ordeal. They quickly mounted the better of their horses and thundered off to the town of Dereczin, the location of the local government office, and they submitted a complaint regarding the incident and the attending damages. The impression made was quite strong, reinforced by the appearance of their wounds and the copious amount of blood on the clothing. And if, in connection with complaints that they presented from time-to-time, they received no response because they could not provide witnesses, this time the bruises and the many bloodstains on their clothes were like a hundred witnesses, and the authorities could no longer refrain from discharging its duty. An order was issued, at the behest of the municipal authority, to immediately summon five of the elders from the nearby town in order that they be flogged. And they were publicly flogged on that very same day (in those days, flogging was a common punishment). And they were further warned in this connection, that if they allow their herds once more to tread upon the land of the Jews – they'll get double lashes, and with that they levied a monetary fine on them for the damage they had caused. The beating they got, the lashing they received, and the money they had to pay – these three things together with the intervention of the authorities on one hand, and the Jews on the other, made an impression. The relationship went from one extreme to the other.

The neighbors came together because of this, and established cordial relations as befits equals. There were, among the gentiles, those who looked upon the Jews with respect: I recall, that when I was a little boy, when a gentile from the surrounding area would enter our home, he would take off his hat, and didn't have the temerity to draw near until my father, of blessed memory, told him that he had permission to approach.

From that day on, a transformation occurred in the temperament of all the residents of the settlement, rooted in the recognition that everything that had gone on in the past had evaporated and vanished, and from this day forward, they would not reach destitution, and will see a return for their labor. Nonetheless, they never achieved great wealth, but they had bread to eat and clothing to wear, and they were content with their lot. They had a ritual slaughterer at all times, who also served as a teacher for the youngest children. They would retain the services of two [additional] teachers from nearby towns during the school season. They would pay them a set amount of money for half the year, apart from the meals they would take at the homes of their students. They did not have a permanent Rabbi, because thirty families did not have the means to support a Rabbi who was also a family man.

About twenty years before the First World War, a young Rabbi came to this place, and resided there permanently until the outbreak of the War, this Rabbi, who subsequently became well-known as one of the Righteous Men of his generation, was far removed from worldly experience, from its tumult and hubbub. Having found a quiet little retreat where he could study Torah and say his prayers among straight and simple people who tilled the soil, who live by the labor of their hands, he was able to fulfil that which is written:

> *And he saw tranquility, that it was pleasant;*
> *So he put his shoulder to it, that he might take part of it.*

He injected the love of Torah and the fear of God into that place, and brought more suitable teachers, and stimulated parents to send there children to centers of Torah scholarship. And he influenced the parents of scholastically gifted young men, who demonstrated an ability to master advanced Torah study, to send them to the great *Yeshivot*, such as Volozhin, Radin, Slobodka, and Telz. I recall, that in comparison with nearby towns, where one [student] would be enrolled in one of the afformentioned *Yeshivot*, – from our community of thirty families there were five. And there was no bounds to the affection of this Rabbi for a Torah scholar. When I would return home from the *Yeshiva* for the holidays, he would embrace me with great joy. It was through his many initiatives that a synagogue was built, a stone structure made of brick, with a slate roof in the center of the settlement, which amidst the wooden houses of the farmers, thatched with straw, took on the appearance of a magnificent castle.

This Rabbi was HaRav *HaGaon & Tzaddik Rav David Yitzhak Magen* ל"זצ , who went to the Holy Land in 1927, and took up residence in Jerusalem. He was known there as the Rabbi of Dereczin, and he passed away at the onset of the Second World War, but was privileged yet to be interred on the Mount of Olives. He was survived by two married daughters: one married to *Rav HaGaon Aharon Weinstein*, a *Rosh Yeshiva* and author of books on the *Halakha*, and a second, married to the great Rabbi, *Rav Hillel Witkin*, a worker and Headmaster of the Beth Joseph Yeshiva of Novogrudok. His son is *Rabbi V.M. Magen*, Principal of a state-run religious school.

It was in this manner that several decades went by, and the farmers of *Kolonia-Sinaiska* conducted their lives as if on still waters, raising their children to lives of Torah and honest labor. Those who were scholastically talented – continued to learn, and those skilled to work – went into agriculture or other forms of labor. Idlers or shiftless individuals, which was common to the urban middle class – were not to be found. Nonetheless, they worked hard, although their demands from life were not many, and they made do with what was given to them, and most were content with their lot. After the Russian pogroms of 1905-6, a noticeable change began in the settlement; most of the young people immigrated across the ocean, especially to the United States. The settlement lost almost all of its young people, and only the very old and very young remained. The

central reason was this: the farmland had already been subdivided into thirds and quarters of the original land holdings of the settlers, and didn't lend itself to further subdivision, in order that it be adequate to provide any sort of a livelihood. In those days, Jews were forbidden to accumulate land assets.[Under these conditions] Young people did not see any future in working the land. An additional factor was the wave of immigration, that swept over the entire Jewish Pale of Settlement like a powerful tidal wave, which took up many in its wake, and among them were the youth of the settlement. This was a bad turn of events for the settlement, whose results were emotional, and immediately recognizable: the gentile neighbors from the surrounding villages, on seeing the outflux of Jewish youth, reverted to their old behavior, and began to permit their herds to graze the Jewish farmland. As it was during the early years, they took advantage of every opportunity to do so. And once again, the thought entered their hearts that sooner-or-later, the Jews would leave, and they would be able to take over their lands. The spirit of the farmers weakened under the influence of these forces. The force of creativity was undermined, and the farmer, even as he walked in the furrows behind the plow, would have the following question constantly burrowing in his mind: "whom am I working for?"

They continued to carry on in this way, without much expectation for the future, until the outbreak of the First World War. The retreating Russian Army put the town to the torch, setting fire to all four corners, and all of it went up in flames, up to its synagogue. The Jews, who were driven for several weeks already to an adjacent village, returned and entered a nearby village to take up residence, all the residents of the village, who were Russian, fled to the interior of Russia for fear of the invading Germans, and the villages were emptied of their occupants.

The Jews took this opportunity to work the abandoned fields of the gentiles in addition to their own lands. And in light of the fact that the price of grain rose during wartime, buyers were found, and they were able to earn a significant enough sum of money, to rehabilitate their property in *Kolonia-Sinaiska* after the war ended. And yet, it seemed that conditions would continue to improve, a new cadre of young people came of age, with an inclination to do the work, with the lot of the farmer in those first years after the War coming together rather nicely, without suffering at the hands of their gentile neighbors who had returned to their places, because at the end of the War, that vale was annexed to [the new republic of] Poland, and the village peasantry was Russian, and they were afraid to raise their heads. The ruling of a Polish judge was so abhorrent to them, that the most virulent invective one man could hurl at another in the heat of an argument was : "I hope you have to stand trial before a Polish judge!"

Years of quiet returned to the settlement. They built houses much nicer than the ones they had before the War, the roofs were slated, and even the synagogue was renovated and repaired, and returned to its normal place. However, not many years went by before the price of grain plummeted disastrously. Even dairy manufacture did not bring in much income, and the economic circumstances of the farmer deteriorated. When H. Sitkov, the emissary of the "Farmers Cooperative" in the Holy Land came to Poland in 1924, with the consent of the Palestine Mandate government, to recruit experienced farmers and their families to come to the Holy Land, people sped to him, and enlisted as eligible for *aliyah*, and in time, twenty families, consisting of about 100 souls made the journey. Most of them, as did most [at that time] settled in Rishon LeTzion, and a few families went to Petakh-Tikvah, and Netanya. All eventually attained a measure of peace and land entitlement. Those left behind in *Sinaiska*, about five or ten families, were as if orphaned, and they were left forsaken. Smitten by a loss of spirit, and emotionally pained, they continued to reside there until the outbreak of the Second World War. The terrifying Holocaust engulfed them. The filthy Nazis razed the settlement, and transferred its Jews to the neighboring town of Dereczin, and threw them with the rest of the Jews of that town into a ghetto. And on that bitter and overzealously prosecuted day, which was the Tenth day of the Month *Menahem-*

Ab[54] 1942, they were exterminated together with the Jews of Dereczin. And this is how the end came to the settlement of Sinai, a Jewish agricultural settlement that existed for more than a century. Everything was destroyed. The land is now worked by the gentiles of the surrounding area. No trace remains of the settlement, as if a Jewish foot never had trod the earth. Of the families that founded the settlement, more than twenty families live in Israel, and several tens of families are scattered in lands overseas, especially the United States. All are established, and a number of them have achieved great wealth. Her sons – among them are those of high intellectual accomplishment, including talent in engineering, that are recognized as inventors.

moistened the furrows of black loam, and whose prayers called down the rains of heaven on their fallow land. Let the sons [of coming generations] read this chapter, and read about it to their sons and tel them this tale, and their children to the generation after them.

In order to preserve the name and memory of my birthplace, I changed my family name from Miller to Sinai, and I have raised a marker to my forbears who walked after the plow, and whose beads of sweat

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54 This is significant insofar as it is one day after the Ninth of *Ab* – *Tish'a B'Av*, which commemorates the destruction of both Jewish Temples in Jerusalem.

From the Mouth of My Mother, of Blessed Memory

By Yaffa Prozbol

(Original Language: Hebrew)

I am a native of Dereczin, the daughter of *Haya-Esther & Yaakov-Raphael Salutsky*. To this day, the stories of my mother, of blessed memory, come to my mind, about our town, and its way of life.

Distinguished rabbis were leaders of the Dereczin Jewish community, and among the lay community there were also many who studied and learned, among them many who sat and learned days at a time, from one prayer session to the next in the *Bet HaMidrash* on the *Schulhof*. Among these was numbered my grandfather, *Abraham ben David*, who would rise in the dead of the night, at about three-thirty AM, go to the synagogue to pray, to learn and to teach a page of the *Gemara* and to read for those gathered a chapter from the *Mishna*. This was the way those in town who studied would 'sit on the Torah' until noon, the hour at which they would go home to eat and rest, in order to return after their rest to prayer and to the *Gemara*.

And additionally, my mother who bore me, may she rest in peace, told me about the handshake agreement between my grandfather and grandmother: grandfather, as I said, spent his entire day learning and teaching, while grandmother took care of household affairs, occupying herself with the preparation of wine and honey mead, and supervising the work on the parcel of land that was in the control of the family, raising and supporting the entire family, consisting of her six sons and single daughter. On the occasion of the marriage of their eldest son, there was much joy, and in honor of this festive occasion, the two of them, my grandfather and grandmother agreed on a handshake, that half of the benefit earned by my grandfather (who occupied himself solely with prayer and good deeds), in the World-to-Come, after his allotted One Hundred Twenty Years, would accrue to my grandmother, who was the provider and took care of household affairs. They formalized this agreement legally...

It was from my mother that also heard stories and legends about the house of the Duke to which Dereczin belonged. The duke, who ruled at the beginning of the last century,[55] was a good-hearted liberal man, according to my mother, who heard this from her grandmother, and she from her mother before her, and so it was handed down from generation to generation. Once, coming through the door of his palace, and spying the decrepit house of the mother of *Hasia-Faygel* in the distance, which appeared to him to be "standing on chicken's feet," ordered it taken down, and a two-story dwelling put up in its place.

The duke had a son, and in the days of the uprising of Poland against Russia, he was promised dominion over his liberated possessions, if he will lend his support to the rebellion. The son came to his father, and attempted to persuade him also to join the rebels against the Czar, but his father refused to take heed of his son's advice. Legend has it that the son poisoned his father. After the Polish rebellion was crushed, the son fled into exile, and the Russians confiscated the assets in the duke's home, and converted his palaces to royal use.

My mother, of blessed memory, told me, that when I was still a little girl, my father took me in his arms, and brought me to the market square to see the great miracle that had first come to our town – a horseless carriage. It was said, at the time, that the driver of the car that he was the grandson of the duke, owner of the palaces, the beautiful orchard, and possessed of the good heart.

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[55] This was likely a *Sapieha*, and the reference is to the early 1800's

At the Dawn of the Twentieth Century

In the Days of Change and Transformation

By Jacob Kobrinsky
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photos: *The Levitt Brothers – Sitting Herschel, Standing Berel* (p. 72)

As one of the sons of Dereczin who left their birthplace at an early age, I was not close to the initiatives that motivated that marvelous generation which lived there between the two world wars, the generation that was incinerated, as all the Jews of Poland from that time were, [not close to] its means of sustenance and international values, which paved the way to the establishment of the State of Israel, and the rescue of masses of people. It is to our great chagrin that only few, a small number, were so saved, while the majority were left behind in graves.

★★

When I reach into my memory for the Dereczin that I recollect, I return back to those early years at the dawn of the twentieth century. The little town is nestled among the impressive buildings of the golden age of Poland – the large fortress and the remaining palaces of the Duke,[56] in which the soldiers and officers of the Czarist Army were billeted, along with other officials of the regime. We, the Jews, lived in adequately spaced houses, built in rows a handbreath on either side of the market square, and also in flimsy houses that seemed to be constructed without any order or plan on the way down to the river.

On market days, and on the Russian Orthodox holidays, the large market square would fill up with the wagons of the farmers from the nearby villages, until there was no space left. Alongside the wagons, and in the adjacent stores, business is being conducted, and we children, are catching snatches of the intonation of the strange language being spoken, that our parents resort to with some difficulty. Towards the end of the day, the square became emptied, and the farmers traveled back to their villages, and the Catholic 'townies' went to their homes on the outskirts of town, and the town center reverted to being an exclusively Jewish quarter. The Jews then began, for the afternoon and evening prayers, to stream toward the spiritual center, the *Schulhof*, where three *Batei Midrash* were clustered, along with the large, beautiful synagogue, which was silhouetted against the sky, with its typical roof, alongside the old cemetery. What a good feeling and sense of beauty descended on these holy places, especially during the major holidays, the High Holydays and *Simkhat Torah*!

And these days were harbingers of change in the lives of the Jews: new ideas, challenging trends, increased anti-Semitism, and the footfall of the approaching upheaval, slowly but surely began to erode the solid signposts in their way of life, one of which stands out in my memory as most vivid of all. This was my grandfather, and mentor, *Reb Ze'ev Wolf Lev*, the *Dayan*. He sedulously observed the commandments of the Torah and its interpreters without any compromise, read only the works of the Sages and learned rabbis, and dismissed as rubbish any challenging [external] thinking. On *Yom Kippur*, he would not leave the synagogue from the time of his arrival for *Kol Nidre*, until the blessing of the moon at the nightfall of the observance. During the holiday night, he would snatch a short nap on his bench, and the rest of the time he would recite chapters from the Psalms, and selections from the writings of the *Kabala*. My grandmother supported the family with a small store, and when it was necessary for her to leave it, for some reason, and my grandfather was left to mind the store, he found it extremely difficult to conduct transactions with non-Jewish people. When he became a widower in his seventies, he turned over his house and assets to his heirs, and he himself went up to the Holy Land. I recall with what pride I sat with my grandfather and parents in the wagon that took us to the railroad station in Zelva, and how after us, came a long line

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[56] Seemingly, yet another reference to the works of the *Sapieha* family.

of wagons and pedestrians – literally the entire town came out to wish farewell to my grandfather. Subsequently, he settled in Jerusalem in one of the *Kollel* institutions, but he did not live very long thereafter.

My parents, *Reb Aryeh-Leib and Rivkah*, were already 'exposed' to the new winds [blowing through] the Jewish world. My mother was one of those women in Dereczin who knew how to read and write Hebrew in an open [free] manner. She even peeked into the modern literature of the time, but she was sharply critical of those writers and authors who wrote about non-traditional subjects, and were derisive about the faith. She was the one that townspeople turned to, when they needed enveloped to be addressed that were sent to the United States – in those days, knowledge of the Roman alphabet was a rarity in Dereczin.

My father practically instigated a 'revolution' when he decided to enroll me in the 'Revisionist *Heder*' established by the teacher, *Abraham Izaakovitz* (who came from Mikhoysk), who attempted to teach reading and writing using the method of *Ivrit-B'Ivrit,*[57] using the textbook, *Eden HaYeladim.*[58] My father, and his friend *Eliyahu Abramovich*, the tavern keeper, nurtured the seed of the *Maskilim*[59] and subscribed to the Hebew newspaper (*HaTzefira*, which later became *Zman* - the Times), and read the creations of our authors and poets.

However, sharp and fundamental change came to our town on the wave of the Russian upheavals of the years 1904-5. It was as if the entire town was drugged. Young men and women, from all walks of life, mostly from the '*Badgessel,*[60]' would congregate at the *Bet HaMidrash,* and orate about their ideas over the objections of the synagogue functionaries. On the Sabbath, and sometimes during the midweek towards the evening, large groups of the 'brothers and sisters' would parade with red colors, with the songs of revolution on their lips, to the outskirts of the town behind the *Ma'agilkes* (the Christian cemetery). Workers demanded an increase in pay, and once actually went on strike. Muscular young men would come around and shake down the wealthy for protection money (a 'self-protection' organization), they distributed labor organizing leaflets, brought outside union people from the big cities, marched with red flags, and of course, there were run-ins with the constabulary. A part of the bourgeoisie, and most of the common people sympathized, even warmly with these young people, but even so, they could not forgive them "because they say there is no God."

Not many days went by, and this upheaval was suppressed, and all of its external trappings disappeared. But the way of life in Dereczin, especially of the young generation underwent a transformation, a daily Yiddish newspaper became compulsory in each and every home. Emigration surged upward. Many young men left, not to go to the Yeshivas, but to secular schools, or to learn a trade. And a new custom arose: unions that were not arranged by a matchmaker, but rather 'out of love.' In secret, the 'self-protection' organization began to operate again.

The younger generation in Dereczin became driven by the challenges of the times, and was hurled headlong into them with the outbreak of the First World War.

In those days, when I was on the threshold of maturity, having gone through growing pains of investigating what was over my head, faith and its abandonment, the secrets of nature and the human soul, the ways of the world both Jewish and gentile, etc. – I loved carrying on extended conversations with two of my friends who were inspiring – and yet both of them had ideas that were at extremes from

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57 This is the pedagogic technique of teaching a language by using the language itself in the instruction, literally, 'Hebrew with Hebrew.'

58 Literally, the Eden of the Children.

59 Disciples of the *Haskalah*

60 The meaning is not completely clear: the word suggests the 'little' street where the bath house was located. The inference may be from 'the other side of the tracks.'

one another.

One was *Menahem Mansky*, a man of revolutionary ideas, opposed to religion, and who saw the future of the community and its fortune dependent on the harnessing of the forces of nature, and who saw the ultimate salvation of the Jewish people through the establishment of a society based on equality and justice. The second, was *David Alper*, a man possessed of a profoundly intense sense of Judaism, rooted in the notion of being one of the 'Chosen People." A believer in the eternal existence of the Jewish people without hesitation or doubt, who yearned for the realization of the Zionist ideal. He was not well-read in books having to do with the debate of ideas, or natural phenomena, and in contrast to this, he literally ingested volumes of philosophy of the Jewish philosophers, and those of other nations, and was aroused especially by the new Jewish poetry which appeared at that time already in its greatest glory.

Menahem Mansky went to Moscow, where because of his good skills, immediately obtained a distinguished position with the Soviet newspaper establishment. During the 1930's we lost all contact with him, and according to what we heard he fell victim to the [Stalinist] purges. And *David Alper*, true to his creed, became one of our better teachers in Poland during the years between the two world wars, and as the headmaster of the Hebrew Gymnasium in Pinsk, he was responsible for inculcating a love of the Jewish people into many students, and to encourage them to make and consummate *aliyah*. Most of his students [in fact] did make *aliyah*, and he, himself was planning to do so himself, except that the *Tormenter*[61] may his name be for erased, got to him first. The master educator fell at his post.

61. A euphemism for the Nazis.

A Torah Scroll

By Fanny Boyerman-Feder
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photos: Copy of a letter from R' Gavriel to R' Simkha-Isser in America, requesting him to remit funds speedily to his wife to cover the cost of writing the Torah scroll. (P. 74)
Rabbi Plotkin (p. 75)

This story took place in the year 1907 or 1908 when *Rabbi Leib Luner* passed away in Dereczin, and there were no funds to provide a proper headstone for his grave.

My father, *Simkha-Isser*, may he rest in peace, went out across the entire town, and went door-to door, once, and then again, until he was able to accumulate a specific [sic: the necessary] amount of money. [From this] it would be possible to place a beautiful headstone for the deceased rabbi, and a small amount of money remained afterwards from the funds raised by my father.

As it happened, at that time, a pauper came from a faraway place to solicit alms, and he fell sick in Dereczin, laid for a short while in a sickbed, and expired. My father takes an interest in the deceased pauper's family, sends for his widow, and assumes responsibility for arranging the funeral. We host the poor widow for a couple of weeks, and send her home with a few rubles. Needless to day, this poor woman does not have the means with which to fund a headstone, so my father, once again, made the rounds around town, and gathered money from the *balebatim* for this purpose.

In assembling these funds, my father computed that, after providing a headstone for the grave of this deceased poor man, a tidy sum of money would be left over. [From this} he conceive the notion that with this remaining money, together with an additional sum he would contribute from his own pocket, that he would commission the writing of a

Torah scroll.

So, he went off to *Yudel the Scribe*, and took counsel with him. The idea inspired *Yudel*, and the two of them applied themselves to the endeavor.

Yudel the Scribe ordered the best quality parchment from Warsaw, and it took a while until the Torah scroll was completed.

And when the Torah scroll was completed, my mother, *Hindeh*, may she rest in peace, baked and cooked for three days and three nights, to prepare the repast for the Feast of Completing the Scroll. Flyers were sent to the surrounding towns, and many rabbis came for this great [festive] celebration.

Our father felt himself to be the principal host for the entire celebration.

After the feast and all the formalities, the question was posed as where the Torah scroll should be domiciled. It was decided to do this by lottery, and the lots cast were in favor of *der Alter Mauer* [synagogue], which was the place where the town rabbi made prayers.

This caused yet another occasion for celebration in the town. Can you imagine: a brand new *Sefer Torah* is to be installed in a synagogue – no small thing! We grab a bite, and the brand new Torah is carried under a canopy from our house on the *Neuer Gasse*, to the *Schulhof*, with care not to go past the church. The young folk got a pail of kerosene from *Sholom Pinoyer*, and soaked rags in it, and carried torches [lit from this]. In all the houses that we passed during this parade, there were lamps lit in all of the windows. The Torah scroll is escorted with song on the lips of the entire company, and all the faces are shining with joy.

When the procession drew near the *Schulhof*, the Jews brought out all of the Torah scrolls from each and every house of worship, and came towards us in a welcoming procession for the new Torah. The community celebration lasted well into the night, and by the time the new Torah scroll was deposited in the ark of the Old Synagogue, and the company dispersed to their homes, dawn was beginning to break.

Our father counted himself as the happiest man in the world, and our mother radiated with joy, and she was exceedingly proud of her husband's accomplishment.

Shortly thereafter, our father departed for America. He arrived there during the time of a severe economic crisis, when many people were unemployed. He worked extremely hard, under bitter conditions, and yet from his meager wages, he was able to send back money to Dereczin to help build a new ritual bath. At that time, he [also] brought me to live with him in America.

He yearns, however, to return to his roots. After spending a couple of years in America, he returns to Dereczin, and I stay in America. To me, he said, that he is going back home, where *Shabbos* is *Shabbos*, and *Yuntiff* is *Yuntiff*, and Jews can live as Jews. When he arrived back in Dereczin, my mother wrote to tell me that all the Jews came to greet him. In those days, it was not a trivial thing to survive such a long voyage from America to Dereczin.

My father, indeed, brought back some dollars with him to Dereczin, but could not find an occupational outlet for himself. After another bit of time back in his hometown, my father decided to go once again to America. With him, he takes my two younger sisters and a brother, and leaves my mother and two younger brothers in Dereczin. He agrees with mother prior to his departure, that as soon as he can find suitable housing for the entire family, and get himself established and organized, he will send back ship tickets for her and the two brothers.

However, at the time that father arrives in America, with three young children, the First World War breaks out. This was in 1914. Contact between America and the 'old country' was broken. A couple of years later, America also is drawn into the world war.

During the war years, father was unable to discharge his plan concerning those whom he left in God's care, my mother, who was ill, with two small children. Meanwhile, the Russian Revolution breaks out, the sovereignty in that part of the world changes

periodically, and we get no news at all from Dereczin.

Finally, when the war ended in 1918, we received a letter from Dereczin, with the sad news that our mother had died, along with one of the two younger brothers. *Meir*, may he rest in peace, died at the age of 13 in a typhus epidemic. Our youngest brother, *Kadish*, remained alone in Dereczin.

At the same time, a letter comes from Rabbi *Plotkin*, with a request to help find the Rabbi's relatives in the United States, who originally were from Minsk. It was not the easiest thing in the world to track down the rabbi's relatives. Our father attended several meetings of the Minsk Society, and in the end this finally led to him finding a cousin of the rabbi, who was a ritual slaughterer - a *shokhet*. In 1920, when Rabbi *Plotkin* visited the United States, he was indeed able to meet with his kin.

When Rabbi *Plotkin* arrived in America, he first sent for my father. I accompanied my father to this meeting. It was three days before Passover.

Rabbi *Plotkin* embraced my father like a long-lost brother. The hosts receive us with great respect, and father begins to inquire about his youngest child in Dereczin, about the family in general, and about everything and everyone.

The Rabbi says: "Reb *Simkha-Isser*, relax, sit down, and I'll tell you everything, whether it is about your son, or about Dereczin. Thank God that we are able to see each other again in good health. But before anything else, Reb *Simkha-Isser*, I want to tell you that I have brought you a gift..."

My father is astonished: "A gift for me? From Dereczin? Rebbe, I need to give <u>you</u> a gift for Dereczin, not you to give one to me..."

"Reb *Simkha-Isser*, I have brought you a gift," the Rabbi reiterates, in a quiet but firm tone, " I have for you the Torah scroll which you commissioned to be written in Dereczin!"

At this point, my father lodged a complaint: "See here, Rabbi, you removed a *Sefer Torah* from such a sanctified location, from our old *Bet HaMidrash*, and you brought it <u>here</u>, to a *treyf* country?!

Rabbi *Plotkin* replies: " I know, Reb *Simkha-Isser*, that you are an observant Jew, and I [also] know how much time, work, energy and money was expended until this Torah scroll was completed..."

And, it was in this manner, that the conversation between my father and Rabbi *Plotkin* ensued for several hours, during which time the Rabbi related to my father what his plans were for his American trip, and he also solicited a variety of suggestions from my father. As the hour was growing late, my father arranged with the Rabbi that in a few days, the second day of *Hol HaMoed* of Passover, a Tuesday, the Rabbi would be a guest for dinner at our home.

Rabbi *Plotkin* then wished us a Happy and Kosher Passover, and I left with my father to go home. On the way home, we decided to invite several other Jewish relatives and acquaintances to dinner with the rabbi.

To our greatest sorrow, Rabbi *Plotkin* came to our home, not on Tuesday, but on Monday, the first day of *Hol HaMoed.*. And he came, not to a festive holiday dinner, but for the funeral of my father. My father died suddenly on the second day of Passover.

I do not remember who brought the Torah scroll to our house – father, or Rabbi *Plotkin*. I do recall, however, that during the days when we sat *Shiva*, the Torah scroll was used for reading.

When we left home for work, I was so afraid of either a fire or theft, that I asked our relative, *Zalman Friedman*, that he should take the Torah scroll to his place, and turn it over to our *landsleit* from Dereczin.

There were those among our *landsleit* who proposed that the Torah scroll be sold (it would have fetched about a thousand dollars at that time) and that the proceeds be sent to Dereczin to provide for the needy Jews there. However, the majority of the Derecziners were opposed to this proposal. It was decided to establish a Dereczin *Landsmanschaft* Synagogue, and this Torah scroll, which was commissioned by my father to be written in Dereczin, was taken into this synagogue.

This synagogue was situated in Brownsville, a

neighborhood of [Brooklyn] New York City, which at the time was largely inhabited by Jews.

A short time back, I became interested in determining the fate of this Torah scroll, and the Dereczin Synagogue. All these years, I live far away from Brownsville. To my sadness, I discovered that the synagogue had not existed for many years already, the neighborhood had completely turned over, and most of the Jews from their had moved to other neighborhoods in New York. I did not find the Torah scroll, and I do not know where it is. I hope however, that I will have the opportunity to continue to search for it.

Rabbis, Scholars and Teachers

By Malka Alper
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photos: *The Melamed, R' Yosheh Abelovich* (p.77 Top)
R' Meir Yanovsky ('Meir der Melamed') (p.77, Bottom)
The Teacher, Leib Abelovich (p. 78, Top)
Y. Pintzov, Teacher of Russian Language (p. 78, Bottom)

When I cast a glance at Dereczin from the perspective of many decades later, I can confidently say that my town stood – without exaggeration – on a very respectable cultural level, even by today's standards: all children of school age were enrolled in study at a *Heder*, or in *Talmud Torah*, or under the tutelage of a rabbi. And Dereczin was blessed with good rabbis and scholars.

The scholars that I remember were: *Reb Meir Yanovsky (Meir der Melamed)*[62], *Reb Alter (Alter Deikhess), Hirschel der Lehrer, Reb Leib Abelovich,* who later emigrated to America, *Abraham Izaakovich (der Mikhoisker), Reb Leib Kobrinsky (Leibeh Meite's),* and others, whom I can no longer recall.

When the *Talmud Torah* came under the oversight of the *Hevra M'Fitzei Haskalah,*[63] before the First World War, they began to teach arithmetic there also to the children.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the *Haskalah* movement, with the concept of promoting the study of Russian language and other general education in middle-level schools, began to do so as well in my town of Dereczin. The instruction of children in Russian was begun, preparing them for gymnasiums, taking advantage of every opportunity to utilize the skills of qualified or trained teachers, such as the pharmacist, and *Mordechai-Yankel Lansky* (the father of the well-known Hebrew poet, *Chaim Lansky*, who perished in Siberia), and *Pintzov*, and *Motkeh Izaakovich*, and others. More and more spheres of skills were encompassed and harnessed through the spread of general education. Young people champed at the bit, to leave the town, and Pale of Settlement, which was far from the railroad, even without a spur to the train station, to

[62] Spelled *Yanofsky* in the USA. Father of Sarah Slotnick; originally from Zelva.

[63] The Organization for Dissemination of the 'Enlightenment,' a progressive movement.

break out into the larger world. The long and the short of it was – one wanted to be "a person, alongside other people, on an equal basis."

The religious *balebatim* did not want to, and could not reconcile themselves, to permitting Russian to be the language of instruction for the children. What is to happen to *Yiddishkeit?* A page of the *Gemara? Reb Velvel Meite's* the Talmud teacher, in his older years, after his wife passed away, went to the Holy Land; the Talmud teacher from out-of-town, hired by several of the *balebatim* to come to Dereczin to teach the Talmud to their children, found it necessary to return home after a couple of years. Can this be? No *Gemara?*

In this instance, it was Rabbi *Plotkin* who came to the aid of the *balebatim.* He organized the parents, and arranged to send the young boys to study at the Yeshiva of Szczuczyn. He, the rabbi, took responsibility to escort the boys there to the Yeshiva. As he said, so did he do. To the best of my recollection, this group [of boys] consisted of: the Rabbi's son, *Moishkeh Plotkin, Shmuel Shepshelevich, Shmuel Abelovich, David Alper, David-Zelig Epstein,* and his brother, *Berel, Joseph Dykhovsky, Berel Sakar,* and several others. The rabbi accompanied them, arranged for where they would be given their 'days' of food, and lodging – in a word, he erected a wall as a barrier against assimilation.

In those years, in the beginning of the twentieth century, the yeshivas were already not so hermetically sealed off from the influences of the *Haskalah,* especially not opposed to the influence of Hebrew language. The young men began to look into the pages of the new Hebrew books of prose and poetry, which they would conceal inside the folios of their Talmud volumes. When they came home for the holidays, at the end of a school period, one would hear them singing songs written by Bialik or Tchernikhovsky, carry on literary discussions, or general themes of public interest, such as Zionism, the Bund, Hebrew, Yiddish, etc.

It was in this way that the modern Yeshiva students sought a synthesis between the *Gemara* and the new national imperatives, in order to inject a little modernity into the Jewish-national thought processes, into the life and learning of the young people.

Indeed, the debate surrounding the Hebrew-Yiddish issue took on a concrete form, when a Culture Club (*Kulturverein*) was founded, at the initiative of Bundists, and a library for Russian and Yiddish books was opened. The pro-Hebrew faction, who also joined as supporters of the Club, demanded that a section be set aside in the library for Hebrew books as well, in order that [the library] be given a truly general nationalist character. After some heated discussions, debates, and lobbying, they were able to carry out their agenda in large measure, and a section for Hebrew books was created for the library.

Those who were caught in the yeshiva reading a *treyf-possul*[64] pamphlet, such as the poems of Bialik, or other authors, or books by the new Hebrew writers, were forced to leave the yeshiva. Fairly advanced yeshiva students, already close to ordination, used to wander between the smaller yeshivas, looking for an opportunity to complete their studies and reach their objective.

Der 'Mikhoisker' and His Progressive Heder

I will tell of one of the exponents of Hebrew and secular education in Dereczin – about *Reb Abraham Izaakovich,* who is remembered as *der Mikhoisker.*

When I came to his *Heder,* at the age of seven, he had already educated a couple of generation of students, among them were such that were already studying medicine at the university, or pedagogy at Steinberg's Teachers' Seminary in Vilna.

His progressive *Heder* was very well received in Dereczin. There were two sessions taught: until noon, Pentateuch, Prophets, Hebrew and Prayers (*davening*). In the afternoon – reading and writing Russian, penmanship, and arithmetic (the afternoon sessions were conducted in Russian). Both boys and girls received instruction in his progressive

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64 Impossible to translate the sense of loathing that comes with the notion of being ritually unfit for human consumption!

classroom, in which they sat as equals but in two separate groups.

His classroom was to be found in his own small house, which stood off to a side on the *Neuer Gessel*. The house was divided into two parts, and a large dark foyer separated his private quarters from the *Heder*. The windows of the small house were set close to the ground, and in the winter, during the great snowstorms, they became obscured by the snow, and it was necessary to learn by the light of kerosene lamps which hung from the rafters.

Reb Abraham Izaakovich was an intellectually accomplished Jew. Apart from Jewish reference material, he was knowledgeable in Russian (his children were education by the Russian method – in high schools), and German. He made use of a *Tanach* with Mendelson's commentary. Often, his discourse on the *Tanach*, peppered with German phrases, was unintelligible, almost as bad as the source material itself.

His classroom took on a much improved appearance when he built himself a new house, a wooden construction, with nice windows and well-lit rooms.

Reb Abraham went through many changes of situation as a teacher: he ran the progressive *Heder* until the First World War, then there was a period during which he was unemployed during the German occupation; later, [he was] a teacher of Jewish religion and German language in the German school, which the occupation forces established; and at the beginning of the 1920's he taught Hebrew (*Ivrit B'Ivrit*) in the middle classes of the *Tarbut* School for a number of years – until is children brought him to Russia, where he was not comfortable.

His memory and his pedagogic and scholarly accomplishments are woven into the history of Dereczin, quite apart from his skillful leadership in school education from the end of the nineteenth century until the end of the first quarter of the present [sic: twentieth] century.

Our Town at the Beginning of the [Twentieth] Century

By Naftali Ben-Dov (Dykhovsky)
(Original Language: Hebrew)
Translation by: Miriam Kreiter

On restless nights, as I lay tossing on my bed, the image of our town appears in my mind as I remember it from sixty years ago. These recollections are always accompanied by feelings of pain and grief over the destruction of Dereczin.

Our town was small and impoverished. There were no paved roads, and no railroad passed through it. In

order to get to Slonim, the seat of the district, we traveled for an entire night in the well-known wagon of *Sholom Hirsch*, of blessed memory, the only coachman on the 'Slonim-Dereczin Line,' seemingly having a franchise for that line. Most of the travelers were tradesmen who had business contacts in Slonim, and occasionally people who had business to attend to at the regional government offices.

Dereczin's contact with the outside world was through the railroad in Zelva, a distance of two hours by [horse-drawn] wagon. And those who were fortunate, got to Zelva, which was endowed with a railhead that led to all the cities of Russia and the outside world.

Every day at noon, a wagon drawn by two horses would bring us the mail. At 3:00PM, the mail would leave for the train.

There were two coachmen who served this 'Dereczin - Zelva Line.' I remember their frequent quarreling very well.

The only hotel in town, an inn for transient people, was the hotel of *Beckenstein*, in his home, a building of two stories in the center of town.

Because of this, a hidden envy lay deep in the hearts of Dereczin residents relative to their more affluent neighbors in Zelva, but they understood that their town, Dereczin surpassed Zelva in its spiritual qualities. Beginning with the great rabbis who served the community of Dereczin, up to the time of our national liberation, Dereczin was known as a seat for learning, study and reflection. Its Jews were blessed with lively thought, a yearning for scholarship, and Zionist activities.

We find testimony to all this here in Israel and in the Diaspora, among the remnant of Dereczin residents, who are doing everything they can, to perpetuate the glory of the little community of Dereczin, destroyed and annihilated during the Second World War.

Haskalah, the Bund, Self-Defense

By Chaim Rabinovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

The old, traditional way of life continued without being threatened until the beginning of the twentieth century. On the threshold of the new century, the new winds of the *Haskalah* blasted through even our little town, and with them came – the rise of new, revolutionary movements.

The Thirst for Knowledge

In those years, there suddenly appeared among the freshly arrived students in our *Batei Midrashim*, also those sort of young boys, who would conceal under their Talmud volumes and on their learning stands, all manner of *treyf-possul* books. I remember one such student, who was a relative of *Reb Leib Luner*, an outstanding scholar, who brought to Dereczin all manner of Hebrew books and Russian periodicals, such as Восхóд,[65] and Еврéйская Увозерня. [66] We would study together with him in *Chevra Shas,* and he would, from time-to-time discuss worldly and scientific matters with us; He also permitted us to read selected pamphlets of his.

It didn't take long, and a number of our small-town, more sheltered young folk (please understand, with a Talmudic education and religious inculcation) began to see in front of them a new world with entirely different horizons. A little at a time, they began to look beyond, and free themselves of the atmosphere of the *Bet HaMidrash*, and quite frequently began to strive towards a more cosmopolitan education. A portion of them went off

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65 *Voskhod*, a periodical. Means 'ascent.'

66 A Jewish Periodical, *Yevereiskaya Ovozernya*, or Hebrew Courier.

to our district seat in Slonim, and began to study there in existing [more] worldly schools, such as the Евре́йская Учи́лище, and the Городская Учи́лище.[67]

Young people who lacked the material means to go and study out of town, began to dig in for themselves into the books of the *Haskalah*. A little at a time, they began to distance themselves from the *Gemara*, and began to learn Russian, Hebrew, and a variety of intellectual disciplines from which they had heretofore been distant.

A few of the Dereczin youth decided to go to the major Jewish cultural center, to the "Jerusalem of Lithuania," – Vilna. That place [was a magnet] that drew many hundreds of Jewish young people from the cities and towns of the Pale.

It was in this manner that the following went away from Dereczin to Vilna in those years: *Pesach Dworetzky, Ezer Weinstein, Katriel Gelman, David Poupko, Leibeh Abelovich, Aaron Rabinovich,* and the writer of these lines.

Naturally, for parental consumption, this meant that one was going to Vilna for the purpose of continuing Torah and *Gemara* studies with the famous scholars to be found there. In reality, as soon as these young men, who for the first time in their lives, and in the lives of Dereczin youth in general, were exposed to a large, tumultuous city, with a populous young intelligentsia, they were drawn into spheres and circles where they immediately became infused with new ideas and pursuits.

Haskalah & Revolution

It was in this manner, that these former small-town, provincial young people, threw themselves with their entire enthusiasm and energy into the world of *Haskalah* and general education. There were no shortage of teachers in Vilna – Instructors from the Jewish-Russian Teachers-Institute, and students from the university, would provide lessons, and lectures on all subjects to the newly arrived knowledge-thirsty students, for a small fee, and often free of charge.

Large, famous libraries, where stacks and reading tables stood at the disposition of those willing to learn, who wanted to continuously absorb the Russian language, and other languages, and read, literally swallow, the books written by the best that were available. Especially, they interested themselves with disciplines which to this point they had not been introduced, such as, science, anthropology, cultural knowledge, general history, etc.

The larger portion of the Jewish youth in Vilna was, in those years, already involved in the general Russian revolutionary movement and in Jewish socialist circles.

It is no wonder, that these Jewish young folk:

> which always saw in front of its eyes the terrifying tragedy and chronic martyrdom of the Jewish people, the life without civil rights of the Jewish masses in despotic Czarist Russia,

these Jewish young folk:

> who, with smoldering anger and clenched fists, heard the news of the pogrom of Kishinev, and the hounding of Jews and excesses against them in other cities in vast, dark Russia,

these young folk:

> raised in their hometowns on Torah concepts, such as 'love thy neighbor as thyself,' and the vision of the prophet Isaiah of the 'end of days,' –

That these Jewish young folk seized upon the ideals of socialism, of freedom, equality, and brotherhood. They saw, in their youthful fevered dreams, the immediate coming, in the near future, that New World with its New Order, in which slaves and oppressed nations will be liberated from their chains and their poverty. For this Jewish youth, socialism

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67 *Yevreyskaya & Gorodskaya Uchilishcha:* Jewish and Municipal Academy.

was the new Messiah, a modern one, real, and for which it would not be necessary to wait so long.

The First Bundists

A specific circumstance arose in that the small circle of Dereczin youth happened to land in a neighborhood where there was a certain active cell of Bundists. {The Bundists] immediately began to nourish our young folk on Bundist literature, and by applying its entire energy, normally focused on agitation, it so influenced the thinking of these former yeshiva students, that it didn't take very long before they were spending their time studying this 'new Torah.'

The new [sic: Bundist] "Rebbe," was extraordinarily pleased with his pupils, who had honed their intellectual skills through study of the Talmud, and [therefore] quickly absorbed the new disciplines of political economics, and other socialist knowledge, and philosophical teachings. Our Bundist neighbor provided a variety of lecturers to our circle. These Dereczin inspired young people saw before them a new world, with entirely new and unlimited prospects. A little at a time, they distanced themselves from their studies of the *Gemara*, and from their one-time plans and dreams. They agreed to bring back to Dereczin, the ideas of the new, socialist Messiah.

After having spent a year in Vilna, we traveled home for the holidays, with our travel cases full of illegal revolutionary literature.

The first act, on the part of these newly-minted socialists, was to tear down the wall between the young people from the family of the *balebatim*, and the young people from the families of the working class and those of the poor. They started to pal around with the embittered working class young people. They did this, having cloaked themselves in the Marxist truth, that these productive laborers were in reality the true role models, and not the *balebatim.*

In Dereczin, the majority of young working people were employed in the big factory of the partners, *Bialystosky-Goldenberg*. Among them were circumspect, yet savvy workers, with whom we immediately joined up, and began our fomenting of agitation.

As their first objective, the Bundists saw the need to organize an economic strike against the 12-hour workday and the attendant low wages. The older workers, who did the "dirty" work in the factory, worked 14 to 15 hours a day, and earned 3 rubles a week. Even the older, more observant people were intrigued by the new "revelations," namely, that it is possible to improve ones working conditions through a strike, and thereby better both one's salary, and lot in life. It didn't take long, and the younger workers, together with some of the older ones of poorer circumstance, gladly seized upon these new ideas, which promised to better their bitter condition, and in the process bring a New Order with a paradise for the working class. A temporary organizing committee of the factory workers was created, of which I remember the following persons [who were members]: *Moshe-Yaakov Abramovich, Leibkeh Shalkovich,* The *Jezernitzky* brothers from Ruzhany, *Nahum Blizniansky,* one *Motkeh,* a worker from out-of-town, and another couple of younger workers, such as the daughter of the blind musician, the children of *Shlomo* the water-carrier, *Moshe Grachuk, Arkeh (Aharon)* the synagogue crier's son, *Berel,* the hatmaker's son, *Temkeh Bricker – Elieh Paretz's son,* etc.

A strike broke out in the factory, and after a sharp conflict, almost all of the demands were met: the workday was shortened, and the pay scale was raised. The 70 year-old "dirty" workers now had more time to go to the *Bet HaMidrash* and recite a chapter from the Psalms, and a couple of more rubles on which to live; the young workers got a bigger pay raise, and more free time to attend illegal assemblies and to read illegal literature.

Meetings in the Forest

The period of summer vacation was utilized by the returnees from Vilna to foment agitation. They found clandestine quarters, far behind the barracks, which was rented from a certain Christian butcher for six rubles a month. For this sum, her was also obliged to stand watch in the street for the entire time that the secret meetings took place, to look for

any strangers who might accidentally chance upon the location.

At these meetings, the first session was devoted to lectures about the meaning of socialism. Excerpts were also read from Philip Krantz's *Kultur-Geschichte*, and Bogdanov's *Political Economics*, which had already been translated into Yiddish.

Apart from these sessions, on every Saturday afternoon, the various Bund supporters were called from their homes by means of [pre-arranged] signals and code words. One at a time, they would go off to the *Visoka-Gur* Forest which was about 3km from town. There, larger meetings and discussion [groups] took place, which continued until nightfall came. Then one would silently part from one another, and quietly return to our respective homes. People at the fringe [of this activity] were unaware of these clandestine gatherings for quite some time.

The conspiracy was a strict one. A newly proposed member underwent and extensive investigation, and was observed for a significant amount of time, before the committee designated him as a full-fledged member. Special men and women took care of orienting and assuring the adherence of new recruits to the tenets of the group, and controlling them. After the decision to admit a new prospect, that individual was sworn in with a oath to be intensely conspiratorial, committed and decent, also in their personal conduct and demeanor. Drunkenness, card-playing – this was strongly prohibited to the membership.

The general 'Vilna Group' used to return to Vilna after the holidays, in order to continue their studies and to complete their development in socialist spirit. During all this time, they maintained a clandestine contact with their comrades who remained back home in town, sending them periodically, by all sorts of means, secret illegal literature and proclamations. From the center in Vilna, various reference materials were also sent to the clandestine meetings in the forest. The larger part of this entire effort was aimed at raising the spiritual and cultural level of the masses that had been oppressed for ages, and to rectify their condition with respect to their human rights.

In the course of a couple of years, a library was created in our small town of Dereczin, which housed over a thousand books in the Yiddish language, and also a certain number of Russian books, for the few Christians and those townsfolk who were drawn to the Bundist circles. In order to promote general socialist objects, it was necessary to maintain contact with the town, and train people who would be able to act as membership recruiters, a circumstance that was to prove quite useful later. Among the comrades, were two talented non-Jewish shoemakers, *Juzik* and *Stepan*, who taught themselves to read and speak Yiddish.

I am reminded of an interesting episode, that took place in those years, involving those two Christian shoemakers. One night, a couple of professional thieves in Dereczin broke into their shoemaker's shop and proceeded to rob them of all their possessions. The Bund organization reacted swiftly and sharply. Saturday afternoon, when the thieves appeared in the *Ager-Sod* park, at a pre-arranged signal, they were surrounded by a group of young people armed with revolvers. The thieves were soundly thrashed, and compelled to return their loot. At an order from the Bund, they were driven out of town for a long time.

Intense Conspiracy

The Bund organization developed systematically, and in time numbered over one hundred comrades. The number of readers, and volumes available, also grew at the library. The local committee stayed in continuous contact with the founding group, which was studying in Vilna and Bialystock. A clandestine correspondence was carried out between Dereczin and the afformentioned two cities. The messages were sent, that is to say, from one private person to a second individual, since friends were in the habit for sending each other letters regarding personal matters, but between the lines, it was usual to write about organizational issues, utilizing a goose feather dipped in lemon juice. The secret writing became legible only when the letter was held up to a kerosene lamp. For reasons of security, in order that the confidential deliberations of the organization not fall into the hands of the Czarist police, we would constantly be looking for all manner of alternatives [to communicate]. So it was, that we, the

intelligentsia, became compelled to give lectures, and to read from illegal publications, to gatherings of young workers. The gatherings used to assemble in upper stories of buildings, always in the evening hours. In order to disguise the true purpose of the meeting, one male and female member were outfitted as a bride and groom, with bottles of whiskey on the table along with food. In the event of a surprise visit from the police, the pamphlets were immediately stuffed out of sight, and the assembled young people began to "carry on the *Simkha*," whether it was an engagement or a wedding. You should understand that we would always honor the visiting police with a couple of drinks, and with that, get rid of them.

It is necessary to remember, that in those years, all the party members were pure idealists, and no ambitious plans were either thought of, or made, by the rank and file membership. The one career that awaited every one of them was – exile to Siberia. Because of the intensity of their conspiracy, members were carefully chosen, and well-controlled, and it was seldom that there was an instance of betrayal, or being turned over to the authorities. Socialism at that time, was accepted as an ethically pure ideal, that demanded loyalty and decency from its adherents. Nobody in those years could imagine, that in the end, these ideals would be crippled by a socialist leadership in socialist country, and to debase the worth of an individual human being, and inaugurate such terrifying deeds against those who offered their lives for [the advancement of] socialism in Russia.

This is how the endeavor proceeded for a number of years. The original founders, who would return at least annually from Vilna or Bialystock to visit their parents, continuously managed the intellectual work, and occupied themselves with developing the knowledge and awareness of the working masses. During those years, they were the ones responsible for maintaining the revolutionary spirit among the circles of the poor, downtrodden and oppressed.

Revolution and Self-Defense

In the years of 1904 and 1905, the general revolutionary movement in greater Russia grew stronger, and from the other side, the reaction of the Czarist regime became intensified. The black-mood, intransigent rulers decided to drown this revolution in rivers of Jewish blood, and they began to organize an array of terrifying pogroms in various sections of the country, pointing to the Jews, and accusing them of being those principally responsible for the revolutionary movement.

The socialist parties on the Jewish side, among them the Bund, decided to establish self-defense groups in all of the cities and towns of the Jewish Pale, which were known by the familiar Russian name, Самооборо́но *(Samo-Oronova)*. A group of this sort, and quite a strong one, was founded by the Bund in Dereczin. From various sources, it was possible to assemble through purchased, about forty revolvers and about a hundred metal *nagaikas*.[68]

It is worthwhile and interesting to tell how the money was come by, in order to purchase the necessary arms for the Dereczin self-defense group. The other factions, such as the anarchists and revolutionary socialists, used to carry out various expropriations, [even] attacking governmental financial institutions, and even private wealthy people, in order to generate the funding for their undertakings. The Bund, as is well-known, was in principle opposed to expropriation, and only seldom engaged in assaulting government financial institutions.

And so it came to pass, that once in 1904, it was agreed with the Slonim chapter of the Bund, to carry out an assault on the Dereczin government post office. From time to time, large sums of money would be kept in the safe there, amounts even up to 100 thousand rubles. The postmaster was at that time a Russian from Kiev, by the name of *Batrokov*, a virulent anti-Semite, and also understand, a big-time card player, a drunkard, and always short of money.[69] The organization, for its purpose, located

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68 A riding crop, or nightstick, favored by Cossack Hetmen as a swagger stick.

69 In other words, *a shayner mensch mit alle myless*. Undoubtedly, had the *Sapiehas* endowed Dereczin with a racetrack, he would have also been remembered for playing the ponies.

a Jew who was well-known to the postmaster. This Jew approached the postmaster confidentially, and made a deal with him, to assemble a large amount of cash in the post office safe by a specific date, and then allow himself to be held up in the middle of the night, when the robbers will tie him up, gag him, etc., understand that according to this plan, he would be cut in for a significant part of the take. To carry out this planned expropriation, several beefy Bundists were selected, who would have to put on military uniforms, and attack the post office at about 2:00AM, in the [dead of] night. Two 'hit men' came from the Slonim Bund chapter especially to help carry out this escapade – a certain *Luria*, and with him, *Shmuel Izaakovich*, known to us from Slonim, who owned a couple of good horses, and was employed often by the revolutionaries for all sorts of dangerous illegal actions.

Everything was ready for the attack. The perpetrators were disguised as soldiers in uniform, and a control group of 'the boys' had the house on *Slonimer Gasse* under observation, where the post office was to be found,. The 'two guys from Slonim' were already stationed with the two horses at the end of *Slonimer Gasse,* behind *Mishkin's* house, ready to make a break for it, with the perpetrators and the money.

Suddenly, someone articulated the thought that the postmaster *Batrokov* could raise an alarm, and offer armed resistance. It was proposed that the attack group would have to take along loaded weapons, and if there was any indication of a hostile reaction from the postmaster, there will be no choice, and they will just have to blow him away. The comrades, who had been designated to carry out the attack, could not agree among themselves to carry out a plan that possibly involved murder, and the entire action was called off at the last moment.

To the best of my recollection, the Dereczin Bund chapter never again undertook to execute plans of this nature, but another way was found to generate the funds for self-defense and the library.

In Dereczin, year in and year out, there were open auctions conducted for forest products, which the government had decided to sell. Many Jewish forest-product merchants from the entire area would attend these auctions. As is usually the case in such auctions, the merchants would enter in competition, and bid each other up by large sums of money. The Dereczin and Slonim Bund chapters agreed to propose an ingenious ploy: before the auctions, representatives of both organizations made their way to the merchants with the following proposal, that they should designate specific forest parcels,[70] on which no competitive bidding would take place, but rather, one designated merchant would buy it in his name at a reduced price. Then after the [regular] auction, open bidding would be conducted privately for these 'designated parcels,' and the profit from that [private] auction would go towards the needs of the Bundist self-defense group. Naturally, the merchants were briefed on the objectives of the Bundist self-defense groups.

The merchants agreed to the scheme, and it was in this manner that over a 2-3 year period, greater sums of money were generated for the disposition of self-defense groups, from which arms were procured for the use of the Slonim and Dereczin self-defense organizations. A part of these funds were used to enlarge the library.

The revolvers were procured through the facilitation of the great Slonim iron merchant, *Nissan Jeserieski*. He had connections thanks to which it was possible to procure these arms from Germany.

After acquiring these weapons, the young people learned how to use them in the fields, where they would meet secretly for practice.

The books for the library were bought in Bialystock. It was there that *Kotik's* Book Publishing company could be found, where it was possible to buy all manner of publications.

Loyal Commitment

In those days, the Bund would get illegal Russian newspapers from Switzerland through a anonymous address. The conspiracy was under very strong

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70 Called *delyankehs* in Yiddish, from the Russian word for 'parcel.'

surveillance, and as a consequence, the discipline was exemplary, and the integrity and commitment of the members was so high and strong, that it is not possible to bring to mind an instance of informing, or internal sedition, despite the fact that the movement conducted a widely diffused and multi-branched operation, with a large library, an armed self-defense group, which recruited fully tens of members in the small town of Dereczin, and conducting secret meetings, with clandestine caches of ammunition, etc.

The bonds of friendship and camaraderie between the members of the Bund were exemplary. There were no paid party officials whatsoever at that time. It was exactly the opposite – more than once, each and every one would commit even their last grosch to support the causes of the organization. Nobody competed or fought for 'position'-- everyone knew only too well, that the more active one was, the greater the risk to one's personal freedom, and possibly also one's life. A sacred imperative ruled the circles of the young Bundists, that they were fighting for a New World, and for the liberation of all mankind. It was assumed and understood, that as the children of the victimized Jewish people, it was incumbent on us to fight for a just outcome. The first objective was to overthrow the monarchy, institute a democratic order, bringing freedom and equality to all, and then anti-Semitism would vanish, and Jews will be able to live in tranquility also among gentiles.

Nobody then was able to imagine what awaited the Jews, and with them other nationalities in Europe, in only a couple of additional decades, after years of socialist endeavor and upbringing among the civilized European nations, with Germany at their head. Nobody could foresee how revolutionary movements and regimes would be able to cripple the high socialist ideals, for which the young people in those days were prepared to even lay down their lives.

Self-Defense Shows Its Might

The Dereczin Bundist self-defense group twice demonstrated its role as an organization of life-or-death necessity, in order to defend Jewish self-worth and Jewish welfare.

The first incident occurred in 1904, at the time of the Russo-Japanese War. A mobilization of draft-age conscripts took place in our district city of Slonim. Several hundred White Russian peasant youth were called there, from the surrounding villages in the Dereczin region.

All over Russia, it was the 'season' for pogroms and all manner of attacks. The black-hearted slogan, "Бийей Жидов, Спасéй Россйю" – "Kill the Zhids, Save Russia" reigned the land. In this spirit, the recently inducted Belorussian recruits, after getting themselves drunk, wanted to 'play around a little' with the Jews. Seeing as they didn't want to make such a bloody scene in Slonim, those who left there after noon to return home, agreed to settle a score with the Jews on the way, in the small town of Halinka.

By coincidence, a couple of the 'brothers' from the Slonim self-defense group overheard the drunken conversation of these young *shkatzim.*[71] They got on their bicycles and went after the gentile wagons. It was in this manner that they were witnesses to a small pogrom that these new recruits carried out against the owners of a couple of poor storekeepers in Halinka. The young *shkatzim* got themselves drunk again in Halinka, beat up Jews, and destroyed small shops.

These perpetrators, on the way home, had to pass through Dereczin. So the two Slonim self-defense group members sped to Dereczin, and told the entire story to the responsible organization. It was very clear, that any moment, the 'caravan' along with the peasant wagons, loaded down with the stolen merchandise from the Halinka Jewish stores, has to pass through the *Slonimer Gasse* in Dereczin.

It was Friday afternoon before nightfall. In an instant, the entire self-defense group was assembled. Armed with revolvers and *nagaikas,* the self-defense group members arrayed themselves along the length of *Slonimer Gasse* in small groups. When the

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[71] Plural of *sheketz* - Hebrew for something to be despised. Used pejoratively against a male non-Jew, pronounced more familiarly, *shaygets* in Yiddish.

wagons arrived, two armed young men immediately jumped up on them, took the reins in hand, and brought the wagon to a pre-arranged location – which was the children's school of the known teacher, *Abraham der Mikhoisker*. There, the gentile wagons were thoroughly searched, the stolen merchandise was confiscated, the *pogromchiks* were roughed up a bit, and then they were permitted to flee to their homes with horse and wagon.

Jews came running from the synagogues, as they were on their way home after the Sabbath *Kabbalat Shabbat* prayers. I remember that among them was the extremely religious storekeeper *Reb Yehuda-Shmuel,* who kept shouting at us: "Little children, may God help you. It matters nothing that you have to violate the Sabbath a bit – it is a *mitzvah* to salvage poor Jewish welfare."

We even force the one police officer at that time, *Ostrowski*, to stand nearby and assist in repossessing the stolen merchandise.

The work of detaining and searching all the wagons took about 2 to 3 hours. In the middle of this affair, from out of nowhere, a drunken postmaster, *Batrokov* appeared, who began to berate the police officer for 'helping the zhids' to attack Russian peasants. He got such a tongue-lashing that he barely was able to get himself away from the scene.

The second incident happened several months later, I think it was already in the year 1905. It was a special Sunday, when thousands of peasants came to town, to go to church for prayers, but first of all they had to get good and tanked. We learned through our Christian security men (we had a few of these in some of the villages), that on this particular Sunday, the peasants were intending to "have some fun" in Dereczin, and carry out a bit of a pogrom.

We assembled the entire self-defense group, and distributed arms and *nagaikas* to all the young men. The youngest of them, called the 'klein-Bund' were given bottles filled with kerosene.[72] After their services in church, and after the peasants had gotten into their cups, an inflammatory compact was established among them. It was clear that there was a specific element among them that was inciting them to attack the Jews in their place of domicile.

Through a pre-arranged fire alarm signal, the readied self-defense group was instantly alerted. The 'klein-Bund' quietly began to set fire to a number of peasant wagons filled with straw. The sound of gunfire was heard from all sides. It didn't take more than a half hour, and not a trace remained of the hundreds of peasant wagons in the town. The peasants drove their horses with speed and fear, and they fled the marketplace like poisoned mice. The Christians knew already then in 1905, of the existence of a revolutionary organization among the Jews in Dereczin.

After these two previously described incidents, which occurred within a few months of each other, the surrounding Christian peasantry came to fear these Jewish youths. Jewish fathers and mothers first became aware of what their children were secretly involved with. The respect shown for these young people grew, to these so-called *Apikorsim.*[73] Ordinary Jews became proud of the organized youth, and dubbed these young people *Hevrei Yosher (Comrades of Justice).* Jews began to understand the reasons why the young people would go off into the forests for meetings, and how this all came about, that the children of the *balebatim* intermingled with working class children and befriended one another.

1905 – In the Breakdown

And it was in this way, that the year 1905 opened. The revolutionary expansion across all of Russia reached its climax. It was generally believed that momentarily, we would see the end of sovereignty for the Czarist monarchy.

In Dereczin as well, the Bund began to feel a little more free, and more confident, and emerged a little from its underground operations into the streets.

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72 Regrettably, it would be anachronistic to refer to these as Molotov cocktails.

73 Plural of the Yiddish, *Apikoress*, meaning an apostate, or non-believer (from the Greek name Epicurus).

I remember how the Bund prepared in 1905 to observe the First of May publicly for the first time. On a specific Sabbath, young people, also from Zelva and Halinka , began to gather in the great park on the opposite side of the *Shifa* River. At sunset, a huge parade came out of the park, with red flags flying, and with revolutionary singing and shouting. The parade went through all of Dereczin, from the *Deutsche Gasse* all the way to the marketplace.

Fathers and mothers ran out of their houses, frightened, shuddering and bewildered – they were terrified that in the very same night their children will be fettered and chained, and exiled to Siberia.

But everything went through peacefully. Indeed, the following morning a couple of gendarmes came from Slonim, with one called *Bolbot* at their head. They immediately went to the Jewish *Starosta* of that time, *Sholom Mansky*, who was well acquainted with these law enforcement people. He talked the matter through with them, and it cost a couple of bottles of whiskey, an a 50 ruble 'donation,' and the whole thing was smoothed out. It was a sort of twilight time all of Russia. Day-to-day, one awaited the overthrow of the regime, and the atmosphere was a bit more free.

In the same year, we permitted ourselves to appear openly at a large meeting in the Great Synagogue. All of Dereczin came to this meeting, the old and young, men and women – everyone wanted to hear what the *Hevra Yosher* would have to say. I remember the astonishment of my parents, and that of other close friends, when they saw their 'quiet *Chaimkeh'* the once shy *Gemara* student, get up to the *Bimah* and delivery a fiery revolutionary peroration against capitalism, Czarism, religion, etc. For sure they bit their nails, with great regret, over the sin of having sent their son to Vilna during the prior year to study Torah. Now it became clear to them that "Vilna had caused their son to stray from the Way."

After this, it was commonplace to hold [such] assemblies and meetings in the *Batei Midrashim*. Dereczin began to treat the Bund as a serious force [in community life]. More than once, the town would approach the Bund on resolving a variety of disputes.

Bit by bit, the working class Jews began to stand up straighter, began to learn and read, intermingled with the children of the *balebatim,* who in turn stopped being embarrassed about labor, and began to detest idleness and 'hanging around' with nothing to do.

In that year, I recall that discussions would take place between the Bundists and the Zionists. The Zionist movement was established during this same period. It also had a strong influence on the development of the younger generation in Dereczin, and on its cultural undertakings.

As everyone knows, the year 1905 did not bring the long-awaited redemption. The revolutionary movement was drowned by the Czarist monarchy in rivers of blood from idealistic youth, workers who rose up and demonstrated for their rights, and Jews subjected to pogroms. After the uprising for freedom was strangled, yet another wave of pogroms descended upon the Jews.

I was witness to the terrifying Bialystock pogrom of 1906. By coincidence, I was stopped in Bialystock, on the way to Dereczin from Warsaw, together with my cousin *Yocheh,*[74] of blessed memory, who later became my wife, and the mother of my martyred children. We were at our friends' in Bialystock, when the pogrom erupted, which lasted for three days, and ended with 120 Jewish dead. Bialystock had a strong Jewish self-defense group – but this pogrom was carried out by members of the military garrison located there, under the leadership of officers brought in from deep and faraway Russia who were re-uniformed. It was very clear that the Czarist regime had organized this pogrom.

A black reaction reigned over all greater Russia after the revolutionary movement was broken. The worker organizations once again went underground, and a deep despondency pervaded their ranks.

Life in Dereczin continued to go on as usual. In the years after 1905, the emigration of young people, to faraway lands across the sea, continued to grow.

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[74] Yiddish diminutive for the Hebrew name, *Yocheved*

However, the wave of cosmopolitan education already had taken hold and was dominant among the young people.

The old way of life was transformed, new disciplines and professions dominated the thinking of Dereczin's young people. The Zionist movement grew, and former Bundists were influenced by it. In general a calm after the storm reigned, but the ideals of freedom did not vanish in those dark years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War.

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Sent Off to Dereczin

By Ray Raskin
(Original Language: Yiddish)

I recall Dereczin and its Jews, who are today no longer with us, with love and pain.

I was not born in Dereczin, but in another town, not far from there. Through a circumstance, I was recorded as a Dereczin citizen, and obtained my passport there in those Czarist days of long ago.

When I was very young, I was impelled to know more about the larger world, and I voyaged to the distant Russian city of Kharkov. I worked there for a woman clothing tailor. Very quickly, I became a member in a secret revolutionary organization. When I was apprehended, I was sent under guard by the authorities to... Dereczin , because my passport identified me as a Derecziner.
In small, tranquil Dereczin, a modest but orderly way of life prevailed. I scrutinized the faces of the residents – worried, overworked people, with insufficient sustenance. I already felt myself to be better off, more developed and better experienced than all of these Jews, young and old alike. I already harbored dreams of a better more beautiful, and more just world , and I was prepared to sacrifice myself for such a world.

There was no secret revolutionary organization in Dereczin at that time. When the citizens of Dereczin became aware that a young Jewish girl had arrived under guard, and was involved with the authorities and the police, they became alarmed. I remember when I went to present myself to the *Pristav* (the Police Chief), many of the townsfolk followed me. Something of this nature had never happened in Dereczin. And when I was already inside the Police Chief's office, I could see inclined faces peering in through the windows. The Chief himself was good and scared as well after he read over my paperwork. In that paperwork, it stated that I had to live in Dereczin under police surveillance. The *Pristav* yelled:

-- "You all need to be strung up!" –

What he meant was all *revolutionaries*. When the crowd out under the windows heard his shout, they fled to their homes quickly and full of dread.

After that, you can imagine, it was difficult for me to obtain a place to live. Only one family had sufficient courage, and rented me a small corner in their dwelling. The people in town were still very uncomfortable with me, the "sentenced one." At night, when I was already in bed, I could still hear voices whispering about me:

– "What is she doing?"
–"She's not asleep yet. She's reading a book."
–"Really?!"

And during the day, when I walked down the street, I could see how stealthily the windows on the small houses would be opened, and the heads of the womenfolk would emerge, with inclined eyes that would follow me:

–"There *she* is."
–"There *she* goes."

It was difficult for me to live in this atmosphere. I

had an opportunity to submit a report to the higher authorities in St. Petersburg, in which I requested permission to move to Slonim, the District capital, where I would be able to get work. Deep in my heart, I hoped that in Slonim there must certainly be a secret revolutionary organization with members that will make it possible for me to have an easier and better existence.

Days and weeks went by. The townsfolk in Dereczin got a little used to my presence, "the banished one," and they were not so frightened of me. People would even say:

– "A Jewish girl, and she strayed from the straight and narrow..."

I even got a job with the Damask cloth tailor in town. Every day, a policeman would come there to verify that I had not run off, because all this time, I was under police surveillance. I already had in my mind to approach and propagandize the two young girls I worked with at the cutting table, to "open their eyes," so that they too, would begin to believe in a better, more beautiful world, and become revolutionaries, like me. I lived with a family (unfortunately I don't remember their names) that consisted of a man and wife, and three children. They had a grocery store. The two little boys studied at a *Heder*. The little girl used to play outside, in the sand, with her girlfriends. The father and mother were totally occupied all week with the store. But when Friday came around, one could feel the onset of the Sabbath in the house. The poor little dwelling was freshened up, and the floor was washed. In honor of the Sabbath, the table was covered in a white tablecloth, on which lay the two *challahs*, covered in white napkins.

All of this was prepared by the mother of the family. She washed the children, dressed them in clean clothes – as befitted the Sabbath. When everything was set for the reception of the Sabbath, she blessed the candles. In that instant, I was able to perceive the day-to-day cares of the week vanish from her otherwise worried countenance. A joyful Sabbath aura spread over all faces, and suffused every nook and cranny.

And just at that moment, the father returned from Schul, walked through the house, and sang the hymn, *Shalom Aleichem*. Everything in the house is joyful with the arrival of the Sabbath. At the table, all are sitting in a more elevated and tranquil state of mind. The children are quiet and attentive, when the mother brings the delicious Friday night delicacies to the table. Afterward, the father chants *zemirot*, and everyone at the table accompanies him softly.

I also sat with them every Friday night at the table. Not willingly, I found myself drawn into the feeling of ennoblement and the beauty of the Sabbath. It was so incompatible with my revolutionary theories against religion, and I remember well my mixed emotions on those Friday and Sabbath days.

Then, a reply came from St. Petersburg, which gave me permission to go to Slonim. I had a heartfelt parting with the family and other people that I had come to know in Dereczin. I packed my bag, and traveled over to Slonim.

And that is the way my short stay in Dereczin ended. For the [short] time, many things and many people became dear and precious to me. The feeling of love for that Jewish Dereczin [way of life] followed me for my whole life, and only became stronger, when it was encumbered by that great, sharp pain after the terrifying destruction of Dereczin Jewry at the hands of the cruel Nazi murderers.

Stormy Years

By Joe Silkovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photos: *Zalman Weinstein, longtime Commander of the Dereczin Fire Fighters* (p. 95)
Rabbi Plotkin's Children. Top Right to Left: Yaakov-Meir & Emanuel, Below (i.e., sitting), Beilkeh, Moishkeh, & Hadass. (p. 95)

I am impelled to relate to those younger *landsleit* from Dereczin, who by some miracle passed through seven levels of Hell and remained alive, a collection of memories of Dereczin from days gone by, from those years between 1903 and 1910, to the extent that those memories still remain with me.

Dereczin was a *shtetl*, like many other *shtetlach*, pretty, lovely, warm, and impoverished. Yes, there were a few prominent *balebatim*, and among them, even a few with some significant means, however, the majority of Derecziners were simple storekeepers and laborers, who exerted themselves strenuously, just to be able to make a living. Not only one Derecziner would start on Monday patting his brow, wondering from what means the coming Sabbath would be funded.

The children of the *balebatim* were schooled by the better teachers, the poorer children – largely to *Talmud Torah*, where they managed to learn a little Hebrew, not even knowing the translation of the Torah text. For a long time, children of the poor could not come by learning, because even as youngsters, they would have to leave school and go to work in order to add to their father's efforts to provide sustenance.

The Ruffians

Understand, that the children of the well-to-do, would continue their education, going to Yeshiva or a Gymnasium in various cities. The poorer young boys, who became workers at an early age, and had not learned a great deal, would hang out all over the town in the evenings, and would not have anything to do. It was in this fashion that a group of young people got patched together who were termed, *zhulyikehs*.

Seeing as there was nothing else to do, these young men would pull all sorts of pranks, especially to irritate the *balebatim*, or the quiet, circumspect Jewish daughters of the town.

The best night for these young folks was Friday night. They would hang out all over town until late at night – [after all], it was not necessary to get up early the following morning to go to work – and pull all sorts of pranks, such as, for example, taking the butcher block, which the town butchers would leave at "deaf *Eshkeh*'s" store, and heave it into the brook by the market, or flinging a cat through the window of *Elyeh der Kvossnik*[75] , who was sunk in a deep sleep after a debilitating week of hard work.

It was a custom, at the time of a wedding, to celebrate the wedding ceremony on Friday night, and the *vechereh*,[76] that is, the feast, the singing, the musicians and the dancing, all would be held over until after the Sabbath at night. If, it should happen, that a daughter from a *balebatisheh* family refused to dance with a young man from the family of a common laborer, that was fodder for something to do the coming Friday night: at the bank of the brook by the market, on the wall of the old Mauer [schul], on the Sabbath, Derecziners would discover placards with all sorts of nasty comments about the behavior of that young woman, "with her nose stuck up in the air..." These signs hung for the entire Sabbath, because no Derecziner would venture to tear them down, thereby desecrating the Holy Day. Among the *zhulyikehs*, was one fellow, who excelled at this form of communication, and he would create these placards...

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75 A person engaged in the manufacture of the beverage, *kvass*.

76 From the Russian, Вечер, meaning 'evening,' and hence the 'evening meal.'

One Becomes a Bundist

While we were still Yeshiva students, periodically, we were tossed proclamations. There were Yeshiva students who immediately discarded these materials, but there were individuals who would take the time to read this material through with care, and make the effort to understand these new concepts, such as 'proletarian,' 'struggle' and 'unite together,' While there was a lot in this material which we as yet did not fathom, something did stick.

In short, little by little, I became a proletarian [radical] in Dereczin. I remember very well how this got started. On a certain Saturday afternoon, when I took a stroll through the *Agrest-Sod*, as was the custom, I was approached by *Sarah-Leah'keh*, the blind musician's daughter, and asked me whether I wanted a pamphlet to read. *Sarah-Leah'keh* had come to us from deep in the Russian heartland, where she had worked as a laundress, and was a well-read Bundist, who was very articulate and capable of creating labor agitation, and on top of this was good looking too.[77] I had heard by this time that she went around with young men from *balebatisheh* families. As a result, I was inclined to accept a pamphlet from her.

But as soon as I brought this pamphlet into our house, my brother came over to me and gave me one good slap, yelling at the same time: "You, *Yeshivah Bokher*, are you starting to hang out with socialists!?"

That slap turned me into an ardent Bundist.

Slowly, the small circle of Bundists grew, until it encompassed the larger part of Dereczin's younger generation. Also, the former *zhulyikehs* abandoned their prankish behavior, and organized themselves into Bundist cells.

The First Meeting

A short time after the incident of the pamphlet and the slap, a friend of mine approached me on a Friday night, and let me know that a meeting was being planned. It will be necessary to go past the barracks, and over the bridge that leads to Aleksich, and there take a left turn, to the pretty shrubbery. He then whispered the secret password into my ear that I would have to provide on the way to the meeting.

The night was dark, and the sky was full of stars. We came to the appointed place. Along the way, we encountered a number of young people who were known to us and were already organized Bundists. The young women had covered their faces with their kerchiefs, in order that they not be recognized. However, I knew everyone in Dereczin very well!

Try to imagine my emotions at the time I went to attend the very first illegal gathering. I relived almost the identical feeling of that time when my father wrapped me in his *tallit* when I recited the *Haftarah* at my *Bar-Mitzvah*. The thought that people had confidence and trust in me, filled me with great pride, and because of this, I had a great inclination to see whom I would encounter at this clandestine gathering.

And I was indeed awestruck to see *Chaim Rabinovich* and to hear his speech. There were several other young people there whom I never would have thought belonged to us, the workers.

There were fifteen comrades at that first get-together, but from one meeting to the next, the Bundist ranks grew. The leather factory workers and other young workers came, as did the young intelligentsia. A culture initiative was undertaken, whereby the young people were taught to read and write Yiddish. In time, a library was established. A Drama Circle produced *Goldfaden's* plays on the stage, and for the first time Dereczin saw theater!

Slowly, the town began to show the Bund some consideration. And for us young people, there came a substantive, serious, but also happy time in our lives. In the summer, when various activists and speakers would come to Dereczin, every Sabbath get-together was literally like a Holiday. We sang a great deal, studied, strolled about, and dreamed of a happy outcome for all working peoples.

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77 Sounds a lot like Adam being offered an apple by Eve. I don't think 'comrade' Silkovich had a chance!

The Fire-Fighting Brigade

In those years, the firefighting brigade was established in Dereczin, *die Pozharneh Komandeh* – the fire-fighters who wore helmets and shiny buttons. The entire firefighting apparatus consisted of two tanks that always leaked, and one hand-pump. Every time there was a fire, the machine would malfunction and be useless.

But it is because of this that I recall an instance when everything in the firefighting brigade functioned properly: one of the Dereczin *balebatim* had caught his daughter with a *treyf* book, and out of great anger, this [traditional] Jew tore it to shreds and then slapped his daughter around. The Bundist members of the fire brigade found out about this, and decided to conduct a fire drill, using the house of that particular family. The pump worked, the tanks did not leak, and that Jewish man got a taste of a blaze without so much as a lick of fire, but with plenty of water...

In those times, when the majority of young boys and girls in Dereczin were organized and carried out an active, meaningful and enthusiastic communal life, there were those daughters of *balebatim,* who in the evenings and on the Sabbath, sat on the sidelines, and observed how the daughters and sons of working class people would promenade, spend their time together educating themselves, and keeping company with one another as if they were part of one big family. And it was not easy to be 'outside the camp.'

When a wedding was celebrated by one of the members, it became everyone's happy occasion. Almost all of the young people in the town would come to make merry, to dance and enjoy each other's company.

By this time, the Bund was arbitrating between labor and management. Saturday night working hours were eliminated. And when the sun of revolution managed to shine in Russia, even though it was briefly, the youth of Dereczin marched through the marketplace on the First of May with red flags.

Once Upon A Time...

By Feiga-Leah Abramovich

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Once upon a time there was a splendid little town by the name of Dereczin. Within its boundaries, and around it, nature was benign. About four hundred Jewish families lived there harmoniously, as if they were part of a single family. The friendship among the Derecziners was noteworthy. The youth of the town strongly wanted to develop itself intellectually. An unwritten moral code governed our lives and was continuous between generations, and Derecziners, from the oldest among us recall this, until the last day of the last Derecziner.

A sense of security pervaded our lives. We walked and rode through those fields and woods without fear.

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In my younger years, I belonged to an organization – I always wanted to be with adults – which in the summertime would gather in the woods. At the head of our group, stood a talented orator, who would speak to us at every meeting, and entrance us with his speeches. We felt a sort of holy aura during the time we were together in the woods.

And that is how the time went by, we wanted to know more rather than less and also – to get a little pleasure out of life. I am reminded of the time that we had decided to put on a show. We had decided to put on the play, *Bar Kochba.*[78] I was also a member of the Drama Circle, and I was given the part of *Dina* the bride of *Bar Kochba.* This was no light role, and I put in considerable effort and energy and despite everyone else's opinion, played the role well. Also, the remaining "artists" performed their

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78 The Jewish leader of a rebellion against Rome c. 135A.D.

respective roles in a fitting manner. I recall the young man who played the role of *Bar Kochba* – tall and handsome and vigorous young fellow, not from Dereczin, but from Izavelin, a town near Volkovysk. His name was *Shlomo Azernitzky*. Both of us were required to demonstrate ardent love for one another in the performance. The role of *Dina's* father *Eliezer*, was played by *Volfeh Zaklas*, the son of *Israel* the *Shammess*. His brother, *Chaim-Nahum, Moshe-Yaakov Abramovich, Shmuel-Yaakov Muller, Leib'keh Shulkovich* [*Shelkovich?*], and *Moshe Minkovich* played the part of the *Sanhedrin*. *Nahum Blizniansky* played the part of the King, Rufus, who was also in love with *Dina*, and wanted to take her forcibly. When *Dina* refused to consent to go to Rufus, he had her arrested. There, she is subject to torture, but she refuses to submit and is prepared to die rather than become Rufus' mistress...

I remember that three other girls played parts in the drama, as chaperones to *Dina*: *Henya Lubetsky, Rachel Grachuk*, and *Chyenkeh Abramovich*. They were in bondage to Rufus, and devised all manner of burdens for the arrested *Dina*, forcing hard labor on her, and all manner of tiring and debilitating activities on the delicate arrested young woman. She begs them to be more civil toward her, and sings them a song about a young shepherd boy. Her singing is well received by the three overseeing slave women, and they slacken their discipline toward her, joining in her singing.

A third character, Pappus the Lame is also secretly in love with *Dina*, and he steals his way into the jail where she is held, and hears her singing from behind the walls, and becomes enchanted... the role of the lame Pappus was played by someone from another town, who worked in the factory, named *Eliyahu* the *Plotnick* (I do not remember his family name).

Understandably, *Bar Kochba* does not want his beloved *Dina* to die in prison, so he comes with his warriors to do battle with Rufus. When *Dina* learns of this, she crawls out onto the roof of the prison, and gives a long dramatic oration directed at *Bar Kochba*, in which she urges him to desist from battle with Rufus, because he will lose the battle and his life. *Dina* throws herself from the high roof and is killed...

The director of the drama was also not from Dereczin. He was called *Aharon-Yaakov* and he was a Yeshiva student at the *Alter Mauer [Bet HaMidrash]*. He matched up the parts to the actors very well, and also directed the play very well with all the participants.

I recall that the staging of *Bar Kochba* in Dereczin made a colossal impression, and it was talked about for several months in town. The proceeds earned from the play were applied to benefit the poor families for the Passover Holiday [sic: *Maot Hittim*]. The play was put on three times. Being in the role of *Dina* brought me invitations to perform in a variety of roles in surrounding towns. Please understand that I refused these invitations.

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Dereczin had a lively and talented community of young people who knew how to make merry and enjoy themselves. It was for this reason that relationships between the young boys and girls were of a correct nature, and in accordance with the expectations of the adult community.

This is how I spent my youth in Dereczin until I got married. As usual, that changed my entire way of life, with the onset of worries for financial sustenance and the raising of children. This was followed by the outbreak of the First World War, with its difficult years of hunger, and then the Polish occupation, with its attendant tribulations for the Jewish people.

However, from today's perspective, those times seem to be almost idyllic when placed against what happened under Hitler's dominion, when Dereczin, that once lovely and happy town, was annihilated under trial and torture, murder, and bitter battle in the woods – those very woods, where in our youth, we wove the most beautiful dreams about the attainments of our people and of all mankind.

Memories from My Father's Tavern

By Dvora (Dvosha) Kress-Beckenstein

(Original Language: Yiddish)

I came to America before the First World War, while still a young girl, and in Dereczin people wondered: "How is it that *Shmuel Beckenstein* comes to send his daughter to America?" In those years, the ones who went to the 'Golden Land' of America, were those who could not find work in Dereczin. In our family, things were quite good, although you could never describe us as wealthy people. We ran a tavern, a way-station, and a beer brewery, in which we would pour beer from barrels into bottles for subsequent sale. Understand, that we had written permission and a license to do this, which granted us a franchise to serve beer, mead and wine, and also associated solid foods, but we were not allowed to hold [or sell] strong liquor, because this was a state monopoly.

But how then, can one come by a shot? To meet this demand, we did keep this type of beverage on hand, but in secret. We had to be constantly fearful of the Excise Tax Agent, because when such an official arrives, and catches us with whiskey on the premises, it is necessary to pay a monetary fine. In Dereczin we had a 'good' Excise Agent. He was required to inspect us three times a month, and he would always first come into the store of our aunt *Eshkeh*, which was his signal to us that he would be coming to inspect us shortly. Until his arrival, we worked around our store to bring everything in order. By the time he came into our store, all that was left for him to do, was to enter a notation in his book that he had found everything in order. Once a month we would receive a visit from a District Agent, and the local Agent would alert us to the time of that visit, in order to assure that the District Agent would not find any forbidden merchandise in our store.

This continued until our good situation came to an end. Someone squealed on our Excise Agent, and he was sent away from Dereczin, and in his place a real bloodhound by the name of *Rafalovich* was sent. He was known as a bad person, who made everyone in town miserable.

Not long after this misfortune, we were beset by an even larger one: one day, late at night, several people who worked at the church were sitting in our back room, and they were eating and drinking. All of a sudden, my father hears a knocking at the door. He opens the door and sees a well-dressed man in civilian clothing. The man asks my father if he can obtain a night's lodging. Father took him to a room. The other person requested a bottle of beer, which my father brought to him forthwith. The guest drank one glass of beer, and then addressed my father: "Do you know who I am?" and proceeds to take out credentials from his wallet and show them to my father. My father was appalled: it was *Zayats*, the Chief Inspector in charge of all Excise Agents in the Grodno Province. He had the reputation of being an extraordinarily evil man, who inspired fear in everyone. My father wanted to remove the bottle of beer, but he didn't permit it, saying that he needed the bottle as evidence to prepare charges against my father for the hearing in front of the magistrate.

To add to these troubles, it was the eve of a local holiday, when the sale of strong drink was prohibited for three days. But it was precisely on such occasions that we expected a big surge of business, and in the adjacent room we had stocked a rather large supply of whiskey. It was already midnight when Father came to us, the children, and woke me up, and my brother, *Yaakov-Chaim*.

In the room where the large cache of liquor was stored, one of our small children lay sleeping, so we woke him up in order that he cry, and in this manner our cross guest in the next room would be unable to hear what we were doing.

We did what we had to: For a long time, we put the bottles of drink into cartons, and handed them through the window to our father. From the garden, we later dragged and hid all this at *Leibeh Valitzkin* the shoemaker on the Slonim Gasse. Afterwards we went to all the Dereczin tavern keepers, and woke them, and alerted them to the imminent possibility of an inspection. A substantial cache of strong

liquor had been put in place in all the taverns. Late at night, we found out that, in addition to our terrible "guest," an additional two "officials" had arrived. They were billeted at the home of *Yosheh Mishkin*, whose house served as the seat for the constabulary.

The following morning these three inspectors searched and ransacked all of the Jewish taverns, but they left with nothing.

Bitter and Sweet Memories

By Nahum Bliss-Bliznianskyy

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Yizkor – To Remember! It is easy to utter this word, but what memories this word is tied up with!
For me, as a Derecziner, it brings to mind our town, its Jews, and their bitter fate.

Along with the Jewish community, the larger part of my family, the children and grandchildren of *Maishel Bliznianskyy* were annihilated. Oh, what has happened to such a large family! From a family of ten brothers and sisters, with their numerous children, only nine persons remained living, sown and spread all over the world. I am in America for many years already. I was the oldest son in the family. Our youngest sister was saved from the murderous German hands. An additional seven grandchildren are found in a variety of countries.

Yet, I have sweet memories of our Dereczin from my childhood years up to the time I became Bar Mitzvah.

My father sent me to the best teachers in the town, first to *Reb Avraham-Chaim* the teacher of *Alef-Bet*, afterwards to *Reb Alter* then to *Reb Shlomo*, the *Kazianem Rav*, and then later I studied the *Gemara* with *Reb David-Chaim Shmeuns*, and toward the end with *Reb Chaim-Yitzhak* in the Talmud-Torah until Bar Mitzvah.

After becoming Bar Mitzvah, I went away to study at Yeshiva out of town. I "ate days," and came home very infrequently, only on holidays. When I became a little older, I traveled to the larger metropolitan centers – to Vilna, Warsaw.

Later, I spent a few years in Germany, Switzerland, and traveled to Argentina. I have lived in America for more than 53 years.

I am now an old man. Those sweet years I had in Dereczin, blend in my heart and mind with the bitter recollection of the destruction of my beloved family. Difficult – it is difficult to have survived all of this.

Jewish to the Last Breath

By Moshe Kwiat

(Original Language: Yiddish)

I will relate what I know of our town from my childhood years. Many years have elapsed since the wars, slaughter, and partisan resistance in the woods, and it is possible that portions of my memory are not so accurate, but the readers of our *Yizkor Book* will forgive me if I make a small error in related my recollections. The important thing is my well-intentioned desire to portray the Jews of those generations at the beginning of this [sic: the twentieth] century.

Rural-dwelling Jews

Good, loyal and observant Jews, were those that

homesteaded land in and around Dereczin. In almost every such rural town there was a Jew who served as a middleman, an estate manager, and was also a tiller of the soil. In certain of these towns, there were several Jewish families in residence.

They were all pious and observant, and a number of them were scholars as well. And while they lived among gentiles, they took special care in providing for a Jewish upbringing for their children.
On the High Holydays, and other Holidays as well, they would come to Dereczin to pray in our *Batei-Midrashim*. In town, they were held in respect and well received.

It is because of this that I cannot forget the *Yishuvnik* from Puzovitsa, a town between Dereczin and Piesk. He was a Jew possessed of a very accommodating personality. As it happened, our Dereczin merchants and workers would make a monthly trip to the market fairs in Piesk, they would regularly have the occasion to travel by this town. And this Jewish *Yishuvnik* would be out, standing by the road, stopping all those coming from Dereczin. It was necessary to stop and come into his establishment [79] and partaking of food and drink – he did not let anyone go by without extending this courtesy at his establishment, and no one was prepared to insult him by refusing to do so.

My father, of blessed memory, used to tell me how this *Kretchmer* of Puzovitsa, not once, would forcibly shove him through the door of his *kretchma*, give him a bite to eat, and even afford him use a room in private to rest and wash off the sweat of the summer heat, and only then permit him to continue his journey to Piesk and the market fair.

It is, by now, difficult to enumerate the names of all the *Yishuvnik* families that lived in our area. I do recall though, my father telling us about the pretty daughter of the *Yishuvnik*, *Berel Plishiner*, who fell in love with a *shaygets,* and wanted to convert out of Judaism. Her father was apparently unaware of this, but my father, to whom this news did arrive, immediately went to *Berel* in order to convey this bitter pill. The *Yishuvnik* immediately addressed this matter, and dispatched his daughter to America. This was one of the ways that Jews tried to look out for one another. The rural gentiles had respect for the Jewish *Yishuvniks* in their midst, to whom they would come for advice, even on family matters.

The Dereczin 'Bourgeoisie'

My grandfather, may he rest in peace, was a *Stolliner Hasid*, and he was a tailor. He would sew for the gentiles in town, the so-called 'bourgeoisie.' I recall at the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, when the draft was being mobilized, older Christian people largely from the bourgeoisie of the town, came to my grandfather so that he could offer them a blessing before they departed for war. My grandfather would offer them his hand and wish them a safe and sound return from the hazards of battle. As it transpired, by the time the soldiers from Dereczin arrived in Siberia, the war had ended...

And I also remember, that in Dereczin there were several Christian women, who would be in the habit of bringing gifts to the *Batei Midrashim,* mostly towels, when someone in their family would fall ill. And I further remember when *Ahar'keh*[80] the *schul* crier, would come to us on the *Zelva Gasse*, which had a mixed Jewish and gentile population, and in the middle of the night wake my father and others for *Selikhot* services with such loud shouting – but never did a gentile utter a cross word either to *Ahar'keh* , or any other Jewish resident on our street because of this.

This contrasts sharply with the murderous and rapacious behavior shown to us by the same residential bourgeoisie, in their great fear, during the Nazi occupation, both before and after the Holocaust.

From the New Month of Elul to Simhat-Torah

I am the son of an observant family. My mother was so *Yiddish-frum* that year-round on Fridays, she

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[79] Called a *kretchma* in Russian, being something of a café or restaurant.

[80] A Yiddish diminutive for *Aharon.*

would gather the *cholent*[81] pots from many neighbors and put them into her baking oven, even though each of these houses had their own baking ovens. "I want to earn a mitzvah, and yet another mitzvah," she would answer, when I asked her why she offered the other *balebustas* this service of setting their *cholent* up.

I cannot forget those special days from *Rosh Hodesh* of the month of Elul to *Simhat-Torah*. With the onset of the month of Elul, an incredible dread would fall upon us all, young and old alike. For that entire month, and throughout the High Holydays, I used to tremble like a fish in water, and I didn't yet understand what it all meant.

Yom Kippur was a day of prayer, fasting and trembling. One could barely wait until the final *Ne'ilah* service arrived – and immediately start building a *Sukkah*. This was a sign to us that lighter and happier days lay ahead.

With what joy we used to construct our *Sukkah*, making an effort to assure that our *Sukkah* would be nicer and better than the others around us, and we would bring green branches in order to decorate our *Sukkah* both inside and out.

Simhat-Torah was for everyone, but especially for us young boys, happy holiday. It was a joyful holiday. Even the gentiles in town would come to hear the cantor, and watch the *Hakafot*. *Simhat-Torah* in the afternoon, the Jews would have a drink in *schul*, and go to each others' homes for a glass of drink and a bite. It was merry in Dereczin!

My father told me that once, the day after *Simhat-Torah*, he came to a neighboring town, and saw several Jewish homes with broken windows. What did this mean? In that town there were two sittings Rabbis, and each Rabbi had his own following. On *Simhat-Torah*, the Jews of that town got good and drunk, and started arguing and fighting with on another – and it eventually came to physical violence, and they started to break windows...

Such conflict was unknown in Dereczin. Dereczin always had only one sitting Rabbi.

The Authorities in Dereczin

I remember the Jewish *Starosta* of the time, *Sholom Mansky*. He would distribute passports to everyone, and annually would determine who would have to go do military service. He had a Christian secretary employed in his chancellery, Citizen Sienkewicz. His principal function was to affix the official stamp in the designated strip on the document. This was all still under the regime of Czar Nicholas II.

I still recall *Shlomo* the *Kazianer Rav*, whose duty it was to record all new births and deaths in Dereczin.

The authorities in town consisted of a *Pristav* (bailiff), an *Uradnik* (magistrate), and gendarmes from the local gendarmerie. Among these was one Jewish gendarme. He would accompany the Christian *Stasrosta* to collect taxes. If someone was unable to pay the tax, he would confiscate the candlesticks, and run from the house. He would have to be pursued in order that the Sabbath candlesticks could be suitably redeemed...

The Fire Brigade

At that time, Dereczin already had a respectable fire brigade, with fine membership – entirely Jewish. The Marshall of the Fire Brigade was *Zalman Weinstein*.

As was the case in many other towns, also in Dereczin there was for many years a running bitter fight for the control of the Fire Brigade between *Zalman Weinstein* and *Yankel Dworetzkin*. Each one desperately wanted to win the sympathy and support of the rank and file firemen, and the last holdouts, indeed, benefitted from this – receiving good food and drink from both sides... The gentiles would literally bust with envy when they saw the modern Jewish firefighting equipment, and the Fire Marshall in his white gloves during parades, the gentiles would literally have to show respect to the Fire

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81 A bean-potato-meat casserole/stew, prepared on an overnight flame, favored by Eastern European Jews as a main Sabbath meal. Recent scientific evidence has shown that *cholent* can produce some of the lowest pH factors measured in the human alimentary canal.

Brigade from their horses.

Dereczin Was a Jewish Town

The Sabbath in Dereczin was – *Shabbos*, and a Holiday was – *Yom Tov*. The gentiles understood this very well, and on the Sabbath one saw virtually no Christian horse-drawn wagons. In general, on the Sabbath and the High Holydays, one saw virtually no gentiles in the streets.

If, perchance, a market fair day should happen to have been scheduled for a Saturday or for a Jewish Holiday, the Christian in charge of the calendar would soon 'hang out a notice that the fair day had been delayed to a further week day.

And as much as the gentiles, with their officials and priests, tried to make Dereczin "more Christian," more Russian – it was to no avail.

Until its last day when it ceased to exist, Dereczin was Jewish and manifested a Jewish character – and that is what it was when it was destroyed.

It was of no use to the Germans during the First World War to "Germanize" our town, and [subsequently] the Poles to "Polonize" Dereczin.

Those Pious, Upstanding Jews

By Esther Nissenbaum-Bricker
(Original Language: Yiddish)

It is not possible to forget those Jews, pious and upstanding, poor and believing, who are today no longer with us in those lands to which we have been scattered.
Of all the nice, special type of people, most often, my own family comes to mind, the family of *Yitzhak-Yaakov Bricker* and his wife, *Hannah-Rachel*. He was an educated man, and the Rabbi invited him more than once to be one of the arbitrators, when amongst Jews there was a conflict among parties.

Physically, he was a weak man, and he was unable to rise and attend the morning *Shacharit* prayers, but every afternoon, he attended *Mincha* services in the *Bet HaMidrash*, studied a page of *Gemara*, a chapter of *Mishna*, and a coterie of listeners always sat about him there, who would take in his every word.

I am reminded of the day when my grandmother, *Sarah-Hinde* passed away. My father returned from the interment, sat down to observe the *Shiva* period, and began to study the Book of Job. Our house immediately was filled to capacity with people. It was a summer's day, and we opened the windows, and many of the neighbors positioned themselves there – everyone giving heed to the entreaties of Job and his great misfortune. Our house was always open to Jews and Christians alike. There, weddings were arranged, with the *badecken* [82] and all the ceremonies leading up to the *huppah;* on the Sabbath, after services, [our house was the place where] honey cake and a shot of whisky were served in honor of the parents of the bride and groom, and toward nightfall – the sumptuous 'Third Feast.'[83] The house was made available without charge, and the parents of the young couple had only to carry out the furniture in order to create more space inside. It was we, the young children, who derived the greatest pleasure from these wedding ceremonies.

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82 The ceremony of uncovering/covering the bride with her wedding veil.

83 Called *Shalosh Seudot* in Hebrew, and elided in Yiddish to *Shaleh-shudiss*

Our house stood across the street from the Russian Orthodox Church. On Christmas Eve and New Years Day, when it was intensely cold outside, our house stood open to the Christians for them to be able to warm themselves up a little.

Yes, there were Jews like that at one time, and let us always remember them.

A Night Ride on the Coach

By Malka Alper

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Dereczin was strongly bound up with Slonim, its district seat for commerce, education, administration, medicine, etc. As Dereczin was about fifteen kilometers from a railroad station[84] from which the train could take you to Slonim, the practical means of connection with Slonim was -- on horses, that is to say, by coach. The coach was a large wagon, covered with an awning, which was intended to offer cover from the sun and rain.

From Dereczin [to Slonim], the coach almost always went empty of cargo, but on the return trip from Slonim to Dereczin, the wagon was loaded with everything that could be packed into it, and on top of all the packages and bundles, the passengers were 'packed in' as well.

I recall, from my childhood, a hot summer's night in the seating compartment of *Sholom-Herschel* the coachman. The wagon was filled up with kegs, packages, and boxes, and was hitched to a tired old nag. Even more exhausted was the appearance of the passengers, who were packed into the seating area under the canopy, which covered the larger part of the wagon.

Reb Sholom-Herschel himself, who the prior night had made the trip from Dereczin to Slonim, and had spent the entire day running around to all the various businesses, delivering packages and taking on merchandise, was sorrily sitting, with his head nodding, on the wagon behind his horse. He had concealed his horsewhip, in order that it not be taken, and used to urge the horse on, who had the habit of stopping where he pleased, and under no circumstance would deign to move from where he had chosen to stand.

The people in the riding compartment attempt to grab a few winks: on with his head on another's shoulder, or on a package of merchandise, and whoever couldn't find such a resting place, nodded their heads from side to side, or up and down – all in rhythm with the movement of the wagon, as it traveled over an unpaved thoroughfare.

The horse decides to stop, and the passengers are awakened – but not *Reb Sholom-Herschel*. They try to urge the horse on, but he refuses to budge.

–"*Reb Sholom-Herschel*, the horse is standing still..." – a passenger says, waking him up and sitting next to him.

Hearing his master's name, the horse moves off his spot, urged on by *Reb Sholom Herschel's* cry of 'Whoa! Whoa!'

One of the 'esteemed passengers' had bought a bread roll in Slonim (A *Slonimer Kuchen* had a name [sic: as a delicacy] in the area). In a stored little container, he also had taken with him a pat of butter. And so, in the middle of a summer night, when the air outside is hot, and the heat in the passenger compartment is oppressive, and packed with people – he takes the *kuchen* out of his napkin, sticks his finger into the butter container, and proceeds to spread the melted grease on the *kuchen*... and starts to eat with gusto.

Oh...how does one get out of this overcrowded coach compartment that is full of the stench of rancid butter, and into the fresh air! But go now,

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84 This railhead was in Zelva.

crawl over legs, hands and even bodies. So, one sits imprisoned for the entire night, not being able to move.

A break in the monotonous and tiresome journey is provided by the barking dogs as we pass through gentile villages. The horse is frightened, and moves more quickly.

The coachman snaps his whip in the air to drive off the hounds. And the 'esteemed passengers' get a treat – the horse moves along more rapidly, and the awning protects them from the dogs...

The night passes, and is replaced by a gray dawn. Through the grayness, it is already possible to catch a glimpse of the Church in Dereczin. The heart lightens a bit, in anticipation of the end of the fatiguing trip.

A Teacher in Dereczin

By Hannah Novick

(Original Language: Yiddish)

*Photo (*p. 104): From L to R: *Sh. Rothstein*, the music teacher and bandleader, his wife, *Eydeleh* and her sister *Rachel* – both of whom were midwives, daughters of *Meir-Shia* the *Feldscher.*

Before my eyes pass a gallery of my relatives, lovely people, forgotten events and experiences of my pristine childhood, which remain deeply etched in my memory.

I remember, as a child, that my brother and I spent nearly a year at the home of my grandfather in *Notzkeveh.* This was after my mother passed away. On one occasion I fell, and twisted my hand out, at which point my grandfather took me to *Dr. Novitzky*, after which he took me to the *Feldman* family where there were many children, and later, he went with me to *Bebbeh's* where I went to work. From that point on, I remember *Bebbeh* as a short lady with wise and understanding eyes, and a sweet feminine voice, which made a very good impression on me. I was so satisfied, that my grandfather, *Mordechai-Benjamin Novick* told me afterwards, that for the High Holydays, he and my grandmother, are planning to come to Dereczin and to stay with this goodly woman – with *Bebbeh Rabinovich.*

Years later, my grandfather found lodging for me with *Fradl Goldberg.* It was at that time that I decided to undertake teaching as a profession, giving private lessons – in Dereczin. *Fradl* had a sewing store, and rose early in the morning to prepare food for her oldest son, little *Shlomo'keh*, who was already attending *Heder*, and for the younger boy, who stayed home with his grandmother, *Fradl's* old mother.

Fradl's house was in the middle of town. Across the street was *Alpert's* Pharmacy, *Bebbeh's* place of business, *Yochi's* house, and the way to the *Schulhof*, where there was a wedding taking place practically every Friday. The *Huppah* was erected on the *Schulhof*, and when I would hear the musicians start to play, I knew thereby that the bride and groom were being escorted to the *Huppah.* At which point, I also made my way there, and met with people that I knew.

With what impatience I used to wait for Fridays! When I arose in the morning, the floor in the main room had already been waxed, on the table, which had already been covered in a snow-white tablecloth, stood sparkling candlesticks with candles, ready for the Sabbath blessing.

Two *challahs* lay on top, modestly covered in a napkin, the oven was partitioned off with a board, and from it, emanated tempting odors of the Sabbath delicacies.

On Friday, by noon, *Fradl* was already closing her store. After coming home, she would put on her Sabbath clothing, dress up her children, and along

with her mother, begin preparations to receive the Sabbath. Her face looked entirely different from the way it looked during the middle of the week: her face, usually manifesting the burdens of work, shone, the wrinkles were smoothed out. When she stood up and chanted the Sabbath *Kiddush*, it seemed as if the Holy Spirit rested on her. After the Sabbath meal, we would go out for a stroll, during which she would tell me about her husband, who had died prematurely, and her plans for raising her two small children.

When I hear talk today of the Sabbath, the image of *Fradl* swims out in front of my eyes, along with her Friday nights.

In the middle of the marketplace was the home of *Meir- Shia* the *Feldscher*. There were two daughters there. The oldest was called *Rivkah*. Young people used to get together there, and so I would go there as well, but I somehow didn't quite fit in with this crowd, despite the fact that I was treated in a very friendly manner.

About that time, I was invited to *Yochi's* house, for a literary evening, where her husband *Chaim* was to give a talk, and I made the acquaintance of *Rivkah Rabinovich*, who for a long time remained my close friend. There, also, I became acquainted with *Yehudit Plotkin*, the Rabbi's daughter, with the teacher, *Pintzov*, with *Rachel Kaplan*.

A new and interesting world opened up for me. I even took parts in two theater productions which were suitably produced under *Chaim's* direction in a fully-packed auditorium at the edge of town. The proceeds were applied to a much-needed purpose. The two productions were: Sholom Aleichem's *Mazel Tov* and *The Doctor*. The children in town, after my performance used to call me 'je vous prie,'-- a French phrase I had occasion to use in my role.

And how can I ever forget the summer in Dereczin? The meetings on the little bridge past the *Blizniansky* house, the first house on the way into town from *Notzkeveh* into Dereczin.

Across the way was a park, over which the moon shined seemingly brighter and friendlier than anywhere else. By the park, in an old house with rather large rooms, lived the daughter of my grandfather's brother from the town of *Lantzevitz*. She was called *Shayna*. My grandfather's sister, *Stirkeh*, had a little store in the middle of the marketplace. Her husband, a scholar, would come to help out on market days, and would give away the merchandise free of charge to the poor peasants out of pity for them. Their only son, *Berel*, studied at a Yeshiva. This also belongs to the packet of memories from Dereczin.

It is especially pleasant for me to recall that winter and summer in Dereczin, with all the people, who remained my closest friends also later in life, but it is painful and bitter to remind oneself of their annihilation and the destruction of the beloved town of Dereczin.

From the Last Will and Testament of Simkheh[85] the Storekeeper

(Original Language: Yiddish)

– A time will come when we will have to give an accounting for everything. At that time, there will be no excuses in order to remain 'right' before the Final Judgement. At that place, the argument that "I didn't have the time to think about myself, but day and night, I was over my head in worldly concerns . . . " simply won't work. But what can one like me say, who has taken stock of himself a little too late in life? What indeed, will my purpose be seen to be? I feel myself growing weaker from day to day, there is no immortality, and one needs to anticipate all things...

– My entire hope, that my sons will lighten my eternity with the recitation of the *Kaddish*, with study, as is the custom among good sons to lighten the passage of parents in the afterlife, – is a hope I do not have any longer. I have transgressed against my two crown jewels, through whom I would be freer of the bonds of Gehenna, and now I have no one on whom I can rely on, but first on God, and on my son-in-law. Because he understands my plight quite well. I have nothing to say about my children, they should only be well and prosper – those who are far and near, all. But they are busy men, and one can't expect this from everyone, it is difficult for them to demonstrate this.

Only *Yitzhak* do I implore, that he should count me like a mother, that he should do me the truest boon that can be done as a compensation, with prayer, the saying of *Kaddish*, and study, all these things that I ask. Even though I understand that what I ask for is too great a request to make, nevertheless, I hope that he will feel able to oblige me. And I ask that a candle be carried for me each day for the first year. The *Yahrzeit* should be recorded, so that it not be forgotten.

Also, I come to implore my husband and my partner, that in the case where I have given something with my own hands shall be mine – I have worked hard enough in my life to the end of my strength, not having spent any money on frivolities, or on any entertainment. My entire concept is to sustain oneself for life's basics, and to set something aside for the later years.

I ask you once again that everything I have asked be done properly, even if this is asking a great deal, but I beseech you one and all not to refuse me.

I ask my beloved and loyal daughters to live a good and proper life, even though I know I don't have to write this, you are capable, but despite this, it is important to say this to you, because one must obey what a mother has instructed to be done.

You have to know, my dear daughters, that I have led you in a path of *Yiddishkeit*, and your husbands are like my own sons. Remind them, when *Yahrzeit* comes, that they are to pray, and to set lit candles. This is my entire behest, something to lighten my transition to eternity.

I know that my sons-in-law are decent Jewish men.... I also ask of my children that my candlesticks be utilized each *Shabbos*, on my behalf, to bless the candles on the same table, as a memorial —

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85 Here, the name of a woman. This is *Simkheh die Kremerkeh, Epstein* the grandmother of *Dov Gorinovsky*, who writes about his grandparents on p. xx. Her picture appears earlier, on p. 35 of the original text.

In the First World War

The Years of War & Occupation

By Chaim Rabinovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

When the First World War broke out in 1914, many young people from Dereczin were mobilized into the Russian Army, and immediately sent to the front. Immediately, in the first days of conflict, the Czar's Army suffered severe defeats, and began to pull back from the borders. In the first days of the war, Dereczin suffered its first casualty – *Pesach Dworetzky* fell at the front, who had recently completed studies at the Vilna Teachers Institute, and was known in Dereczin as an intelligent and capable young man and an active revolutionary. He had married not long before that, and left his young wife widowed and pregnant. Their son became a doctor in Ramat-Gan, and to our sorrow, passed away in 1963.

The reversals of the Russian Army came one after another. The Germans moved ever closer to our area. As was usual in times of stress for the Czarist regime, so it was this time, that the anti-Semitic rulers sought a scapegoat in the Jews, and accused them of collaboration, espionage and, of course, plotting [with the enemy].

The then Commander-in-chief of the Czarist army, *Nikolai Nikolaevich*, uncle to the Czar, *Nicholas II,* was a sadist and anti-Semite. He gave the order that Jews, along with the retreating army, should abandon their homes and towns, and permit themselves to be moved deep into the heart of Russia. First off, Jews were driven out of the border towns, away from their homes, and arrived in our neighborhoods almost empty-handed, and then they were driven even further, to the east. Not only one town or village, in the path of the retreating Russian army, was put to the torch.

The Russians Retreat

We, in Dereczin at that time, lived in daily fear. We did not know where we stood, or what it was that we had to do.

When the Germans got close to our area already, Dereczin became flooded with retreating Russian military forces day and night, who fled in panic, and often without order or discipline, full of fear for the German enemy. Our own fear grew with each new wave of retreating Russians. The Cossack battalions of the Russian army wreaked havoc on us. Russian officers and soldiers were billeted in nearly every one of our homes.

Many Dereczin Jews had already prepared horses and wagons, to be used in the event there was a forced evacuation, or in the event that other dangers might befall us, which threatened us from the side of the Russian soldiers and other organs of the military.

I remember that in the last days before the Germans arrived, a senior Russian Officer stayed in our home a certain Grand Duke *Trubetskai*, an intelligent and cultured Christian. When we became better acquainted with him, we were motivated to ask his advice – should we also abandon our hometown along with the Russian Army. Our three children were still very young, and we were literally in a state of flux, and unable to decide what to do. At any moment, we had already prepared a horse and wagon for the inevitable march into Russia. The officer thought for a moment, looked at our small children and our frightened faces and said: "I advise you to remain here, in your home. You will be lost, if you get in the way of such a chaotic route and retreat of our army, with such small children. The Germans will not do you any harm as civilians. You may pass along my advice to the rest of your friends and relatives."

Indeed, this is exactly what we did, and immediately advised our surrounding neighbors that they should not budge from their places.

Two days later, during the night hours, the last detachments of the Russian army passed in retreat from the front through Dereczin. The same senior officer, the Grand Duke, directed us not to spend that night in our own homes, which were on the front street through which the retreating soldiers

would be marching, especially Cossacks that had been incited to riot. "They will cause you trouble," the Grand Duke warned us.

A 24-Hour Period of Fear

On the last day before they departed from Dereczin, a certain angry and panicked [Russian] officer gave the Cossacks an order to drag all the Jewish men out of the houses and line them up in the marketplace across from the church. By hand and with *nagaikas*, the inflamed Cossacks ran from house to house, driving out the menfolk to the designated place. Thus, they gathered all the menfolk, and let them stand in fear for an hour, surrounded by Cossacks. Nobody knew what they were planning to do with us. Fortunately, a group of womenfolk furtively went to the manse of the Polish Priest, where a Russian General was quartered, and with tears and wailing told him what the officer had ordered to do with all the men. The general immediately ordered all the menfolk to be released and sent home.

We went through such hours of terror more than once in those days.

That last night was terrifying. We were, altogether about a hundred souls with women and young children, at the home of *Alter Bukshtever*, who had a house on a side street behind *Meir-Shia* the *Feldscher*. The men concentrated themselves in a front room, and we concealed the women and children in a back room. The night was frightening. From the faraway houses, we heard terrible screams of alarm. Periodically, drunken soldiers would also barge into our location, tearing off whatever they could that we had on, especially better shoes, taking money, and watches. At that time, the womenfolk would raise such a hue and cry, that the soldiers would become frightened and run away. They didn't have much time to rob and plunder – the Germans were already quite close.

At about five in the morning, we observed that the last contingent of Cossacks were pouring kerosene on the houses, and were getting ready to set the town ablaze. As we had become emboldened, knowing that there was a Cossack Hetman at the home of *Rivkah-Rachel*, a good person, we got a delegation of about ten men together, and secretly went to him. With tears in our eyes, we told him that the Cossacks were preparing to burn down all our houses. Our entreaties had the desired effect on him, and he told us: "Go in peace to your houses, I will be here until the last soldier leaves here..."

The Germans were already a couple of kilometers away from the town, and the Hetman did not permit the houses to be set afire. We wanted to present him with a gift, but he refused to take anything.

The Germans March In

At about seven in the morning, the last bomb destroyed the church – and the German cavalry marched into Dereczin. The last of the Cossacks had only minutes before galloped away on their speedy horses.

After a night of such terror, several of the elderly Jews broke out into a dance, seeing the arrival of the German leaders of that era, who had liberated us from the wild Cossacks.

All the houses and stores that we had abandoned, were robbed and pillaged on that last night. We found practically nothing left, even to the point of having nothing to eat on that first morning.

After the arrival of the initial reconnaissance troops, phalanxes of soldiers began to march into town. The very first day, their penchant for order showed its real face. They began to drive the Jews to start clean off the mountains of rubble from the streets, left by the retreating Russian army.

In town, signs of a cholera epidemic began to appear. The Russian soldiers dragged everything they found out of storage. Dried, tanned leather goods, they stole, the wet, damp sections they pulled out of their containers and tossed them all over the streets – and this befouled the air and called out all manner of illnesses.

Because of the suspicion of cholera in Dereczin, the German Command was afraid to establish itself in the town, and so it quartered itself in Halinka.

Suddenly, about three or four days after occupying the Dereczin surroundings, an order came from the

Command that the leadership of the Jewish community should immediately present itself in Halinka. A fear gripped everyone. Rumors began to circulate that the Germans were apprehending Jewish "detainees," and holding them as hostages under arrest. Nobody wanted to risk their lives, until it was decided that the following four people would appear: the immediately past *Starosta, Sholom Mansky, Hirsch Beckenstein, Fyevsky* from Halinka, and the writer of these lines, *Chaim Rabinovich.*

Frightened, we came to Halinka, and presented ourselves at Command Headquarters. We were received by an elderly Major, named *von Wrangel*, with a number of other staff officers. There we met two Christian representatives, the *Graf Tishkevich*, and another nobleman.

The Area Overseers

The old Major immediately declared that the Germans had taken possession of the surrounding area and would remain here as the permanent masters. There were in need of six overseers who understood German and will represent the six districts, into which they had divided Dereczin and its environs. Without waiting for an answer, he immediately spoke to us in an authoritative voice: "I appoint all six of you as officials, who will be responsible for the six so designated districts. You are appointed as those designated by civilian consent and will receive a salary of fifty marks a month."

The officer immediately took down our names and addresses, and spreading out a map of the area in front of us, proceeded to show each of us the specific areas for which we would be responsible. The districts encompassed villages and fields, and each of us had the right to appoint assistants and intermediaries.

It was in this fashion that we were transformed not into "detainees," but into – officials, "Area Overseers." We breathed a little more easily, and returned to Dereczin, not under arrest.

Concern for Food

This turned out to be a favor both for the Jews of Dereczin and the peasants in the surrounding area. It became quickly apparent that for a variety of reasons, far fewer peasants fled with the Russian army into the heartland of Russia, from Dereczin, than from most other areas. Almost in every village, a substantial number of peasants remained behind, who had guarded their fields, as well as the property of their neighbors that did flee, and were well provisioned with a large number of the tools needed to do their work. The Jewish leaders conserved resources for the entire war, on behalf of the Jewish population in their town, and concerned themselves with assuring that they should not, God forbid, suffer from hunger. A number of the Dereczin Jews had actually begun to manage the fields of those peasants that had fled. Under the influence and with the cooperation of the Area Overseers, a reserve of grain and other produce was created, to serve the needs of the citizens of Dereczin, the Christian population and the villages were also satisfied, because each Overseer had selected those villages that were familiar to him, and dealt with peasants whom he had befriended through many years of acquaintance. In addition, we advanced our interests through a variety of arrangements, in which we put in place successful relationships between the populace and the military forces. Our management created a situation where "the wolf was satiated, but the sheep remained whole."

It is significant to underscore that Dereczin was one of the few regions where not only did the populace not suffer from hunger, but was able to provision, more than once, other regions such as Slonim and Baranovich, which suffered from a complete absence of food. From those places, almost the entire Christian populace either fled, or was driven because of their proximity to the battlefront.

Frequently, and understandably, there were difficult months during the war years. The German occupiers, more than once, demonstrated their despotic character in regards to the resident population. However, it must be said that in our area, we did not experience serious incidents or complications.

More or less, life in Dereczin under the German occupation proceeded normally. Apart from the Officer, *Sholom Mansky*, in whose district Dereczin

fell, along with those villages on the way to Zelva, together with *Kolonia Sinaiska*, as the representative of Dereczin proper, there was *Itcheh-Berel* the carpenter a skillful and intelligent Jewish man. Several young Jewish boys were designated as intermediaries.

The secretary-bookkeeper for the Jewish area was the religious Jew, *Reb Yitzhak-Avraham Abelovich*, well known in Dereczin, a beloved and upright man, and with the permission of the German military *Beamts-Forsteher*[86], *leutenant Rhein*, a magazine for grain and other produce was established in the town. The representative *Itcheh-Berel*, with the secretary *Abelovich*, would every two weeks distribute set food rations to each family, in accordance with the number of people in it, for quite low prices. The Jewish overseers from the Christian districts received special permission from the *Beamts-Forsteher* to submit even fish caught in the lakes of their rural districts to the food-magazine, and even that was distributed to the residents of Dereczin at reasonable prices.

Some time after their arrival, the Germans opened a public school with a German as its headmaster. Local male teachers, and a number of female teachers were appointed to the faculty, among them, two from the *Novick* family. It is understood that in that school, the German language was also taught.

A German-Jewish "Ideal"

The military *Beamts-Forsteher*, leutenant *Rhein*, was an intelligent man with higher education. His secretary was a German Jew. Both were attracted with understanding and sympathy to the Dereczin Jewish populace. It was anyway, convenient and comfortable for them to maintain a relationship with the Jewish, more cultured community, because they could not find a common basis for discourse with the standoffish Byelorussian peasantry.

I remember an incident in the year 1916, when the well-known Jewish Bundist lecturer and culture worker, Jacob Patt came to Dereczin to raise funds for cultural causes, and I went to the *Beamts-Forsteher*, with a request for him to permit us to call for a larger-than-normal gathering to which Patt would give his appeal. The German leutenant asked only if the speaker will speak in Yiddish or Hebrew, and when he heard that Patt would speak in Yiddish, he immediately granted his permission, provided a location, and requested that he also be invited to the assembly. Indeed, he actually did come, and stayed to the very end of the meeting, thereby establishing that Patt was a good speaker...

In general, the Jews continued to conduct their lives according to their prior practices, they went to the synagogue, studied the occasional page of *Gemara*, organized weddings and circumcisions, to which they invited Germans of their acquaintance. The conduct of commerce took place even under a more strict military oversight, the roads form Dereczin to the larger commercial centers, such a Bialystock, were always full of German patrols, who strongly forbade transport of a variety of products, but despite this, Jews found a way to deal with this. A familiar ruse of that time was often used: when a German patrol would stop a wagon with Jewish merchants that was carrying contraband merchandise, in order to avoid the customary search of the wagon contents, the patrol leader would encounter one of the Jews lying down in the wagon, covered with bandages on the head or abdomen. The partner, namely the wagon driver, would immediately start describing to the German, that he was transporting someone ill with typhus – and this produced the absolutely best result. The Germans always would immediately recoil from such a wagon, murmuring *"Donnerwetter!"* and similar epithets.

Jews developed all manner of stratagems of this nature, and smuggling was carried on. Actually, because of the outbreak of various epidemics, we were able to cause the German staff headquarters to remain in Halinka, thereby causing them to remain at a distance from Dereczin. Every time when we district overseers would report to the staff headquarters, the old Major would always ask us about the status of the cholera epidemic that broke out shortly after the Russians had departed from Dereczin. For a long time, our answer was that there were still cases of cholera, and this significantly

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[86] Official military representative to the civilian population.

alarmed the Germans.

Banditry in the Forests

A certain time after the arrival of the German occupiers, deserters from the Russian army, who were hiding themselves in the thick forests around Dereczin began to appear, and who engaged in attacking isolated citizens, and wagons passing through the area, whom they would rob, and even commit murder. The German military lacked the forces needed to track them down, because the surrounding Christian populace was fearful of turning them over, as it was often forced to provision the deserters and robbers, under threat of mayhem and murder.

At the outset, two Jewish victims fell at the hands of these thieving deserters. Two Jewish millers had set off on foot to a distant village, carrying money with which to buy a horse. They never returned, and all the efforts to find them on the part of the German military, the Jewish district overseers and intermediaries, produced nothing. Not even a trace of them was found. Also, a Slonim forest products merchant who had a wood business in the forests around Dereczin, was murdered along with his Jewish foreman, while traveling with a large sum of money that he was going to use to pay off his forest workers.

Because of these bandits in the surrounding forests, we found it necessary to purchase from the Germans, because they had left Dereczin, a larger amount of weaponry, with hand grenades, and even a machine-gun in order to protect ourselves against their predations, when there were no forces in the town.

A Privileged Town

Now, many years after the first German occupation, and informed by the terrifying deeds of their second occupation, one can obtain the impression that Dereczin enjoyed the status of being a privileged town.

It was because of this, that we were able to render assistance to the fire victims in Slonim after the great blaze of 1917, even though Slonim was in another district, and it was strictly forbidden to conduct the transaction of merchandise between our town and Slonim. We lobbied the military authority for permission to assemble grain, potatoes, and other foodstuffs, and transport it to Slonim for the use of the fire victims.

The Jews of Slonim were extremely grateful to us, and could not forget the help that they received from Dereczin. Several years later, when a fire broke out among us, the Slonim community sent us several wagons with clothing, and other products, along with a sum of money to help the victims.

This was the way Jews managed to get through the difficult war years. During this time, a part of the Dereczin Jewish population learned how to reclaim land, farm and plant. The Jewish population also became accustomed to the German standard of orderliness and attention to detail – characteristics which had never been seen during the era of Czarist rule.

All of this generally was to the benefit of the day-to-day life of the Jewish populace during the German occupation, but the real purpose of German attention to detail, and "order," the real face of German hegemony, was felt by the Jews during the years of atrocity of the Second World War.

In the Vise of the War

By Malka Alper
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photos: *Chaykeh Mishkin, Teacher* (p. 117, Top)
A German School class, with their teacher, Chaykeh Miskhin (p. 117, Bottom)
A. Sh. Emanuel, (sometimes spelled Emiel) Teacher at the German School (p. 118)

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, our town, like someone dead, became enshrouded in despair. Really, an understatement! They mobilized fathers of children, reservists who had fought in the Russo-Japanese War, young sons of elderly people, and even slightly underage young people. Many families were left without their breadwinners.

The Jewish committee that was organized to help those families whose fathers were on the front, focused on lightening the need and difficult circumstances of those families that were suffering, but this was like a drop in the ocean. From what I recall, the Czarist regime, apart from the meager salary paid to each soldier, largely did not care for the families of those who were mobilized.

Also, the Christian populace was shaken up by the outbreak of the war: apart from the mobilization of the skilled workers, their inventory of livestock suffered neglect, and fields were left fallow and unplowed. Understand, that this had immediate repercussions on the livelihood of the Jews in the town.

Under such circumstances, there was nothing to think about regarding sending children off for an education. Only the *Talmud Torah* continued to function after a fashion, and even took in more than its usual amount of students. The entire energy of the town was focused on generating sustenance, about which there was a continuous stream of bitter news. Everyone's thoughts were occupied with their relatives either at the front or in the barracks.

And so, the months flew by, and the front got closer to Dereczin. One lived in fear and under pressure from the decrees of the military authorities. It becomes clear that the Germans are going to reach us as well. Everyone prays that we will live through the impending transition of power: that the Russians retreat without bloodshed among the civilian populace, and the "good" Germans take over already.

After the last days of summer, the High Holydays arrived, and after nights of fear and sleeplessness, after hiding oneself wherever possible, we became free of the Russians, and the Germans occupied our area.

In town, there is a transport garrison, the horses are stabled with the local Christian populace. Everyone had rooms [in their homes] taken for use and they were occupied by Germans of all types. The economic circumstances were not good. In order to travel from town to the village, or from the village to town, it was necessary to receive [formal] permission.

And then they started taking men for conscripted labor, to repair the infrastructure that had been ruined [because of the fighting]. The pay for this work was meager, often in the form of bread ration coupons. Dereczin finds itself caught in the vise of war, with everything that this condition entails.

Whole families, women and children, go out into the fields to dig up what few potatoes they can find that haven't already been harvested, in order to stockpile for the coming winter with whatever they can. It was terribly sad to look at the women and children, returning from the fields after a wearying day, with a basket full of potatoes on their backs, often barefoot, wet from the rain. From eight o'clock in the evening on is "curfew," and you are not allowed to be on the streets, and gendarmes patrol the streets to enforce the order. Even if someone had good reason to be out of their house and on the street, where the outhouses were found, one had to be extremely careful, and be able to account for oneself, or have to plead with the patrols.

In time, the pressure felt from the occupation forces

began to lighten, but the first period, with its character of compelled activities etched itself deeply into the memories of the Jews of Dereczin. I remember very well the school established for school-age children, by the military command, shortly after they took over Dereczin. It was compulsory education, conducted in the Prussian manner and style. Jews accustomed themselves to this as well, and attempted to infuse the education with more Jewish character and content.

Things became a little easier when in the place of the military command, an official representative to the civilian population was installed (*Beamts-Forsteher*). He looked down on all the Jews. He granted permission to bring in and move out merchandise and food, and the livelihood of the Dereczin Jews depended on him.

And what can one not get used to eventually? Slowly the Jews, and the young folk who came of age in the war years, became bound to the yoke of finding sustenance. One traveled around from town to town, or to nearby cities, some looking for business, others for work.

The epoch of occupation comes to its end a little bit at a time. Revolution breaks out in Russia. The reverberations reach even the areas under German occupation. The German front is shaken up.

The surrounding forests are full of deserters and escaped prisoners of war. It is dangerous to travel on the roads, but what does one not do in order to make a living? Ignoring the isolated instances of murder on the highways, Jews travel the villages, build houses, set up ovens, sew clothing, and footwear for the local peasantry, and bring a little food into Dereczin. Merchants travel to Slonim and Volkovysk to bring merchandise from there.

But the young people, who make these trips instead of their parents, come back with not only merchandise and food – they frequently bring back a periodical, a brochure. Just as the town Jewish people would duck into a convenient *Bet HaMidrash*, in order to partake of a sacramental bit of learning, so these young people duck into the branches of their organizations in order to obtain material for the young people in their town.

The Prussian School

For the first year of the war, and until the Germans came, nobody gave any thought to the need for educating the children. Worry about husbands and sons who were at the front, and also the day-to-day concerns of making a living, for these families who were left alone, consumed the time and attention of most of the Dereczin residents. This same condition continued to prevail for the first several months of the German occupation. Dereczin was virtually isolated from its entire surroundings. The military authorities made themselves comfortable. The military condition was a difficult one. Apart form the *Talmud Torah*, there was no institution of learning.

A short time after the occupation of Dereczin, the occupiers established a school for the school-age children -- a German school. The Germans had the expectation that the territories that they had occupied would remain under their control even after the war ended. They were certain of their victory. They decided to initiate the "Germanization" of the occupied territories, and with giving the occupied territories a "taste of German culture."

They did this in their usual Prussian way. On one day, an order went out, requiring all children from the age of 6 to 13 to enroll in the school. The organizer and director of the school was a military man, a Prussian. With his swagger stick in hand, he drove the German-Prussian discipline into the school. The rod was not spared in instances when the director felt that a child was slow to understand, or did not respond quickly enough to please the director.

Teachers? Local men and women who could read and write a bit of German. One teacher was from outside Dereczin – *A. Sh. Emanuel*. The director himself taught the highest grade, and he kept his eye on everything that went on in every corner of the place.

And since this school was compulsory, the *Heders*, which were barely existing, closed up, one after another. Few families who had the means, allowed themselves to have their children schooled in Hebrew by private instructors such as *Feivel*

Einstein, Leizer Matz, and the same *A. Sh. Emiel* who taught at the German school.

Despite its Prussian character, the German school was to a large degree, a planting of the seeds of general education for the children of Dereczin – a current that had its origins in the first years of the twentieth century.

Under the Yoke of the German Occupation

by Jacob Rabinovich

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Jacob Rabinovich as a student in the German School. (P. 119)

As a memorial to my father, brother and sisters, and their children, who were exterminated in the Holocaust at the end of 1942.

In September 1915, about a year after the outbreak of the First World War, the great retreat of the Russian armies from the province of Grodno began. Whole battalions of Cossacks and artillery began to stream through Dereczin. The first-aid stations became clogged with wounded soldiers. The Jews of the town were filled with fear of the impending events. Cossacks would break into the houses and take whatever they could, especially money. I recollect, that at about that time, there was a festive parade in honor of the Czar's uncle, *Nikolai Nikolaevich,* apparently to help raise his spirits. The great prince received the review standing on the porch of our house. When the show was over, my mother, she should rest in peace, approached him, and invited him and his retinue in for a glass of tea. He responded to her request, and from then on, his soldiers did not have the nerve to enter our home for purposes of plunder.

At the end of the month of *Elul,* the Russian army left the town. On the night of the retreat, there were many incidents of robbery. The citizenry locked themselves in their homes, but the Cossacks forcibly broke into them. The Jews were defenseless. These wild men broke into our house as well. Suddenly, the wife of *Shmuel Stukalsky, Vikhna,* appeared, accompanied by a Cossack officer. It turns out she had bribed the officer, and was going from house to house, in order to calm the residents, and thanks to this, there were no human casualties.

The following daybreak, the Germans entered the town. At first, the thought was that the Germans were bringing liberation to the Jews, but in the end, the bitter disappointment came. They issued a decree that all citizens above the age of nine were to appear in the courtyard of the Russian Orthodox church, and to be photographed there and receive a residential passport. Whoever was not provided with a document was liable to be conscripted into forced labor.

During the three years of the German occupation, from 1916-1918, the economic condition in the town was lamentably bad. The captors confiscated everything, beginning with clothing, and bedding, all the way through to copperware. *Sholom Mansky* was selected by them to function as the city's chief executive *(Burgomeister).* At his side, a sort of citizen's committee worked, *(Burger-komitet).* One of the duties of this committee was to distribute food rations in accordance with ration cards. The Jewish community suffered from a state of malnutrition. Every little thing, like a trip to the cemetery, required prior clearance and special permission from the German ruling authorities. Jews managed to sustain themselves through smuggling and trading. They would secretly buy from the Germans, and resell to the farmers. All of the synagogues in town were seized by the occupiers. The Jews prayed in *minyans* that were convened in private homes. Despite this, the plight of the Jews in the town was much better than that of the farmers in

the surrounding area. They were beholden to the Jews, who understood the language of the conquerors, and who ruled the farmers with a harsh hand.

In the middle of 1916, the Germans issued a decree requiring all Jewish children beginning at age nine, to undergo compulsory registration in a German school. As it happens, only part of the children got registered. There were many parents who were reluctant to enroll their children in a non-Jewish school. The director of the school was a German officer by the name of *von Zusnirtz*. Three classes were opened. Two of the classes were conducted in the in the hospital building, and the highest class (*Uber Stuffe)* was held in the school building across the street from *Izaakovich (der Mikhoisker)*. There were several Jewish teachers: *A. Sh. Emiel*, of blessed memory, *Sima Rubinovsky* from Slonim, and others. The language of instruction was German. Textbooks were received from Germany. Discipline was strict. The curriculum was quite varied. The common name for this school was : *Stadt-Schule der Judische Gemeinde zu Dereczin.* A portion of the students secretly studied Jewish subjects in the afternoon.

After the October 1917 revolution, the governance of the German occupation forces became more liberal. Almost completely out in the open, a Yiddish cultural group, called *Atid*[87] was founded (the Yiddish *Kulturverein "Zukunft"*), in which the influence was Bundist. The group was headed by the sons of *Sholom Mansky, Menahem and David,* and the son of *Ephraim-Yehoshua, Herschel Levitt.* With the consent of the Germans, representatives from Bialystock, such as the Bundist representative Jacob Patt would appear in town, as did others.

At about the same time, word of the Balfour Declaration reached the town, which led to the establishment of the *Histadrut* organization of Zionist Youth (*Tze'irei Tzion*), under the direction of *David Alper*, of blessed memory. We, the young people in town, would split up to attend the meetings of both of these organizational streams, but with care, so the director of the German school wouldn't catch us. From time to time, there would be evening discussions held jointly between the two groups. I have the impression that in those years, the hand of the Bundist-Yiddishists was the upper one, and their influence on the young people was stronger than that of the Zionist Youth organization.

The relationship of the German authorities to the population improved and softened.

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87 "Future" in Hebrew

I recall that a portion of the Jewish residents took up working the fields of the farmers that fled in fear of the Germans, at the time of the Russian retreat. Jewish refugees reached our town from areas that were quite distant from us, from even as far as Warsaw, and they stayed to live in our midst during the entire period of the occupation. The people of Dereczin assisted them quite a bit, a portion of them remained afterwards permanently.

The Food Committee

By Mattityahu (Mottel) Abelovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Our town was on a side thoroughfare, without railroad service, and without a highway. In order to get to Slonim or Zelva, it was necessary to be taken by a horse-drawn wagon driver.

The Germans came into Dereczin at the time of the First World War, disciplined in their manner, with a complete plan as to how they will "bring everything to order." They immediately took to the task, putting sanitation facilities in place, building roads, and later, even opened a school in order for children to begin the study of German. They took the former Russian teachers, and prepared them to be German teachers. The occupiers had a good idea of what they wanted to accomplish, and allocated capable people and leaders [to get it done.]

I myself, was prepared to enter the high class *(Uber Stuffe)* of the school. I knew a little German from before, having taught myself from a Yiddish textbook. Quite a number of young Dereczin children studied with me at that time.

In the town proper, a committee was established, which gathered food products from Dereczin and its surroundings. With the approach of the German army, many of the peasants from the surrounding area fled into Russia, leaving the villages behind with significant amounts of food. All this was gathered up by the food committee, which was headed by my father, *Yitzhak-Abraham Abelovich*. His responsibility was to distribute this food to the populace, and to keep the books. A daughter of the *Hurwitsch (Horowitz?)* family, who knew German, helped my father with the bookkeeping.

There was no lack of work for the committee to do, especially my father. A lot of the menfolk from town had already been mobilized into the Russian army, and their wives and children remained behind in town, many of them already widows and orphans. Apart from them, there were many elderly people who were desperately in need. My father did everything to assure that the foodstuffs would be divided fairly and equitably, and that no one, God forbid, should be left without something to eat. Periodically, German inspectors would come to us from Slonim in order to assure that everything was being carried out properly.

I greatly want to write about my father, may he rest in peace, who was taken from this world at a young age. I cannot forget my early childhood, when I studied the *Gemara* with *Reb David*. On the afternoon of the Sabbath, he would invite the fathers of his pupils to come and hear the way their children learned. My father was a scholar in his own right. He would listen to me, and when I demonstrated that I understood the issues of the Talmudic debate I was studying, he would swell with pride, come home full of *nachas*, and tell this to my mother.

And to this day, I cannot forget the Passover Seders at my home. My father would sit at the head of the

table, and together with my older brother, *Shmuel*, would direct the course of the Seder, with the *Haggadah* and with singing. People actually came to stand under our windows to listen to the singing, in which we, the younger children chimed in to help our father and *Shmuel*.

On Yom Kippur Eve, after taking the last meal prior to the fast, our father would put on his *tallis*, and before he departed for the synagogue, one-at-a time he would take each of us aside, and bless us with a warm, Yiddish blessing.

The Friday nights in our family remain as some of the most beautiful and shining memories that I have.

When Rabbi *Plotkin* assumed the Rabbinate of Dereczin, he became very friendly with my father, and always took his opinion into account when dealing with community affairs.

It was in this manner that my father, during the time of the German occupation, served his community with integrity, and concerned himself with the welfare of the poorer element in our midst.

The war, as we all remember stretched on for a long time. After the Germans retreated, the sovereignty of our area changed frequently, the Bolsheviks came, and after them – the Poles, and later, once again the Russians. When they entered Dereczin, they immediately mobilized the youth. Part of these young people were shipped deep into the Russian heartland.

My father had by this time passed away, and we, the younger children were with our mother. The oldest in the house at this time was our brother, *Yudel*. He worked in the mill owned by *Shelovsky*, and through him we had the ability to buy wheat, store it at the mill, and then sell flour. This provided us with some modest income during those difficult times.

A Charity Soup Kitchen for the Needy

By Malka Alper

(Original Language: Hebrew)

During the First World War, when Dereczin was under German occupation, a soup kitchen for the needy Jews in town was established by the *Amts-Forsteher*, who served as the senior officer in charge of the civilian administration. He was a uniformed German, with a thin rod in his hand, He was deferential to his seniors, but looked haughtily down with derision at all those he came in contact with, he was the "mover and shaker" because by his word, commerce could dry up, and he was the one that established who had permission to take out farm produce, and who could import from the markets of surrounding towns.

He personally knew all the residents of the town, and knew the distress suffered by part of the population, and it was then that he granted a "great boon" to the [food] committee that had been organized at his behest (door-to door solicitation and street begging were outlawed), to open a soup kitchen so the needy may be able to obtain hot soup, if the Jewish community would provide the following: a salaried cook, with assistants, daughters of the townsfolk, who would come at a scheduled time to peel vegetables, provided by the surrounding landholders at no cost.

In those days of limitation, an order was given and the kitchen came into being as a reality. Each day, daughters would come to participate in the preparation of the vegetables for the following day. Even "the Boss" in all his glory, would show up almost every day, since he was pleased to see the young women gainfully occupied, and jeering at those who seemingly had no skill for this kind of work, sticking the ladle into the big pot, and tasting what was cooking, remaining sometimes for the period where the food was distributed into pots, that every mother would bring there to get their ration for their family. They were often given a portion of bread that was provided by the Jewish "committee," to take home along with the soup.

The kitchen was set up in the home of *Zelig*

Lobzovsky, not far from the old *Bet HaMidrash*.

One day, I was summoned to the office of "The Boss." Every request of this nature aroused dread, because a meeting with him, and his haughty looking down caused very unpleasant feelings, which when they welled up inside, needed to be consciously suppressed with effort, lest they burst out into the open. What was up?

A landholder from the area had arrived with a shipment of vegetables – mostly potatoes, beets and carrots, for the kitchen, and it was my responsibility to show the wagon driver where to deposit the shipment. In turning to the landholder, without so much as introducing me, he said:

> "The vegetable girl Alper will look after arranging this." I parted from them with good wishes, and a lighter feeling, that this was the sole purpose of the call.

If my memory doesn't deceive me, the kitchen functioned for the years of 1916-1917.

War Chitchat

By Malka Alper
(Original Language : Yiddish)

Photo: The barracks. Before the Germans, a part of the barracks served as a prison. By the end of the occupation, the larger part was used as a public meeting place.

Immediately after the outbreak of the First World War, reservists from Dereczin were mobilized, among whom were those who had already served in the Russo-Japanese War.

The reservists were the fathers of families. Their families were left without breadwinners, and suffered a great deal materially, because the Czarist regime provided next to nothing for them. The community did whatever they could for them.

On a certain evening, a woman came to us [in the store], whose husband had been a soldier in the Russo-Japanese War, and had been mobilized again, and was at the front. After purchasing what she needed, she paused, and spoke from the heart:

– "You don't know what they are like. At the time they signed the Russian-Japanese peace treaty, the plans for the present war were already lying under that very table..."

A second woman, whose husband was also mobilized and sent to the German front, complained about her bitter fate. Suddenly, she abruptly stops what she is saying, and asks:

– "Tell me, I beg you, and please don't take an umbrage at the question, but do they wage war there during the night?"

– "Of course," came the reply.

– "Oh, my God," she says, clasping her hands, –"You could knock someone's eye out that way!"...

Personalities & Their Achievements

David Alper

My Brother, David

By Malka Alper
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Portrait of David Alper (p. 125)

Even as a child, he stood out in handsomeness, wisdom and quick-wittedness. He was the darling of his teachers, beginning with his the teachers who taught him alphabet, through his *Gemara* teachers, and those who taught him secular studies.

He teachers and *melamdim*, who lived in Dereczin, would come to visit him on Holidays or during vacation periods, when he would come home. They had a great interest in talking with him, because he was always – in that period of his life – more developed, and knew more than most people his age: he was never satisfied only with the material he received from his teachers, he constantly searched for opportunities, through self-study, to slake his thirst for knowledge.

He was greatly attracted to philosophy, and used to devote the larger part of his scarce free time to pursue philosophical study, and that at a young age.

By being correct and tactful in his relationships with everyone, old and young alike, and with those not as gifted as he himself was – made him beloved by all segments of the population.

He never confined himself within the narrow boundaries of his own knowledge base, wanting also that others should be knowledgeable, beginning with the establishment of *Hovevei S'fat Ever*, evening courses for [the study of] Hebrew, *Tanach*, and Jewish History, through the *Tarbut School*, and the *Tze'irei Tzion – Poalei Tzion* [organizations].

He was skillful at stimulating the desire for ambition and self-development among his [own] sisters: he would lightly and good-naturedly banter about the role of women, and would bring examples from history, women who he held out as role models, which awoke in them the desire to struggle for gender equality, not to relent in this regard, and find means to learn and develop oneself, and thereby create a place for oneself in society.

He never compromised with himself, he did everything with full commitment, with his whole heart, and this showed itself especially in his role as a teacher and educator in the *Tarbut* Gymnasium in Pinsk, in the years 1922-1939, and from the year 1931 onwards as its director.

Until the hand of *The Tormenter* reached him in 1941, at the beginning of the occupation.

May his memory be blessed!

Our Unforgettable Teacher

By Liza Katz-Bialosotsky
(Original Language: Hebrew)

The beginning was in a *Heder*, in the conventional tradition of a *Heder*, and as it happened in a tiny little darkened room, in the *Hasidim-Shtibl*, in the poorest quarter of the town. The remainder of the regular *minyan* that would come late on the Sabbath at the *shtibl*, after the morning prayers, would get there before we arrived carrying our book bags. They would typically be rushing to put away their own prayer books in the old armoires, and would leave, in order to make room for us.

We, the young little girls of our households, would rush to take the places around the big wide table and begin the study of our alphabet from the teacher of that time, *Leib Abelovich.*

We mastered reading skills rapidly, and began to understand the words and whole sentences. The more advanced among us moved on to study with *Feivel Einstein*, who was already a more advanced teacher, who taught us *Tanach* with commentaries, providing instruction in Hebrew (*Ivrit Be'Ivrit).*

Another year went by, and our parents became concerned and started to discuss: what to do with us, and how to give us an education and an exposure that was full of the spirit of these new times? Apparently the parents sensed that the day was not far off when their children would begin to seek places of learning that would be outside the boundaries of their parents' control, and far from our town. Many ideas were presented, but the sentiment of my father prevailed, supported by a group of the attending parents, that a Hebrew School be established for their children. It was David Alper, of blessed memory, who came to the support of these forward-thinking parents.

David, a man of broad perspective, and a proponent of the upcoming ideals of the time, was especially alert to the issues surrounding the education of the young generation, beginning from the earliest age through to maturity. He invested his entire energy in the establishment of a modern, secular school, able to provide instruction of knowledge, and to instill love of ones' people and homeland. He assumed the responsibility on his own shoulders to assume the position of principal of the school, and its founder, dealt with every detail, large and small, brought talented young teachers in, and joined in the establishment of the new curriculum at the pleasure of knowledgeable people of the area. Our teachers in those years were: *Zvi Marmanski, Tieger, Sinai,* and others. They brought education to a high level. The school on Dereczin was not open very long under the direction of David Alper before offers began to come in from all around the area.

Studies were conducted entirely in Hebrew. The preservation of the ancient language of our people was wrapped in a Zionist education that was given to us within the walls of the school, and all this thanks to David Alper and members of his family, who served as a wellspring of Hebrew-Secular education, and a cradle for the Zionist-*Halutz* movement in Dereczin. Even today, decades after all that has happened to us during the years of the war and the Holocaust, at every gathering or celebration, we bring to mind memories from those distant and precious years, when we sat rapt, on the student benches of the new school, full of light, Torah and faith, and our hearts exude love and gratitude to the Alpers, and especially to David. He, and members of his family rooted the love of our homeland in our young hearts, as well as the yearning to make *aliyah,* and the conviction to reestablish our people in its [ancient] homeland.

In those years, we learned to give homage to, and celebrate every national holiday and feast day. As an extension of our Jewish tradition, we celebrated the New Year of the Trees in our rustic town – *Tu B'Shevat.* We would go out, with the blue and white flag leading the way, to the outskirts of the town – as if we were going to plant trees and sow grain, with agricultural songs on our lips, the song of the flowering almond tree.[88] We knew that a repast awaited us, consisting of fruits grown in the Holy Land, and all this aroused us, and filled our hearts with love for a new life in our [ancestral] land. And did we know how to celebrate *Lag B'Omer!*

And the end of the [school] year was also marked by celebrations, and presentations by the drama club that was established within the walls of the school. When we were called upon to participate in the celebration of national holidays of Poland, we were not embarrassed to appear before a large audience and to perform in the local language [sic: Polish] as well.

And it was in this manner that our education continued up to the time that David Alper went to Pinsk. The strong bonds that tied his students to their teacher and educator, and to his household and sisters, did not cease after this. At every holiday or

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[88] Reference to the Hebew song for *Tu B'Shevat*, which opens with reference to a flowering almond tree.

feast day, when he came to visit his parents, we would do everything we could to meet with him, and not only for just a few minutes. When he would return to his position in Pinsk, we would escort him, whether from near or far, with feelings of respect, and boundless affection.

With the passing of the years, his sisters also began to leave home, and made their way to the Holy Land. Thanks to them, their aged mother was able to reach the shores of our homeland, and to live there. What a pleasure it was for me to visit her, and find her bent over a newspaper or a Hebrew book, as she anticipated the arrival of her townsfolk, and began with memories of Dereczin – and her beloved son, David.

Until the outbreak of the Second World War, we had continued to hope that we would yet see David among us, together with his wife, *Shoshana,* and their two children.

To our terrible sorrow, David delayed his timetable, and the hand of *The Tormenter* reached him, and robbed the family and the community of his students of the good fortune of the most unique reunion of our lives.

David was precious to each and every one of us, and his memory is as precious today in our hearts. To this day, I can see him in my imagination, in the fullness of his height and handsomeness, with his infectious smile, as he speaks to his pupils who ingest every word he utters, and their hearts quivering with love for their gifted, unforgettable teacher.

The Alper Family

By David Rabinovich
(Original Language: Hebrew)

It is not possible to describe the community life, and the *Halutz*-Zionist movement, and the organization of the secular education in Dereczin, without underscoring the central role and leadership provided by the house on the market street, which bordered on the school building, in which the Alper family lived.

There was a wide wooden porch at the front of the pharmacy of the Alper family, and it was on the wooden steps of this porch that the *Halutz*-Zionist movement was born in our town, along with all of its offshoots.

The pride of this family, and the pride of the town was the only son of this family, David Alper. Educated at the Yeshiva of Szczuczyn, rooted in the Jewish Torah, David succeeded in absorbing and internalizing the best of the intellectual and literary works of the enlightened world. He was brimming and effusive with knowledge of Torah, science, literature and philosophy, and everything that he learned and absorbed, he knew how to communicate with great clarity to his audience. He would speak with grace, and the entire town would come to hear his words. In debates with anti-Zionists, he always held the upper hand, and I will not exaggerate if I aver that David stood head and shoulders above his supporters as well as opponents, his friends as well as his pupils. His acuity and depth of knowledge might occasionally falter, but of all his undertakings, what stood out most of all, was his initiative in the field of education of the younger generation, and his skill in the establishment of the frameworks and organization for the Zionist-Socialist youth, the *Halutzim,* the workers for *Keren Kayemet LeYisrael,* and for anyone prepared to contribute effort for the Zionist cause. His impact on the cultural community life was felt in every aspect of these undertakings in Dereczin, and to this day, it is possible to see among the many good sons and daughters of our town, the legacy of the marvelous teacher, David Alper.

David was raised in a Zionist home, and along with him were raised five sisters. Four of them are found here with us in Israel, and of these, three continue to

be employed in the field of education, and the fourth is a pediatrician.

Among the sisters, who were all committed to the Zionist ideal, it was *Malka* who especially excelled, who in those years was the head of the Zionist *Halutzim* at the right hand of her brother David in all his undertakings, in the establishment of the *Tze'irei Zion* (Zionist Youth), and the young peoples' auxiliary for this organization, the establishment of *Bnot Zion* (Daughters of Zion), that encompassed tens of young girls from town, in the establishment of the library, in the name of *Y. Ch. Brenner*, and all manner of other activities in town.

The Alper house served as the center of all Zionist activities in Dereczin. In the pharmacy, prescriptions were concocted, and inside the house and in front of it, the agendas for all the cultural-community-secular activities were "concocted" with David and his sisters. There practically was not an hour in the day or evening, when someone wasn't sitting at the Alpers discussing one thing or another that needed to be done, over a glass of tea. There were those who came just to unburden their hearts, while others wanted to obtain advice from David, or a point of view on one subject or another.

And when David left for Pinsk to assume the position of Head of the Jewish Gymnasium there, and to work in the Zionist movement, many of his neighbors and friends would wait with longing for a holiday or celebration, and would meet with him during that time when he would come home to visit at the home of his parents. I, also, will not forget my meeting with David Alper in the year 1932, when I returned from the Holy Land for a visit to Poland. We fell into each other's embrace, and had a long and very warm conversation. When we parted, David said to me: "Nu? And now we will meet [again] in the Holy Land..."

But David did not reach the homeland, because he dedicated his entire life and energy to his calling. And we were denied the privilege of seeing this greatest of Dereczin's sons among us, this outstanding personality, under whose aegis, a whole generation in our town was educated.

David Alper, Our Teacher and Principal

By Asher Shofet (Negbah)

(Original Language: Hebrew)

(From the Hebrew article *al HaMishmar – At His Post* – written on December 25, 1961 at the 20th anniversary of the death of *David Alper*)

David Alper came as a teacher to the Gymnasium in Pinsk shortly after it had been founded. From the time of his arrival, he was accorded a senior standing among the organization of the teachers there, for many years, even prior to his becoming the principal in fact, he was the living spirit of the organization. The positions he held both internal and external, his role in cultural and *Haskalah* activities, in addition to the responsibilities for educational direction and teaching, transformed him into the central figure in the Gymnasium, and it became one of the greatest and best of the *Tarbut* Gymnasiums throughout Poland.

First and foremost, he proved himself as a teacher and educator. He was a great believer in conducting a class. I recall: the class is rapt with attention and holds its breath as the woven fabric of the lesson unfolds from the mouth of the teacher. He is imparting his thoughts to his audience standing, or in the middle of stepping lightly between table and chair. Hand gestures that clarify and explain, an intelligent and lively look over his ever-present eyeglasses, a black mustache which concealed a scar from his boyhood, adds a measure of affability to the appearance of his already pleasant face.

Of the many subjects which he taught at the

beginning of his work, among them mathematics and engineering, he moved subsequently to the exposition of Jewish learning and other subjects in the humanities, and in these he was unique.

By today's standards, I see his educational enthusiasm and attention to detail which he provided for the modern courses of study, as incredible. How he brought a question up in front of the class, whether large or small, how he guided the ideas and exchange among the students, transforming it into a riveting debate, how he held the scepter of conquest in his hand, with which to tame the subject matter, and the solution to the question residing in his mouth, regarding the sought after literary-social issue under discussion.

The main discipline which he earned in his classes, and in all his demands from pupils, was the discipline of respect for position. The sobriquet of "teacher-friend" did not apply to these relationships, but rather, "great father," before whom his pupils stand with mixed awe and affection.

At his height during his appointment to the institution, David Alper was the principal catalyst and the one who freshened the lives of his students. When the time for the long vacation began, he would walk up and down the length of the auditorium of the Gymnasium, with his hands outstretched to the masses of students, he would look about him, quip a bit, and smile at the older classes, while gathering in rivers of their laughter that would come back to him from all directions, and outside – talks with the collected parents, founders and authorities.

And even this – in those years, when the occupations of "guidance counselor" and "special services teacher" were practically unknown, David Alper understood how to allocate both thought and effort to these needs. Not once, did a growing young boy find himself getting lost, and unable to keep focused on the rigors of his study, especially at the onset of puberty – and it was at such a time that a youngster would find the way to the home of David Alper, where he would find an attentive ear, and good advice.

He would teach the young man how to organize his time, and to control his restlessness, by adhering to a set schedule of daily tasks and periodic recuperative activities, and found for him a classmate with whom he could jointly prepare his lessons; in follow-up meetings, the young man would sit across from him with bright smiling eyes, very strongly motivated by his return to the right line of endeavor.

We left the walls of the Gymnasium, and fresh new youngsters took our place in the rows of seats. The future of young Jews in Poland was decidedly uncertain, and the reaction to this was – the development of a community and cultural focus, with an orientation to the Holy Land, whose gates the British had effectively locked up already.

David Alper faithfully guarded the relationship he had with those of his students who emigrated, and he was proud of them, and they would even write him letters from [such] great distances, and when they visited home, they would meet him, yet again, on the grounds of Jewish education in the city. In the meantime, he was appointed the principal of the Gymnasium, when his predecessor *Abraham Mazer,* of blessed memory, made *aliyah* to the Holy Land.

What transpired and was created in the Holy Land lived in every nook and cranny of his soul. He educated his only son in Hebrew, as if it were his mother tongue. His pupils in the Holy Land, who came to visit Pinsk, never forgot to visit with him.

His students became leaders and heads of most movements in Poland, and ideological differences were forgotten in his group. But, he himself, remained at his post to the end. This for him was like Mount Nebo[89], from which he was not destined to come to the land of his dreams, and the center of his yearnings.

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89 The mountain from which Moses saw the Promised Land that he was fated not to enter.

He Who Is Not Forgotten Is Not Dead

By Naftali Ben-Dov (Dykhovsky)
(Original Language: Hebrew)

I heard these words from the mouth of one of the pupils of *David Alper*, of blessed memory. In reminiscing about this outstanding scion of our town, *Moshe Koll*, an officer of the Government of the State of Israel said: "Men of accomplishment are not dead, so long as their memory has not vanished from the hearts of the members of their generation."

And I know, feeling this with my whole heart, and I am certain that many feel as I do, that it is impossible to forget *David*, his good-heartedness, the high level of his spirit, his nobility and devotion to the essential – the preservation of our language, and the transmission of the heritage of our people, which he strove to preserve.

He was my classmate at the Yeshiva in Szczuczyn. I carry the memory of those days with me even now, his warmth and graciousness in me, as the memory of one who stood out from the rest, who will forever be remembered by those who knew him.

David, David, we will not forget you, because you live within us, in our memories, in our souls, with all that ties us to the distant past in out town, and the bright future in our Land.

Rabbi Chaim Zvi Sinai-Miller

Our Father's Way

By Khemda & Israel Artzi
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Rabbi Chaim Zvi Sinai-Miller (p. 130)

Our father, *Rabbi Chaim Zvi Sinai*, of blessed memory, was in his youth deeply immersed in the study of Torah, and far removed from the practical aspects of life. The one big event in the outside world that had the greatest influence on him, was the Dreyfus Affair. The trial laid bare before him the Jewish Question in all its depth, and he came to the unsurprising conclusion that the only solution to the dilemma of the Jewish people was the Zionist solution. From that time on, the Zionist ideal became the central focus of his life. He took an interest in all the proceedings of those first Zionist congresses. Understandably, his Zionism was an inseparable part of his religious world outlook. A complete Jew, according to his profound perception, was only one whose world was based on Torah and *Mitzvot*, in which residence in the Land of Israel was an integral part. He remained faithful to this outlook for his entire life: only that individual who personally performs the *mitzvah* of building the Homeland – fulfills his destiny.

He was active with his entire heart and soul on behalf of Zionist organizations, and he raised the Zionist issue prominently in every possible instance before the community: In the streets of Lithuania, in Poltava in the Ukraine, and in Dereczin in Poland. These cities were way stations in his life after the First World War, which uprooted entire peoples from their places of origin. With the publication of the Balfour Declaration, he was transported on the waves of Zionist enthusiasm, and his oratory about the onset of the Final Redemption captured souls for the Zionist cause in each and every city. In Dereczin, he put in place a generation of students loyal to the Zionist cause, most of whom, because of his influence, made *aliyah* to the Holy Land.

His longing for Zion received tangible expression through his desire for the land. In 1912, through the "Organization for Facilitating Settlement," he came into possession of a parcel of land in *Kfar Uriah*, and in 1926 he made *aliyah* together with his family and settled in the town along with eight other families. It is difficult to describe the difficult circumstances that these settlers had to contend with in a hostile land, surrounded by Arabs, isolated in the Judean hills, far from the centers of the *Yishuv*. He assumed the burdens of subjugating the land and building it with love, and lived his life together with his wife, *Bluma* ע"ה, who was his helpmeet, and a role model of devotion and total dedication. She followed him (as she herself often expressed it) "into the desert, an unsown land."[90]

In 1929, this little dot was destroyed at the hand of the Arabs, and their lives were spared thanks to an Arab Mukhtar who befriended them, and guided them to his village and home in the dead of night, and from there to the settlement at *Rehovot*. He continued to fulfil his desire to build the land with his settling in *Ramat HaSharon*.

In his new home, he continued with his way of life to which he remained faithful for all of his days: Torah, Work, and Performing Good Deeds.[91] His love of nature, raising living things, which he brought with him from his native town of *[Kolonia-] Sinaiska* were expressed in excerpts of his memories that he wrote in *Ramat HaSharon:*

> "...The fruit orchard, which turned white during the winter months, became a carpet of flowers...the trees, because of their clusters of blossoms, emitted a pleasant fragrance. The chestnut colored animal, with the red

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90 From Jeremiah 2:2

91 Expressed by the Hebrew expression, *Torah, Avodah, U'Gemilut Hasadim.*

> alter around its neck and a bell hanging from it, sent a rushing ringing sound to me... everything about me is effervescent, exuding life and ecstasy."

From this it is possible to apprehend his love for the labor that he devoted to the development of his pleasant lands. This fundamental value he blended with yet another such value: love of the Land of Israel. He had three loves that formed a three-part strand of his life: love of his people, the land and the cultural heritage of Israel, in the middle of which was the faith of Israel. In *Ramat HaSharon* he taught the *Tanach*, and the Oral Tradition to many [students], and was the leader of the religious advisory board, a member of the local leadership council for many years, a founder of the local charity organization, and a member of many other organizations.

He was active up to the last half year of his life, until he became ill with the disease from which he did not recover. He withstood all the stormy tribulations of life, being a widower, and sustaining the loss of children. We saw him as "strong in spirit, certain in his convictions, independent of the opinion of others, following his own chosen path, carrying his ensign within and without, and a guardian of the divine spark."

We will follow in the light of his steps for many, many days!

A Figure of Shining Light

By Malka Alper

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Rabbi Chaim Zvi Sinai-Miller was a man who was exceptionally gifted, a figure that emanated the light of friendship, truth, the love of Torah, his people, to his fellow man, and to the land.

He was a man of deep and abiding faith, with no conflict between his faith and deeds, at one with himself and his God. A person whose signature was truth [itself], and anything else was not imaginable. A broad-hearted man, of expansive thought, with sensitivity to the opinions of the public.

During the time when we lived within the ambit of *Rabbi Chaim Zvi* ל"ז, he was involved with education only for a limited number of years, but his persona served as an educating force in all his undertakings, in the light of his face, and the under the influence of his good heart.

That he was a Zionist from his early youth, was a matter of course, and even before the First World War, he obtained a parcel of land from *Kfar Uriah* for the purpose of coming to [The Holy] Land in order to settle there. The War not only denied him the fulfilment of this desire, it even uprooted him from his place of residence in Lithuania, and sent him into the vast reaches of Russia, where he tasted the taste of a double exile: as a war refugee, and as a Jew without civil rights.

He was not seduced by the calumny of the Russian Revolution, nor swayed by the limitless possibilities of America, from which his brothers and sisters called to him without a surcease. He preferred the life of a pioneer to all of these, in the Land of his Fathers, his heart's desire since the days of his youth.

It was my privilege to receive *Rabbi Chaim Zvi* and his family when they reached the port of Jaffa on Passover eve of 1926. How his face shone with happiness and good fortune: for his dream of youth had come to pass: he did not want to have the sailor carry him from the dinghy to dry land, as was the custom of the time, but desired rather to walk in the surf, in order to feel the seashore of his ancestral

homeland under his own feet. "You will be carried upon shoulders," as is written in the Book of Isaiah, he shouted from the distance, as he was carried nevertheless, on the shoulders of a beefy sailor.

The life of a pioneer, for which he yearned, continued through all the years that he resided in the Holy Land, nearly thirty three years, beginning with *Kfar Uriah* in the hills of Judea, the events of the *Sharon* in 1929, leadership in *Ramat-HaSharon*, and through the difficulties and sacrifices associated with the work of creation and development of the land. In every tree that he grew, he saw the fruition of his caring, every house he saw built in the settlement gave him true joy, and every settlement that was put up on his land, was a major event to Rabbi Chaim, and he lived it with the total depth of his Jewish-Zionist soul. And it was in this fashion that he lived the building and the creation of his settlement with all his might, and above all these, the miracle of the establishment of the State of Israel in his land. Despite suffering and misfortune, loss of children and sorrow, he bore his pain with an unshakeable spirit, and elevated ideal, as one in the vanguard, who believes that this is the destiny of those living on this land.

He was a man of enlightenment, a man who could carry on an interesting conversation, radiating light and love in all his words to everyone with whom he came in contact.

During the time of his illness, neither a word nor a hint was heard from his lips concerning his condition. About two weeks before he passed away, I visited him once more, and he was weak, and it was evident that his days were numbered. But his mind was clear, and he took an interest in what was going on in our town, he asked if we had called the annual assembly in memory of the annihilated community, he wanted to know what the disposition was of the *Dereczin Yizkor Book*, and the welfare of those who were putting it together.

He fell like a great tree. He was interred in the earth of the Land of Israel, whose image he apprehended in his youth, and was privileged to see its establishment and early development.

My Mentor and Teacher

By Kalman Abramovich

(Original Language: Hebrew)

There ware three things that served as a beacon to his path in his role as a teacher, and to these he gave his entire energy, thoughts, and a great part of his life: the inculcation of knowledge to his pupils, the transmission of the Hebrew language, and implanting a love of the ancestral homeland.

He focused all of these three pillars on one objective: abandonment of the Diaspora, and *aliyah* to the homeland. In the instruction of students in the subject that he taught, *Tanach*, literature, he explored the material in every facet, leaving no stone unturned, until he was convinced that his students had absorbed his words and explanations, and that the work of the lesson was not in vain.

I am reminded of one of his explanations of a poem by *Shaul Tchernyikhovsky*, *'Ani MaAmin'* concerning the young generation to be raised in the homeland: *"For one eye and the next will see the light."* This, too, was the teacher's belief, that the world will be transformed into light, people would become pure in mind and deed, the love of man for his neighbor would rule throughout the world, and when this becomes the way of mankind, there will be a light in the world that will be seen from one eye to the next, that is to say, that as an eye gets close to light, it is no longer sensitive to it, but accepts it as the norm.

He sought to lead his students in this direction. I am, again, reminded of our study of the poem by *[Chaim Nachman] Bialik, 'El HaTzippor.'* What longing and love he instilled in us during the study of this poem, and we knew these were his dreams and aspirations as well: *who shall give me the*

appendage, and I will wing my way to the land of the almond tree and date palm...

All this was not in vain. Thanks to *Miller-Sinai* the Teacher, who educated us to a love of our ancestral homeland, a portion of his students made *aliyah* to the homeland, from those who did not delay because of the times. Because of this, they were saved from the Holocaust. His students made the move at a time when they achieved fluency with the Hebrew language. The teacher continued his dream of life in Israel through his connection to the land itself.
And it was in this fashion that he continued in the study of Torah and its explication in the synagogue.

He was active in all manner of organizations, for the common good in his place of residence – *Ramat HaSharon.*

May his memory be for a blessing!

I Was Proud to Call Him 'Uncle'

By Gustav Sharon (Johannesburg)
(Original Language: Hebrew)

My thoughts return to that night, thirty-three years ago, on which I first reached the place that was then called "Palestine," and I met, for the first time, my aunt and uncle and the rest of the family. To this day, I remember the powerful and deep impression made on me by my uncle, in his role as the trusted leader of the old settlement, the Zionist, the Fulfiller, the True Builder of Zion, who guarded his faith in the face of disappointment, misfortune and even tragedy. I was struck by his good-hearted character, his patience, the good, capable Jew. When I returned to South Africa, I published a short article about him in the local Jewish press.

I knew that he took a fatherly interest in me, and he once told me that he kept every letter I ever sent him. I have a sad feeling about the fact that my exchange of letters with him over the years became less frequent, which I attribute to the difficulty I had in expressing my thoughts in Hebrew, and that writing in English to him struck me as being somewhat bizarre.

With his passing, a chapter is finished, but it is closed in only one respect. I am hopeful that my memories of him will always be with me – the memories of a man possessed of impeccable conduct, a faithful Jew of the old school, who took part in the brilliant attainments of the people. A man whom I was proud and happy to call 'uncle.'

Chaim Lansky

A Difficult Childhood, A Hard Life

By Jacob Rabinovich
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Chaim Lansky (p. 133)

I remember *Chaim* yet from the days of the German *Schule*. It was already apparent then how different he was from the rest of us, and the degree to which he transcended us in ability. At an early age, he began to read serious books in Hebrew and in Russian: he also drew and sculpted, and played the violin. He learned music from his neighbors, the musicians.

He had a difficult childhood. In 1922, I was in his company in Vilna, and after he left Poland, in the period 1924-1933, he would occasionally drop us a letter from Russia. I recall that in his last letter to us, he asked for a picture of the Great Synagogue in town. He summarized his life's story and sent it in 1934 from Leningrad to his friend, the writer *Avraham Kariv*.

I was born in 1905 in the city of Slonim in the Grodno Province. Before I even learned to say 'father-mother,' my parents were driven from their home. They traveled into the larger world. He – to the interior of Russia, she – to Austria. I was taken into his home in Dereczin by my paternal grandfather (a town close to the city of my birth). He made his living by his pail and axe. Apart from drawing water and hewing wood, during the fall, he also acted as a watchman for fruit and vegetable gardens. He was an early riser during weekdays. In the middle of reciting his morning prayers, accompanied by the clang of his pails, he would tread out into the early morning darkness. He would recite his evening prayers in the house. He would take [the ritually required] three steps back, start the *Amidah* prayers yet again, in order to discharge the obligation of also reciting the *Mincha* prayer. On the Sabbath and Holidays, he loved to pass in front of the Ark. Between the *Mincha* and *Maariv* services he enjoyed looking into the *Midrash*. On Saturday nights, after the *Havdalah* service, people would come over and spend a quick hour in front of our well lit window: *Reb Shlomo* and his grandson are singing *Zemirot*. My grandmother was a good, wise woman. I never heard her complain about her lot in life. And our lives were not particularly easy either.

My grandfather, nevertheless, continued carrying his difficult burden until darkness. As is well known, the burden of much work accompanies a deficiency of blessings in life. They scrimped on food in order to assure that payment to my teachers was made on time. I studied in the best of the *Heders* in town. The core of the studies was the *Tanach,* which the teacher knew how to impart effectively to his students.

A Poem

by *Chaim Lansky*

Zelva is famous for its fairs,
Slonim for its rolls with mohn seeds.
You will take pride yet, my far flung town,
In my songs which will make me renown

Because I suffered and sang,
I returned pained in heart,
They will raise a memorial to me,
In the garden of my heartwarming hometown.

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At rare intervals, my father would turn up for a few days, and leave behind for us and our neighbors enough material for several months worth of conversation: the son of *Reb Shlomo* the Water Carrier rode on a machine that had two wheels! And the kids at school envied me for having such a father...

During the first days of the War, I saw my mother for the first time. – Where did she come from? She stayed a day, and then traveled on. – Where did she go? – Another issue for the townsfolk to take up.

I composed my first song [poem?] at the age of 12. It grew on well-worked ground – they are the

teasing rhymes I used to compose for use on my friends.

For my subsequent compositions, I found a sympathetic ear in my teacher at the German *Schule*, *Sima Rubinovsky*. She knew a little Hebrew. Once, she invited me to her residence. I came to visit her with my notebook ... and after reading her my new poem, she gave me a little box full of candies. My first reward was a sweet one!

This teacher of mine arranged for me to have access to the home of the city leader (the intent is to refer to *Sholom Mansky* – JR), where there was a rich library in three languages – Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian. All may spare time was given over to be spent with books. But the world of books did not deter me from the world of diversion. Among the kids on my street, I was always the leader, and first in all sport activities. It was in this manner that my childhood years were spent.

I lost both my grandparents in 1921. I found refuge with my aunt. My uncle took it upon himself to teach me his trade – shoemaking. I wasn't particularly good at the work. They gave up on me – I wasn't going to succeed. I travel to Vilna, and I am accepted as a student at the Teachers Seminary. Its Headmaster is *Joshua Gutman*. I neglect my studies. The good will of the Headmaster enables me to remain in the institution. I publish my first collection of works, *Leket*, around which all the literary forces of the school rally. Two printings go out of 300 pieces.

Spring 1923 – My first love, my first plagiarism (the author will forgive my "lifting" of several of his songs). I attempt suicide. It is not a pretty experience. I send my songs to *Yaakov Cohen*. His reply: "your songs are immature, study, practice a lot and observe nature. Then, in three years time, send me samples of your song writing."

I get a letter from my father in Baku, and he invites me to come visit him. I return to my town, and work for several months in the forest, and save up money for the expenses of the journey.

On *Rosh Hashana* of 5684 (the year 1924), I sneak across the [Russian] border. I am apprehended on Soviet territory. I am kept in quarantine for two months in the area of Borisov. I am sent to Samra, and given a card: "This citizen is a Soviet subject with all attendant privileges, but is denied permission to leave this city for two years." I flee. In Tsaritsyn I change my name. At the end of February 1924 I reach Baku. A total disappointment – my father has finished burying his second wife, and was marrying his third.

Friction begins to set in among the family members and relationships begin to deteriorate. I leave the house. I survive by giving Hebrew lessons, and on a monthly stipend from the Yiddish Club for my poems and songs that are publicly read twice a week. At the end of 1925, I travel to Moscow, from there — to Leningrad. I work for "*Amal.*"

In 1929 – I marry. In 1932 I receive a letter from the Holy Land. In it, it is written: My dear brother, do not be dismayed that I call you 'brother.' I have good reason for this – we are the children of one mother... I saw in the 'Weekly' a poem called 'Polonz' signed by you. I went to the publisher, and they gave me your address. It was in this fashion that my sister, the daughter of my mother, found her outcast brother. I discovered that my mother was in Kovno. I wrote to her once or twice, but did not receive any reply. The contact between my father and myself was completely broken off. Today, he works as a chief engineer at some establishment. I am no longer of any interest to him. I am employed as a second level employee in the 'Elektrofribur' factory, and I earn 120 rubles a month..."

This is where Chaim Lansky ended his description of his life's story.

Lansky In His Town

By Malka Alper
(Original Language: Hebrew)

It was a small wooden house with wooden shingles, leaning on its side, on a hillock at the edge of town. Behind it, and to the right was a parcel of land that was a vegetable garden, extending to the other side of the river that flowed by the edge of town. Opposite the house was the community bath house which used to go up in flames every few years. The reason – God only knows. And the sight which was revealed through the windows on the south and west sides of the house were entirely different: a bubbly river, and on its second side, green meadows in the summer, in which the Christian citizens of the town, who were farmers, pastured their domestic animals: horses, cows and pigs.

A wide wooden door, dusty with age, having a wooden doorstep higher than the outside, and twice as high as the inside, bringing you into an entry-foyer of the house, an unusual type of entrance that served as a sort of foyer. From there, into the interior of the house, which was sort of divided into two parts: two small furnished rooms sparkling with cleanliness, whose furniture took up the entire space of the rooms, on its small windows, white shutters with floral designs. This was the first half encountered on entering, and then a sort of kitchen that took up about half the house. In which the baking oven – as in the rest of the town, divided the kitchen in two: in front, a form of dining room, on which the mouth of the oven faced, and behind it a roomlet with a combination wooden bench and bed, with a window facing to the west.

In this house, which looked so seedy on the outside, but sparkled with cleanliness within, lived the grandparents of Chaim Lansky, *Reb Shlomo* the Water Carrier, his wife, and daughter, *Bashka*, who had reached adulthood. It was in this house that I first saw *Chaimkeh*, as his relatives called him, and even us children, when he was introduced to my older brother ל"ז, and to me by his father, who would become our Russian and French teacher. *Chaim's* father, *Mordechai Yankel*, came to his town of birth in order to engage in teaching, and to support himself and his son, until – according to his own words – he would be in a position to continue his education: he was certified as a general teacher.

There was no Russian language school in town in those days, only a rural school established by the church, in which the Christian children of the town and surrounding area received three years of instruction. The *balebatim* were therefore very pleased with the arrival of a teacher in town. There were, nonetheless, *heders* in town at several levels, beginning with elementary subjects, and ending with an 'advanced class' in which *Tanach* was studied, *Aggadah* with Yiddish commentaries, an introduction to the Russian language, Russian calligraphy and writing, and even arithmetic in Russian. *Chaim's* father was the teacher of the highest level class, and was received with great favor as a teacher.

In the summer, my brother ל"ז, and I would go to his house for instruction, and during the winter, he would come to our house. In the year and a half that he spent in town, we were his pupils.

As it came to reach our ears, the ears of the children from the conversations of our parents, *Mordechai Yankel*, *Chaim's* father separated from his wife. The child, (on top of the furniture) came under the father's control, and here they were, in the house of his parents, in the town of his birth, that also was my hometown.

A dark and shrunken little boy of about five years of age, short in stature, with shining eyes in which the sadness of the entire world seemed collected, looked out from a pale face, when I first saw him in their home (and I was then not much older than he), when his father was first introduced to us in Russian before our first lesson.

The young boy stood respectfully before his father, perhaps even with a touch of fear, and on trembling legs, timidly approached us, and with a lack of confidence, extended his hand. The relationship of the father to his son was neither warm nor cold, and

it is possible to say that he turned him over to the members of his family to deal with him. And those members of his household related to him in a very warm and exceptionally loving way. He used to call his aunt, *Bashka*, and his grandmother, *Mameh*, just like his father and aunt did. They spoke Yiddish to him, and his father – Russian.

And his *zaydeh*, his grandfather, *Reb Shlomo* the Water Carrier, used to make the rounds of the town every day, carrying his yoke and pails on his shoulders, and was an honest, observant Jew, respected by all the town's residents: *Rebbe Shlomo*, they would call him, when they encountered him. The water that he provided to all the houses, he drew from a well that flowed not far from his home near the river, this was water for tea, sweet enough for drinking even without being boiled. He would go down to the well, which was at the base of the hillock, with his pails empty, and would trudge back uphill with his pails full. It was *Reb Shlomo's* custom to hum sections of the prayers to himself as he walked, or to recite excerpts from the Psalms. In the winter, when it was possible to hear the crunch of the white mantle of snow beneath the feet of walkers, it was possible to hear the crunch of his feet at the third watch of the day, whose sound reached our ears even through double-glazed windows as he walked by our house. I remember an exchange between my brother ל"ז, and my late father, at which time my brother told of having been on his way early in the morning one day to the first *minyan*, and meeting *Reb Shlomo* quietly whispering verses of the Psalms to himself, and asking of him:

– *Reb Shlomo*, how many times is it now? (the intent being to ask how many times had the old man managed to go through the entire text of the Psalms) And the answer of the old man was : the third time! The old man was not a man of many words, taciturn by nature, doing a tough job in order to earn a respectable living from which he could support his family.

It was not only once that I would find *Chaim* standing on the threshold of the foyer, greeting his grandfather who would be passing by across from their house, burdened with his pail yoke, smiling at him with his sad little smile, which he would form by slightly bending his lips, and with his sad lidded eyes, as they were.

The relationship of *Chaim's* father, *Mordechai Yankel,* to his mother was an interesting one: she had an attitude of respect toward him, and he showed her both love and attentiveness. Here he was, standing outside, the axe in his hand, chopping wood to prepare them for use an oven fuel. He cut the wood, and stacked it in a pile, washed his hands and face, entered the house, and the table was set for him: a small dish of pickled beets on its leaves, half of a salted fish from the crock, broiled on the hot coals, a cask of baked goods, a round loaf of black bread on the table, and the man, a product of the *Haskalah*, in accordance with the ideas of the time, would seat himself at the table side, eat with relish, and say to his pupils – to my brother ל"ז, and myself – who were waiting for their lesson, in Russian with the lilting accent that earned him the nickname "Raven" – Here I have worked and toiled some, as soon as I have satisfied my appetite, then we shall engage in scholarship.

I did not see this scene only once.

And *Chaim* spent his time within the confines of his house, and nothing seemed able to warm his heart enough to bring a smile to his lips; not his grandmother's tousling his hair, when he would rub up against her and hold on to her wide apron which was tied around her narrow hips, following in her footsteps in the living room, or the entrance, going with her into the vegetable garden, which she would begin to prepare in the spring for the planting of vegetables for use in the house, with the idea of selling off the excess. At the direction of my mother, I would come to his grandfather in the summertime for purposes of purchasing from the harvest crop of vegetables (we would study with *Mordechai Yankel* in the afternoon, because my brother ל"ז, would study *Talmud* in the morning with a special teacher, that had been hired by my late father in partnership with a number of other *balebatim*), and I would see *Chaimkeh* tagging along in her footsteps in the rows of the vegetable garden. I don't remember a single instance where they criticized or rebuked the young boy.

I remember one summer day from those days, in the afternoon. The skies darkened, and heavy, low

clouds covered the horizon, the air became heavy with electricity and was suffocating. The approaching sound of thunder could be heard in the distance. We arrived for our lesson. The teacher is urging us to go to the entrance way, and to observe the storm breaking out around us.

The teacher held his son's hand and mine, because I was younger than my brother (I had followed him only reluctantly, because I was frightened), and the four of us came closer to the threshold, which was very high on the inside, because the floor of the foyer was significantly lower than the street level. As we stood, a bolt of lightning flashed that blinded us, followed immediately by a deafening crash of thunder, and it seemed like the very foundations of the world were coming apart. This so frightened us children that we screamed, just as the teacher burst into a laugh from deep inside of him. *Chaimkeh* was especially frightened. His father grabbed him, and carried him in his arms into the kitchen, and stood him on a bench, and began to soothe and calm him down. The young boy stood stone-like, frozen with fear. The father then took down his violin, which hung on the wall, and in turning to us, he said: – I love to pour out my soul through music from time to time. And he began to pluck at the violin strings that began to emit different enlivening melodies. I will not forget the smile that appeared on *Chaimkeh's* pale lips. It didn't spread to the rest of his face, however, that same smile that in normal circumstances would be confined to his lips, and his eyes – the sorrow of the world was in them.

In wintertime, the teacher would come to our house for our lesson, and in the spare time after his lesson with us, if, in fact it was his last of the day, it was his custom to tarry a while and carry on a conversation with my late father, read a Russian newspaper, engage in a wide variety of diversions, or puzzles that were at hand. He would take them apart, and try to put them back together – without much success. My ambition – he would say – is to study mechanical engineering...

His father left Dereczin, and *Chaim* remained in the household of his grandparents. Other teachers came to our town, and the memories of *Mordechai Yankel*, nicknamed "The Raven" faded. Years went by, and the First World War broke out. The [Czarist] Russian Army retreated, and we found ourselves under the control of the Germans. It is the fall of 1915. Despite the elation of being rid of the terror of the Cossacks, and the warm reception accorded by the town to the "Good Germans," the town was concerned about its future fate: work disappeared, stores stood empty, and farmers were forbidden to leave the confinement of their villages. The ruling authority is tracking the harvest and the output of the town.

Many of the farmers in the vicinity, who had transportation vehicles fled to the east either before, or on the heels of the retreating army, and those that remained behind, do not have the means to reach town. Winter begins to make itself felt, and arrives. Fields full of potatoes, but abandoned by their owners abound in the vicinity. The Jews of the town spread out into the fields to dig up these potatoes, in order to stock supplies for the winter, while there are still good days of light. Among those who went out into the fields were *Chaimkeh* and his aunt, *Bashka*. At that time he was barely ten years old. Even the old man, *Reb Shlomo*, went out into the fields a number of times. But the pressure from his daughter and grandson grew great on him to stay home, and that they would look after this matter of supply. And several times a day, *Chaimkeh* would appear, returning from the fields, carrying on his young back, the sack with its valuable provisions, even though its weight was more than could be managed by a youngster of his age. And so, day after day, until the rains came, the young boy was so occupied.

The [military] regime announced a labor draft for the purpose of repairing roads and highways. The wage – bread, coffee to drink, and a number of pastries. Among those who presented themselves daily, in the marketplace at the center of town across from our house, were *Bashka* and *Chaimkeh*. His head was bound up with old kerchiefs to protect him from the cold. On his feet he wore ill-fitting shoes, not of his size, from which a variety of rags stuck out, to provide him protection from the cold, and to fill up the empty spaces between the shoe and his foot.

At the beginning of the year 1916, the authority opened a school for 14-16 year-olds, in which

attendance was compulsory, and the study of German was required. The Headmaster – a German officer who immediately introduced Prussian discipline. The authority provided the textbooks. The teachers, who were local residents, had to fulfil their tasks under stingy conditions. Jewish studies were only permitted to the students and their teachers in the afternoon hours.

For every misstep on the part of a student – punishment. Among those who attend school is also *Chaim*. Pale, shrunken and with the appearance of a child who hasn't eaten properly, he would come every day to school. He was a clever student, but for some reason did not find favor with the Headmaster, who continuously found fault with him (about which the teachers from our community would discuss). Was it because he was not outgoing enough, or because he was not as quick to seek diversion like the rest of the kids – the ire of the Headmaster cascaded over him more than any other of the children – and he took it silently.

The school remained in existence for the entire period of the occupation. At the beginning of the year 1918, when the severity of the occupation eased slightly, the civilian authority permitted a revival of some aspects of town life: the opening of the library, organization of evening classes for the study of *Tanach* and Jewish history, to call together Zionist meetings, and to establish youth groups, and things of that sort.

During one of these days, *Chaim's* aunt *Bashka* came to our house, and turned to me with these words:

– I have come to ask for you to teach *Chaimkeh* Hebrew. His father, *Mordechai Yankel* taught you Russian, and I ask you to do this thing, teach him Hebrew, because his heart is in it. We do not have the means to hire a teacher for this. When *Chaimkeh* grows up, and will become an adult, he will find a way to repay you in kind.

I did not hesitate. I began immediately to teach him language and literature, and his speed was a marvel to behold. Like an open pit, he swallowed everything that he heard. Every book that was put in his hand, he consumed in short order. How he obtained his facility with Hebrew before he came to me – I am uncertain. I assume that he occasionally attended a *Heder*, and his strong desire for knowledge was that which propelled him ahead.

Taciturn, inner-directed, soft-spoken, almost to the point of inaudibility, occasionally bantering, the same smile that I recall from his youth, except that it was tinged with sarcasm.

The young man amazed all of us with his unique feel for the Hebrew language. He wrote with such focused precision, as to surround the reader. I became filled with respect for his sentence construction, for finding the right word for the right place, and for the maturity of his thought processes. It was not only once that I kept his work at my hand for days at a time, in order to show it to those who were older than I, so that they could appreciate his use of the language. And all of us were amazed by him. As was customary of all budding "teachers," (and I was yet quite far from being a fully qualified teacher) the temptation is aroused to "edit" the text. But I immediately felt that his was superior to mine, because there was no way to alter or change even one syllable of what he wrote. And when I praised him – it was as if it made no impression on him, not even an eyelid fluttered.

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The years 1918-19 were stormy years for us, in our area in general, and in our town in particular: Zionist organizations, and in counterpoint, the Bund and its organization. A youth movement was established. I do not recollect *Chaim* [participating] in these. Town meetings took place with sharp discussions in the *Batei Midrash* concerning control over the funds being made available by the "Joint [92]" that became available in those days with Jewish support, the Zionists or the *Bund*?

Both adults and young people of all ages took part in these discussions, either as participants or listeners, but I do not recall seeing *Chaim* at any of these.

★

I left home in the fall of 1919. I would come home

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92 The Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

for vacation from school during the summertime. It was told in town that *Chaim's* father was studying at a university in Russia. And what of *Chaim* himself? This will undoubtedly be related by those who met him in his travels and wanderings outside of Dereczin in those days.

If my memory serves me properly, the last time I saw him in person was in 1923, it was during my vacation from school, I was at the home of my parents, and my brother ל"ז, was also with me. On one of those days, *Chaim* came to us to take his farewell from us, especially my brother, with whom he was wont to speak with more freely than with me. He seemed to be the same *Chaim* that I recalled from my earlier memories in his youth, when we would meet.

– I'm going to my father, I'm going to him even though passage is illegal. My father is in Baku, in the Caucasus, working as an engineer. Perhaps I too, will succeed in getting an education there. It is said that there are tremendous opportunities for those willing to learn.

He related that he planned to hit the road, unencumbered, and sneak across the border, but that he would take along the violin that his father had left behind, along with a change of underwear.

He left, and we eventually got word that he had been stopped at the border by the Russians, was being detained until his father could be located, who would then take him to his home.

I made *aliyah* to the Holy Land in 1925. I didn't hear about him until the early 1930's at the time that I had returned for a visit to the home of my parents. It was at that time that his aunt told us that she had received a letter from him in which he happily related to her that he is writing songs, and publishing them, and that he is sending two copies of his collection, one inscribed to her, and one for our family. He said to her in the letter that he understood the material would be difficult for her to understand, and that she should turn to a member of our family to translate and explain it to her.

Up to September 1933, on the day that I left Dereczin, the volumes had not yet arrived.

On my return to the Holy Land, in the year 1939, a collection of his songs was published in *Davar*.

And her, in front of this large collection of rhythmic songs – a dedication to me from this member of my town, and my student "from the other side of the Lithuanian River!"

(*Davar* – Literary and Art Supplement, 16 Sept 1960)

A Poet Under Duress

By Joshua Gilboa
(Original Language: Yiddish)

In the prominent constellation of Hebrew writers, the writer, *Chaim Lansky,* occupies an unchallenged place.

In the second half of the year 5698 (1942), news reached the Holy Land that *Lansky* had been arrested in Leningrad, and sentenced to a concentration camp for five years. But even during the time of his detention, the writer's creative muse was not stilled. His song burst through prison walls, and flew across borders, making its way from Siberia to the Holy Land. This writer had the opportunity recently to meet with someone who had been arrested in Leningrad at the same time as *Lansky*. He related that *Lansky* had 'served' the five-year sentence, and was subsequently released. When war broke out between the Nazis and the Russians in 1941, *Lansky* volunteered to serve in the Russian Army, but he was excused from service because of his frail health. The subsequent fate of this writer is

unknown to us.

Today, in Israel, there are a few people who in his day in Russia, were in close contact with *Lansky*. From their stories, memories and impressions, it is possible to construct a portrait of the writer and his personal life, and this portrait harmonizes with his writing. This was a man of exceptional sensitivity, great feelings and very talented. He could play the mandolin and the flute, as well as composing musical pieces. Physically, he was chronically weak, and lived in a state of perpetual deprivation and need. A friend of his from the years in Leningrad told of him that he never changed out of the clothes that he came in from Lithuania, but "almost every day he managed to squeeze in another book into his writer's cramped quarters." *Lansky* worked in a metallurgical factory in Leningrad. The heavy work exacted a toll from his energies, but he specialized in the work and became a skilled craftsman. He became sick, however, with tuberculosis, and because of this was excused from military service. Later, he fell in love, married, and became the father of a son.

Something of the writer's life story, up to the period of his life in Leningrad, is known to us from an autobiographical letter written by *Lansky* to the Jewish writer and critic, *Avraham Krivaruchka (Kariv)*:

He was born in 1905 in Slonim, in the Grodno Province. *Chaim's* parents became divorced before the young boy could speak. The child was taken in by his grandfather, *Reb Shlomo* – a hewer of wood, drawer of water and vegetable gardener in Dereczin. *Chaim* wrote his first song at the age of twelve, and at that time he was already possessed with a craving to read. During the First World War, the area in which he lived was occupied by the Germans, and it was at this time that he mastered the German language, and in later years, he was much taken by the poetry of Heine. In 1921, his grandfather passed away, and *Chaim* attempted to learn shoemaking from his uncle, but is not successful. In 1923 he attempted suicide out of great depression. On *Rosh Hashana* 5684 (1924), after receiving a letter from his father in Baku, he stole across the Soviet border. He was detained, but obtained release in short order. In Baku, he supported himself by giving Hebrew lectures from royalties for his songs, and by storytelling in the Yiddish language.

Lansky was perpetually drawn to the places and experiences of his childhood throughout his entire life. His poem, *Litteh*, is a lovesong to those faraway times and places. His verses in *Litteh* are simple and full of pathos. Important tales are told with grace, alongside mundane day-to-day activities, warmly, as if describing a legend.

The poem, *Litteh* makes clear to us, that the persona of *Chaim Lansky's* grandfather was the personification of the Jewish masculine ideal, because he saw in him the embodiment of physical strength in synthesis with spiritual gentleness. He took great pride in his grandfather, "He didn't have any outstanding business," but he built up "strong muscles in the hand on which he laid his *tefillin*"; "who else could compare to him as a leader of the daily prayers," and who else but he could swim and course through the water with his eight-year-old grandson? With epic tranquility, the poet braids one line and then another, and weaves his song about *Kabbalat Shabbat*, Sabbath candle-lighting, Sabbath delicacies, and *Zemirot*. But this epic description cannot suppress the poet's unrest. The stanzas fill the reader with peace, but simultaneously awaken turbulent emotions. A rich play of colors, artful expressions, and elegant tonalities weave themselves together. The poem ends with Messianic longings, and a certainty of a day of redemption – "and the Redeemer will come to Zion."

Despite the difficult experiences that the writer endured, his work is suffused with optimism. His joy of life was not diminished even during the travail-laden years he spent under arrest and in exile. On the contrary: "Bitterness exposed me [to the world] with its sharp, full aura." The "North of the World" attracted him, which even in its primitive harshness, evoked images of the time of Genesis in his mind. The writer was able to create pearls out of the maudlin and sad waters of his own life. He sated his eyes with real life nature vistas; even in the land of his fated exile, he listened attentively to the swish of fish in the rivers, to the song of birds, and the whispering of the branches in the trees. In Marinsk Siberia, in 1935, the poet asks himself the tragic question: "shall he hang up his

violin on a northern tree branch?" For what is the purpose of playing a Hebrew melody in this alien wasteland? But the poet answers himself: no; even though he does not know what is in store for him "in the land of Siberia in the enchantment of its snows" he will not stop singing "so long as he hears the sound of music from above..."

Just as we are inspired by *Lansky's* patience in the land of his oppression, we are equally inspired by his stubborn allegiance to the Hebrew language, in the hostile climate in which it was. Poetic talent and love of the Hebrew language were part and parcel of his very being. What *Lansky* has bequeathed to Hebrew literature is a sufficient testament to what our people have lost because of the excision of Russian Jewry from its corporate body politic.

("Zion & The People," Vol. 13)

My Friend Chaim, The Dreamer

By David Rabinovich

(Original Language: Hebrew)

A portrait of a friend and neighbor, from my childhood days, and from our time together as students.

A number of years before his demise in the wilds of Siberia, his name became publicized in the land as a gifted songwriter, one of those few who sing their songs in Hebrew, in the land of the Soviets, through which our ancient and regenerating language was graced and edified.

Who would have foretold then, many years ago in our town, that this young dreamer who wandered its streets, would become one of the outstanding poets of our generation?

I did not know his father and mother, but even *Chaim* could recollect them only with difficulty. His father left for Moscow when he was about three or four years old, and from that time on, *Chaim* grew up in the home of his grandfather, *Reb Shlomo* the Water Carrier. His grandfather was a simple and straightforward man, who knew the Psalms by heart, and as he made his rounds, with the water pail yoke on his back, his lips never ceased uttering verses from the Psalms. *Chaim* was raised in the home of this observant Jewish man from early childhood on. The house was small, seemingly about to fall down, covered by a straw roof, hidden among the other dwellings by the bathhouse, adjacent to the well (*die krenitseh*).

I sat next to *Chaim* on the bench at school. It was only years later that we came to realize how different he was from all the other children about him. He was quiet, and a dreamer, preoccupied with his own thoughts. He was largely withdrawn and sad among us, the children without concerns, who lived under the aegis of their parents, and *Chaim* didn't have his parents. At that time, we did not understand his feelings, and there was not one among us who would offer him encouragement. Like many of the kids, he earned a nickname from his friends, "*Chaim* the Raven," (*die Voroneh).* In his solitude, he sought a home and refuge, coming to our house and sometimes spending days at a time, coming after school, and staying for lunch and dinner.

I recall his interest in the violin. He never studied music formally, but he had a good ear, and he was drawn to violin playing, and especially loved to listen to the sad pieces, and the *Nesaneh Tokef* prayer of the Cantor on the High Holydays. In view of the fact that he lived next door to the *klezmorim* (musicians) in town, he would come to them in his free time, and listen to their practice on the violin. From time to time, he would ask permission of *Archik the Violinist* to play on his violin. And he was able to play without knowledge of notes or the details of music composition. To this day, I can recall how he would start to play the *Hatikvah*, and segue into other light songs, and other folk songs. For a long time, he dreamed of owning his own violin, but when it became clear that he would not satisfy this desire any time soon, he decided to construct one with his own hands. He would sit in our house in the afternoon hours, and carve the

pieces of his violin. When he finished his work, he had a sort of primitive instrument that produced very interesting melodies from its body, but it is difficult to describe *Chaim's* sense of satisfaction in those days.

He did not excel in his studies, and was particularly not enamored with the study of arithmetic, but he forged ahead in Hebrew literature, and wrote poems without showing them to anyone to obtain an opinion about them. His most loyal friend was my brother, *Jacob*, and it was from him that I heard of his longing for his father, to whom he was attracted from his earliest days, until he grew up in his grandfather's house. He spoke to us about his father out of envy for those of us who had a mother and father at hand. He dreamed endlessly of the ways he might get to his father who was so far away.

In 1922, he left Dereczin, and went to Vilna where he was accepted as a student in the Hebrew Teachers Seminary. He had no money with which to support himself, and often times went hungry. I ran into him under these circumstances in Vilna, in 1923. He told me how he earned a few pennies, hiring himself out as "The Tenth Man" for a *minyan,* on the outskirts of the city of Vilna. During this depressing and painful encounter, I heard from him that he had fallen in love with a young seminary student, a beautiful young lady from Slonim, who was vivacious, and surrounded by many admirers.

Chaim did not have the nerve to open his heart to her. In those days, he wrote many love poems, and secretly dedicated them to the love of his heart.

His rebellious life, loneliness in the big city, and his unrequited love – all these taxed his strength and deteriorated his health. For a long time he made himself miserable, and suffered accordingly, until he came to terms with his disappointments in love, and realized that this was one more letdown added to the many letdowns in his life. After a while, I returned home, where I received a letter from him, in which he communicated his decision to cross the Russian-Polish border in order to reach his father.

Afterwards, it became known to us, that on a dark night, he stealthily crossed the border near Stolupczy under a hail of bullets, and that in the end, he managed to reach his father, to whom he was drawn since early childhood.

And again, he was confronted with bitter disappointment. The meeting between father and son was not at all encouraging. Even with his father, he found no emotional peace as he had dreamt and hoped. His bitter destiny hounded him even there. He worked at hard factory jobs, and in his spare time wrote poetry – in Hebrew. He succeeded in getting in touch with *(Chaim Nachman) Bialik*, and transmitted a number of his poems to the Holy Land, and it was only then that he was revealed to be the gifted poet that he was. During the years of Stalin's Reign of Terror, he was exiled to Siberia, and died alone in one of the slave labor camps, my friend the Hebrew poet in Soviet exile, *Chaim Lansky.*

The Role of Home in Lansky's Poetry

By Abraham Kariv
(Original Language: Yiddish)

"Where does the Elegance Come From?"

The three-sided thread, grass-green on one side, snow-white on the other, and blood-red in the center, is woven through *Lansky's* poetry through the three principal forces in his life (until he disappeared from view): Lithuania – Leningrad – Siberia. They were like three aspects of his poetry, centers of the melody in his heart, each different from the other – the tune of a sad, intense prayer, the tune of a bitter, frustrated circumstance, and the tune of a quiet, resignation and acceptance of one's fate.

The first center, from whose source his heart and song never ceased to drink sustenance, was his distant and far-flung hometown, from which he drew his warmest memories, and to which he poured out his love through the intensity of his poetry, his compassion and his longing. Many poets and writers, men of thought and action, turned their backs on the Jewish *shtetl* in the last years of its existence, but *Chaim Lansky,* the scion of such a town, from which he had wandered such a great distance, always remembered it, and thought of it with love and warmth, with affection and a prayer in his heart. From that time on, in the most distant of locations, his *shteleleh* played on the most delicate of his heartstrings. In the lines of his poetry that he writes about his home, a tear seems to tremble in every line, a tear of longing, compassion and love. The most intense of his emotions stream forth in his poetry when he is describing each and every nook and cranny of his town, and every single individual who did him a good turn during his formative years there.

A double-entendre cries out from the lines:

> *The last pail is filled from the stream,*
> *The last bird has flown from the garden;*
> *The house, sunken and in despair, becomes visible,*
> *And who has gone, will no longer return.*

The wanderer will not return now, he has no place to come back to. The stream has run dry, and the house stands desolate, the nest has been destroyed, and those friends and brothers who have survived have been scattered to the four corners of the world by angry winds. Yet in those days, even before the bitter end of his hometown, *Lansky* sent to this writer his poem, "The Dying Town," and added a few words: "This is my *Kaddish* for my dying town, perhaps you will answer *Amen* after the *Kaddish.*" About fifteen years before the destruction of his hometown, its loyal son sent a sort of *Kaddish* [to me] from Leningrad to Moscow.

Several years afterward, he also set a poetic gravestone on that town which was so dear to him – that is his poem, *"Litteh."*

The poem is a voyage back into the past, to those years that have permanently disappeared, and that no experience can replace in the innermost reaches of his soul. With playful phrases and verse, the wandering poet celebrates the occasion of his return visit to the neighborhood of his youth, to the modest little house where he was raised from childhood on. *Lansky* never had a home with his parents from his earliest years, and this forlorn child was raised at his grandfather's knee, who extracted a hard living from his axe and water pail; potatoes – *Lansky* relates, were a "royal delicacy." And to so difficult an upbringing the poem pulls the reader, and refers to it as "my morning-gilded childhood!"

We can understand how he paints his grandfather in rich colors, as we read the poem, *"Litteh."* The old grandfather is "merely" a hewer of wood and a drawer of water in the small town, carrying his load from the

dark of morning to the dark of night, and in harvest time, is a night watchman in the gardens – but he is replete with a heartfelt joy of life, and steeped in the old tradition, a wonderful harmony fills out his entire person. His grandfather has keen senses, is deeply tied to nature, the dew of humor spurts out of him, he is beloved by all, and loves them in return, and fully tastes the fabric of his life. He is a caring Jew, in whom every fiber prays and sings – a Jew who is at once a member of the common poor, and the people's aristocracy.

From him, his grandson inherited many emotional qualities that were not diluted even by his many long years in unfamiliar places. Reflections of the Sabbath sanctity of the 'old home' followed him during the weekdays, and from city to city in his travels; memories of those days made the burden of his bitter days and nights in cold exile easier to bear, lighter, and warmer.

It appears that poverty alone cannot ruin everything around it. Poverty can also be majestic. Here, from an impoverished 'kingdom,' with its pitiful crown on his head, *Chaim Lansky* wandered out into the unfamiliar world, and yet zealously guarded in his heart a fiery love for his poor-but-rich childhood. He never once denied his 'family tree,' and sang the song of a grandchild of a water carrier.

The Last Generation

I See Her, Dereczin

By M. Izaakovich
(Original Language: Hebrew)

– And here I see our town, in my mind's eye, as it stands on its hillock more than a half century ago. She sits at a crossroads, at a distance of two hours ride in a passenger wagon, from the nearest railroad station.

From the center of the marketplace, one could see the column, bearing witness to historical events of the times of the larger than life rulers, a place where evil spirits and the shades of the underworld congregated. Everything entwined in imaginary legends, which in our childish perceptions were entirely credible, and caused us to believe that our town was the center of the universe, with everything else – attached to it.

Here are the houses on both sides of the marketplace, here are the plentiful stores. At the end of the marketplace – a two-story building, the only one of its kind in town. A few steps from it is the [Russian] Orthodox Church, which instills fear in us children. On the other side, the marketplace is completed with the *Rad Krommen,*[93] and behind them the *Deutscher Gasse* up until the second edge of our town. Behind the marketplace stand the synagogues, and right beside them the old Jewish cemetery, which was there to make you understand: ' know, where you are destined to go.'[94] To the back of the *Schulhof* , alleys and lanes extended all the way to the *Shifa* River.

Parallel to the marketplace, on its second side, with the houses and low hanging branches ready to fall on the straw thatched roofs, and this street, it so happens was called *Neue Gasse (The New Street).*

For generations upon generations, our town stood this way on its hillock, and Jews grew up here, were education in the spirit of the times, and entered into marriage and the task of earning a living. We are short of space to completely detail all the occupations undertaken by the residents, however, when the first years of this stormy and turbulent [sic: twentieth] century arrived, the winds of change did not pass over our town, as did not the sense of resignation and stasis that accompanied the failure of the revolution of 1905. Only that, since that time, the rate of emigration across seas and oceans strengthened considerably, and the pastoral sense of tranquility of prior generations no longer found a place in the midst of the town's youth. The Jews continued their business of buying and selling to the farmers of the area, and craftsmen continue to ply their respective trades, as rabbis and *Dayanim*, and all manner of religious functionaries – engaged in their sacred work, and teachers continued to instruct their pupils in the study of Holy Writ, each in his own area of expertise – but the sparks of yearning for the acquisition of knowledge, the linkage to the larger world, and the movements for international liberation and brotherhood did not cease from that time on in Dereczin.

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93 Attached storefronts, not unlike a mall of small proportions.

94 Expressed in the metaphor of the *Pirkei Avot.*

Our Synagogues

By Jacob Rabinovich
(Original Language: Hebrew)
Translated by Miriam Kreiter
Translation edited by Jack S. Berger

The most splendid of the synagogues was the Great Synagogue (*Die Grosse Schul)*, where all the official celebrations took place. It was a large building. Inside, its walls were covered in drawing of lions and eagles, interspersed with biblical and prayer verses, such as *Mi SheBerakh*,[95] in Hebrew and Russian, in honor of the Czar of all Russia.

Almost every Dereczin resident, even those not ardently observant, felt a great attachment to one or another of our synagogues. A synagogue called "The New Wall" *(Der Neuer Mauer)*, was a popular place of prayer for the distinguished citizenry of our town. Next to it was "The Old Wall" *(Der Alter Mauer)*. There was also "The Wooden Synagogue" *(Der Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash)*. Besides those, there were also prayer houses for the tailors *(Hayatim)* and shoemakers (*Sandlarim)*.

The sitting Rabbi of the town would normally pray at *Der Alter Mauer Schul.*

There were various interest groups (A *Hevrah*) attached to each synagogue. A *Hevra Shas* for the study of the Six Orders of the Mishna and Talmud, a *Hevra Tehilim* for the study of the Psalms, etc. During the long winter nights, one could see tens of Jews from all walks of life, sitting around the long tables, listening carefully to the commentaries of the scholars of the community. On the night of *Hoshanna Rabba*, there were many from the ranks of the scholars in Dereczin, who would go through the entire Five Books of Moses, studying in the synagogue until the early hours of the morning.

It is true that there might occasionally be quarrels and disputes among the Jewish residents of the town. But at times of crisis, such as during war, natural disasters, fires, and general deprivation, the sense of kinship among the Jews and the imperative to extend aid to one another who were needy, would intensify. This was, in no small measure, due to the role of the synagogue, and to the study of the Torah and the *Gemara*, and its commandments, over the course of many generations.

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[95] A prayer to bestow a blessing.

Dereczin In No-Man's Land

By Chaim Rabinovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photos: Reb Dov-Ber Walitsky, the Master of the Talmud Torah, and His Wife (p. 154 Top, Left)
Hazzan Zvi-Hirsch Beshkin (p.154 Top, Right)
The Wedding of Treineh Levitt to Avraham Blacher, 1919 (p. 154, Bottom)
The Wedding of Noah Lifshovich to Mirel Ogulnick, 1922 (p. 155, Top)
The Yiddish Folks-School and Culture Organization "Zukunft," 1922 (p. 155, Bottom)

When the First World War ended, and the Germans began to leave the Dereczin region, we as yet did not know into whose hands the area would fall – to Russia or to Poland.

For a short time, our town and its surroundings were without *balebatim*. Deserters from the Russian front continued to hide out in the surrounding forests, who engaged in acts of robbery and murder. The German occupation forces carried on a continuous campaign against them, but were unable to clear them from the forest areas.

We saw, that with the withdrawal of the Germans, that Dereczin and its surroundings and neighboring villages, were being abandoned without any control. At that time, we created a self-defense organization, comprised of local Jewish youth, and selected Christian residents of the town. In order to protect ourselves from the eventual depredations, we purchased about forty guns from the departing Germans, a machine gun, and several cases of hand grenades for two thousand marks.

The first objective of the organization was to form a strong self-defense company. A local town leader, *Danielevich*, a returning officer from the Russian Army, was appointed as Commandant and instructor for the self-defense force. A group of from thirty to forty young people would patrol the town with loaded guns in the evening until midnight, covering both the interior and exterior parts of the town. A peacekeeping force was also established with a militia, who would detain alleged lawbreakers, and try them for possible penal action.

The reserves of grain, potatoes, and other foodstuffs, that remained after the Germans departed, was turned over to the local administration.

From Russia, the peasants began to return to their villages, and it was necessary to provision them with food as well, from the German reserve magazines. It was necessary to maintain a tight oversight to assure that these [limited] supplies were properly distributed and not dissipated. This responsibility was attended to by the administration and cooperating Christians from the villages.

What was interesting was the approach taken by the deserters-turned-bandits, to the administration. Seeing that we had taken control of the situation, they sent a delegation with a request that they be incorporated into the standing militia, until such time that they could return to their homes in the interior of Russia. It is understood that the administration did not accept this offer. We promised them, that if they behaved decently, and did not attack the town, that in time, we would permit them to return to their homes freely.

As has previously been told about these forest bandits, they did not only once fall upon and murder or rob Jews on the roads, and also the resident Christians as well. They murdered the [entire] *Fyevsky* family in the town of *Klimovich* – the father, mother and two young daughters. During the time of the German occupation, it was not possible, under any circumstances, to try and track these lawbreakers, and not find the bodies of their victims.

During the time of the [interim civilian] administration, it happened that a couple of these murderers were apprehended, and they were tried and sentenced to death. However, there was no one to carry out the death sentence. They were kept under arrest until the arrival of the Polish authorities. The lawbreakers were turned over into the hands of the Polish police, however, no one

knows what was done with them.

This interregnum situation continued for several weeks. Slonim had already been occupied by the Bolsheviks, who came from Baranovich – meanwhile Dereczin remained in the middle without anyone in authority. We still did not know into whose hands fate would cast our lot.

A portion of the Dereczin Bundists began to show open sympathy to the Bolsheviks. Over the course of several days, there were heated discussions both for and against Bolshevism.

At that time in Dereczin, there was a certain Russian, by the name of *Tchatkov*, who had come to visit some of his relatives. He was a specially sent Bolshevik agitator – this became apparent later, when he took a high position in Slonim as part of the Bolshevik administration. It appears that he had a significant influence on swaying the majority of the Bund to the Bolshevik cause.

Suddenly, one day, I received a letter from a newly formed Communist Committee, with a demand that within 24 hours, we were to turn over all our weaponry and ammunition to this Committee, because this Committee was taking control over Dereczin and its environs.

I had no choice, and turned over to this new authority everything that the administration had.

Two days later, groups of the Polish Dombrowsky Army marched into Dereczin. They plundered the town, dispersed and drove out the newly formed Communist Committee, and confiscated all the weapons and ammunition, which had been procured through us for the purpose of protecting the resident population and its welfare.

I found out about this when I already was in Volkovysk, where I had gone with my family after turning over everything to the communists. It was at that time that my membership in the Bund ended, as well as my living in Dereczin. From Volkovysk, I went to Slonim, where I was active during twenty years in a variety of community posts. From there in 1940, the Soviet rulers sent me deep into the Russian heartland – and my family, my wife with our three precious children were brought to their end at the hands of the Nazi murderers.

During the Stormy Days

By Malka Alper

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Group Picture of Histadrut Youth 5683 (1922) untitled. (P. 157)

With the outbreak of the First Worlds War, the international sentiments of the Russian Jewish people grew strong, and the intelligentsia drew closer to the masses. The expulsion of Jews from the boundary territories created a wave of donor assistance on the part of the city dwelling Jews, whose locations were traversed by these refugees, and who were given sustenance in the form of food, drink and clothing. These refugees reached up to Niznii-Novgorod (modern day Gorky). Schools were opened there for the children of these refugees. The "Hebraists" and the "Yiddishists" competed for a number of the schools that were established, and for the allegiance of the students who were enrolled in them.

Zionist organizations did not stop even during the time of interdiction, and actively raised funds for the Land of Israel.

The expectation that the war would be over, and the belief that this would bring with it equal rights for Jews, accelerated the organization of the Jews.

The front began to disintegrate, and danger began to materialize for both Jewish life and possessions, and

it was at this time that a self-defense force was organized; In the Jewish street there was talk of autonomy.

In the captured area where we were, the hand of the occupying force began to weaken, and news begins to reach us through neutral countries concerning the conditions of Jews inside Russia, which are published in a Jewish newspaper in Bialystock – the closest city to us, from the standpoint of such communication reaching us.

The revolution broke out in Russia, and it inflamed the passions of the youth in Dereczin. Most of the young people who were Bundists , allied themselves with the revolutionary cause, believing that from it would come the salvation to the Jews as well.

The youth, which had international sensibilities, which before the war had been educated on the new, modern Hebrew literature, had sung Zionist songs, and held discourse on the writings of *Ahad-Ha'Am*, and spun the thread of hope throughout the war years that even Zionism would be rescued and become widely accepted when the victorious powers would sit down to delineate the new world that would have to be built on the wreckage of the old. – Young people such as these found themselves an expanded vista for their endeavors, and under the encouragement of the occupation forces were permitted to undertake cultural initiatives, started up evening lessons in Hebrew language, history and *Tanach*. Under this guise, they also undertook to deal with the clarification of issues concerning both general Zionism and Socialist Zionism. A group formed a *Bnot Zion* chapter, whose goal was to promote speaking Hebrew in daily life, and also for raising funds for the *Keren HaKayemet LeYisrael*.

Then came the Balfour Declaration. There was, however, no one to organize the townsfolk to focus on a Zionist initiative, because of the concerns about making a livelihood, and the lack of security to life and limb which was threatened by the Russian deserters and military prisoners who preyed on the populace from the nearby forests, thereby eliminating the possibility that the grown-up members of the community could focus on this opportunity.

The youth thirsted for leadership. *David Alper* came to this role, and along with him (with a wish for long life) *Feivel Einstein*, who today is in the United States. A vision of an Israel that was working, pioneering, providing personal freedom and fulfilment – this was their world outlook, and they wished to instill in the youth.

Many of the young people rallied to them. The Bund did not stay its hand either, and its influence on the soul of the ignored town youth was at its peak of intensity. In public gatherings, the discussion included issues regarding nationalism and internationalism, the expectations of the diaspora Jews for salvation at the hands of the International, and the question of cultural autonomy and self-rule, the organization of the community *(gegegenwarts arbeit* -- as it was called*)* – all these [subjects] became fodder for discussion at the public gatherings, that took place largely in the Old Synagogue, taking into consideration that the youth was supported by the *balebatim*, who gave them permission to use the building.

In addition to these, more limited meetings were held in which Zionist Socialism was discussed. The facilitator who brought the topics up for clarification [and debate] was *David Alper* ז"ל. After these meetings and discussions, it was decided to establish a branch of the Zionist Youth Organization , *Tze'irei Tzion*, in Dereczin, for all ages beginning at age 18 and up.

The youth of Dereczin were not dull-spirited, and these meetings along with the discussions and debates roused their emotions. The discussions spilled out beyond the walls of the gathering halls (where possible...) and consistent with the temperament of the youth, in which each individual recognized his neighbor up close, the members of each faction saw the other as mortal enemies.

When the chapter was organized, *David Alper* was selected as its leader, and its governing board consisted of: *Rachel Shelovsky, Abraham Zlotagura, David Zelig Epstein*, and as the Secretary – *Malka Alper*. The news of the establishment of the chapter took wing, and it began to receive visits from young people in the area, even from Bialystock, who took an interest in the new movement.

And it is now the days after the War in 1918. We are still disconnected from the center, and it is still not known who will have sovereignty in our area: will it be the Poles, who were granted their independence by the Allies, and wanted a nation defined by its historical boundaries, or the Bolsheviks, who cast their eyes on their Byelorussian brethren. There are also unaffiliated forces, from both sides, who come to town periodically and plunder it, and from whom one tries to keep away to avoid harm. The roads were especially dangerous, but commerce was carried out one way or another, with merchandise brought in from Slonim or Volkovysk. This burden fell primarily on the young people, who when they returned home, would bring any and all materials with them from the nearby cities that they visited (the mails did not work at all). Just as in other times, the Jews in outlying villages would come to town, and go to the *Bet HaMedrash*, so now, the young people would stop off at the offices of the Zionist Youth Organization, or clubs, provision themselves with whatever they could lay their hands on, and return home. This [experience] served as a means to hone and clarify the various practical questions concerning Zionism.

Meetings of the ZYO took place on Saturday afternoon in the main Hall in the center of town. There were some incidents of disturbance instigated by opponents [of the movement], but slowly, the issues were channeled into their proper courses, and the incidence of disturbance subsided.

During Hanukkah, a soirée was organized with lectures on issues of comparison and presentation – the inauguration of the *Keren Kayemet*. All the town residents came to the event, regardless of age or outlook, and the crowding exceeded the capacity of the premises, to the point that the [candle]light glowed at its minimum from the heat and humidity. The event went over with considerable success, and was talked about for a long time afterwards.

Fund-raising for *Keren Kayemet* occupies the youth, and even the ZYO, appearing first as 'collection plates' for the benefit of *KK* adjacent to the various synagogues on the Eve of Yom Kippur prior to the *Mincha* service.

The working class youth, which felt stirrings of independence in its midst, was not at peace with the Bund, which had allied itself almost entirely with the Bolsheviks, was also not comfortable with the ZYO, whose leadership came from the family of the *balebatim*. *David Alper* initiated an effort to found a right-wing branch of *Poalei Tzion*, which he would oversee, but be run by its own organizers. It was at this time that a *PT* chapter was established (among its founders who still survive today and reside in Israel are: *Nekha Petrukhovich* and her husband, *Michael*).

Every member of the ZYO saw himself perforce as a pioneer, and spoke of facilitating *aliyah*, and the first one who actually fulfilled this dream, and made *aliyah* in 1921, was *Naftali ben David Dykhovsky*.

In the meantime, the Russo-Polish War of 1920 broke out. The Russians got as far as the Viszla, and were under their rule from the Ninth of *Ab* in 5680 (1920) to the Eve of Sukkot in 5681, amounting to about nine weeks. It should be clear that all manner of Zionist initiatives were silenced. As the Red Army pulled back on the Eve of Sukkot, the Poles entered the town on the next morning. After the cease fire, life began to return to its normal course.

It was a period conducive to the launching of a fully-branched set of Zionist initiatives: the hearts of the Jews were open to these ideas, and they entertained the champions of these causes with sympathy.

In 1921, *Fyvel Einstein* emigrated to the USA, and in the fall of 1922, *David Alper* ז"ל moved to Pinsk, to serve as a teacher at the *Tarbut* Gymnasium there.

Activity began to wane, but the seed that was planted in those days did yield fruit, and a portion of those young people did make *aliyah*. It is a pity, however, that the number who did so was so little.

Memories From Those Days

By Jacob Rabinovich
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photos: The Tze'irei Tzion Chapter takes leave of Fyvel Einstein in 1921 (p. 159)
The Cultural Organizations Committee (untitled). (p. 160)
Poalei Tzion group picture on the occasion of Ch. A. Reichman visit, 1930 (untitled). (p.161)

At the onset of winter in November 1918, when revolution erupted in Germany, the German Army abandoned the captured environs around Dereczin, and like this entire area, it remained without rule. A Regional Committee was organized that consisted of Jews and Byelorussians, with pro-Bolshevik sentiment. In January 1919 a pro-Bolshevik demonstration took place, with all organizations participating, including the ZYO, with red flags waving in the open. It was bitter cold on that day, but the attendance at the demonstration was substantial. That evening, as large, well-attended feast was held under the auspices of the pro-Bolshevik Bund (KomBund), sitting at long tables. Suddenly, news reached us that Polish forces were drawing near to the town. The crowd dispersed. That night, the Polish army, raised by General *Dombrowsky* entered town. They began a manhunt for the organizers of the demonstration, going from house to house, on the basis of lists that they had. All night long, they plundered homes and abused the citizenry, especially those they suspected of harboring Bolshevik sympathies. The following morning, the Poles left town. In the course of several months, Dereczin was passed back and forth like a ball between the competing powers, from the Bolsheviks to the Poles, and God-forbid, back again, until finally the Poles established their hegemony over western White Russia.

The relationship of the Polish regime to the Jewish residents was not particularly good. There were also language problems. Despite this, the Jews inured themselves to Polish rule over time. Many residents, who had relatives in the USA began to receive support from them. A number of them emigrated to the USA.

In the summer of 1920, the Polish-Bolshevik War broke out, and under the pressure of the Red Army, the Poles were forced to retreat. In the midst of this Polish retreat, new incidents of plunder and abuse arose. Thanks to the volunteer Fire Brigade (who were all Jewish), the officers of the retreating army were bribed, and as a result, there were no incidents of murder, as did take place in nearby towns.

In the month of August 1920, the forces of the Red Army occupied the town. Once again, it became necessary to become accustomed to a new regime. It is difficult to describe the suffering of the Jewish population during that period. Stores were emptied of their goods, and the air was heavy with tension. In Slonim, at that time, a young Jewish woman was executed for smuggling dollars. In town, labor assemblies organized by the Bolshevik regime took place daily. Participation in the assemblies was compulsory. The local authority was a "revolutionary committee," and was led principally by Jews who were members of the Communist Party, of which only a portion were idealists. The alert ones, who could speak Russian, obtained positions in the offices of the authority. Many young people and also family men, were drafted into the Red Army, and the older ones were drafted into labor forces to build fortifications. At the beginning of October 1920, the Polish Army went aggressively on the offensive, and the Red Army was obliged to initiate retreat. The last of the Red Army companies came through town on the Eve of Sukkot. It is noteworthy that they did not plunder or abuse the population as the Poles did during their time. The Jewish communists left along with them. The following day, the Poles occupied the town.

Slowly but surely, life began to return to its prior course, after the tribulations that had beset the town, from the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. The storekeepers reopened their stores, and the craftsmen their stalls. The Joint, once again, provided support. It was at that time that a general Hebrew school was established due to the efforts of

David Alper ז"ל. This school was the marvel of the area.

Beginning in 1918, *Agudat Tze'irei Tzion* was established; a *Keren Kayemet* chapter began to function; a Hebrew library was opened, named after *Y. Kh. Brenner*. The foundation of the library became the books of the teacher, *Fyvel Einstein*, who donated them for that purpose, at the time of his emigration to the USA in 1921. A goodly number of the Hebrew books that were published in Warsaw were acquired, published by *Shtibl*, and also books written in Yiddish.

At the same time, the activities of the local Bund expanded under the guise of the cultural organization called *Zukunft*. They also opened a library and reading-room. Most of the books, in particular the Russian volumes, were remnants of the Bund library from 1905. At the head of this organization was *Shmuel Abelovich*, a man with a leftist outlook. As a result of the work of an informer, the Polish police suddenly instituted a series of arrests among members of this organization. The Russian books were seized and impounded. After efforts made with the authorities in Slonim, the detainees were set free. From that time on, there was no indication of activities in the Jewish neighborhoods on the part of the Yiddish Left. Only in the year 1928, did the Polish authorities return about two hundred Russian books that had been confiscated years back, to the hands of the management of the "Brenner" library, with the intervention of the Vice-Mayor of Slonim, *Mr. Zabludsky*. From that time on, those books were kept in the attic of our house. Periodically, the young Byelorussians would come and ask to borrow these books to read, and we would willingly, if secretly, respond to their requests.

In 1921, the first pioneer from Dereczin left for the Holy Land. This was *Naftali Dykhovsky*. The ties to the central *Tze'irei Tzion* office in Warsaw were quite flexible. Occasionally, the members of the central office would come to visit us in town. The daily Yiddish newspaper, *Befreiung*, and the monthly Hebrew publication *Atid, were distributed in town*. I recall the time when the *T"T* took up a collection for *Keren HaAvodah*. They took up a collection of tools from the townsfolk: axes, plows, ropes, etc. for this purpose. If my memory is not mistaken, I believe that the chapter of the *T"T* ceased to function in 1923. Because of this, in 1925, an organization called *HeHalutz* (The Pioneer) was founded. In the month of May 1926, the first organized *aliyah* left for the Holy Land, with the assistance of anonymous help from Poland: *Shimon Abramovich, Dov Gorinovsky, and David Rabinovich*. With their departure, the energies of the pioneering organization were weakened, and the chapter disbanded. Only the *Keren Kayemet* and the *Brenner* Library continued with their work. The leadership of the *KK* consisted of *Abraham Zlotagura, Masha Alper, and Dov Polachuk*. In 1929, a branch of *Poalei Tzion* was reestablished in Dereczin, with a membership of about eighty souls. In that time, the organization developed quite nicely. Members were [also] active in *K"K*, the library, etc. Thanks to this branch, a *Schul-kult* organization was established and it led to the opening of a Jewish school, in which instruction was given in Yiddish and Hebrew. Before the establishment of this school, Jewish children studied in the Polish school (Szcola Powszecznie). In 1930, the central office sent *A. Reichman* as a teacher, who was very active in the branch of that organization, and thanks to him, the activities of the *Poalei Tzion* in Dereczin widened. A branch of the Labor League for workers of the Holy Land was also established. In the elections for the 17th and 18th Zionist Congresses, the Labor League scored large victories, despite the efforts of the revisionists who attracted a goodly part of the young people around them. Together with *Poalei Tzion*, the *Halutz* movement was also revitalized. The town changed its face. From time to time, the directors from the district office in Slonim, and the central office in Warsaw would come to visit. The youth that was attracted to these movements came from all walks of life, beginning with gymnasium students and ending with the ranks of tailors and shoemakers. Every day, twenty copies of *Der Wort*, the printed organ of the organization, published in Warsaw would arrive. My brother *David* regularly sent the paper, *Davar*, home to us, and anyone who was interested to learn about what was happening in the Holy Land was welcome to read it. It is worthwhile at this time to take note that in 1925, with the initial publication of *Davar*, The *HeHalutz*, chapter took a subscription to the paper, and up to the middle of 1927, packages of the *Davar*

paper were received weekly at the address of the Secretary of *HeHalutz*, who at that time was *David Lifshovich*. In the period between 1929-1933, the following excelled in their unique contributions: *Fyvel Gelman, Issachar Abelovich, Yitzhak Minkov,* ל"ז, and to be separated for long life, *Moshe Sedletsky*. Let us also recall *Joseph Dykhovsky* ל"ז, who put his shoulder to any task that was asked of him.

There was also a Players Group in town, who would put on performances from time-to-time in Yiddish. *Simkha Hurwitz* was very active in this group. Revenues were donated to the Library, charitable purposes, etc.

There also existed a general Zionist *Histadrut* in Dereczin, headed by *M. Feldman*, but it did not produce much in the way of activities, because the majority of the young people were under the influence of the *Poalei Tzion*, and the revisionists who grew strong during the early 1930s. *Sima [Sioma] Shelovsky* ל"ז, was active in that organization.

A communist cell operated underground, which was connected to the Communist Party in Western White Russia. On May 1, they would paste up notices in Yiddish with revolutionary slogans.

At the end of the Twenties, a general Jewish bank was established in Dereczin, that was instrumental in providing credit to storekeepers and craftsmen. Because of inept management, it went bankrupt in 1933. The economic condition, which had always been at a low level, worsened as the Thirties progressed. The Polish regime did whatever it could to beat down the Jewish population.

I recollect, that before I made *aliyah* to the Holy Land in 1933, it was forbidden for the farmers from the surrounding area to park their wagons with produce in the marketplace during the weekly market days, or monthly fairs, as they had done since time immemorial, but rather had to park them outside of town.

This robbed the storekeepers of their livelihood. There was already talk at that time to open a centralized purchasing cooperative for agricultural produce. Up until that time, many Jewish families made a living from running merchandise stores. The difficulties associated with making a living led to [sic: unhealthy] competition and intense hatreds.

Relationships with the Christian population was generally benign. I do not remember any time when we felt the danger of a pogrom. The farmers, who were largely Byelorussians, also suffered from the yoke of Polish rule. Naturally there was anti-Semitism under the surface, and it was felt in relations with the urban Christians, who always acted tense. They were more readily influenced by anti-Semitic activity, but these issues never came to a confrontation.

A Jewish-Polish Kitchen

By Malka Alper

(Original Language: Hebrew)

It was at the outset of Polish rule. In the USA, a Polish-American Committee was established for the relief of the newly established Republic of Poland. Jews of Polish origin also participated in this committee. The requested that no distinction be made between Jews and Christians in rendering aid to the people of the new Polish Republic.

One day in 191, we received word that they were getting ready to open a shared kitchen to serve the needs of both Jews and Poles. They turned over the organization of this matter to Mrs. *Nowicka*, the wife of Dr. *Nowicki*. She invited *Rabbi Plotkin*, ל"ז, who proposed that two separate kitchens be established, one for Christians and one for Jews, or that the foodstuffs be distributed to the Jews dry, and they would prepare their own meals at home.

The "old lady" suspected that the Jews would take their rations and trade them in the market for whatever they wanted, and stubbornly insisted on a single, shared kitchen (perhaps she held some inner hope that it would be possible to tempt some unsuspecting Jewish child into eating non-Kosher food), and there would be a need for someone to stand guard, in the spirit of shared work, to assure that needy Jews would obtain Kosher food from whoever was dispensing the rations.

It was my lot to be selected as the link between *Rabbi Plotkin* as the head of the Jewish community, and Mrs. *Nowicka* as the head of the local committee.

A tiring negotiation was carried out with her, until she agreed that the portions of lard would be given to the Christian children who were town residents, and also the residents of the village of Aleksich, which was nearby, and those items prepared in the kitchen pots would be dairy only, and supervised as such. The interesting thing was that the old doctor [sic: her husband] would always stand by my side, and gently ease the temper of his wife during the discussion, by citing different illogical customs that existed in the Catholic faith as well.

For almost the entire year of 1919 until about the month of November,

I would come daily to the kitchen, which was located in one of the buildings of the aristocracy, *'die palazen'* outside of town to keep an eye on the cooks, who were two elderly teachers who had moved to Dereczin, Russian by their appearance, who declared themselves to be devout Catholics (they were the *Goznyuva* sisters), especially to oversee the rationing, and assure that no swine products were put into the pots. Jewish children received cartons of buttermilk in place of meat.

The old lady also used me in the evening to do the accounting (those receiving rations were asked to pay a nominal sum for each portion), and conveyed them to the central district, and consequently it was incumbent on me to be familiar with a variety of the aspects of the kitchen's operation.

Planting and the Harvest

By Schraga-Fyvel Einstein (Chicago)

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Schraga-Fyvel Einstein, Ethel Rabinovich & Yaakov-Meir Plotkin (untitled) (p. 164)

After having spent three and a half years in *Krynki* (the Bialystock District), the place where I was a Yeshivah student, and during which time, I was placed under the care of my late older brother, *Abraham Yehuda* ל"ז, (he and his family were wiped out in the Holocaust), who subsequently became one of the founders of *Tarbut* in Poland – I returned home to Dereczin. This was my home, and the home of my family, in the middle of the summer of 1915, when the intensity of the First World War was at its

height. The full military pressure of the conquering German military was not felt at its greatest intensity in our area, since the front of battle receded from our area on a daily basis. The Jewish population in Dereczin, as in all the surrounding towns of the district, was elated by the temporary peace that came to it, and quickly began adapting to the conditions of a new life.

When I was possessed by the fire of youthful exuberance for the realization of the desired ideals of the salvation of our people, the Hebrew language, and the Land of Israel, I set my steps first in the direction of organizing Hebrew education in our town. In accordance with accepted custom, I pasted a short notice on the door of the Great synagogue, arranged in Hebrew, describing the founding of an ordinary Hebrew school. I signed the announcement in the capacity of a teacher of this school. Parents immediately rallied to me, enrolling their sons and daughters so that they could learn Hebrew, *Tanach*, and the history of Israel. I divided the children into classes, and I taught them around one large table, in a four foot by four foot room in the home of my parents. This was a sort of "Reformed *Heder*." The method of teaching that I selected was, naturally, *Ivrit B'Ivrit* (Hebrew taught in Hebrew).

And soon a message began to permeate the town that something new, vibrant and stirring, was coursing through the educational process of the children: Hebrew speech. An awakening arose in the midst of the community, interest strengthened not only in broadening the renewed Hebrew language studies, but also in Zionism, and in nurturing Hebrew culture in all its aspects and nuances. A " Lovers of Hebrew Language" Club was organized, whose objective was to meet periodically for the express purpose of carrying on Hebrew conversation. This group was led by young people, who in the past had benefitted from a Yeshivah education. Meetings of the group took place in the regular homes of the members. During our first meetings, we clarified our own agenda of efforts that we would like to realize. In about an hour, we had decided what our course of action would be on the cultural front. We put out a weekly newspaper called *HaNoar* (Youth), which we would publicly read during our meetings. We opened evening lessons to the older members of the community in *Tanach*, History, and Hebrew language. And with the support of yet other young people, who came to us as unaffiliated, with our collective efforts, we opened a town library.

And then *David Alper* ז"ל, joined our group. He was young, talented and intelligent, and had received a comprehensive progressive education. He was among the few from our town, who as a young man, had the opportunity to attend the Russian public schools, because of the governmental requirement. As a result, he was able to obtain exposure to more broadly based ideas in the Hebrew language and in its literature. We saw in him the man destined to bring "the splendor of Japheth into the tents of Shem."[96] It did not take many days before the group found their leader in Member *Alper*, as well as their director and organizer. A working committee was formed, headed by Member *Alper*. Also, *David's* sisters, *Malka, Masha* ע"ה (she and her family were wiped out in the Holocaust), *Beileh, Duba,* and *Rachel*, all joined the group as members. It was in this way, that the *Alper* house became the center of the Hebrew movement in Dereczin (the father of the family was the sole pharmacist in town. The pharmacy store business was conducted from a room of the house that faced out onto the street). It was here that the meetings of the working committee took place, during which the various agendas of our activities were created. Slowly but surely, the urge to organize our work grew stronger, with the goal of satisfying our desire to embrace more general Zionist principles, with an eye toward the welfare of our people and the redemption of the Land. After a course of rulings and discussions, we founded a branch of "Zionist Youth" in our town. We established relations with the central office in Warsaw (our area was at that time already under Polish rule), and we received periodic news regarding different activities aimed at supporting the workers movement in the Holy Land. Once , we received a notice from the central office to collect tools and farm implements for the use of pioneers who had gone to the Holy Land. We returned to our sources and gathered all sorts of tools, most of

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96 Allusion to descent from the sons of Noah, where Jews (Semites) are thought to descend from *Shem*.

which were rather old and worse for wear, and whose utility was questionable... but we did our thing.

Of all the efforts that we undertook in various fields of endeavor in the "Zionist Youth," none was as successful as what we were able to accomplish on the cultural front. On this front we went from one success to the next, until we proved to ourselves that we had laid down a firm basis on which we could establish formal Hebrew education. We turned with an announcement to the Hebrew community at large, which responded to us immediately. Everyone felt that the time had come for the establishment of a general Hebrew school. In a large public meeting, in which *David Alper* spoke on – the issue of a [Hebrew] school – the curriculum of study in accordance with the outline of the "Zionist Youth" was approved by a voice vote. In the middle of 1919, after all the necessary preparations were made, a general Hebrew school was opened with three classes, with a broad curriculum, that included Hebrew studies as a significant part along with general studies and the study of the national language (Polish). Our member, [*David*] *Alper* was appointed as Headmaster of the school. Considerable difficulty was experienced in the teaching of general subjects (arithmetic, geography, physics) because of a dearth of suitable textbooks. We, the teachers, were compelled to prepare our lessons in these subjects by translating Russian and Polish text material into Hebrew. In a short period of time after its establishment, good reports went out not only in our town, but to the entire area around us. This contributed to giving us both strength and encouragement.

In time, when the *Tarbut* movement was created in Poland, with its headquarters in Warsaw, for the purpose of establishing Jewish day schools throughout the country, our school became affiliated with the movement as a *Tarbut* school as well.

In those years an unaffiliated drama society was formed in our town. The Players staged several plays, among them, *Aluvei HaChaim* (The Slings and Arrows of Life) (in Hebrew) by *D. Pinsky*. For a theater, we used an old large stone building, which was in a state of disrepair standing in the center of town, which at one time had been used by the Polish nobility in the area. This building also served to house the large public meetings that our movement organized periodically. At the request of the school administration, we put on the play, *Shnei Nigunim* (Two Songs) by *Y. Shweiger*. The performance made such a strong impression on the audience, that filled the hall from end to end, that even the diehard Yiddishists were compelled to say, "Amen!"

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In the middle of the summer of 1920, our movement temporarily ceased its activities. The Soviet Russian Army spread throughout our district, and pushed the Poles back to the gates of Warsaw.

The head of the city that was appointed by the Soviet military, invited me to his office – a bare room in one of the houses – and turned to me with these words: "I have heard that you were a teacher in a general school here, [therefore] from this day forward, you will serve as a teacher in a Soviet school that will be established shortly. In the coming months, you will be free of any military obligation, because you will be responsible for organizing a group that will assist you in the establishment of a school, which will have the curriculum of a Soviet school. You will be responsible for participating in the meeting of the District Committee of Soviet educators that will take place in Slonim.

Needless to say, I was compelled to follow his orders. I traveled to Slonim, to the Committee meeting. There were about two hundred teachers there who came from all the cities of the district. A young lady, of about twenty-eight years of age, addressed us as a meeting facilitator, who had been sent to us especially for this purpose from Moscow.

She explained the nature of the curriculum in Soviet schools, and emphasized the Soviet recognition of the responsibility of the teacher to indoctrinate students. Her presentation was given both forcefully and with great emotion. Prior to the conclusion of the meeting, the people who ran the meeting distributed to each teacher one inkwell, one pen, one notebook and one pencil, to be used in teaching their students.

I returned to Dereczin, and as I was standing bewildered and struck dumb over what had transpired there, the miracle happened: the Poles

succeeded in driving the Soviets back, and our district became "liberated."

In the meantime, we received (both myself and the rest of my family) a formal invitation from our relatives in Chicago to emigrate to the USA. We made all the necessary preparations for our trip to America, and at the beginning of November 1921, we reached Chicago – where we live to this day.

Text of the Message Over the Picture (see P. 165) Taken at the Time of Fyvel Einstein's Departure From Dereczin, in 1921

Given to our dear and respected friend and Committee Member, *Schraga [Fyvel] Einstein* on the occasion of his departure for America.

Our comrade! With our hearts fluttering, here we are, preparing to take our leave of you. In our minds is the great void that will remain behind in our midst in the Zionist-Socialist camp in Dereczin. We find a bit of comfort in recognizing that you are transferring your work to another, large arena, and we give you our blessing with the wish that the line of your endeavor will broaden, and you will continue to rise higher together with the outlook of our world that continues to prosper.

On behalf of the Organization:

Head: *D[avid] Alper*
Sec'y: *Y[Yosef]. Dykhovsky*
Members: *Nachman Goldin*
A[braham] Zlotagura
L. Kwiat
D[avid] Alper

Between Zion and Revolution

By Malka Alper
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: A group of young women active in the Brenner Library (untitled) (p. 168)

The repercussions of the Russian revolution reached the occupied territories. It became clear to the Germans that they had not really won the war, and that they had no real expectation of retaining control over western White Russia. [Consequently] the relationship of the occupying force became more liberalized toward the local populace. A freer access to other locations around Dereczin is permitted. The youth takes advantage of this opportunity to engage in culturally-related work.

But where would an appropriate place be, in which to conduct expanded cultural activities? In this regard, the German military command themselves placed a room in their barracks building at the disposal of the culture workers, practically in the center of town. It was there that lectures were organized with regard to Yiddish subjects and *Tanach*.

News reaches us regarding the Balfour Declaration! The enthusiasm of the young people rises. *Bnot Tzion*, a circle of Hebrew speakers is organized, along with committees for Zionist activities. Discussions are initiated regarding a variety of Zionist themes, and fund-raising begins for *Keren Kayemet LeYisrael*. Every opportunity is utilized, when special evenings come, like Yom Kippur Eve, when collection boxes are put out for various charities, the *KKL* box is also put out among them.

I remember well the Hanukkah evening celebrations that were organized annually, with a lecture about the meaning of Hanukkah, followed by a presentation. Young and old alike, all the residents of Dereczin came to the Hanukkah evening. The hall was packed full of people to the point of asphyxiation. In this stifling air, the Hanukkah candles were barely able to stay lit. The speaker could barely hear himself speak. Despite this crowding, the celebration was carried off with aplomb, and it was talked about in Dereczin for a long time afterwards.

A group of children, ages five to six is assembled, and the first class of the [new] Hebrew school is opened. The German school is closed. The school of *Abraham Izaakovich* has not yet been reopened.

The work of the school is initiated and directed by *David Alper*, ז"ל. He was assisted in this by *[Schraga] Fyvel Einstein*, and the writer of these lines.

The older youth carries on discussions about the problems of communism-bolshevism, general Zionism, and socialist Zionism. A number of the former Yeshiva students are drawn closer to the ideals of the Bund, and even further left, but the largest part with Zionist sensitivities seek a synthesis of religious values with Zionism and socialism. I am reminded of the long discussions in a small circle that took place in my home, in which *David-Zelig Epstein* took part (he died young in 1919 from typhus), *Shmuel Abelovich*, *Joseph Dykhovsky*, *Abraham Zlotagura*, *Shmuel Shepshelevich*, *Nachman Goldin*, and others.

The "Zionist Youth Organization" is established. The worked out program of the new organization is agreed to at the founding meeting. Meetings are organized, speeches are given, and a mission-clarification initiative is undertaken. ZYO does not encompass all the older young people, and it is therefore necessary to launch a larger invitational effort, in order to prevent the young people from falling under the influence of the leftist, anti-Zionist movements. *David Alper* ז"ל, assembles a group of young people, including married individuals, and means are sought to establish a more right-wing *Poalei Tzion* organization, that will be active among the working class young people. And this is, indeed, accomplished.

A variety of material begins to arrive from the

centers in Slonim, Volkovysk, and Bialystock. Despite the tenuous contact with Warsaw, because of the chaos that reigned in those times, even from there we received helpful materials.

However, the Bund wasn't about to give up so easily. Its loyal members organize themselves as well, and a war is declared for the soul and spirit of the young people in town. At open gatherings in schul, in the *Alter Mauer*, or in the barracks-hall, debates between the leftists and Zionist-socialists take place with regularity.

In the meantime, aid began to arrive from America for the impoverished population of Poland, which looked upon our area as part of their country, as promised [to the new republic] by the Allies Powers. The "Joint" initiated its activities, and among the populace a discussion began regarding who would be responsible for distribution of the aid, where should the resources be sent to – and what form should such support take, or should it be through constructive activity of some kind. The "Joint" required that the people who needed the support should participate in community projects. It was the community at large that would receive the funds involved, and decide how these funds would be allocated. Will this newly appointed body be Jewish-nationalist and Zionist, or one with leftist, anti-nationalist tendencies? Heated debates took place around this issue, at public forums, with speeches that lasted many hours, until the speakers themselves grew hoarse.

The town *balebatim* were sympathetic to the Zionist youth. An administrative body was formed with representation from all parties, but with a Zionist majority.

This was an interesting, if stormy epoch, when our region changed hands between Russia and Poland, and during which we experienced periods with no national rule at all.

On January 6, 1919, a Christian holiday, a large public demonstration was called with red flags paraded, during which the authority of the church was challenged, and in which bolshevik authority was championed. The demonstration was organized by a group of bolsheviks and commissars, who had arrived from Slonim a couple of days before. The rural populace streamed into Dereczin to observe the demonstration, particularly the young people, which had been co-opted by the 'solution' of having large parcels of the landed aristocracy divided up among the land-hungry peasantry. The older peasants came to town to celebrate their Christian holiday, buy some merchandise, and in the meantime, also listen to what the bolsheviks had to say.

The demonstration began first with the communists leading the parade, with their flags, followed by the Bundists, and then *Poalei Tzion* with red flags. There was a large crowd. Speakers held forth with fiery oratory from the veranda at *Joseph Rabinovich's* home. Afterward, the demonstration continued peacefully.

At night, after the demonstration day was over, immediately after midnight, a group of Polish army officers from *Dombrowsky's* army appeared in the marketplace. They fell upon the stores there, and began robbing and pillaging whatever came to hand. The senior officers began to hunt for the Jewish speakers who spoke at the demonstration. If one of them had hidden themselves, then their fathers were taken as hostages and whipped, it force them into revealing the hiding places of their children. It was literally a miracle that no loss of life occurred on that night.

Both the Bund and the *Poalei Tzion* had to furl their red banners until better days would come.

Meanwhile, there was no sense of security, neither for life itself, nor for the ability to make a living. One lived in constant fear, "from hand to mouth." And what did one not do in order to find sustenance? One traveled to the neighboring towns, and even more distant places, as far as Warsaw, returning with merchandise and products. If young people are traveling, they bring back also [reading] materials, literature and ideas.

The older youth gets together almost every evening, mostly in private homes, to hold discussions, to listen, talk and deepen the foundations for the coming movement to a working Land of Israel. In those trying times, the Hebrew school was also established.

Where did those active young men and women find the stamina and energy to create the spark and effervescence for their fierce love for the Land of Israel, for the preservation of the Hebrew language, for their love of humanity, for their own peoples, for peace and brotherhood of man all over the world?

When I recall the personalities of those days, of those debates, of those activities – none of them is with us any longer – when I think of the sharp analysis and heated arguments over newspaper articles, and the discussions about them, of the talks we had over songs and stories, I come to the conclusion that they were nothing less than the teachers of an entire young generation. It is our great loss, that only very few survived the Holocaust years, to find refuge in the Jewish Homeland.

Following Upheavals and Pogroms

By Moshe Sedletsky
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photos: The HeHalutz Chapter in 1925 at the time of Minkowski's visit (untitled). (p. 170)
The Keren Kayemet Committee - 1925 (untitled) (p. 171, Top)
The Keren Kayemet Organization - 1930 (untitled) (p. 171, Bottom)

Young people on the barracks lawn (untitled) (p. 172)
By the Church (untitled). (p. 172 Center, Left)
A group of Dereczin girls (untitled). (p. 172 Bottom, Left)
In front of the [Sapieha] palaces (untitled) (p. 172, Bottom, Right)

Hanan Abelovich & Chaim-Yehoshua Lifshovich (p. 173, Top, Left)
A group of young people (untitled) (p. 173, Top, Right)
A going-away party for Shmeryl Mishkin (untitled) (p. 173)

When the first news of the October 1917 Revolution reached Dereczin, a great joy erupted in the town, and demonstrations and holidays were proclaimed in honor of the great revolution.
Red flags were flown in public, and young people marched and sang revolutionary songs. With this great awakening, active people and the intelligentsia of the town began to set up parties, and give very inspiring speeches. It appeared to me that redemption has, finally, arrived.

An I, a lad of ten years age looked about me with wondering eyes: what happened here? According to my grandfather, *Reb Abraham* ל"ז, the Final Redemption would come with the arrival of a Messiah, Zion would be redeemed and the Hebrew tongue would be our tongue. If that were the case, then why, suddenly, are revolutionary songs being sung in Russian , and demonstrations being conducted in the streets of the town? As a little boy, I too, was caught up in the stream of exhilaration of the moment. I recollect the stormy debates that I listened to on the other side of my teacher's door, who boarded in my parents home, ל"ז. They would rule and debate how to bring the newfound freedom and redemption to the entire world, and to the masses of Jews, and I almost believed that the end to this lowly suffering was really at hand. I saw the stalwart young men, who had taken control of the town, joining the Red Army. News was spread to the effect that the assets of the wealthy were being distributed to the poor, a New World was upon us, everyone would equal, whether big or small, whether rich or poor.

This joy didn't last very long in our town. The Poles reached Dereczin, and the supporters of the revolutionary government fell back along with the

retreating Red Army. The young people of the town began to emigrate across the ocean. The town became emptied of its youthful energies, and we began to hear about the pogroms in the Ukraine. Even in Dereczin, we felt the influence of these *Halrachiks*, who would cut off beards and side locks, and give beatings, which caused the Jews to lock themselves in their homes, fearing what the next day might bring. A sense of crisis weighed on the hearts of the young people, who saw in this that the redemption of Jewish people was yet far distant, yet many continued to err in following this fallacious cause. Left-wing Jewish movements went underground.

The Zionist movement was revitalized by the Balfour Declaration. Through the effort of several active people, the youth in town gathered together, displayed a blue and white flag, and sang songs. This great day remains guarded in my memory, a day in which our hope for the redemption of the Jewish people, once again, waxed strong.

We finished the *Tarbut* school that was established through the efforts of the educator, *David Alper*, ז"ל. We matured, and understood what we had to do and how to face the future, in order to realize our dreams of going to the Holy Land and joining those who were building the Homeland. In 1925, even before a chapter of *HeHalutz* was established in Dereczin, the first of the pioneers made *aliyah*. In 1926, we established the *HeHalutz* chapter, and began putting the *KKL* collection boxes into houses, and throughout the town, sympathy for the Zionist ideal grew. We initiated cultural work in our chapter. The arrival of the newspaper, *Davar,* which came to the *Rabinovich* home, was a major event for us. We would gather there, and read from the paper about events that took place in the Holy Land. We broadened the scope of our cultural activities, we set up classes for the study of the Zionist movement, for the Zionist-socialist workers' movement, and for the kibbutz movement in the Holy Land. We dreamed of emigration, getting certifies to leave, and *aliyah*. There were no organizations that facilitated emigration in our area, and it was at that time that we tried to put one together under the auspices of a "nobleman" who was know to be an eccentric, but this endeavor did not succeed. We began to look for work among the Jewish households. The only work was – cutting firewood, and even that work could be had only with great difficulty. It was no wonder that everyone agreed that "Jewish Children" would work at hard physical labor.

The events of 1929[97] led to a great awakening among the members of the *HeHalutz* chapter. The young people were ready to go join the defenders, but to our sorrow, their will did not prevail, but rather the refusal of their parents to let them go. Despite this, four members of the chapter did go in that year. In 1930, the *HeHalutz* chapter hit a crisis, with some of the members making *aliyah*, a few emigrated to Argentina, and only a small body of members remained to carry the burden of work in the chapter. The *Betar* movement was established, and most of the young people joined their ranks. The chapter became frozen. In order to generate membership interest that would strengthen the Zionist movement, we established *Poalei Tzion,* and several of the teachers joined its ranks, along with a number of the leaders from the ranks of the working class. This chapter was under the aegis of the *HeHalutz* chapter. In order to broaden our membership ranks, we opened evening classes in general subjects, and by this means, we succeeded in attracting the young workers to our ranks, as well as craftsmen, who left the non-Zionist organizations.

I recollect a Bund-sponsored meeting which several of us *HeHalutz* members attended, and after the presentations, we asked for time to speak. We said what we had to say, and when the moderator saw that our words had aroused some interest on the part of the listeners, he replied to us off the topic, jokingly, with words of the following nature: – the children of the rich play, each of them bringing the toys that they received – from their parents; a poor boy approaches and wants to join the play. So they ask him, what toys have you brought? The boy raises his shirt and says: I have a bellybutton, it croaks. Laughter broke out all over the auditorium. I was not embarrassed, and asked for permission to say a few words.

I said that I understood the implications of the

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97 Possible reference to the Hebron massacre.

moderator's remarks, but there is one thing that the Bundist moderator does not know, that he who transgresses gets his just desserts, and this is the same with the Jewish people, who will obtain redemption through return to our motherland, the Land of Israel, to derive sustenance from her. The audience applauded me, and a craftsman, known for his communist leanings clapped me on the shoulder, and said: "You've convinced me!" and he joined our sympathizers, and when we returned, he joined up with *HeHalutz*. We established a branch of *The Worker* and a number of the craftsmen [in town] joined this organization, among them *S. Beckenstein*, who was one of the workers in the branch.

To our great sadness, the gates of emigration closed, and our membership did not succeed in making *aliyah*. The mood of the town was not lacking in Zionist inclination. The movement to the Holy Land, and the work toward that objective grew in our town, Jews donated generously to Zionist causes and the interest in everything that transpired in the Holy Land was received with great interest.

In 1933, several members of the *HeHalutz* branch obtained permission to emigrate, a portion of them were fortunate enough to obtain proper certification, and another group went up with *Aliyah Bet*.

Not all of them succeeded in getting through, and many fell victim to the Nazis or as casualties fighting with partisans in the forests [during the Second World War].

May their memory be a blessing to us all!

The Tarbut School

As Told by a Group of Students

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photos: David Alper (p. 174, Top Left)
Eliezer Tatz, of the Hebrew Pioneers in Dereczin (p. 174, Bottom, Right)
The Teacher, Shoshana Alper, of the Berels Family (p. 175, Top, Right)
Eliyahu Abramovich, one of the founders of the Tarbut School (p. 175, Bottom, Left)
The Teacher, Schraga-Fyvel Einstein (p. 176, Top, Right)
The Teacher, Malka Alper (p. 176, Bottom, Left)
A group of students in 1925 (untitled) (p. 177, Top, Left)
The Teacher, Zaydl Emiel (p. 177, Top, Right)
A 1922 Tarbut School Picture (p. 177, Bottom)[98]

[98] Note of Interest : In this *Tarbut* School portrait of the Class of 1922 (presumably all grades, as distinct from a graduating class), *Carol Gelman Lowenbraun* (whose father, *Foyka Gelman*, was from Zelva), identified her mother, *Alta Osherovitz Gelman* (from Dereczin).

The *Tarbut* School was founded in 1918 by *David Alper,* ל"ז and *[Schraga] Fyvel Einstein.* It was a group of mothers, among them *Fruma Bialosotsky, Rachel Shelovsky, Sarah Leah Gelman,* and others, who turned to *David Alper,* ל"ז with a directive and a request to establish such a school. He responded willingly, and the institution was opened initially for first and second grades, with established pedagogical resources.

The *Tarbut* School obtained for its use, the physical resources that had been used by the German School during the occupation period of the First World War. The school did not wait for a building of its own [to begin functioning], even when it reached the point of running four and five grades, doing so in rented rooms, some of which were large, well-lit and airy, while others were too small and stuffy.

Despite this, the atmosphere in the classrooms was a good one, and the relationship between the students and their teachers was one of trust and respect.

Despite the shortage of adequate textbooks, the conduct of study took place properly, that is, *Ivrit B'Ivrit* (Hebrew taught in Hebrew). During recess time, which was held out of doors, the teachers mingled with the children, which contributed to the good atmosphere that prevailed among them. Not every house in which there was a school classroom had a gated yard; in those instances, the children spent their recess time in the street, and filled it with the chatter of play, and the sound of speech, peppered with Hebrew. The adults would pass by the children, with ears cocked toward them in wonderment, as they listened to the use of the Holy Tongue.

All the Jewish residents literally lived out the activities of the school: whenever there was a class in gymnastics (conducted out of doors for lack of an indoor facility) – many were curious enough to come and stand around the gymnasts; a walk or a tour, if it occurred through the town streets – would be accompanied by a throng of young people and adults; if a play or a celebration was being staged, either on a holiday or at year-end -- this became an event for the entire town.

Despite the difficulties of external life circumstances, the atmosphere inside the school was a good one. The teachers dedicated themselves, heart and soul to inculcate their charges with important disciplines: knowledge of the Hebrew language, love of the *Tanach,* love of the Land of Israel that was in the process of being reborn, and love of their fellow man.

The school lived every happening in the Holy Land: the defense of Tel-Chai; the death of [Joseph] Trumpeldor, and his companions; collection of tools for the *Keren Poalei Eretz Yisrael.* I am reminded of *Abraham* at the time the tools were being donated – and he was the youngest of the children – after the representatives of *HeHalutz* taking donations had left their home, and his father had given whatever he had given – he said that it was not enough, and secretly went to the assembly point and added a large axe that he took from his house.

At the end of the school year, there were final examinations given, in which the Headmaster *David Alper* himself participated, along with the officers of the school committee that consisted of parents who served with the Headmaster.

Even when *David* was a temporary visitor to Dereczin, he would frequently visit the school, and involve himself in lessons, testing the mettle of the class and individual students, testing one or two of them individually, in order to take a measure of their progress. He was a stickler for discipline, and it was not once that he took a student to task for not measuring up to his standards.

When *David* left the town to take a position in another city, it was the custom to wait for him at final examination time, because it was known that he would be returning to visit his parents during vacation.

Education professionals from nearby towns would come to the school, because it had garnered a reputation as a school with high standards in the district. We took great pride in the good name that the school appeared to have earned among our guests.

At the center of the school's educational endeavors

were the initiatives undertaken on behalf of the *KKL*. In this respect, the efforts of the teacher, *[Rabbi] Chaim Zvi Sinai-Miller* ל"ז, were prominent. Pupils donated themselves, and solicited donations from others. On Yom Kippur Eve, they would set out a 'Collection Plate' at the entrance to the various synagogues for purposes of soliciting donations from those coming for the afternoon *Mincha* service.

It is clear, that the home of every father and mother was influenced by the atmosphere of the school, which was permeated with an international spirit, as the speech of the children rang with Hebrew. We accepted a *Tarbut* obligation on ourselves, to fulfill the Hebrew dictum even outside the walls of the school, and to elucidate its message among all the children, and assure its realization.

The Hebrew Lending Library was right beside the school, and the students ran it under the supervision of the teacher *[Rabbi Chaim Zvi Sinai-]Miller* ל"ז, and lent out books twice a week.

A youth movement named *Agudat Trumpeldor* also existed, and this was a long time before [the formation of] *Betar.*

On *Lag B'Omer* we satisfied the *mitzvah* of going out into the forest with bows and arrows, a parade led by the international flag, and a line of young people, mothers and their little kids tailed after, with the students marching decked out as Jewish pioneers, with songs of the Holy Land on their lips.

As for *Tu B'Shevat,* The Jewish Arbor Day, we celebrated that in the height of the Polish winter, in which the 'fruits of the fifteenth' when they did arrive, were accompanied by the singing of songs of Zion, and praises for the Holy Land and its fruit.

Kalman emphasizes: To this day he recalls the experience of learning stanzas of the poetry of *[Chaim Nachman] Bialik* and *[Shaul] Tchernikhovsky* from the mouth of the teacher, *[Rabbi Chaim Zvi Sinai-]Miller* ל"ז, those that had been put to music. The teacher, *Sinai,* with his endearing pedagogical approach, inculcated in each of us, a love of Zion, a love of the Hebrew language, and a love of *Tanach.*

Another adds: Every morning that we arrived at a class that took place in a gathering house, in which the teacher *Sinai* ל"ז, lived in a room, we found a saying from the *Tanach* on the blackboard, or a riddle.

It is important to take note that with the *aliyah* of the teacher, *Sinai* to the Holy Land, the school went into a decline that eventually led to its closing.
It is our responsibility to commemorate those teachers, who thanks to their efforts, we, the students of the *Tarbut* School are found here today:

David Alper – The founder and first Headmaster of the school, killed in the Holocaust in Pinsk soon after the fall of that city in 1941, when the German command ordered him to become the head of the *Judenrat*, and he refused. He was seized immediately, with his 14 year-old son, and taken out for execution.

Malka Alper – A resident in Israel since 1925.

Abraham Izaakovich – Went during the mid-1920s to live with his sons in the USSR, and our contact with him was lost.

Moshe Vankhutzker – Made *aliyah* during the 1930s and is today in Haifa.

Zvi (Grisha) Marminsky – An outstanding science and mathematics teacher. Later worked in a number of *Tarbut* schools in Poland. Killed in the Holocaust in Kharkov.

Shlomo (Solomon Rothstein) – A music teacher. Killed in the Holocaust in Slonim.

Zeydl Amiel – A citizen of Piesk. Died in the diaspora.

Yaffa Berzovsky – Made *aliyah* and settled in *Kfar Eyn-Kharud.*

And the last is our most beloved: *Rabbi Chaim Zvi Miller-Sinai*, who made *aliyah* with his family in the spring of 1926. Until the events of 12929, he was a resident in *Kfar Uriah*, and from then to his passing in 1963, he resided in *Ramat HaSharon.* His entire life in the Holy Land was literally the life of a *Halutz* – a pioneer.

My Father, The Last Rabbi of Dereczin

By Meir Bakalchuk
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Rabbi Zvi-Hirsch Bakalchuk (p. 178)
Various pieces of correspondence by the Rabbi

My father, ז"ל, the last Rabbi of Dereczin, dedicated his whole life to study and preaching. From the gray hours of the morning on, one heard his voice – he sat over his books and learned. It was his feeling that the well of Torah study had not yet been plumbed out, and he sat studying for long hours, over yet another line of reasoning, and a new insight.

My mother ז"ל, looked after her husband and her children, from the early morning hours until late at night, carrying out her duties as a housewife like a proverbial Woman of Valor. Every difficult problem that arose in our house, or in the family, was solved by her to the best of her abilities. I always felt that my mother could overcome any difficulty. She never asked anyone for help, and complained to no one.

My father came from the *shtetl Sernik*, near Pinsk. From childhood on, he demonstrated an inclination for Torah study, and he excelled in the development of his skills. My father was one of the first students of the *Gaon, Rabbi Yossel Hurvich*, the Head of the Novogrudok Yeshivah. *Reb Yossel* personally gave my father his ordination (*smikha)* as a Rabbi. Later, my father also studies with the *Hafetz-Hayyim* and received *smikha* from him as well.

I feel small and inadequate to the task, when I try to put down my father's character traits on paper. I know that I am not qualified to undertake this task. Who can describe the greatness, gentleness and persuasive personality of a *Gaon*, who was able to elicit commitment from anyone who came within the four walls of his presence.

Apart from his thorough expertise in the vast sea of Torah lore, and its commentaries, my father was also an accomplished mathematician, knowledgeable in history, literature and grammar. His sermons had a reputation throughout all of Poland. On the Sabbath between *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur* , and on the Great Sabbath before Passover, the synagogue would be packed with people who had come to hear his sermons, and for many months afterwards, his explanations and exegesis would continue to serve as themes for discussion.

His principal concern was to assure that Jewish children would study [the Torah], and he sunk a great deal of his energy into this. He was true to his calling, and organized a group called *Tifereth LeBakhurim*, and studied with selected students individually. When he detected a gift for scholarship in any young boy, he would not let him go, and tasked him to learn. There is more than one student, who achieved advanced cultural development, that owes thanks for such achievement to my father, the last Rabbi of Dereczin.

Over the course of decades, my father wrote extensive Torah commentaries. During this time, packages of his manuscripts accumulated. This would have been a very substantial contribution to the Masoretic literature. He had continuously hoped to submit this work for publication, but so much [raw material] had been amassed, that it would have been an overwhelming effort to prepare it for printing.

In the [final] fateful days of the town, he found a hiding place for his creations, in a corner of the attic. Witnesses give testimony that he had approached a number of the *balebatim,* and asked that his work be made public if any of them remained alive.

This work subsequently was consumed by fire

amidst the general destruction that ensued.

My father did not occupy himself with money matters, and would not have recognized a coin of the realm had he seen it. The material side of existence for him was merely a means to provide necessary sustenance, in order to serve his Maker and the congregation. The one to whom these concerns fell was my mother, and this was not easy for her, because, just as was the case in all rabbinical households in Poland, we did not have much of an income.

My father was nationalistically Jewish, and proud of his identity as a member of the Jewish people. Back in the days of the First World War, when he was the Rabbi of Stolovich, near Baranovich, he hosted the Catholic Archbishop, religious leader of the Polish community, during the time of the Soviet occupation. My father held that a person of such high rank in a second religion should be accorded the dignity of a reception with great respect. Apparently the Catholic leader said certain things, perhaps that he should not have, because when he arrived in *Gorodishch* he was arrested. He was condemned to death. My father then presented himself to the Soviet authorities, and he was afforded an opportunity to explain to the bolsheviks, that the Archbishop did not malign the authorities, but rather said a prayer in accordance with Catholic ritual. The priest was set free.

A year afterwards, when a stable Polish regime had been established in our area, my father was invited to see the Polish President, Wojieczowski, who thanked my father for what he had done, and offered him a concession in either tobacco or alcohol – a business from which it would have been possible to become rich in those days. My father, a proud Jew, did not accept this offer, saying that a Rabbi does not accept compensation for his humanitarian deeds. The Polish officials were literally stunned to see this forthright Jew before them. My father was awarded a medal of high rank, but I do not recall him ever making use of it for his own interest.

During the 1930s, my father was formally invited to occupy a pulpit in Baltimore, Maryland in America. After considerable wrestling with this matter, he declined this offer as well. He couched his refusal to take the offer in the thought that he had lived the better part of his life in Dereczin, where he had his family, and grandchildren who come to see him every morning, to wish him a good morning before he goes off to the synagogue to study, and he is very comfortable and satisfied with his congregation and his family. I remember to this day, how my father used to stand at the window each morning, waiting, until his grandchildren appeared on the little hill between the Old Synagogue and the *Bialosotsky* family's house.

"Here they come running, my little birds," – my father would say with great affection. And not only once did he complain: "In America, I would be a Rabbi by position, not because Jewish people need me, but rather because a Jewish community has to have a Rabbi.

Here, in Dereczin, I am needed. There is always a Jewish person [here] in need of some advice, an answer to a question, a specific form of assistance. And here, I always find a Jew with whom I can carry on a conversation, or to study a page of *Gemara* with him. I will not leave Dereczin..."

It was in this way that my father, the last Rabbi of Dereczin, together with my mother, that righteous woman, perished in Treblinka. The two, beloved and faithful to each other in life, were not parted even in death.

The Holy Rabbi, Gaon of Dereczin, Bakalchuk זצ"ל

By Rabbi Chaim-Chaikel Grinberg

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photos: The construction committee with Rabbi Bakalchuk in front of the building of the Yavneh School (untitled). (p. 182)
A list of contributors to the Yeshivah Committee (p. 183, Top, Left).
In front of the Grosse Schul Wall, children of the Yavneh School with their teachers and committee chairman, M. Feldman (untitled) (p. 183, Bottom).

At the time that I studied in Baranovich, there was an event – to hear the sermons of the Rabbi of Stolovich, and he was received in Slonim as a preacher, and as a great orator and with distinction, as the Rabbi of Dereczin. The holy Rabbi זצ"ל, was famous, renown as a spiritual man who could conquer hearts with his words. Rabbi *Bakalchuk* was known as a man of religious outlook, godly presence, and an exponent of the highest human values of truth, goodness, charity, modesty and straightforwardness. His name went before him, because he was known as a great and accomplished scholar, being both thoroughly versed and analytically gifted in matters of *Halakha*. As the leader of his community, he reached the hearts of not only scholars, but also the hearts of the masses of Jews, in general. As a shepherd overseeing his flock, he tried to imbue the essentials of Judaism to his congregation, even as it applied to practical matters. The home of the Rabbi, ז"ל, was a symbol of sanctity, purity, charity, good will, and love of Israel and the people of the town and its surroundings. The Rabbi understood how to lead the members of his community in the path of Torah and good works.

It was not only with his oratory that he was able to capture hearts, but more so with the projection of his character, and the conduct of his congregation, to which he dedicated his entire life, his energies and the force of his influence. He did not lack for the tribulations of life, tiring and burdensome – however, he did not abandon his study of the Torah for even a day, because he always saw before him the motto: "your words are a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my pathway."

I recall, in Baranovich and Slonim, when notices were posted that the Rabbi of Dereczin would be preaching, the *Bet HaMidrash* would fill up with a large audience, drawn from all walks of life, would come to hear his awe-inspiring words, that came from his mouth as a means to draw the children of Israel closer to their Father in heaven.

I heard words of endearment uttered in memory of this saintly Rabbi from many people and those who were born in Dereczin, not only from those who were religious, but also more secular people, who retained something of a feeling for their faith from their homes and from the town. Each and every one of these enhance the typing of the Rabbi, who was from the old school, which is the image that has remained etched in their memory from the town – the spiritual shepherd of the town.

That was the way the saintly Rabbi of Dereczin was. To be compared to a shepherd that leads his flock while walking in their midst, giving the appearance that he is walking alone, and that he happens to be walking in the direction he is taking his flock – as in the manner of the Rabbis, the shepherds of Israel.

That is why the Rabbi ז"ל, fought like a lion lest the influence of the rabbinate on the people be in any way impaired. He was used to saying that if God forbid, the influence and the support of the Rabbinate was removed – it was inevitable that a calamity would befall the Jews, and a dissipation of their spiritual vigor.

It was the Rabbi's [tragic] privilege to give his life

to sanctify the Name of Heaven, along with myriads of others – because he fell in Sanctification of The Name at the hands of the Nazi murderers, ימ"ש. We honor his memory. Would we be so fortunate as to be blessed with his equivalent again!

The Yavneh School

By Nekha Petrukhovich

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: School picture (untitled) (p. 184, Bottom)
A Purim play at the Yavneh School, 1937 (untitled) (p. 185, Bottom)
The Kindergarten class of Malka Shelkovich (untitled) (p. 186, Top)
Kindergarten class of the Kreslansky sisters (untitled) (p. 186, Bottom)

The following responsible people were involved with the Yavneh School in town: *Hirschel Beckenstein, Berel Walitsky, Mendel Feldman, Berel Polachuk,* along with Rav *Bakalchuk* at the head. It was the Rabbi's custom to come to the school on Friday in order to orally test the children.

All Jewish children attended this school, and their parents paid tuition. Parents of lesser means paid according to their ability. It was in this way that Jews did everything within their power to assure that their children would have a Jewish upbringing.

I am also reminded of the evening presentations that the Yavneh school would organize on specific holidays. The children would present, and the teachers, with the principal *Berenholz,* as their leader, put in a lot of work to prepare the youngsters for their presentations. Especially, I wish to note the teacher, *Leah Alpern, Eliyahu Abramovich's* cousin, who did most of the work in organizing and directing these presentations.

At the time of these "evenings," there would also be a buffet set out for the audience. It was the parents and the school leadership who supervised the preparation of the buffet and the sale of tickets to the presentation, which provided a source of income for the school. The buffet was a "pot luck" sort of affair, in which one went from house-to-house, and whatever was possible was donated for the buffet. *Hazzan Beshkin's* son-in-law, *Tambolsky, Rivkah's* husband, himself a *Hazzan* and a ritual slaughterer, prepared the meat, mothers prepared the baked goods and sweets, and parents would lay out all this [food] in the auditorium where the presentations were made – many people worked to put on the "evening" at the Yavneh school. To this day, I cannot forget one special Purim presentation put on by the schoolchildren.

They put on a presentation based on the Book of Esther. The part of Esther was taken by *Moishkeh Mishkin's* daughter, the role of Ahasuerus was played by *Abraham Zlotagura's* little boy, *Chaim.* Parents, fathers and mothers, teachers, brothers and sisters, and even ordinary townsfolk, all basked in the satisfaction and joy of watching these presentations by the children. And on every Hanukkah, the Hanukkah candles were lit in school, accompanied by the singing of Hanukkah songs, and putting on presentations.

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With the arrival of the Soviets in 1939, teaching at the school was converted to Russian. Among the teachers were *Chaikeh Mishkin,* and *Chaikeh Dworetsky;* science was taught by *Alter Skrabun, Berel Gorinovsky's* father-in-law.

This was the beginning of the end of the Yavneh school of that time.

Betar & Tzahar In Our Town

By M. Bakalchuk, A. Beckenstein, K. Abramovich
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photos: Girls chapter of Betar and the membership (untitled) (p. 188)
The Tzahar Organization in Dereczin in 1930 (untitled) (p. 189)
The Tzahar Organization at the departure of Eliyahu Abramovich (untitled) (p. 190)
The Betar facilitation organization in Dereczin and the members of its cell (untitled) (p. 191, Top)
A gathering of the Betar membership on a porch opposite the theater hall (untitled). (p. 191, Bottom)

The Betar facilitation organization & members (untitled) (p. 192,Top, Left)
A portrait day for the fire-fighters (untitled) (p. 192,Top, Right)
Dereczin soldiers in the Polish Army, Abraham Kulakowski kneeling. (P.192, Bottom, Left)
A group of members with Moshe Sedletsky before his aliyah (untitled). (p. 192, Bottom, Right)

As was the case in all of the cities and towns of Poland, there existed both a Zionist and *Halutz* movement in Dereczin as well. At the end of the twenties and in the early thirties, this movement was not active, and did not attract the youth to its ranks, which rather was drawn to activities with a framework of ideals that enabled them to realize their desire to demonstrate their national loyalties. The inspiring appearance of the outstanding leader, *Ze'ev Jabotinsky*, amidst the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, especially after the events of 1929,[99] aroused our young people from their slumber. The charisma of this Zionist leader made a great impression on many of the young people of our town, even before they actually saw him personally, or heard his words. Like a magical force, his personality drew countless young people and even more mature folks, into the ranks of the *Betar* movement, which in Dereczin had its origins back as far as 1927.

It was on one of those evenings in the fall of that year, when we were called for a meeting at the home of the *Wilenczyk* brothers. While we have already forgotten [the names of] many of those who attended that night, filled with many issues of importance, certain of them remain etched in our memories, and of them especially, the brothers, *Shimon & Moshe Wilenczyk*, (who are today in Canada) – *Shlomo (Siuma) Shelovsky*, ז"ל, *Joshua Sedletsky*, ז"ל, *Jacob Sakar*, ז"ל, and to mention separately, for long life, *Eliyahu Abramovich* (today in the USA), as well as the authors of this memoir. That night, *Betar* [in Dereczin] was established, and began its activities with great enthusiasm and limitless commitment.

We did not anticipate, that the lessons of pride and glory, which permeated the *Betar* training, would bring not few of our members into the ranks of the partisans and rebels, who fought against the Nazi invaders during the Holocaust against the Jews, in the days of the Second World War.

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Betar was active in Dereczin up to the outbreak of the war, in September 1939. Most of our young people joined our ranks. Among the active membership, and those who led the movement, we raise the following names: *Aryeh Beckenstein, Avigdor Shelovsky, Melekh Sakar, Abraham-Hirsch Kolkovsky, Jacob Azov, Eliyahu Lifshovich, Aryeh Kreslansky, Shmuel Korn, Mendel Grachuk,* the brothers *Meir & Shmaryahu Mishkin, Hanan Abelovich, Ze'ev Shelkovich, Ze'ev Ogulnick,* and many, many others. The membership grew, and over the years became endeared not only to the young people, but to their parents as well. Until the establishment of *Betar*, our parents were not used to

[99] Reference to the Hebron Massacres

a youth organization that adopted a special uniform, and that engaged in both sporting and military exercises. When they saw the effect of the training that was carried on in the evenings in the hall, and the inculcation of the knowledge and common sense, and the adherence to the principles of *Betar*, the older populace began to respect and favor the organization, which was a focal point for their younger sons and daughters.

Betar would also appear on different occasions in Polish national holidays, in parades jointly with Polish youth. The disciplined presence of the *Betar* marchers in these festivities, along with their orderly military marching, when they were called to arms by their officers – and he was one of them – roused a sense of respect and admiration among the Poles, toward the Jews of the town, and its young people.

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During the thirties, the *Lunsky* family, which had come from one of the surrounding villages, settled in Dereczin. The oldest daughter of this family, *Zina*, joined *Betar*. From her first day, *Zina* stood out in her commitment and energy, and until the day she left for the Holy Land, she was the living spirit of *Betar*. By sheer force of her will, and with focused initiative, she overcame her liabilities, and with her intellectual gifts, she stood at the head of the movement with her activities on behalf of *Betar*, in whose ideals she had complete faith. Her home was open to all, and was visited by visitors who were representatives of the [larger] *Betar* movement. Her advice was eagerly sought, and quite often things were done according her dictates. She was privileged to make *aliyah*, and live in the Holy Land. She died prematurely, but left a family behind. Her memory is sealed in the hearts of her near ones, and her comrades from the days of *Betar* in Dereczin.

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After the events of 1929, a branch of *Tzahar* was also established in our town. Among the organizers and workers were: *Zvi Zlotagura, Aryeh Kushnir, Shimon Wilenczyk, Joseph Rabinovich, Yoshe Walman, Rudenstein*[100], *Dr. Shelovsky, Moshe Kustin, Miriam Podlishevsky, Liota Beckenstein,* and others. *Tzahar* served as a community backbone for *Betar*, composed of [more mature] adults. Both organizations were visited by officers of the central organization, and speakers, such as *Dr. Lipman, Dr. Yunichman, Captain Yanovsky, Ze'ev Burstein,* and others. All praised the outstanding chapter in Dereczin.

The *Betar* branch established a public library for all to use. Because of the efforts of a number of the members, quite a number of books, of a wide variety, were acquired. Many young people and adults used the library extensively, in order to enjoy the benefits of reading from its collection, among them books about *Betar*, which conveyed the essence of the thinking of the movement's leader.

The Dereczin branch set up a curriculum that was recognized by the office in the Holy Land. Those who finished this course of study were awarded a certificate, and no few of them were privileged eventually to make *aliyah* before the war broke out. Many members of the branch completed their requirements for *aliyah* in a number of Polish *Betar* chapters. *Kalman Abramovich*, a member of our chapter, was sent to take *Betar* naval training in Ziutvikia in Italy.

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During the thirties, anti-Semitism was on the rise throughout all of Poland, and even in Dereczin, the hatred toward the Jews was felt forcefully. A group of Polish ne'er-do-wells began to pick on the Jewish population, and to create disturbances in town. The *Betar* leadership decided to put a halt to these abuses. This mission was given to those members of the chapter who were not daunted by the dangers of such an undertaking in the Poland of that time. This group of ruffians was ambushed and subjected to a serious thrashing. After that, the anti-Semites ceased their arrogant acts of abuse. The entire town breathed a little more easily, and everyone sang the praises of the brave Jewish youths, that simply could no longer stand by without taking action.

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[100] Also spelled *Radenstein*.

The *Betar* club was the only one in Dereczin that held its activities in the evening, each and every evening, and Saturdays. The membership was always full of young people of all ages, and adults. These were all divided up into groups by age, and each group had a leader. The leadership of the club allocated out the various duties (general administration, secretariat, treasury, organization, culture, military training) to the membership, and each of the members looked after the proper discharge of these assigned responsibilities. It was in the evening that classes and lectures took place. Not once, would parents invite themselves into the club, to find their children occupied with either lessons or various sporting activities.

Betar continued to function up to September 1939, when the war broke out, and the Soviet army occupied the territories of Western Byelorussia. When these territories were subsequently captured by Hitler's armies in 1941, and the extermination of the Jews began in each and every town, the *Betar* members were among the first to join in the resistance movement in Dereczin and its neighboring forests. In their lives, their fighting, and their deaths, they stood out as a shining symbol of the defenders of the honor of the Jewish people. Their memory is guarded in each and every one of our hearts, and we intone their names here with a holy trembling.

Shlomo (Siuma) Shelovsky - Leader of the Dereczin *Betar* Chapter, and Head of the *Betar* Slonim District.

He was the very embodiment of the military arts. A man of culture, a medical student, modest, diligent, and a man of influence on all his charges, quiet, and introspective in his thinking – was respected by all of us, his peers, who accorded him with respect, every time he appeared among us.

Along with many of the young people of our town, he fled to the forests, and in his works of vengeance, took no rest in his assault on the German aggressors. He fell, betrayed from within, during an attack on a dairy that supplied milk products to the Germans. His parents, his brother, *Avigdor*, a member of the chapter, and his two sisters, *Sima & Zipporah*, all fell in the forests.

Eliyahu Lifshovich - A member of *Betar* from his earliest youth, committed to his movement, and discharging all his obligations faithfully, was one of the fierce combatants in the forests, as the deputy commander of the partisan group of *Dr. [Meyer] Atlas*. When the Doctor was mortally wounded, in battle with the Germans, he turned over command of the group to *Eliyahu*, who directed his campaigns, going form victory to victory. Much has been written about the outstanding exploits of *Eliyahu*, for which he was subsequently decorated by the Red Army. Our *Eliyahu* was not privileged to make *aliyah* to our Homeland – he fell at the hands of Polish murderers from the ranks of the AK, in the city of Legnitz (Legnica) .

Zvi Zlotagura & David Dombrowsky, who were *Betar* loyalists, fell in battle together with regular military forces in Dereczin.

Tens of members, inculcated in *Betar* disciplines, faithfully upheld the *Betar* teaching: "I will raise my arm to defend my people," fulfilling their oath through actual deed.

We will remember them to the end of our days, in our Homeland which continues to fight for its very survival.

In the Service of the Dereczin Community

By Eliyahu Herenson
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photos: Hebrew calendar, 1938-39. (P. 195)
Baruch-Neta Glinkovsky & his family in front of their home. (P. 196)
The Market Day (p. 197)

In 1926, I came to live in Dereczin. To live – but not to put down roots, because from my earliest youth, I held the hope of making *aliyah* to the Holy Land.

In my parent's home as a child, I collected a variety of stories about Dereczin and its populace, but an absolutely different picture remains in my mind of the town , as I saw it and came to know it so well in the years that I dwelt there. The memory of this community, its character, the way of life and its customs, come back to my mind frequently from time to time, and I will try to paint a portrait of the town from these memories of mine.

Dereczin was a beautiful town, clean and open, surrounded by an enchanting ambience, with a well-populated area. The *Zelva Gasse* led to the railroad station at nearby Zelva, and was our gateway to the wider world; from the *Slonim Gasse*, the way led to the district capital, in which many of the town youth went to be educated, and to which Dereczin was also tied with links of commerce, family connections, culture, and joint organizational memberships, etc.; the *Deutsche Gasse* led to the villages, estates, and nearby towns. These three broad streets served as the means of access to the near and far surroundings, and bounded the large market square in the center of Dereczin.

To the extent that I can recall the population statistics of 1928, the population of Dereczin was about thirty thousand, of which 72% lived in the town itself.

Most of the Dereczin Jews were people of action, possessed of energy and initiative in matters of commerce and crafts, of these – grain merchants, operators of flour mills and other factories, but most were energetic storekeepers and craftsmen. All worked in the creation of clothing, footwear, utensils, and a variety of implements useful to the surrounding populace. On market and fair days, thousands of rural dwellers would come to town, and whoever had a store in the marketplace, or its environs was guaranteed of some income. The qualities of a market day were present during all days of the week, but on market day itself, Dereczin took on a completely different air, and assumed a new color: everything hustled and bustled, the pace was quicker, rushed and pressured – the Jews in the presentation of their merchandise, and the farmers in their purchases. Only with the coming of evening did the hectic pace slow down, and the town return to its former calm.

The Appearance of the Community Changed

This portrait of the market days, that left such a pronounced imprint on the life of the town and its livelihood, are in my memory from stories told to me by my parents when I was a child, but the face of the community, and the character of the Dereczin populace changed in the years after the First World War, which was in itself the cause of these changes.

A new generation came of age, with greater insight, and more liberal in its thinking, with significantly greater connection to the wider world than its parents, who had lived their entire lives within the boundaries of their town and its immediate surroundings. A variety of political organizations appeared and began to work within the community, each with its own active chapter and meeting place. Those young people who did not move away to distant places, began to dominate the community and cultural life of the town. New concepts began to stimulate the young people: Zionism, socialism, and the *Halutz* movement. The system of *balebatim* that had for many years been the dominant form of community rule, slowly began to disappear, and in

the place of these stalwarts of the community, representatives of the people, of "your people" began to speak its piece.

Despite this, Jewish tradition did not completely disappear, since it was observed even by the rising young generation. The young people continue to attend synagogue on the Sabbath and Holidays, and they continue to use these synagogues as centers of assembly for debates, discussions, and events of organizations to the left and right as if one.

In those years, which I describe in this memoir of mine, general Zionist organizations were active in Dereczin, along with *Poalei Tzion, Betar*, and to some extent, the Bund.

Many, many of the young people of Dereczin left their town in those years, traveling to other cities for education, and ultimately many of them emigrated out of Poland, in which they could not aspire to a future with any meaningful potential, and went to distant lands. A portion of that generation was bound up with the *Halutz* movement, and made *aliyah* to the Holy Land. Because of this, it was of great importance whenever any young people came from other cities to live in Dereczin, settling there, and contributing from their energies and strengths to its communal life.

A formal Jewish community did not yet exist in those years of the twenties, with an elected governing body, and the local community was governed by a 'committee' that was selected by a handful of the *balebatim*. This establishment, nevertheless, saw itself as the leadership of the Jewish community of Dereczin, but was not recognized as an active body, with most of the essential work being done by the Zionist *Histadrut* organization in town.

The "Movers & Shakers"

There were not few among the citizens of Dereczin, who dedicated their energy, effort and time to the public welfare, through their participation in various organizations. Let us remember several of these: As an example, *Reb Moshe Shelovsky* and his son, *Yehuda* (a dentist), *Reb Mendel Feldman*, Head of the General Zionist Organization, *Reb Buma Grachuk, Reb Fyvel Blizniansky, Reb Eliyahu Abramovich*, father-in-law of the writer *Reb Moshe Rabinovich, Reb Eliezer Hanoch Alper* – the head of the family of educators and disseminators of Torah, whose home was a center for active Zionism.

All of these people, and many others of the Dereczin community, had their own private concerns, there were among them scholars, wise men, strong in their convictions and attuned to the surroundings, but all were equally faithful to the obligations that they undertook, and nurtured the seed of benefitting the public good for the community of Dereczin.

The "Alper House," in which the workers and young people of Dereczin would meet daily, to read newspapers, carry on conversations on all subjects, whether general, Jewish or Zionist, was always imbued with the spirit of the son of the family, *David Alper* ל"ז, the outstanding and committed Zionist educator, whose influence on that generation of Dereczin youth was considerable even in the years when he was away, when he served as the Headmaster of Jewish studies in Pinsk, where eventually, he met his end at the hands of the German murderers.

And if I raise the memory of my individual dear ones in Dereczin, I have a sacred obligation to record the name and memory of my childhood friend, the son-in-law of *Reb Eliezer Alper, Reb Isser Lamprat*, the scion of a distinguished family from *Kletsk*, wherein he, his wife and all the members of his household made the supreme sacrifice during the Holocaust. He was a Zionist from his earliest days on, and worked a great deal for the redemption of the Homeland.

I will remember and not forget one of the members of the community, *Reb Dov Polachuk*, an enthusiastic Zionist, an orator and debater with those opposed to the concept of the rebirth of the [Jewish] people and their Homeland.

I would really like to recall many more of the Jews of the Dereczin community – but if I should omit some, I will beg the pardon of those surviving descendants who still live among us. Well known and respected were the heads of the families of *Ratner, Zelikovich, Weinstein*, whose family head was *Zalman Weinstein*, the head of the fire brigade, and involved in all aspects of town public issues, *Zvi Beckenstein*, his son-in-law, *Abraham Rozovsky*, son of the Rabbi, these are among those who came from outside Dereczin and worked in its Jewish community. And there were among the *balebatim*, important yet modest men, operating behind the scenes, who did not get involved in the "politics" of the town, but did their good work secretly – all of them straight of heart, doing what they had to do faithfully, such as *Reb Shmuel Beckenstein, Reb Sholom Sakar, Reb Ze'ev (Veleh) Rabinovich*, whose two sons, *David & Jacob* were among the first of the *Halutzim* from Dereczin to make *aliyah* to the Holy Land, *Eliezer Sedletsky, Gorinovsky*, and their grandfather, *Reb Yehuda- Shmuel*, a righteous and straight man of the older generation, *Reb Joseph Mishkin, Reb Aryeh-Leib Bialosotsky, Reb Meir-Yehoshua*, the well-known *feldscher*.

And I must raise the name of the Rabbi of the community, זצ"ל *Rabbi Gaon Rav Zvi Bakalchuk*, one of the truly great Torah scholars of the rabbinate, a man of commanding presence, and a wondrous orator.

It is incumbent upon us to also remember the many good people from the rank and file of the people, from the craftsmen and laborers such as *Zvi the Blacksmith* from the *Slonim Gasse; Mordechai Zambrovsky & Noah Lifshovich*, workers for the Bund, who gave of themselves selflessly and honestly for the public good.

And once again, I beg the forgiveness of those, whose names escape me, because of the betrayal of a failing memory, after so many years of being uprooted from that distant past that was, but is no more.

Before the Community Council Elections

As previously noted, towards the end of the twenties, there was not yet an elected town council, and the 'Committee' functioned at its own discretion.

The organized power in town was in the hands of the Zionist *Histadrut*, which was led by several important citizens of the town – *Reb Mendel Feldman, Reb Eliyahu Abramovich, Reb Berel Polachuk, Reb Eliezer Alper*. The youth primarily joined the *Poalei Tzion*, whose leadership consisted of *Sedletsky, Rozovsky*, and the writer of this memoir.

The work to disseminate cultural initiatives and attempts at influencing those issues that affected the way the community was led, and its institutions, was in the hands of the youth who conducted their work with the support of the general Zionists. There was also a small segment of extremists who were active, from which the revisionist eventually evolved, and also the *Betar* movement. In their ardor for their principles, it was not only once that they generated arguments and conflict between different movements. The Bund as well, did not sit with folded hands, and periodically was a disrupting force to the Zionist effort, and general community initiatives. It is to the credit of the people of Dereczin that these disputes never once created a schism in the institutions of the town, instead they were largely resolved through compromise and a continuation of partnership in the endeavor.

Disputes among the factions of the town started up over matters in the cultural sphere – concerning the library, the drama society, etc.

A credit union was [also] established in those years. The members of its council were: *B. Grachuk, E. Alper (who served as Treasurer), M. Feldman, D. Polachuk, Eliyahu-Chaim Walitsky*, and the writer of this memoir. The credit union went out of business under distressed circumstances, because the economic circumstances of the Jews of Dereczin worsened year-to-year during that period and at the

same time throughout all of Poland.

The membership of *Poalei Tzion,* in cooperation with the Zionists, would organize evening lectures that were held twice monthly in the 'headquarters' of the community (*Der Kehilla'sheh Mauer*), in the neighborhood of the *Dworetsky* home in the center square of the town. During the day, [this facility] was used for classrooms, and in the evenings it was used for a variety of assemblies and public meetings.

A Committee for Charitable Works (*Gemilut Hasadim*), and a Society to Visit the Sick (*Bikur Kholim*) also existed. The Fire Brigade occupied an esteemed position in town, which under the leadership of *Zalman Weinstein,* who was a committed leader, became the pride of the town.

This condition of partisan conduct of the institutions of the town by different public groups continued until 1928, until a law was promulgated by the Polish regime, that made it compulsory to establish a formal Jewish community with elected officials that would be accountable to the government.

The Community Council Elections

As was the case in all of the towns in Poland, an awareness began to grow in the Dereczin Jewish community, and its various parties, regarding the formal establishment of a community and the election of its leaders. The passage of the law regarding formal community establishment was seen in the midst of the Jews as an important milestone in the striving for Jewish autonomy both within and without Poland.

The youth of the community were active in the organization of the elections, and most of the work was in the hands of the *Poalei Tzion* membership – all the Jews of Dereczin were registered and granted the right to vote. This was the first time that the Jews of Dereczin participated in a democratic election by secret ballot for the members of their community council.

There was great excitement in the town. The election committee was organized according to parties. The election slates were composed of eleven candidates, in accordance with the rules established by the government. Three slates were presented to the public: Zionists & *Poalei Tzion,* The Bund, and ordinary *Balebatim.*

Election day was a real holiday in Dereczin. Approximately 85% of the eligible voters turned out at the polls, and elected 8 members of the Zionist party and 3 members of the Bund.

The first meeting of the Council, the inaugural meeting, was a stormy one, because it was then that the Council leadership was selected. After extensive negotiation and debate among the elected members themselves, this writer was selected as the Chairman, and his deputy was a Bund officer, with *Eliyahu Abramovich* as the Treasurer. The remaining duties were allocated out to the rest of the Council membership.

The community office was open three days a week, in the afternoon and evening hours, naturally, so the elected officials could properly discharge their obligations, seeing as no stipend had been established for their work.

Initially there was much accumulated work, since in Dereczin nothing had been done to organize institutions for meting out justice, aid and culture. There was neglect in the *Talmud Torah, Bikur Kholim,* and other institutions.

The town Council also came to grips with the declining economic fortunes of the Jews, oversaw the taxation of the Jews by the regime, in appropriate measure with the lines of work of each individual. The Council also sent its officers to the town meetings. The condition of the Jews was, generally speaking, bad, with many of the storekeepers and craftsmen going bankrupt every day of the week, and competition was great, but sources of livelihood dwindled.

In the years between 1928 and 1931, developmental

work was done on some institutions in the community: a new Talmud Torah building was erected, the charitable works of the *Kupat Kholim* was renewed, and an audit was conducted of all the towns institutions.

In 1931 before the elections to the Polish Sejm, pressure was brought to bear on the leaders of the community, by the ruling party of the regime, to 'deliver the vote' of the town on behalf of the party in power. Even the writer of this memoir was subject to this pressure, and because of this, submitted his resignation as a member of the town Council. The other members of his party joined him in resigning as well. The only remaining members were the Bund officers, and a number of *balebatim,* and these tried to carry on in some fashion with the management of public affairs.

The work of the Zionist party membership – including *Poalei Tzion, Tzahar* - did continue afterward. I can never forget those friends of mine, the workers of *Poalei Tzion-Tzahar*, who despite their own difficult economic and family circumstances, continued to do good things for the settlement of the Homeland,

the redemption of Its Land, and the facilitation of *aliyah* for the youth of our people, to rebuild the land and then lead it.

In 1933, I and my first wife, *Esther Rabinovich* ל"נ, of the well known and extensively branched Dereczin family, made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

Visiting the Sick & Overnight Sick Watch

By Nekha Petrukhovich

(Original Language: Yiddish)

The two organizations of *Bikur Kholim* and *Linat Tzedek*, assumed the responsibility to help the sick among the poor, who themselves did not have the wherewithal or the necessary means to heal themselves.

Bikur Kholim concerned itself with providing medical assistance, bringing a doctor or a *feldscher* to the aid of the indigent sick, and to provide the patient with medicines.

Linat Tzedek would send its supporters to spend the night at the bedside of the sick individual, to keep a watch over him, administering the necessary medicines, and to provide assistance to the members of the family of the patient thereby enabling them to obtain some rest after a hard day of labor and worry.

In the summertime, it was customary to boil up and reduce raspberries and cherries, in order that these "preserves" be distributed among the poor who were ill. The raspberries (*malyeness)* were considered especially effective against colds, and was taken with hot tea, in order to promote sweating and to lighten the impact of a cold. Dried cherries (*karschen)* were used to freshen the mouth of the patient, and to provide a bit of strength in the instance of severe illness.

Dedicated ladies would collect monies for the purchase of the fruit in season, and sugar as well. These ladies would also volunteer to prepare the fruits to make these preserves, and also act as safe-keepers for subsequent allocation among the sick.

Year in and year out, if I am not mistaken at *Hol HaMoed Sukkot*, one of the responsible workers was selected as the "Gabbai" of the *Bikur Kholim.*

Every Friday, one of the Jews would go around and take up a collection for the necessities of support for the ill, in order that there be resources for the outlays of the *Bikur Kholim.*

In the case of *Linat Tzedek*, leadership was provided by either a male *Gabbai* or female *Gabbait.* They

already knew who in town was ill, and had an understanding of who required overnight assistance, in order to relieve the household members. They would normally approach either the young or the old who would have the capacity to spend the night at the house of the person who was ill.

My house was used more than once to prepare the preserves, and I was the one who kept an eye on the product to assure that it remained useable. When it became necessary to allocate this among the sick, they would come to me. Also, a variety of implements and utensils to minister to the sick were also kept with me. I was always strongly interested in providing help to the sick, and I always stood ready to provide such help with other men and women. It was in this fashion that my husband, *Michael Petrukhovich* was active in the capacity of Gabbai both for *Bikur Kholim* or *Linat Tzedek*, and he was also the Gabbai in the *Bet HaMidrash*, and a fellow of the group of Psalm Reciters.

Not once has the thought crossed my mind: perhaps in consideration of this [charitable] work, and in consideration of those young boys who took meals in my home, we were granted the boon of continued life?

Our Town in the Thirties

By Isser Lev

(Original Language: Hebrew)

When I recollect Dereczin in my memory, it seems to be tranquil and quiet on its place, during those very stormy years of the 1930's before the outbreak of the Second World War. Externally, everything was in turmoil. In Germany, Hitler ascended to power, and his influence was especially felt in Poland. The anti-Semitic ferment became a national policy, and the economic circumstances of the masses of Jews worsened daily, as sources of income for storekeepers, merchants and craftsmen were foreclosed.

Only someone who penetrated within the life of the Jewish community of Dereczin would know that there is no peace and quiet in the ranks of Israel. Nevertheless, the young people occupied themselves in a variety of activities, cultural life continued in its accustomed path, children learned, and parents worked to earn money for their loaf of bread as they had always – but the sense of resignation that was eating at the young people was on every mouth. Not one of them saw a future for themselves in their birthplace, and dreamed instead of *aliyah* to the Holy Land, because it was not permitted – to emigrate over the sea and ocean.

Most of the young people were organized in those years into the Zionist movement – be it *HeHalutz*, *Poalei Tzion* or *Betar & Tzahar*. The eyes and the interests of the youth were diverted to distant places. To another life, a life that would be better and more attractive than the one they were currently living. Only the coterie of *balebatim*, the older generation, continued in its traditional fashion, seasoned by trial and tribulation and secure in its faith in Divine beneficence. Under the supervision of the spiritual leader, *Rabbi Zvi-Hirsch Bakalchuk* ז"ל, religious life was conducted as usual, such as when the Rabbi conducted the study of the daily page of Talmud (*Daf Yomi*) in the Old Synagogue between the

afternoon and evening prayers. Occasionally, *Reb Abraham Shelkovich, & Reb Yitzhak Epstein* would read the daily *Mishnah* chapter after the morning prayer service. *Reb Eliyahu Abramovich* would teach the *Daf Yomi* at the New Synagogue. The Cantor and Ritual Slaughterer was the newly married young *Reb Moshe Tobolsky.*

Bet Midrash officials would be invited to Dereczin from other places. It was *Reb Zelig Lobzovsky*, one of the elders of the town, who looked after their billeting, who worked hand-in-hand with *Reb Dov Walitsky.*

Compassionate women would go out on Fridays to solicit Sabbath victuals for distribution among the poor of that place.

And the Sabbath would descend peacefully, quiet, and relaxing, on all the houses in Dereczin. And not a single person foretold in those years of the thirties, what would befall this, our beloved town, in a matter of a few short years, in which the community would be cut down, her youth, elderly, and children – all annihilated.

Hatred of the Jews on the Eve of Destruction

By Malka Alper

(Original Language: Yiddish)

The decade of the twenties goes by quickly. It is already the end of 1928. The *Sanacia* rules in Poland. For the elections to the Sejm, Jews are forced to go to a specific town in order to vote. We hear, already, the name of *Kartuz-Berezo*, where *Pilsudski* has condemned his opposition from many circles.

Jews continue to feel that they live securely in Poland. Part of the forests around Dereczin are cleared, and Jews circulate in the forests, taking control of these parcels. Storekeepers buy merchandise on credit, in the commercial centers, and sell on credit, even to the peasants. Trade credit is good for only one week, so there are few days for which payment can be deferred: Sabbath — Jews don't do business, Sunday – maybe God will send us a little bit of business from which to earn something, and then it will be possible to pay on Monday. Sunday, stores are supposed to be officially closed, but the police turn a blind eye to the peasant who steals into the store through a back door in order to buy something.

Young Jews wander about without work or purpose. Each year it becomes increasingly difficult to be accepted at a university with a faculty where you want to be chosen. Not all are Agreeable to taking over their father's livelihood, to go stand and sell goods in the store or the marketplace.

Tuesday is market day. A day for the eager Jewish [merchant] to determine the weather: will it snow or not? Will it rain or be a sunny day? Will more peasants come to the market because the weather will be nice?

In the market square stores, the women sit at their storefront doors looking for a customer that might buy a blouse, an apron, or a kerchief. Goods are sold almost for cost, just to make the sale, for the sake of having something to "turn." One storekeeper envies the next one, and together, the lot of them have no business and no income.

And this is how the Jews live, day in and day out, one grabs a consideration from someone, a few zlotys to pay off a trade note, so it is not submitted as delinquent (for "protest"). Merchant from the land parcels in the forest contest with one another for control of different pieces of land, swearing up and down how fortunate their lot would have been, had not the "other guy" gotten control of a particularly attractive parcel. On market days, Jews go through the marketplace carrying finished pairs of shoes in their hands, tied by their laces.

But Christians are buying less and less from the

Jews. There are already gentile shoemakers in the villages. Indeed, they learned this trade from the Jews. The same is also true of tailors and seamstresses.

The regime assists the Christian craftsmen with credit and new equipment, and in this fashion, old occupations slip out of Jewish hands. Jews keep looking for the postman, perhaps carrying a letter from children, or a brother or sister living across the ocean, perhaps with a couple of dollars. And better off Jews still laugh when it is proposed to them that they send some of their money, along with their children, to the Holy Land, in order to buy a parcel of land: "I'm not at that point yet" – they say jokingly.

Halutzim wait for many years in order to get proper permission, and yet there are no certificates available. *Betar* conducts parades, its members wearing their brown shirts.

In the course of the thirties, all the processes are honed and sharpened. Anti-Semitism grows with the growth of German Hitlerism. The circumstances in the town become even more difficult, but not all seek refuge from the gathering storm.

And you look at everybody and wonder: God in Heaven, don't these people realize they are living in a world at the brink of chaos? How long can they hold out?
In a few [short] years, the bloody flood did come, and erased it all.

Memories

This Is How We Lived in Our Town

By Haya Kreslansky
(Original Language: Yiddish)

More than thirty years have passed since I left the town where I was born, Dereczin, where my cradle stood, and where my childhood and youth were spent, but to this day, [the town] stands as if living, before my eyes. Every sapling, branch, and blade of grass, is etched into my heart. In order to better recollect each nook and cranny, I close my eyes: there is the big market, with its businesses and stores, between the first two is our own ironmonger's store; further along, the *Deutsche Gasse* extends , with its pretty houses, all the way to the green fields, that stretch far, far beyond the town; to the left – the *Puster Barg*, where we would stroll on the Sabbath afternoon; further is the *Shasei* that leads to the village of *Kuczin*; the *Slonim Gasse* that was used to travel to Slonim; the *Zelva Gasse*, half Jewish and half Christian, from which it was the way to travel to the neighboring town of Zelva, with its railroad station, to which we would have to travel in a horse and wagon, in which we got shook up really badly during the 12-kilometer ride, and were tired out by the time we got to the train; to the right – the forest, where we went to gather mushrooms, raspberries and strawberries; the *Neue Gasse*, and all the remaining smaller streets and back-streets; at the marketplace — the Russian Orthodox Church surrounded by a garden, and further on, near the barracks — the Roman Catholic Church. Very early on Sundays, the Catholic Church would peal its high note bells with a dainty *ding-dong, ding-dong*, to be answered by the bass bells of the Orthodox Church, *bing-bong, bing-bong*.

To this day, I do not know why the pealing of those bells invoked such a sense of sadness in me. It is possible that in my Jewish subconscious, it awoke the experience of the times of the inquisition, when the church bells pealed as Jews were led off –

– Life in Dereczin flowed peacefully, and each person earned a minimal living. There were no great yearnings for the luxuries of life, and one was content to make it through the day, with the expectation that God will provide for tomorrow. The Jewish populace engaged in a variety of occupations: tailors, shoemakers, small goods, merchants. Every Tuesday was our market day. Starting very early in the morning, the peasants would begin to arrive, with their wagons full a variety of products: chickens, eggs, pig hair (!), sheep, cattle, grain, potatoes, etc., and the smell of horses suffused the air. Their horses and wagons clogged the entire marketplace to the point that it was impossible to get through. Our womenfolk would go out looking for bargains, feeling the hens and blowing their feathers, to see which was fatter, bargaining with the peasants to lower the price, and then weighing the merchandise. The scales in our store didn't get a moment's rest during those market days. The women would come into the store even after getting their bargains, and re-weigh their onions, or beans, to assure themselves of the correct weight. That's the way it continued till noon. When the peasants had sold off their produce, they turned to the stores in the market to buy products for themselves. They bought kerosene, salt, manufactured goods, dyes, and all things that they needed. Our store was also full of buyers, and one had to watch them with a thousand eyes, and not permit them to grab any items of merchandise, even the cheaper ones. In our store, the peasants bought cast iron pots, pails, locks, files and saws. The saloons and guest houses were full of peasants, who would drink and eat, often getting drunk, to the point that they would stagger through the wagons tied up in the marketplace. As soon as it began to get dark, the marketplace would begin to empty out, the gentiles, with drunken shouts, would climb into their wagons, and ride off to their villages to the sound of the bells ringing that were attached to the collars of their horses. Merchants and storekeepers would begin to count the take of the market day. Between one market day and the next, Dereczin yawned and daydreamed, with the merchants waiting for a customer.

Year after year this fashion continued, and since no one knew of a better way of life, there was a contentment with what we had. No sensational criminal episodes ever occurred in Dereczin, and it was rare even that a theft was ever mentioned.

For us, the children, life in Dereczin was literally an ideal. We would get together in my big yard. My older sister *Sarah,* appointed herself as the "baker," making mud pies out of sand and water, and then dusting them with "cinnamon" scraped from red bricks. She would sell her "baked goods" to the other children. We make a scale from sticks, and as money, we used pieces of broken plates, rounded out by rubbing the pieces against a stone. And if we didn't get a fair weight, we immediately got into an argument, – and started wailing at the top of our lungs.

I personally ran a "greengrocer:" I tore up a variety of grasses and leaves, and sold them to my customers. When this play-commerce began to bore us, we would play "blind hens" (blind man's buff) – covering up the eyes of one of us, who would then try to catch someone else of us. I recall once, that we broke an electric lamp once while playing this game, which stood on a Marmaran (Turkish ?) stand.

I recall, that when we got a little older, we found a new game: we would stick a marker in the ground, and from a set distance, we would throw sticks at it to dislodge it. We called this game, *Metteh.* Once, in the middle of a game, one of us broke a window in the *Bet HaMidrash* with such a stick. I remember that we all agreed that under no circumstances would we reveal the name of the individual who cause the damage.

Saturday afternoons, we would take a walk in the fields, passing by the Catholic Church, its crucifix and image of the Christ, from which we would avert our eyes, and asking one another: "Have we passed by yet?!" And while a Jewish child was forbidden to gaze at the image of Jesus, one was tempted to steal a glance in passing...

We would then come to the cemetery, half for Polish Catholics, and half for Russian Orthodox, where we would sit and sing in several voices, until it got dark, and a pale moon would illuminate the crosses and gravestones around us. Fear would descend upon us, and we would quickly run home.

Our childhood years flew by without care. We were educated, some in a *Heder*, some in the *Talmud Torah,* and others at the Polish public school. We borrowed books to read from the town library, and it was at this time that many of us committed ourselves to a variety of organizations such as, the *Poalei Tzion,* Revisionists, Zionists. A Drama Club was active in Dereczin. Many of our young people traveled to bigger cities to get an education, such as Lida and Slonim, Vilna, etc. The Hebrew *Tarbut* School stood on a high plane – there, we were suckled with our national ideology, and to this day we remain grateful for what was planted into our hearts and our minds. Apart from local teachers, many also came from other places. To this day I remember the teachers, *Zvi Mereminsky* from Slonim, *Stefania Ruzetsky*, and the old teacher *Izaakovich (Der Mikhois*ker).

We loved and respected our teachers, and more than anyone, we treasured our unforgettable Headmaster, *David Alper.* A sense of respectful awe would possess us the minute he walked into the classroom. I remember his smile, and his gentle hand gesture, indicating that we could be seated, after we rose and greeted him with a hearty "Shalom," and he would begin his lecture. I remember his first words, as for example: "Today, children, is *Rosh Hodesh Adar (The first of Adar)*, and the saying is, "When Adar arrives – It is appropriate to multiply one's joy..." Before each holiday, he would tell us about the historical meaning of the occasion, and with great spirit, we would imbibe every word of our Mentor.

I am reminded of the last days of the school year, the Day of Judgement – of final examinations. I work a great deal, literally not letting the books out of my hands, and my heart is full of trepidation – will I succeed in being promoted to a higher class? I arrive with the first crowing of the rooster, and

quietly and imperceptibly, in order not to wake anyone, I steal out of the house, with my books under my arms, and pick a corner where I can study. The sun shines at length from the east, and the odor of freshly baked goods wafts over from the nearby bakery, and I run over to get fresh rolls for breakfast.

Finally, the day of the examinations arrives, which I awaited with such trembling. The students all come to school dressed in their holiday finery. The teachers sit across from us with serious looks on their faces. Each of the students is called one at a time. My turn comes, and I answer all questions meaningfully and clearly, apart from which I am proficient in language, the Pentateuch and *Tanach*. I get a good report card and I move over to a higher class. In the higher grades we get homework, compositions and speeches. I remember one of my pieces, titled, "The Life of an Orphan & Widow." And who better than I could understand the fate of an orphan? I had been such from early childhood. Indeed, I remember how I started my composition: "Life is like a sea, and the father of a family is like the captain of a ship. He guides that ship with a steady hand through stormy waves and holds fast the rudder of family life, he wrestles with the difficulties, until he brings the ship into safe harbor. But it is bitter indeed, when a ship loses its captain and navigator. Then the ship becomes a plaything for the angry waves..."

My composition made a strong impression on our teacher, *David Alper*. He brought it into class, and read it in front of the students. A few of them were brought to tears.

Then our beloved teacher left Dereczin, and took up a position in Pinsk. When he would return to visit his parents during holidays, or for vacation, he would send someone to call for me, asking for copies of my work that he could read to his students.

For many years, I took care of my schoolwork, and my diary, which I took with me from Dereczin to Belgium, but when the Germans occupied Belgium, I lost everything.

This was the way we grew up in Dereczin, until we reached a point where we asked the question: what's next? Dereczin had become too crowded for us, and we saw no real prospects for ourselves. The young people began to leave the town, going off to a variety of other countries. Our mother, who also doubled as our father, because we had lost our father in early childhood, had given us the maximum and the best in an upbringing that was possible in Dereczin. She would also spend a lot of time with us, and our friends, whiling away many hours reading to us from various books. Our mother was a well read and wise woman, and did not obsess over the difficulties she encountered in life, first losing her parents as a young girl, and then her beloved young husband – she was always full of good humor and in good spirits.

My older sister *Sarah,* married young, and stayed in Dereczin. My mother and I moved away to Belgium, where we lived through the terrifying time of the German occupation and miraculously survived. I lost my young fiercely beloved husband, who was deported, along with 28 thousand other Belgian Jews to the Nazi death camps. My sister *Sarah*, her husband *Velvel,* and their only son, *Yehudeleh*, were killed in Dereczin. The lie in a mass grave, not far from the place where as children, we would stroll, play and sing.

That is the way we lived in Dereczin, and this is how our most beloved ones were killed there, and of our hometown, all that remains are sweet memories, wretched ruins, and mass graves without any markers.

My Grandfather, ז"ל

By Tzirel Kamenetsky
(Original Language: Yiddish)

My grandfather, *Reb Moshe Friedman – Reb Moshe Shayneh-Chaya's* – ז"ל, was a wonder of a Jewish scholar, spending days and nights in study. I can see him now, reciting the *Hadaran* blessing[101] in front of his *Mishnah* study group.

Residents of rural settlements around Dereczin would travel and come to our house. I recall *Reb Leib Stein* from *Shchara*, a son of *Reb Jacob-Abraham, Dayan of Volkovysk*, with his marvelous presence, and his handsome white beard; and *Reb Simkha Rabinovich*, of Wielka Wola[102], the son of a Rabbi and a renown scholar, whose scholarly pedigree extended back many generations. My dear grandfather would spend his time with them in the discussion and study of Torah. I can remember how they would accord respect to on another, and how their goodness and gentleness was suffused in their faces, and how it radiated into every nook and cranny. They would engross themselves in wordplay, and with inferences in Torah portions, referring to a book here, and a line of reasoning there. In the world of casuistry and logical inference, they understood each other very well.

The following picture stands in front of my eyes: the samovar is percolating, the electric light is shining, illuminating our large house. My dear mother, of sainted memory, brings in delicious cakes and strudel, which she baked herself. Our worthy guests dink tea, grab a bite of baked goods – our house was a genuine conclave for Torah scholars.

My *zaydeh*, with his shining countenance and fear of God, never instilled fear in anyone or intimidated them through lecturing or emotional discourse. The acceptance and respect that he won from other observant people and Torah scholars, as well as more liberal and non-observant people, was obtained thanks to his personality and gentleness. He was a *mayven* (expert), and an auditor of *Reb Zundeleh* The Righteous,[103] for whose sake, may we and all Israel be worthy of Divine protection. *Reb Zundeleh* was a great *Gaon*, but was lacking in administrative and practical skills, and my *zaydeh* assisted him in administering his rabbinical chair. When *Reb Zundeleh* was called away from Dereczin to take the pulpit in *Eishyshok*,[104] thanks to my grandfather's familiarity with the position, we obtained the services of *Rabbi Leib Luner*, ז"ל. When *Rabbi Luner* passed away, *Rabbi Plotkin*, ז"ל, was selected with the informed counsel of my grandfather. He occupied the pulpit for many years in Dereczin. The gentle *Rebbitzen Plotkin* passed away in 1920. I can still recall how all of Dereczin escorted her funeral cortege to her eternal resting place, may her memory be for a blessing. The Rabbi's children, at that time were in Russia. *Rabbi Plotkin* emigrated to America, and the pulpit was given to *Rabbi Bakalchuk*, ז"ל.

My husband, *Moshe Kamenetsky*, was a close friend to *Rabbi Bakalchuk*, and to this day, the extent of this 'last Rabbi of Dereczin's' scholarship and personal presence is a source of wonderment to him; he had a reputation as a magnificent orator and disseminator of Torah scholarship, and was a persona who possessed a gift of open sensitivity to

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101 The Aramaic formula expressing the sentiment of returning to study the chapter once again.

102 Pronounced *Velikaya Volya* in Russian, meaning Greater Volya.

103 *Rabbi Yossef Zundl Hutner* (cf. *Eliach*).

104 Confirmed in *Eliach*: see pp. 99-100. This 'recruitment' took place in 1896. The account offers a fascinating glimpse into the rabbinical 'headhunting' of the day.

all manner of issues in community life in Dereczin.

I return, once again, to memories of my grandfather. He was full of a love of his people, Israel, and the fear of God. He had a great influence on many walks of religious life in Dereczin. Everyone took his opinion into account. He was always invited to participate in religious courts; every involved and convoluted dispute would be brought to my grandfather, who could unravel and simplify, and was one of the best arbitrators of his time.

During the time of the First World War, my grandfather went to his daughters in *Slutsk* – and from there to *Rostov*. He writes to us, begging for our mercy, and asking to be brought back to Dereczin, to the *Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash*, to his son and daughter-in-law, who accorded him such a large measure of paternal homage.

My grandfather never returned to Dereczin, but his [good] name remained behind, and he was well-known someone active in assuring continuity of Torah study across generations, in sanctity and purity.

My grandfather's sister, *Chana – Shayneh-Chaya's, Chana Weinstein,* ע"ה, [105] was the wife of *Reb Shmuel Weinstein*. He was a scholarly Jew, having been a student of the Yeshivah at *Volozhin*, a substantial businessman with a worldly education. In his spare time, he was always occupied with study and with reading.

His dear, modest wife was a true Woman of Valor, who ran the manufacturing business, and raised her nine children. I see her now before me, with her combed wig, decent, regal and modest in her appearance and demeanor. She was always satisfied with what she was able to accomplish, with the business and with her children. The first one of Dereczin's children who studied medicine [and became a Doctor] was her son, *Ezer*, ע"ה. In this manner, my Aunt *Chana* had *nakhas*, despite the fact that she lost two children, a son, *Joseph,* and a daughter *Dvora-sheh.* As only a truly righteous person would do, she bore her pain with love as well.

I remember how my aunt *Chana* was eulogized at her funeral by *Rabbi Bakalchuk*, זצ"ל. He spoke of her distinguished lineage of many generations, of how her [good] deeds were an example to her children, and how with womanly wisdom she built her house and family. She raised her children to be fine and gentle people, full of positive virtues. My her memory be for a blessing. Perhaps it was ordained that such a righteous lady should pass away before she could witness with her own eyes how her children and grandchildren were tortured by the German murderers.

I would like to place on record the memory of my dear cousin, *Chaim Weinstein*, a man of many virtues, with a gentle approach to personal relationships, who was always ready to offer assistance to those in need. He rendered assistance to members of the family in every conceivable way.

He was a son-in-law of *Reb Mendel Feldman*, ע"ה. Those townsfolk who survived, know well the way of life of this head of our community, who took his own life when, with his own eyes, he saw the end of the Jews of Dereczin.

As I relate stories about members of my family, I am reminded of my childhood years at home. I was born eighteen years after my parents were married. I was raised as the apple of their eye. My father, *Reb Zelig Friedman*, the son of the renown scholar *Reb Moshe Shayneh-Chaya's*, spent almost his entire life in the *Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash*. He studied the *Shas*, and was a member of a *Mishnah* study group and a Pentateuch study group. I recall his wonderful appearance, his generosity in receiving guests, and how his face shone when he made *Kiddush* on Friday nights. And I recall my mother, with her

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105 This form of appellation was common among Eastern European Jews, linking the individual to his or her *mother*. This, then is *Chana* the daughter of *Shayneh-Chaya*.

good virtues, and her piety.

My parents raised me in the Jewish way, and at the age of six, sent me to *Reb Leib's [Abelovich] Heder*, where I learned from 9AM till 6PM. Who doesn't remember *Reb Leib*, who would explain to us the meaning of the words in the prayers; *Reb Leib Abelovich*, a Jew from his heart, and a fine educator, he would satisfy us with a portion of the *Chumash*, and his presentations were always full of wisdom and a Jewish flavor.

I spent five years under the tutelage of *Reb Leib*, and to this day I cannot forget the *Abelovich* family, with *Reb Leib's* wife, *Chaykeh*, ע"ה, with their two children, *Dvorah'leh & Abraham'eleh*, along with *Reb Leib's* elderly father, *Reb Joseph*, ע"ה. They lived in a small house, and there were many children underfoot who were there as pupils, but how magical it was there! We were especially happy, when *Reb Leib's* wife would bake bread, and take the symbolic ritual portion of *Challah*, and throw it into the oven fire – the dough would begin to burn, and the air in the small room would get filled with smoke. We would all get a headache, and the good *Reb Leib* would send us home early.

From *Reb Leib's*, I moved on to the *Mikhoisker*, to *Reb Abraham Izaakovich*. There we undertook the study of arithmetic, grammar, and the history of our people – *HaKorot HaIvrim*

It did not take long, and a general school was opened in Dereczin. *David Alper*, ז"ל was the founder

Those, who will be writing about the last twenty years of Dereczin, will describe his good virtues and great works on behalf of the education of our children. It is literally difficult to portray his great personality, and the extent of his strong influence on the spiritual life of the last generation of Dereczin.

When the general school closed because of a lack of resources, our group of girls went to study with the teacher, *Fyvel Einstein*. We obtained a great deal of knowledge from him, and to this day we remember him with great respect and gratitude.

Under the Bolsheviks

By Mattityahu Abelovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

I remember the day that the Bolsheviks came to Dereczin. The orchestra played in the middle of the marketplace, and all of Dereczin turned out to listen, The youth was in the vanguard, and the success of the Russian revolution inspired their full ranks. The authorities took advantage of the situation, and drafted 18 year-olds into the Red Army. All the conscripts were taken to the synagogue, from where they were destined to be sent away deep into the Russian heartland. Among these was also our

brother, *Yudel*. He was not yet eighteen, but because of his greater than normal height, the Bolsheviks signed him up as well, and were prepared to ship him out.

My distraught and trembling mother went off to *Hirschel Levitt,* our cousin, the son of *Ephraim-Yehoshua.* He was a communist, a good speaker, an effective doer, and was already playing an important role among the Bolsheviks.

My mother began to plead with him, with tears in her eyes, that he should release *Yudel*, who was not yet eighteen, which *Hirschel Levitt* knew well. Our mother reminded him that *Yudel* was our only breadwinner, after *Shmuel & Hirschel* our two older brothers had passed away.

Hirschel Levitt promised my mother to have *Yudel* released, and in a couple of hours, our brother returned home. We all cried – but this time they were tears of joy.

Hirschel Levitt, and his entire family moved into the Soviet Union, where in the 1930's, he died of tuberculosis.

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These are my recollections of those war years, which extended from 1914 to the time that the Polish regime occupied Dereczin.

The Budding of Zionist Socialism in Dereczin

By Naftali Ben-Dov

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Membership of HeHalutz on a trip (untitled). (p. 210)

How far we are from those years, when the first Zionist-Socialist seed sprang up , the first of the Zionist Youth! What a difference between that handful of young people, aroused, aspiring, dreaming in a small out-of-the-way town, and a nation working to renew its own homeland – to the children of our generation, the children of the pioneers on the land, and its preservers.

In my innermost dreams, I constantly sense the initial stirring of those 'enables of the *mitzvah*' the founders of the Zionist Youth Organization. Like all beginnings, this beginning was also a difficult one, and our initial steps were hard ones to take. We did not have a clear path that we, the young people full of aspirations of the *Halutzim*, and the energy and spunk of the young, could follow with any conceptual or practical certainty.

For a number of consecutive years, the anti-Zionist Bund movement was dominant among the youth of Dereczin. There were [at that time], very committed Zionists, but the extent of their commitment was manifested in the reading of a Hebrew newspaper, and in debates with their protagonists. Actual work on behalf of the movement was expressed through support of the *Keren Kayemet LeYisrael.* Nevertheless, we – thirsty for activities relating to being a *Halutz*, felt weary of our existing way of life, and sharpened our desire to be *Halutzim* in the Land of Israel. And a powerful imperative existed among us to find a synthesis between the ideals of nationalism and internationalism and the ideals of Zionist socialism. I will not say that we understood how to realize the aspirations locked within us, and to bring them to the youth of the town for fulfilment.

It was the Balfour Declaration that awakened the Zionist feelings of the Jews in the Pale of Settlement and the Jews of our town. You would have thought that Dereczin, being small and out-of-the-way, would have been among the last to respond to this awakening, yet miraculously the following happened: they were among the first respondents to this important nationalist event, the Balfour Declaration, when young people took the leadership of this movement, whom I shall never forget. The living spirit of this small group of young people was *David Zelig* ז"ל, an ardent, yeshiva-trained young man, who was a fiery orator, who in those days, gave an inspiring and fiery expression to readings from the leadership of the movement who exhorted the young people to make *aliyah*, and build the homeland for the sake of generations yet to come. Whenever he went to the podium, he was accompanied by stormy applause. I see him as the founder of the Zionist Youth Organization in Dereczin, because the young people gathered around him in those days, before there was a Zionist-socialist movement implanted in these territories, since only now were they beginning to gradually liberate themselves from the tribulations of the [First World] War, and the burdens of the German occupation.

To our great distress, the fate of this wondrous young man took a turn for the worse, and he was taken from us in the prime of life, after he contracted typhus.

But the seed had been planted, and people to carry on were found, who possessed both intellectual and administrative skills, at the head of which stood *David Alper*, ז"ל. It is not easy to succinctly convey the extensive good works of this educator of the young generation in Dereczin, how he broadened the horizons of so many of our youth, and set them on the proper path of loyalty to people and to socialism.

It was *David Alper* who led me to the path of being a *Halutz*, and helped me to make *aliyah* to the homeland. I was active for all the years I lived in our homeland, as a member of the Third *Aliyah*, who saw in this work a dedication and commitment in the day-to-day life of the people – and I always saw myself as a disciple of those progenitors, the founders of the ZYO in our town.

The Origins of the HeHalutz Branch

By David Rabinovich
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: The HeHalutz membership in 1929 (untitled) (p. 211)

From the time that the Zionist-socialist seed was planted in the midst of the Dereczin young people, with the establishment of a ZYO branch and the establishment of a Hebrew School, the spirit of these young people would not go quiet, fortified by their desire to be *Halutzim*.

In 1923, I journeyed to Vilna, along with a number of other classmates to study, in order to qualify for acceptance to a technical school. For economic reasons, I was compelled to return home, and we then decided to establish a branch of *HeHalutz* in Dereczin. Before I left for Vilna, I had already become active in a number of Zionist institutions in Dereczin, in the *KKL"L*, the *Brenner* Library, and various other cultural undertakings. When the time

to realize our plans came – that is when I decided to return home.

In the span of a couple of months, the membership of *HeHalutz* in Dereczin reached about fifty people. These young people were in essence the seed of the active and operational Zionist movement in our town.

We decided to go to work and prepare ourselves for making *aliyah*. We turned to various *balebatim*, and asked of them to retain us to do any manner of work, light or heavy, for which they had a need. At first they greeted this request derisively, but little by little, they gave us access to a variety of things to do. Even in the general community, we earned a good reputation for dedication to work.

In 1925, when the [Hebrew] newspaper *Davar* was established in the Holy Land, our house was the only one to get a subscription. I would read from its articles to assembled meetings of the *HeHalutz* branch, and the members would devour every word about news from the Homeland.

In order to speed the *aliyah* process, I attended a facilitation camp with other members near *Suwalk-Augustov*. As the leader of our group, I stood together with the central leadership of the *HeHalutz* movement, especially with *Pinhas Kozlovsky*, (who is today *Pinhas Sapir*, the Israeli government official), who was the organizer of these camps in the Grodno Province. After I returned home from this camp, *Pinhas Kozlovsky* visited us, and asked of me that I participate in a *HeHalutz* seminar in Warsaw, and delay my *aliyah* for a number of years. I did not agree to this proposition, and in May 1926, a group of five of us from the movement in town made *aliyah* to the Holy Land.

My Grandfather & Grandmother, ל"ז

By Dov Gorinovsky

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Who in Dereczin did not know *Yehuda-Shmuel Epstein* and *Simkheh die Kremerkeh* [106]? More than one person received help from them, and their home was open to all. They were generous with their charitable contributions, both public and private, despite the fact that they worked very hard to earn their own livelihood.

My grandfather, *Yehuda-Shmuel*, was born in nearby *Kozlovshchina*. He was orphaned at an early age, and was educated by relatives. He studied in yeshivas, as was the custom in those days. He was a scholar, and dedicated all his spare time to the study of the *Shas*. He was strictly religious, with a tendency to sterner observance in matters great and small. Despite this, he had an understanding of the heart of young people and their spirit. He was one of the supporters of the Zionist movement , and of the Homeland itself.

Not once during conversation, would he find favor with our side [saying]: 'you young people will have the privilege of seeing the redemption of the Land of Israel and the establishment of a Jewish State in your lifetime...'

After the terrible tragedy of losing two of his sons within days of each other, he turned inward, brooding in his sorrow. As expected, he was in the habit of going to synagogue on a daily basis, to the *Neuer Mauer*. After services, he would remain behind, and study a chapter of the *Shas* in memory of his two sons, who were taken in the prime of life. His tearful voice would be heard through the open

106 Yiddish for 'storekeeper' (fem.)

windows of the synagogue, and his weeping would tug at the heartstrings of the neighbors.

The extent of his faith can be gleaned from what he had to say at the burial of his [first] son, *David-Zelig*, who died in the typhus epidemic that ran through town inn the closing days of the First World War. After the eulogy delivered by *Rabbi Plotkin*, ל"ז, my grandfather found the spiritual strength to mourn his son as follows: 'God gave me the responsibility for twins for a specified period of time. I will not speak against the Lord, even after so great a tragedy. I will always bear this pain in my heart.

And when his second son [*Dov-Berel*] fell sick and died, only weeks after the death of his brother, my grandfather found the spiritual fortitude to say the following at grave side, after the Rabbi's eulogy: 'The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away; would that my sacrifices cause Him to turn away from his wrath, and let the pestilence subside...'

My grandmother, *Simkheh die Kremerkeh*, was tied down to the store from morning until late in the evening, with the entering customers, with a seemingly permanent smile on her face. The battle for making a living was a difficult one, but for her entire life, she was a helpmeet to my grandfather.

Despite the burdens of her labor, this woman had the talent to put down in writing the circumstances of her life in a clear and heartfelt manner. A portion of her writing, which by chance is preserved with me, is also reproduced on Page xx in this volume, ands it serves as a means to highlight her noble character.

The Holy Sabbath In My Father's House

By Sarah Basevitz-Slonimsky
Translated by Miriam Kreiter
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Friday was always filled with activities: preparations for the Sabbath. My mother was busy and anxious, never sparing any effort to add warmth and a holiday spirit to our home. Mother was always afraid that perhaps she would not manage to finish all her preparations before the Sabbath. That was her custom. She was always among the first to receive the Sabbath Queen, and the last to see her on her out.

As usual, all the preparations were ready on time and before twilight, the house was spotless and shining. A white table cloth adorned the table, and eight Sabbath candles burning brightly spread warmth and light in the room.

The shadows melted away and with them the [weekday] anxiety. A holiday ambiance encompassed every comer of the house.

My father, wearing a *kapota* (black traditional garment) hurried off to synagogue. My sisters, *Hanna-Esther and Zeldeleh*, ל"ז, *Miriam*, and I, began chanting '*Lekhu Neranenah.*' We were all joyfully anticipating my father's return.

Impatiently, I would go outside and stand at the entrance of the house in order to welcome my father on his return from the synagogue. How I loved to hear his greeting: *"Gut Shabbos!"* How profound was his faith in this blessing, and how much I believed that it would materialize. The Sabbath would rid my father of the day-to-day worries, of which he had plenty, and it would transport him into a world which was all goodness and beauty.

Father sat down at the table, blessed the Sabbath, and made the blessing over the wine. We all

accompanied his words with "Amen." During the meal, my father spiced the conversation with verses from the Scriptures, and we sat and listened. The same thing happened the next day. The custom was prayer, study, and singing. The Sabbath meal, with the traditional *cholent* (meat stew), passed from its beginning to its end in a holiday atmosphere. My father was a *Hasia*, and his worship of God was conducted with joy in his heart.

For the last meal, called "the third meal," my father used to invite a number of Yeshiva students to eat with us. The joy was seven times greater.

There was no limit to the singing and chanting. What did the worries of daily life matter?

"In the Lord I will trust" the singing would burst forth. Until late in the evening they would sing with joy and thanks.

The passers-by would slow down their steps. A neighbor's window would open, and yet another would peek through the door. Even the Christians were full of wonder: how great were the strength and sustenance that a Jew would draw from his God, they would think.

After the departure of the Sabbath Queen, our house would go back to the routine of everyday life, but always with faith in the Rock of Israel.

Thus it was until, until that terrible and bitter day, for my family and all Israel, good and just people, who fell before the forces of evil. May their souls be bound up in the bond of life.

Festivals and the High Holy Days

By Malka Alper

(Original Language: Hebrew)

A. Passover

Passover would arrive early in our home, by about *Tu B'Shevat*, when the owner of the textile store, where our mother was in the habit of shopping, would come around to discover what our mother had in mind to buy for the various family members for the up-and-coming holiday. He did this, because in a matter of a few days, with God's help, he would be turning to travel to *Bialystock*, to arrange for his purchases, and it would be at that time, that he would want to take into account my mother's specific tastes, and reflect her order among the other orders he would be fulfilling.

On *Shushan Purim*, a day on which school was closed, mother would go to the store to obtain her necessities. We would naturally accompany her, and assist her in the selection of merchandise.

Once material was purchased, then the selection process of the dress patterns begins, coupled to a visit to the seamstress, reading magazines, (although we may have been young at the time, we also leafed through magazines, and attempted to influence our mother in the matter of a dress pattern), an this is how the consultation among us proceeded, the daughters, their friends, until an auspicious hour when the final measurements were taken for each of us, and transcribed like the law into the notebook of the seamstress.

Then came the process of fitting. In the afternoons, young women, mothers and grandmothers would come together. If indeed, there was a line for first-come first-serve, how could one not give way in favor of the mother of a good friend, or some other respected lady? Meanwhile, the hours run by, and it is after dinner, and then our father appears, to find out what has delayed our return home.

And the baking of the matzos? Even before the special bakeries were opened up, their owners would come to my father to offer their services (my father was the designate to oversee the performance of this mitzvah). But we also personally participated

in this mitzvah: we wanted to be present every time the dough was kneaded and baked, to pass the matzo from the table where it was rolled to the table where it was perforated, and to inhale the fragrance of the freshly baked matzo as it emerged from the oven. That morning, when the matzo was being baked, we were late for school, with the permission of our father and mother. And when we returned from school, how not to help store the matzo in the large storage area of *Eli the Stout!?* The matzo was stored in as big wicker basket, and was accorded its own special corner, from which exuded its odor, literally the odor of the Passover holiday.

The various preparatory tasks, like cleaning the house, taking out the Passover dishware and utensils, storing all the year-round dishes – all this occupied us, the students and young people, and filled the days leading up to the holiday.

When we grew up, and either studied or worked away from home,. We never lost the opportunity to spend the Passover holiday under the roof and between the walls of our parents' home. We would gather from the 'four corners' of the country, and come by train or horse-drawn wagon, on the roads, or off the roads, in order to be seated at the table of our parents on Passover.

On the Eve of Passover, we would seat ourselves around the table which had been set for the holiday, with our father at the head, wearing his spotless *kittel*, and read the *Haggadah* together. And we do not content ourselves with mere rote recitation, for everyone adds some insight to enrich the reading: someone with a new explanation he had come upon, another with an historical insight to a specific portion; pedagogical points are exchanged with the children during the Passover event —

And the *Seder* lengthens and stretches out, until mother begins to urge us on to reach a break point where she can begin to serve the food, because she is beginning to feel tired.

It was our custom to invite friends for the holidays, or younger relatives. The big dining room table, even with its two leaves was often insufficient to accommodate all those sitting around it.

Yet the eight days of the holiday fly by, and on the last day of Passover, we begin to pack our bags. At a late hour, the wagon driver takes us to the train station, and from there, each one goes off -- either to work or to study.

B. Yom Kippur

On Yom Kippur Eve, our mother would get up especially early, in order to bake the special *Challahs* in the shape of a ladder while it was still morning -- symbolic of the path that our prayers would take to heaven, as was the custom of the women of our area.

Then, in the early hours of the morning, the ritual slaughterer, *Reb Yankel-Aryeh*, would come knocking at our door, a venerable man with a clear voice, who passed before the Ark during the festival days, scrawny and short. He had come to slaughter the *kaporeh*[107] roosters in our yard. The rest of the town had managed to recite the ritual over their *kaporehs* on a prior day, and had brought them to the *shokhet* or the *Hazzan,* but our parents had the custom of reciting these blessings precisely on the Eve of Yom Kippur, and the *shokhet* would come to us, for which he was specially compensated.

Until the fowl are chased down and tied up, the *shokhet* sits himself at the table and has a boiling hot glass of tea, a second and a third, while snatching a bit of conversation, and then sets his sights on the yard, from whence then come the squawking of the bound fowl and the ones being killed.

During the day, our father would take an interest in each one of us, in terms of the state of health of each member of the household, he would ask about and

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107 The ritual placing of one's sins on a chicken, as a substitute for the biblical scapegoat. Often replaced by a monetary consideration in more modern times.

direct choices of food intake, how much, and when – all of this with an eye towards the rigors of the fast, or half-day fast. As the sun began to set in the west, father would return from his afternoon prayers, after having distributed his contributions to the various plates [set out at the synagogue].

On that same day of Yom Kippur Eve, many children would come around to us with small bottles for sale containing 'smelling salts,' really being drops of ammonia inside, whose sharp odor counteracted any fainting, should a worshiper be overcome by the rigors of prayer and fasting.

The table is set for the final meal before the fast. Father's *kittel,* along with his prayer shawl, are set aside on a special chair, as are the *makhzors* of our parents. With trepidation and anxiety, we approach the table, with a broken and roiling heart: The Day of Judgement!

Before the final meal, the tea has been poured into glasses, in order that it cool down, so it could be drinkable as a closing to the meal. As they recite the blessing after the meal, tears begin to fall from the eyes of both parents.

And then they rise from the table. Father puts his *kittel* on over his holiday finery, approaches each of us filled with emotion and trembling , from withheld tears and intense feeling, he embraces and kisses us giving us his blessing: A Good Year, may we all be worthy to be here for the next year! And our mother does the same.

They turned to the synagogue. The way is not far, the courtyard of the synagogue is behind our house, in which the Great Synagogue was found, a stone structure which was mostly closed during the winter because it wasn't possible to heat it, *Der Alter Mauer*, where my parents worshiped, and *Der Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash.*

The rabbi's manse was also in this courtyard. From both sides of our house, main thoroughfares came to the afformentioned courtyard.

I liked standing on the porch of our single story house to watch everyone walking to worship, parents and children, young and old [alike], in particular to reply to their blessings with the blessing 'A Good Year!' And it was here that the stream of passers by stopped. The houses of worship enveloped even the latecomers. The full light shines out of the open windows, whether kerosene lamps, or the high candelabras. The sounds of prayer reached all the way back to our house, and it was possible to participate in the service even while sitting in our house.

During the fast day, Father would come back home several times during the day, to find out how we were doing. I remember distinctly my very first Yom Kippur fast. Father was on top of me the evening before the fast to eat a lot of fruit, to eat fully, but in small portions. And during the fast day, he was unceasingly interested in how I felt. At the end of the fast, after he blessed the wine in the light of the Yom Kippur candle, he passed me the cup of tea he held in his hand: I was astonished: 'Why, Father, do you give me the tea first?' To which he immediately replied: 'I am used to this, but you – this is your first fast...'

How Could One Possibly Forget!?

By Dvora Smith-Shelkovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Here she stands before my eyes, my hometown that I loved so much. There, we were close to one another, and I will always remember neighbors, friends, the houses, the streets and gardens, the summer sands, and the winter mud – every highway and byway, which were happily traversed by our young people.

When the heart of a Jewish member of the community became heavy [with a concern], he could always turn for solace to a neighbor or a friend. Our street was inhabited with Jewish laborers and craftsmen who worked hard to make a living, but would derive full joy from their children and grandchildren, living in *nakhas*, and always hoping for a better life.

This is the way my father's family also lived. Who in Dereczin didn't know *Shmuel der Schmid (The Blacksmith),* with his perpetual smile, with his wit and wisdom, with a comforting word for anyone who needed one.

My father survived different [sic: difficult] times, but together with my mother, he always hoped to have *nakhas* from his children and grandchildren:

from *Elya & Bluma* and their children; from *Esther & Shimon* and their children; from *Liebeh & Velvel* and their children; from *Leibl & Zlateh* and their children. Here, I have listed some of my nearest and dearest. They grew and matured around my mother and father, just like the trees that sprouted and grew about our house.

Until the angry tempest came that disrupted the lives of towns and cities. Our Dereczin also was destroyed, and our loved ones were cut down just like trees that are uprooted from the soil.

The song of our brothers and sisters, together with that of our fathers and mothers, was silenced. After difficult and tortured years, I still held the hope that I might find a member of my family [still alive] – but when I stood at the long large mass graves, into which our Dereczin townsfolk were cast, old and young alike, I saw that I had been left all alone.

It is our *Yizkor Book* that will serve as their memorial marker, over which we will be able to mourn and weep.

My Birthplace, Dereczin

By Shayndl Wilenczyk
(Original Language: Yiddish)

The larger part of my life has been spent in The United States, but my birthplace Dereczin, lives ever in my memory, even though that lovely town no longer exists, where my eyes first saw the light of day. I recall the way of life of the Jews of Dereczin with great affection. It was from those roots that I imbibed my spiritual nourishment, and that is why I am full of respect for the legacy I received from those Jewish generations in their long march to martyrdom. This legacy is all the more precious to me, after thousands of Jewish communities in the towns and cities of Eastern Europe were wiped off the map by a murderous hand.

Our town of Dereczin was small, but it had valuable human resources, organized into different functions, which constituted its community infrastructure. The *Poalei Tzion* and Bund were active, theater, libraries, and charitable works, and all manner of activities to serve the needs of the Jewish residents.

My grandmother, may she rest in peace, was known for her work on behalf of orphaned young girls in the town, who needed a dowry to get married, lest, God forbid, they be left in spinsterhood. Where in today's world will you find that level of concern for all manner of people in need, as existed then in tiny, poor Dereczin?

And when the years of war and revolution came, Dereczin and its youth was also active. I still remember the year 1919, after the Russian revolution, when the Bolsheviks came into our town. The Bundists, together with some of the radical youth in town, allied themselves with the Bolsheviks. The leader of the communists in Dereczin was a "Committee Head." In those years, we would receive wagon loads of flour and other foodstuffs from The United States for city and town residents, who suffered greatly during those years of The First World War. *Rabbi Plotkin* was the head of the committee that oversaw the allocation of these supplies, and my father was also a member of this committee. Produce was distributed equally among all.

When the Polish forces drove the Bolsheviks from our area, they began to look for the local young radicals, and especially the "Committee Head." One of the local leaders accused my father, and together with a goodly number of young people, who were informed upon by local Christians, he was detained at the local constabulary. All the detainees were given sentences of punishment by flogging across their bare backs, which when carried out caused the walls to be spattered with their blood. When it came time for my father to be whipped, he pleaded to be spared the punishment, because he had a family with small children, and in any event had never been a "Committee Head," on behalf of the Soviet regime. Another local leader, who was witnessing the punishment, recognized my father, and gave testimony that a mistake had clearly been made, because everyone knew that my father was one of those who was involved in the distribution of the American aid among all the residents of Dereczin, without regard for religion or nationality. Indeed, my father was immediately released.

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Deep in my heart, I continue to carry a little of the joy and a great deal of sorrow regarding that which I imbued from my town of Dereczin. That is the joy of my childhood, and the sorrow of the destruction and Holocaust. I cannot forget that soil on which my young feet sprang, and beneath which lie the hidden remains of our loved ones.

Written in honor of your memory and out of respect for beloved, Jewish Dereczin!

My Grandmother & Grandfather

By Sarah Teichman-Levinger
(Original Language: Yiddish)

It is the sacred duty of each and every one of us to remember and preserve the memory of our families that were martyred. My nearest and dearest were also among the victims of the bloodthirsty Nazis: My mother *Masha,* and father *Karpel Leibovich,* my brothers and sisters, *Moshe Levinger*, together with his wife and children, who were killed in Volkovysk, and *David, Itteh-Leah, Liebeh, Esther, Sholom, Kalman, Basheh-Minkeh, & Resheh* – who met their murderous end in Dereczin.

I cannot forget my dear grandmother, *Chaya-Beileh Zoger*, who at the age of 92 was shot to death at the side of the mass grave by the Murderers. Her days and years were dedicated to helping the needy in town, bringing them all manner of sustenance and support, as for example, an anonymous donation so as not, God forbid, to embarrass someone who might be down on their luck or fortunes.

I can recall, as a child, when she would give me the privilege of accompanying her to earn the *mitzvah* of privately bringing a *Challah* to the home of needy family for the Sabbath. And one day, when I could not repress my feelings and said: 'Grandma, these people live in such a neat and orderly house , do they really need your help?'-- my grandmother warned me, if I once more ask such a question of her, she will 'not take me to provide aid.'

My grandfather, *Kalman-David*, who passed away before the [Second World] War, needs to be favorably remembered for his constant concern for the welfare of the Yeshivas. He was a formidable scholar in his own right, and held ordination as a rabbi. He did not want to practice as a rabbi, since he was concerned about making a potentially questionable ruling in connection with an issue.

That is the way my grandmother and grandfather were, good, heartfelt Jewish people, who we must never forget.

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I feel obligated to recall for good the name of *Reb Shmuel Beckenstein* ל"ז, because thanks to him, the finances were made available that permitted me to pay for the travel expenses connected with my *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

The monies were on deposit with the bank formed for charitable works in Dereczin. In those years of the early thirties, the bank fell on hard times, and I was unable to withdraw my funds. Because of this, my chance to make *aliyah* was at risk of being canceled.

Reb Shmuel Beckenstein, who was responsible for the money in the bank, called me to him, and gave me those funds for which he was obligated to the bank, in order to help me out in the quandary of my situation. When this became known around town, several other men followed his example.

It was in this way that the funds for my trip were preserved, and thanks to that I remained alive, and find myself today in our own Land.

Pages of Poetry Skipped: PP 218-219

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Festival Time in Town

By Chaya Beckenstein-Pilzer

(Original Language: Yiddish)

It is the eve of a festival, and everyone is getting ready. Houses are being cleaned, and there is running to the stores to get ingredients for cooking delicious preparations in honor of the coming holiday. Every Thursday evening, or on the evening prior to a festival, we the children, would go to *Rachel* the Storekeeper, and purchase those things told to us by our mother. Later, our mother would knead the dough for a *Challah* and a babka, and set it aside to let the dough rise. She had already been working since early morning in the kitchen, being occupied with baking and cooking. When we would come home from school, the whole house was suffused with cooking odors, and I remember how we would peek into the cooking pots, and filch little pieces of the freshly baked *Challah*. Our mother, upon seeing this, would chase us from the kitchen.

Oh, how beautiful the house looked on the eve of *Yom Tov*! The white tablecloth on the table, and on it the fish and wine; the candles cast a shadow on the wall, and all of us are around the table, dressed in our Holiday finery, with hair combed, waiting impatiently for the *Kiddush* to be recited, in order that we be able to get on with eating.

The best time was in the morning, when we got ready to go to synagogue. All decked out in our new clothes and shoes that had been purchased for the holiday, we get a snack wrapped in a handkerchief from our mother, in case we get a little hungry during the somewhat lengthy prayer services. In the little package – a couple of pieces of babka, a couple of cookies, ands an apple. Just in case we might run into another youngster on the *Schulhof* who might be hungry. We arrive at the *Schulhof*, teeming with people, old and young, children large and small – everyone has come to go into the synagogue. Some have come to pray, others -- to have some conversation with friends. For us it was like paradise. First one has to show off one's new clothes, and afterwards go present oneself to our grandparents. I very much loved to hear the Cantor accompanied by the choir. I was actually quite angry that I was not asked to sing. Our Cantor was a very handsome man with ruddy cheeks and a very fine voice. Having had my fill of the men, I go off to the women's section of the synagogue. My father and both my grandfathers prayed in the *Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash*, apart from which I also do recollect both the Old and New *Mauer* synagogues, the *Grosse Schul,* and the Hasidic schul. Up in the women's gallery it was always hot, and one had to look down into the main sanctuary through bars, as if we were in a jail. Our grandmother, *Malka*, was always happy to see us, but didn't permit us to utter a word, in order not to disturb her own devotions. Our grandmother, *Nekhama* gave us a bit more attention, and loved to show off her grandchildren to her neighbors ("What do you say to her, not a bad specimen of a young lady, eh?"). After we had been duly inspected and suitably praised, we would go off to see the grandmother of a friend at another synagogue. We could hardly wait to get out on the *Schulhof* and open our little packages of goodies. Everyone shows what they have brought, and we begin to trade morsels, so we can taste some of everybody's snacks.

As prayers draw to a close, the *Schulhof* once again becomes crowded with people, who wish each other a happy and healthy year, walking home, also not alone. By the time I got home, the house was already full of people, family, friends, neighbors, everyone having come for *Kiddush*. After noon, we went out for a stroll through the main streets of the

town, where we would encounter gentile children who looked at us with consternation, and we thought they envied us, because we had such a lovely holiday, in which our entire family strolled together, surrounded by friends and with other Jews, carefree and with no fear of what the morning after would bring...

My Husband's Family

By Nekhama Petrukhovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

I wish to briefly describe my husband's family. His grandfather, *Reb Eliezer* ז"ל, was a pious and righteous Jew, and pro-active as well, always ready to put himself in danger, if it would only help rescue someone else. It was told in Dereczin, of the instance when *Leib*, the son of *Ben-Zion* suddenly took sick with cholera. The Jews of the town were terrified of even coming close to his house, so my husband's grandfather ran to him, in order to help see if he could be saved. For the sake of his Judaism, he was prepared to do everything. He would wake people up to go to *Selikhot* services, or to recite Psalms. People remember to this day, how he stopped in the middle of the street and gave his boots away to a poor man, and put a pair of rough walking clogs on his own feet.

My husband's father, my father-in-law, *Reb Chaim-Yehoshua* ז"ל, was also such a warm and committed Jew. He did many things for the poor of the community. When the *Bet HaMidrash* burned down, he, along with other men of the community, traveled to secure lumber, from which they constructed a new *Bet HaMidrash*. His home was open to all – to the poor, to itinerant preachers, and emissaries who would visit Dereczin. There were a number of families in Dereczin who literally had no bread to eat, for them he took a wagon, and together with *Itcheh-Yankel Ogulnick*, they procured flour, corn and potatoes, and divided it among the [needy] families, and saved them from certain hunger. A Sabbath did not go by without a guest seated at his table.

My husband, who should live and be well, is from the same mold. He was the *Gabbai* at the *Bet HaMidrash*, and took an active part in all of the institutions, going weekly on visitations to the sick, and participating in overnight nursing of the ill. Understand, that he did this along with other good and pious Jews from Dereczin. I also helped out a little – it was in our house that the various implements of the overnight nursing group were kept, and I often cooked up the brews for the sick.

Our house was always open to the poor and needy, during the week and especially on the Sabbath, when we would have guests. This is the way we ran our lives. I would always be going around town collecting money and food, and on Friday before nightfall, I would go out with *Musheh die Kvoshnyitzeh*[108] ז"ל, and we already knew who was in need of help – and we would bring *challah,* bread, and other things for the Sabbath.

Even here, I do what I can, health permitting, I go out prior to the festivals, before Passover, collect a little money, and I have my places, where I know who is needy. God should help us so that we will not have to extend such help to others and above all – we should all be healthy and well.

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108 Wife of a *Kvossnyik*, a maker of the beverage, *Kvass*.

My Scholarly and Enterprising Father

By Shimon Abramovich
(Original Language: Hebrew)

When I made *aliyah* in 1926, my father, of blessed memory, escorted me to the railroad station in the town of Zelva. At the time we parted, he blessed me, wishing me a successful journey, shed a tear, but whispered to himself: I am indeed fortunate to have been privileged to have a son making *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

Forty years have gone by, and yet I can see him before me in that moment as if it happened just today.

My father was a wonderful man, handsome, intelligent and a Torah scholar. He was considered to be a well-off individual, although he was never rich by any measure. He treated everyone as an equal, whether the person was educated or simple, whether rich or poor. Everyone had respect for him, both Jew and gentile, and he was especially held in affection by the farmers of the area. His integrity became the talk of the town.

He was a Zionist heart and soul, and worked for the Holy Land on all fronts: *KK"L, Keren HaYesod,* and the *HeHalutz* movement. Accordingly, he was among the founders of and workers for the basic Hebrew school in the town.

He was an observant man, attending prayers daily, studying a page of the *Gemara* in the *Bet HaMidrash,* in front of a group of listeners, and with all this, he was both liberal and progressive.

My mother ל"ז, was a simple, yet clever woman, who conducted her household in an almost miraculous of necessity confined her to bed for extended periods of time. My father ל"ז, was also occupied with housework. I can remember a house full of little children, with my father feeding, dressing them for bed, helping them with their homework, all this – on top of his difficult work he did to provide for the household.

He always worked hard, from early morning until late at night, and worked at many different endeavors, everything according to the stormy era that prevailed in those days. Before the First World War, he operated a wine press, which he had taken over from his parents, who had made *aliyah* to live out their last days in the Holy Land. He was the overseer at the wine press. During the German occupation, when the wine press ceased operation, he switched over to farming. He bought a horse and cows, and worked a large parcel of land at a time when my brother and I were still quite young, and were still dependent on him.

After the period of the German occupation, the Poles took control, and my father ל"ז, switched over to being a forest products merchant. Together with the *Mishkin, Blizniansky & Weinstein* families, he bought un sections of the forest from the landowners of the area, cut down the trees, and floated the lumber down the Shchara River to the outside world. With great speed, he turned into a truly skillful forest products merchant. Much later, when the lumber business hit a crisis, he bought a hand-operated wool-combing machine. The farmers of the district would bring the wool of their sheep to him, and my father ל"ז, would put the wool through his machine. It was hard labor.

Before I made *aliyah*, my father attempted to reactivate the wine press business, and once again dealt in lumber, and at an even later date he even opened up a store. He was constantly busy, on the one hand with making a living, and on the other hand with work around the house. He never once complained, never raised his voice, and never lost his temper; he was totally devoted to my mother and the children without any measure.

In 1932, when I was in the Holy Land for six years already, He found out from my friend, *David Rabinovich*, who had gone to visit his parents, that

I had fallen ill and was in hospital. He acted immediately, and sent me money, with the admonition that I should rest and not work. My situation was undoubtedly better than his, and my health was satisfactory, and when I took him to task for sending me money, and wanted to return it – he refused.

Together with my mother and father ל"ז, the following members of my family were killed on the 11th Day of *Ab*: my sister *Freda* and her husband *Leibl Beckenstein* a townsman, and their daughter *Chanaleh*, my sister *Leah* and her husband, my brother *Moshe*, my sister *Batsheva*, and my sister *Rivkah*. The last three were still young children at the time I made *aliyah*. My older brother *Menahem Mendel*, apparently perished with his wife *Genya* of the *Yafsha* family, along with their little daughter *Esther*, in Bialystock.

To this day I do not know how they fell, or how they died; Holocaust survivors from our town either do not know, or are unwilling to relate how the members of my family met their end, and they keep their counsel to themselves.

May their memory be blessed.

How I Took Leave of My Home

By Miriam Pechersky-Slonimsky
(Original Language: Hebrew)
Translated by Alain Drezdner and Miriam Kreiter

Sometimes one feels the need to write pages and pages, but when confronting the challenge, each and every line is an effort. Thus, even writing these few lines was delayed for days and months. Thirty years have passed since I left my parents' home and established my own. To this very day, when I reminisce or talk about "home," it is the image of my parents' home which appears before my eyes. It is there that I spent my childhood and adolescence and there that we all lived together, bound up with bonds of love. There is no power on earth that can erase my feelings about my parents' home.

I will recount one episode, one that took place the last Sabbath I spent with my family: how I said farewell to my parents, my sisters, my friends, and to the community of Dereczin. Even this short tale brings choking tears to my eyes, as to everyone of us who remember our loved ones and what happened to them.

In the morning of this last Sabbath, when my father returned from prayers, we sat together around the table to the traditional warm cholent. In honor of my departure, mother prepared two kinds of kugel (pudding). I remember how, with difficulty, I sat at the table tasting my mother's delicacies. With all my strength, I held back from bursting into tears, lest I should darken even further the already depressing mood at home. I remained silent and sought an excuse to leave the table.

In the afternoon, I went to say good-bye to my friends. My mother ל"ז, accompanied me. Parting was not easy, for every house I went to triggered memories of friendship and my childhood. To this day, I vividly remember my farewell visits to acquaintances and friends, in each and every house individually. It seems as if I didn't skip a single house in Dereczin, for we had all been friends. Everyone was happy that I was making *aliyah*,

emigrating to - the Land of Israel. They were even envious of me. They wished me all the best and bid me farewell, with their last words being an expression of hope that they would see me again or rejoin me in the land of our ancestors.

By the time evening arrived, people ceased coming to give their last farewell wishes. Father returned from synagogue and prolonged the recital of the *Havdala*, the blessings for the separation of the holy Sabbath from the mundane. It was apparent to me that all of us, and I no exception, wished to lengthen this Sabbath day ad infinitum.

The moment arrived. Mother's countenance was lime-white. Her hands were cold and trembling. She uttered not even one word. She merely pressed me against herself with all her might. She looked into my eyes and I into hers, signaling encouragement to each other, conversing in silence, like only a mother and a daughter can. This is the image of my mother that has remained with me. Refined and sensitive, she was able to bear her hardships without complaints.

I said good-bye to my younger sister, *Zeldeleh*, who remained at home with my mother. My two elder sisters, *Chanaleh* and *Sarah*, came along with Father to accompany me to the train station, as did many of our friends. It was particularly difficult to part with *Chanaleh*. She stood as if paralyzed, near the window of the train station. She didn't budge. She was immersed in a deep sadness. She didn't even utter a murmur. She was very attached to me and she loved me very dearly. When I used to come home in the evening, she used to find a sweet to give to me. Every Saturday morning on the Sabbath, I would open my eyes to see her standing quietly at my bedside ready to engage in conversation.

Father was never dismayed by the reality that he would have to part from his children and maybe not see them for a long period of time. He was not disturbed by the great geographic distance that would separate us.

When he learned that I was planning to leave for Israel, he protested not the slightest. He simply went to synagogue and immersed himself in prayer the entire night. I know it was difficult for him to part with me. Moments before the train departed from the station, my father leapt onto the train and stayed with me until the train began to move.

I remember my father, wrapped in his prayer shawl, steeped in a Holy Book resting in his hands, with a constant smile on his lips.

A nightmare that pursues us, sons and daughters of Dereczin, took place the infamous 10th day of *Ab*. It is on that day that our dear ones died in agony and everything that we held dear went up in flames. Only with great effort, are we successful in preserving in our memories the image of the members of our family as we saw them last: the last day, the last hour, the last moment when we parted and were tom away from one another. In my case, I remember my family as they were that last Sabbath we spent together. This memory is the only monument that I am able to erect for their sake in the depths of my heart.

And This Is How We Emigrated to The Holy Land

By Esther Dlugolansky (Petakh Tikvah)

(Original Language: Hebrew)
Translated By a Nephew of Morris Spector

Once, in the late afternoon on a winter's day, guests arrived at our home in Sinaiska. We were the first place people generally stopped off when they came to our settlement. My father-in-law, *Simkha Dlugolansky* was a sort of 'Soltis' or 'Mukhtar' (like a Mayor) of the settlement, and all of the issues of the place passed under his scrutiny.

We were sitting in the house, when suddenly we heard the rolling wheels of a horse-drawn wagon, which entered our courtyard, carrying two guests. "*Reb Simkha,*" cried the wagon driver cheerfully, "this time I have brought you two distinguished guests that are special," – "Blessings of welcome upon you, please enter," *Reb Simkha* said to them in greeting them by opening the door to his expansive home – "Where are these Jews from, and what is on their minds?"

"I come from the Land of Israel," said *Tzidkov*, as he introduced himself and the friend who accompanied him. When we heard 'the Land of Israel,' our eyes opened wide with wonder, and it appeared to us that we were looking at an entirely different kind of Jew. He was tall, his face was tanned, and his bearing made a very strong impression on us.

After the initial introductions, it became clear to us that the man was an officer with a farm cooperative in the Land of Israel, and he had come to register candidates prepared to make *aliyah* to the Land, seeing that the British Mandate had authorized 400 entry certificates for farmers, to enable the import of laborers to do agricultural work. The news spread quickly among the populace, and in less than an hour our house was filled with most of the settlement residents. The news of the possibility of reaching the Holy Land ignited all hearts. All the young people, including family men and their children, were prepared and ready to leave the settlement, which their parents had established, and in which they had lived for decades.

At that time, it was already evident to us that there was no future for us in Poland. Each and every day we listened to the rising tide of anti-Semitism. From the time that Hitler rose to power in Germany, the hatred of the Jews began to intensify in Poland as well. Life became difficult, and the economic conditions worsened. Despite the fact that the people of the area distanced themselves from politics, and avoided where possible any form of conflict with their Christian neighbors in nearby villages, they would hear from the lips of the gentiles at every opportunity [the epithet] *Zydy do Palestyny.*[109] It was for this reason that the news of a possibility to make *aliyah* to the Holy Land made such an impression, for the spark of zeal for the Holy Land was constant and basic, but we simply did not know at that time how we could approach the [apparently] sealed gates of entry. Only the organized *Halutzim*, who executed their preparations during a few short years, were privileged to singly gain entry on the basis of very, very few entry certificates. And now, an emissary comes from that magical land, with promises of taking us there collectively.

There was great excitement. Almost everyone registered, however we all understood that only a part of us would be selected to go. Everyone did their utmost to improve their standing with the emissaries. One would show his calloused hands, and another his muscles; one would demand *aliyah* for the sake of his children, and a second would demand it just for his own sake. I will not forget those minutes when the emissaries stood ready to depart from our house. We took our leave of them, and I held my little daughter in my arms, and my sole request of them was not to forget us, because it was my desire to see my daughter grow up in our Land. With a smile on their face, and a gentle pinch

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109 Jews, go to Palestine!

on my daughter's cheek, they gave me their promise in saying: 'Don't worry – you will be among the first.' From that day on, the great anticipation, for the sign of news concerning our destiny, began to grow. In everyone's heart was the hope that indeed he – he was precisely the right type of individual to be selected for *aliyah*, and would merit allocation of a certificate. Until one day, which I will never forget, when my father-in-law *Simkha* arrived from Dereczin carrying all the mail, which contained the hoped for approvals. Twelve families were selected from among the 25-30 that had registered. The entire settlement behaved as if drugged. The community divided into two parts – the happy ones, and the disappointed ones. It was as if their hearts told them that their lives hung on the possibility of *aliyah*, and those left behind would be condemned to destruction.

And these were the twelve families who made *aliyah* to the Holy Land:

- ★ *Shmuel Becker, Jacob Becker, Leiba Becker*
  The three with their families.
- ★ *Natan Dlugolansky , Leibkeh Dlugolansky*
  Together with their families
- ★ *Jacob Turetsky* and his family
- ★ *Jacob Spector, Meir Spector*
  Together with their families
- ★ *Michael Kresnovsky, Zelig Kresnovsky*
  Together with their families
- ★ *Shimon Miller, Aryeh Miller*
  And their families.

It is difficult to describe the parting from those Jews who had to remain behind in place. Almost all [who made *aliyah*], left parents or other close kin behind. The sorrow was great.

When we left the settlement, no person stayed behind at home, everyone came to escort us far, far to the distant outskirts of the place. Their only solace was in our commitment to do everything in our power to be reunited with them, this time in our own land. To our great and everlasting sorrow, this remained only a dream for all of us. This desire was never brought to fruition, Hitler's hand reached them, and all were wiped out in the gas chambers, apart from two people of that place who succeeded in surviving among the ranks of the partisans, and those were *Alter Becker & Leah Becker* with their two daughters.

My Last Sabbath in Dereczin

By Saul Gorinovsky
(Original Language: Yiddish)

When I think about our birthplace, I am reminded not only of every street and byway, not only of the pretty little nooks in and around Dereczin, where we whiled away our time as youngsters – I cannot forget the Jews of Dereczin and their daily way of life, the hard and bitter struggle for sustenance, the deprived and often primitive standard of living of most Dereczin families.

How can I forget the degree to which our parents undertook the strain and wore themselves out on behalf of their children, so that God forbid, they should not want for anything, in addition to their concern about the needy in the town!? One thing my

parents understood: the future of the children, the youth, was not going to be in Dereczin, not among those who so often remind us that 'our place is in Palestine.' This, during those years when the Land of Israel was practically closed to us; how many tiring efforts and disappointments everyone had to put up with and survive until he reached the goal of being able to arrive in the Holy Land!

I remember to this day the conversation I had with my beloved parents. Their concept and orientation was first to enable the children to make *aliyah* to the Holy Land, and in time, they too, would come, and in this manner we would once again all be together.

When I received my orders to travel to the Holy Land, the news spread quickly throughout all of Dereczin. On the way to see my grandfathers, whom I visited frequently, both young and old congratulated me, and shook my hand.

The last day of February 1932 will always remain in my memory. It was a Sabbath day, my last Sabbath and my last day in Dereczin. I went to say good-bye from door-to-door, accompanied by my friends.

Here, before my eyes, is that last image, when practically the whole town of Dereczin turned out on Saturday night to escort me to the edge of town, to the road leading to Zelva, to the train, which I rode to Warsaw, and from there to the Land of Israel. That was my last encounter with Dereczin.

That is why the pain is so great when we gather for our annual memorial meeting. Together with that pain, our hearts are filled with solace from the knowledge that a few of our Dereczin brethren were saved, and lived long enough to be privileged to be in the Land of Israel.

My Little Town, Halinka

By Mina Liebreider
(Original Language: Yiddish)

My town of Halinka was tiny, but it was pretty and neat in my view, comprised of good people, good Jews, who lived and worked hard there for many long years.

Surrounding Halinka were the towns and cities of Slonim, Dereczin, Zelva, Baranovich – surrounding the town were green fields and forests, a quiet stream that flowed by the town, where children went to bathe, play and catch fish.

That is the way it was generation after generation, long, long years of quiet, work-filled Jewish existence.

As was the case in other towns, we in Halinka had people who worked in many walks of life: merchants, storekeepers, middlemen, and craftsmen.

We made a living from our market days, and the Christian holidays, when the peasants from the surrounding villages would come to worship in their church, and in passing also make a variety of purchases. Among the Halinka Jews, there were a number who kept a cow for their own personal use, and always had fresh dairy produce in their homes. There were some who made a living from maintaining several cows, made a little bit of butter and some cheeses, and sold them in Slonim. For winter, they would buy a couple of wagon loads of hay, store it up in the attic, in order to have cattle fodder. During the summer, a number of these Jews engaged in dairy making, would jointly hire a cattle tender, who would take the animals out to pasture on land that was rented from a Christian.

Potatoes were stored in the cellars as part of

preparation for winter, along with firewood for heating the house. Bread was baked by each family for its own use, once or twice a week.

Everything was good and satisfying when our hearts were not troubled. In a town like Halinka, you understand, there naturally was a synagogue and a rabbi, and even a cantor and choir. Our rabbi didn't exactly live in the lap of luxury, he lived in a small house, and had a number of children, no evil-eye intended. It was not permitted to sell candles and yeast for the Sabbath [Challah] – that had to be bought from the rabbi. Indeed, it was a little more expensive, but the rabbi needed this as a source of income. Jews with means would occasionally provide support by offering him 'a gift.'

We had neither a Yiddish nor Hebrew school in Halinka, and therefore the children attended the local Polish school. A Hebrew teacher was retained on a separate basis. One well-to-do family retained such a teacher for their exclusive use, while others would pool their resources to hire a Hebrew teacher for their children, who otherwise were required to attend the Polish school. Others sent their children to study in the surrounding towns and cities. We were educated in Dereczin and Slonim. It was not so easy for our parents, until they reached a point where they had made something of their children.

Both we and the *Polonskys* had water mills. During the Christian holidays, the peasants would come to Halinka and the mill for several days, until they finished milling [their grain], packing it, and making flour, and these were days of hard labor both for the peasants and the millers.

One evening, my father went down to the mill to see how the work was coming along, and he heard a gentile say: 'A day will come when we will slaughter all the Jews...' When our father related this to us in an upset tone, it was the first time that the thought entered my mind to get out of Poland and go to the Holy Land, start a new life, and not be ashamed of any kind of work that we would have to do, even if we were ashamed to do it in Halinka.

It was not so easy to get from Halinka to the Land of Israel in those days. One needed to go through years of getting qualified. But anyone who approached this task in earnest, attained the goal. It is only a shame that so few managed to escape the tragic ending. I left home, harboring the expectation that I would yet again see those nearest and dearest to me. If I didn't think this way, I don't know if I would have had the strength to tear myself away from my family. There are times when I believe that I would have been better off had I stayed behind and shared in their bitter fate, and to this day it is not clear to me which alternative is right. The mind and heart do not always align in the directions they suggest.

Now I have only one alternative – to cherish the memory of my family. My good-hearted father was good to everyone. He would treat someone who was poor as if he were a close friend, in order that such a person not feel burdened by his misfortune. He would sit at the table with such a person, and engage him in conversation, in order to help the man feel better. During the *selikhot* season, he would get up before daybreak, and listen to the subdued incantations, mixed with tears. The trees would rustle, and the brook flowed – as if everything was reciting the prayer along with the supplicants, and I would lie in bed, with my eyes closed and a trembling heart.

The Eve of Yom Kippur is especially etched in my mind. Father would call all the children together, and place both his hands on our little heads and bless us. We stood frightened, and with tears in our eyes. The following morning, we would go to the synagogue to see how our fasting parents were faring. I looked at my father, wearing his white *kittel* and prayer shawl, with his good, bright and shining eyes, as if he were an angel. To this day, I cannot describe the feelings that overcame me then during my childhood.

We could talk to our father about any subject, even about modern problems, he was a well-read man, was acquainted with worldly matters, and loved to discourse on any subject with anyone. Through this, he was able to help anyone he could at any time. Even my mother didn't always know the extent to which my father did things for others.

There were such good people in this little town. Such a person was *Shimon Lusky*. Many remember him. During the [Second World] War, he went off to the forests and joined the partisans.

Both Christians and Jews knew him very well, and appointed him to oversee provisioning. Not once did he put his own life in danger to help rescue women and children, who were unwanted in the ranks of the partisan groups.

The war destroyed my town, Halinka, and my entire family. Very few people from the Halinka Jewish populace survived the war. My family was also wiped out, and only my sister *Leah's* daughter, *Esther*, extricated herself from the bloody slaughter.

Enlivenment in Town - An Autobus

By Chaya Beckenstein-Piltzer

(Original Language: Yiddish)

I remember when I was still a little girl, autobuses began to run between Dereczin and Slonim, and also between Dereczin and Zelva.

Toward evening the Slonim Bus would arrive, and when it was seen turning off of Slonim Gasse toward the marketplace – it was like a signal for everyone to start running – big and small, young and old alike – everyone ran for the station near the row stores in the market square. You would have thought the town was on fire!

The bus arrived, the door opened, and everyone waited impatiently to see who would get off. If a townsman was returning from Slonim, then everyone stared at the packages he carried in his hands; look around for a familiar face, immediately everyone began to speculate as to whom a prospective groom was coming, and what would be the size of the wedding dowry he will get.

On the other hand, if this really was a prospective groom coming, then the prospective in-laws were very fearful, and protected him from strange young ladies, in the event someone says an untoward thing about him, and ruin the entire match.

The little kids would run after the driver and the conductor, looking upon them as great heroes. The bus was unloaded, and then re-loaded for its return journey, and once it had left, the town returned to its normal, quiet pace, everyone went home to wait until morning, when a bus from Slonim would again bring a little 'enlivenment' to town...

A Comical Event

By Shayndl Kamenitzer

(Original Language: Yiddish)

I know that our *Yizkor Book* is dedicated to the memory of our murdered brothers and sisters, and the destroyed [town of] Dereczin, and therefore, I thought a long time about whether this book was an appropriate place to record a very funny incident that took place at our house. But since we wish to recollect and tell about everything that we recall of our once, beloved Dereczin, I present this story to my *landsleit*. Many of them certainly remember this story, because all of Dereczin knew about it, and got more than a few laughs from it.

Our house, the house of *Shmuel-Zerakh & Sarah Bernicker*, was in those years after the First World War, the only house at the head of *Kamenitzer Gasse*, near the Zelva highway. Every spring, we were afraid that the runoff from the melting snows which filled the canal at the side of the highway, would overflow, and flood our little house. There was no other house around us. Near our house was *Der Vian*,[110] and during the war years from 1914 to 1920, when cavalry and other divisions of various armies would stage themselves along the *Vian*, their horses, more than once would come off the road and nibble on the tasty straw on our roof thatching.

It was not only the horses that caused us damage, but also the soldiers in all of these divisions. From all the armies and horses, our miserable little shack was turned into a complete wreck, and we were left with no choice but to institute fundamental repairs.

The workers whom we hired to repair our house asked us to move all of our possessions out of doors, and they stayed outside for quite a number of days and nights. Understand that we had to keep a careful watch over these things, otherwise they would have quickly been stolen. So we alternated in standing watch outside, and everyone used to watch and was raw.

Longer time residents of Dereczin will recall, that anyone who needed to go from *Kamenitzer Gasse* to *Zelver [Gasse]*, or back, needed to pass by our house. When they were working on our house, people literally would walk through our furniture, bedding, possessions and kitchen utensils, which we had put outside.

Well, everything would have gone well, were it not for the attitude of my brother, *Yitzhhak Bernicker* (known in Dereczin as *Yitzhak der Kamenitzer*). He did not feel like spending the whole night on watch. He went off to the butchers in the marketplace, where stray dogs used to hang out. He grabbed one of these dogs, about the size of a young calf, brought him home, and tied him to the leg of a table, in order that he serve as the night watch for the goods we had set outside the house. My brother himself, went off to get a restful night's sleep. The dog crawled underneath the table, and also went off into a deep sleep.

I remember quite well, how in the summertime, early in the morning, the shepherds would take out their herds of cattle to their early morning pasture, which was called 'the early morning feeding.' These herds also had to pass by our house. One such herd went out to pasture, and when it passed by our house, a young calf was curious as to what kind of four-footed animal was lying under a table. I appeared to be a calf. So, the young beast stuck its head under the table to better sniff what it was that was lying under there. At that precise moment, the dog awoke with a start, and was frightened by the horns of the young bullock. The bullock in turn, was frightened by the dog's barking. When the dog jumped up on its four legs, the young bullock wanted to run away, and then raised its head, causing the table to rest on its head and neck. Scared to death, the young bullock began to run with the table on its head, pursued by the dog, which is tied by its neck to one leg of the table.

The young bullock, with the table on its head, and the dog behind, ran right into the middle of the herd, and stampeded all the cows which scattered over all the area. The young bullock ran towards the river, constantly shaking its head in an attempt to dislodge the table and free itself. The dog also was constantly tugging, in order to disconnect itself from the table and from the fleeing animal.

My brother and the herder ran after them – my brother wanted to save the table, and the herder wanted to save the animal. But the beast had so shaken up the table that the table fell apart completely into a bunch of boards.

The unfamiliar stray dog ran off somewhere or another, together with one leg of the table to which he was tethered.

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110 A long unpaved road. Remarkably, a road with a similar name existed in nearby Zelva.

My brother gathered up the boards and the three [remaining] table legs, and brought them home.

It took the herder the rest of the day to round up his scattered cows...

On those days, when we remind ourselves of our nearest and dearest, and in our ancestral home, there is a desire to remember the funny things from what was once a happy Dereczin. That is why I have brought once of those light episodes here.

A Master of the Tanach

By Meir Ziskind

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Of all my teachers, *Reb Moshe* – my *Tanach* teacher – has etched himself into my memory to the greatest extent. He was taken for a good teacher in town. Apart from his appearance – proud in stance with a well-kept red beard, and penetrating eyes, he was an outstanding *Tanach* teacher, and a good explicator. His personality made a great impression on his students.

He had no children of his own; his family life was not peaceful. He and his wife constantly quarreled. She – his exact opposite – short, scrawny, and sharp-tongued – did not understand him. Being unfulfilled and by nature a brooder, he sublimated himself through his scholarship – putting his entire fiery energy into teaching young boys the *Tanach.*

A man with excellent diction, and a talent for weaving a good tale, he loved to relate at great length in Yiddish, the terse constructs of the Prophets. His spirited descriptions ignited boyish hearts and touched their imagination; the images from the *Tanach* became etched into their young minds – never to be forgotten.

Reb Moshe also had a talent for drawing; he loved drawing a complete picture of the Tabernacle and the Holy Temple for his class, with all the details included, and to cut out the paraphernalia of the High Priest from colored paper – just as it was described in the Pentateuch – and thereby elating his students.

Grammar

Reb Moshe constantly inculcated grammar into his pupils: "Hebrew without its grammatical rules cannot be; it is like a garden with no boundaries – chaos," that was how he would express himself. He would love, in the middle of a lesson, to stop at specific words, and then completely parse them. The students were not particularly fond of this discipline; grammar was for them a real letdown.

Once, when he was teaching masculine and feminine declensions, the door opens; in walks the father of one of the boys. Being a miller, the man was covered from head to toe in flour dust. It was not for nothing that he was nicknamed 'the corpse.' He really looked like he was dead: his clothes, the hair on his head, his beard and eyebrows, were as white as snow. When he walked into the room, the little children greeted him by crying out: "Here comes the corpse!" "The corpse" was not any sort of scholar. As he listened to the *Rebbe* teach, the entire issue didn't register with him. In a choked voice (his nostrils were caked with flour) he addresses the *Rebbe*: "Why is this necessary?" *Reb Moshe* answered that one could not properly address a man with the same language as one uses to address a woman. Seeing that the miller still doesn't understand the point, the *Rebbe* attempts to clarify it to him as follows: "Every week I buy a chicken from a peasant woman for the Sabbath meal. I speak to her in Russian – using masculine declension, when in fact I should be using feminine declension. Do you know why? Because I am ignorant of Russian grammar."

The miller didn't grasp *Reb Moshe's* words. He bent over to *Reb Moshe,* and murmured: "When I went to *Heder*, we didn't know about such things."

"Where Did It Happen?"

Reb Moshe's Heder was in a wooden house which was divided by a wall. On one side, the owner lived, and in the second side – the *Rebbe*. The *Heder* itself – small and long – with two windows looking out on the yard, which was always busy with the sounds of all manner of barnyard fowl: chickens, ducks and geese.

In the summertime, the neighborhood women would stand underneath the open windows and listen in on the *Rebbe's* teachings – while sighing, whining and blowing their noses. The boys sat around a long table; the *Rebbe* – at the head, with his back to an oven, conducted the class.

A restless man, he taught while standing – sitting down only during recess, when he took a sip of hot tea from a glass, and then stood up again.

I am reminded of a winter's night – outside a major snowstorm was raging; the room was so heated up, that the warmth pervaded every appendage of the body. Teaching the verse from Ezekiel 16:6,

ם תּ ד ם ׳ ו א ם ל ך ב ד ם ׳ ח ׳
וַ ד ם ׳ ח ׳ ׃

(And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee [when thou wast] in thy blood, Live!; yea, I said unto thee [when thou wast] in thy blood, Live!)

Reb Moshe waxed with ecstasy, and with great spirit, told a story to us at great length, portrayed to us in great detail: of an individual walking in the fields who finds an abandoned little girl – barefoot, naked and covered in blood. He picks her up from the wet field and brings her home, binds her wounds and dresses her regally, and in the end, she transgresses against him.

The *Rebbe's* storytelling was so animated and engaging, that the lady neighbor on the other side of the wall, hearing this story, ran into the *Heder,* and cried out:*"Reb Moshe! Reb Moshe!* I beg you, [tell me], where did this happen?"

Cheek-Pinching

Teaching *The Song of Songs* to children was no simple matter in those days. Apart from the literal translation of the words, students were required to have an understanding of the Commentaries of *Rashi* – to derive the explanation of the parable in the sentence – the role playing of the Lord and the Children of Israel.

It was the beginning of spring. The snow had begun to melt; the rivers began to flow with the runoff. The sun became warmer: young green sprouts began to poke out of the black earth. It was before Passover, and everyone was a little more light-hearted. *Reb Moshe* was teaching his class *The Song of Songs.* Having a love for a well-turned phrase, he conveyed the beautiful imagery of the verses in *The Song of Songs* with a great deal of feeling and fire.

Finishing the first chapter, *Reb Moshe* declared a short recess, sat down and wiped the sweat off his brow, took a sip of tea, and signaled to me with his finger to approach: "Nu, *Meir* repeat – let me hear [what you know]!" I interpreted the verses for him, and with great intensity and pleasure, wove into my explanation of the parable of the verses – in accordance with *Rashi's* explanation. The *Rebbe* was simply beside himself with satisfaction, and he gave me a cheek-pinch, saying: "May you be blessed!" The *Rebbe's* fingers were like a pair of pliers; my cheek hurt; tears welled up in my eyes.

On my way home, my cheek burned like fire. As I came into the house, my mother immediately saw the bruised cheek. Wringing her hands, she wanted to know if I had "once again gotten into a fight." "No, mother! I haven't fought with anyone. The *Rebbe* did this by pinching me."

My mother was beside herself with anger, grabbed me by the hand, and we ran off to the *Rebbe* so she could complain. Pointing to my cheek, she asked the *Rebbe* if it was true that he had indeed pinched me. The *Rebbe,* in an explanation, clarified for her that her son had *earned* a cheek-pinch because he had explained *The Song of Songs* so well.

My mother, seeing no connection between proficiency in *The Song of Songs* and a swollen cheek, addressed the *Rebbe* as follows: "*Reb Moshe,* I implore you, please don't pinch anymore! But if you deem that he is deserving of a pinch, be so kind as to let me know; I will pinch him myself!"

A Fire in Town

By Leah Eliovich-Yatvitsky

(Original Language: Yiddish)

I remember the Great Fire of 1924. In the middle of a perfectly clear day, the fire broke out in the middle of the *Neuer Gasse.* The wind got hold of the flames and blew them over all the neighboring houses.

The roofs, made of old shingles and thatch straw, caught fire quickly, and were lifted into the air, carrying the conflagration to the houses near and far.

People began to try and save their belongings by packing things in sacks and sheets that they found immediately at hand, dragging these parcels as far away from the fire that they could, and then returning on the run to see what else they could salvage – and then finding their houses engulfed by flames. There were those who barely managed to save their young children and emerged from this conflagration literally 'naked,' with no possessions whatsoever.

The town fire-fighters worked bitterly and hard to contain the blaze, but they lacked the proper equipment with which to do so. Everything worked against them: the streams, in the summertime were not full of water; water had to be drawn from them in pails on the end of a chain; the pails had to be carried from the stream to the fire by hand (a bucket brigade) – the fire-fighters did not have horses of their own, and they were forced to ask for horses from the Jewish wagoners, who were not always around, or from the Christians, who were not inclined to provide them, and had driven them off during the fire to the *Vian.*

And by the time a pail of water reached a burning house, the flames had [consumed it and] moved on.

The cries of the fire-fighters, who were fighting the burgeoning flames literally with their bare hands, mixed with the wailing of little children and the womenfolk filled the air, but none of this was effective in putting out the fire...

The flames first began to die down when they reached an empty space.

And after the fire – ruins, smoldering pieces of lumber and blocks of wood from walls and roofs, blackened chimney stacks, and around the burned down houses, dazed little children wandering aimlessly, the fire victims poking through the remnants to see if there is something left to salvage from the blaze. They wander about with a sense of homelessness, as warm-hearted neighbors and relatives welcome them into their own homes.

I Met With My Very First Teacher

By Rachel Alper

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Mrs. *Rukhamah Ziskind[-Abelovich]* from the United States, the niece of *Reb Leib Abelovich* ז"ל, invited me to meet with my very first teacher, and I will never forget this boon!

We started out on our journey on *Lag B'Omer* of 1953 on an express train from New York [City] to Harvard in Connecticut.[111] I will shamelessly admit, that on that morning I felt no less as moved than on the day that I found out that I would be counted among his pupils. During that ride of several hours, the street that led from the house of my parents in Dereczin to the very lane on which my teacher and *Rebbe's* house stood, on a high stone foundation, was before my eyes along with the appearance of that house, the way the rooms were laid out inside, with the *Shtibl* between them, in which my father and teacher, *Reb Yosheh* would give lessons to the beginning students in the afternoon hours of the day. I was reminded of that lane on which my teacher's house stood, along with the wondrous stories of the well of *Henya "die Groiseh,"* who inspired terror in me even before I had ever met her. These memories of my teacher's house and of the well named for *Henya* brought back the fragrance of the tanner's house which was nearby, and the mock fights with sharpened sticks that we carried on with the pupils of *Reb Abraham Izaakovich.* Fights of this nature inevitably caused me to get an extra hair shampoo during the week (an unpleasant prospect for a young lady with long locks), and to the protagonists as well, to prove to them that they could not vanquish me so easily.

I imagined what this imminent meeting would be like at my teacher's house, accompanied by a long silence – a typical silence of those people sunk into memories of the past, and regretting the passage of days that can no longer be retrieved. I was concerned that my appearance would emphasize his own advanced age, and impair his spirit.

How different it all turned out to be in reality!

I met my teacher outside his house. He had gone out for a swim on an early spring morning day. I recognized him without anyone identifying him to me. It looked to me that the years had hardly left their mark upon him. His stance had not diminished! His sallow complexion was, literally as it was in days gone by, when I sat at my desk by his side, as he organized his folders and notebooks on the table in front of him. His dress – not extravagant, his beard unkempt, and his voice soft.

He know I was coming, and when he saw me, he was hit with a wave of emotion. He was left speechless.

As we entered his daughter's house, where he lived, he began to pepper me with questions – about myself, my father's house, if it still existed, about pupils and people from all different neighborhoods.

How astonished I was at the precise knowledge he had of the character of all his students from then! It was as if he was reading from an open book on the days that I spent in his *Heder*, on the happenings of my childhood, and my academic accomplishments relative to my sister.

A look of grief covered his face, when he learned that my brother, *David* and my sister *Masha* and their families, were among the victims of the Holocaust.

From his memories of his two students, the *Alper* sisters, he moved to tell about the '*Alper* House' which cast its influence on all its surroundings and set the character of an entire generation of our town. With a sense of yearning, he told of the evenings when he would come to our home after a hard

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111 Harvard University is in Cambridge, MA. This reference may be incorrect.

twelve-hour day of work, in order to read [the paper] *HaTzefira.* With special emphasis, he recalled the boiling hot glass of tea that my mother ל"ז, would bring to him, and above all – the conversations with *David!* "Ay-ay!" – he would crinkle his eyes – "a conversation with *David*...!" And he added: "I never once let an opportunity for that pass by."

Reb Leib was extremely proud of those of his students who achieved professional status as educators, but no less regarding the one who became a physician. And how great was his interest in everything going on in the field of education in Israel!

He was delighted to hear me praise the folders and notebooks that he used to inculcate reading skills into his students, and the animal pictures drawn on them. "Don't forget," – he emphasized – "I learned the art of teaching reading from Dr. *Moshe Cahanstam* ,ל"ז.

He let out a sigh and continued: "I did not complete the course work in Grodno. I didn't have the physical strength to complete these studies under conditions bordering on starvation. I wasn't the only one in these circumstances."

I described to him the appearance of the classroom, in which we sat and listened attentively to Torah teachings, the black board and the white chalk, whose boards caused us so much concern. I recalled to him the dictionary with the yellow cover that stood next to the coat closet, and how he our teacher, would consult it from time to time.

He was full of wonder at the way I was able to describe to him those winter days when we were in his *Heder*, when the cold became intense, and the snow covered the face of the earth, and we didn't have a noon recess. And how our parents were in the habit of providing us with a cooked meal in a special pot, especially for *Heder.* The teacher's wife, *Chaykeh* ל"ז, would keep these prepared dishes in her oven, and when the hour arrived (usually close to sunset!) Our teacher would sit at the head of the table and we [his students] around him, with our meals before us.

It appears to me today, if my memory does not deceive me, that the teacher's portion was the most meager of all, but I shall never forget the white napkin spread before him, and his care in assuring that we properly made the blessing for washing our hands before we ate.

My teacher asked me to read some Hebrew for him in the Sephardic accent. I read to him from the second chapter of Psalms:

"Why are the Nations Moved..."

Initially, the sound of the accent was strange to him, but as I continued – the smile on his lips widened.

He had a great deal to ask about the institutions of culture and *Haskalah* in Israel, and he suddenly remembered that he had sent a book to the international library in Jerusalem.

Had they received it? – I promised him I would search for the book. A long day, filled with interest and emotion passed by quickly.Towards evening, he went up to his room, and then returned. With a trembling hand, he gave me a memento of my visit to him that day: a *mezuzah* for the wall, about 20-25 cm. long, encased in metal, hand wrought by *Reb Yudel* the Scribe of Dereczin.

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The following day, I had to justify my meeting to the Professor Charlotte Windsor of the university. Her conclusion was that "Your visit was a good deed for your teacher."

But there were "deeds" without number that I uncovered in my teacher, "deeds" in which one can revel in the goodness of all teachers, and Jewish teachers [especially].

It was not for nothing that I was motivated to see him after a hiatus of decades. I will always carry his memory with me, and pass it along to those that I teach.

My Family That Was Wiped Out

By Shoshana Shapiro-Nozhnitsky
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Many years have gone by since those years of the Holocaust, in which all the members of my extensive family were killed, the family of *Hanan-Yaakov Nozhnitsky*, his wife, sons, daughters, and my grandmother along with them. Two sons, four daughters, my brothers and sisters, were all married, and they fell at the hands of their pursuers along with their children.

The pain will not be forgotten, just as the home of my mother and father will never be forgotten. My father was a man of many means, engaged in commerce and community affairs, providing his support in any activity that was for the public good. He was especially concerned with providing medical help to those in need, as a member of the *Linat Tzedek*. My mother assisted him in this regard, by the decoction of summer fruits into medicinal preparations, for distribution to those needing such preparations when they were sick, to help them revive themselves. Our house was always full of jars of these preparations.

My father was also a *Gabbai* of the *Neuer Mauer* Synagogue and was active in its burial society, out of consideration to show respect for the deceased of our congregation.

When I was ready to make *aliyah* in 1935, my parents objected strenuously, as did many other Jewish parents of that time. I was stubborn, and stood my ground, and it was then that my father said to my mother: "Let's let her go, apparently that is where her fortune awaits her. Who is to know, but we might yet meet again. At the very least, she will save her own future..."

My father did not realize the prophetic nature of his words. The clouds of the Nazis already hung in the skies of Europe, and in a few short years, my entire family fell at the hands of the German murderers.

Dereczin No Longer Exists

By Dora Birnbaum-Rothstein
(Original Language: Yiddish)

My dear and warm-hearted Dereczin, you are no more. All that remains are those sweet memories of my childhood, and of my early youth, and they are so fresh in my memory that they will remain there for my entire life.

Dereczin, like hundreds of other towns and villages in Poland, Lithuania, and Byelorussia, was destroyed, and its Jews systematically killed by Hitler's murderers. My dear parents, *Samson & Adela Rothstein*, my brother *Yosheh*, and little sister *Masheleh*, were cut down together with thousands of other Jews, on that black, bloody Sabbath day in Slonim – the city to which Dereczin was bound like to an older sister. The same fate overtook both these neighboring towns, and more that one citizen of Dereczin lies in the graves of our brethren surrounding Slonim.

Our town, Dereczin, was small, but it was so precious and dear to me, that I see all of its virtues, its grace and Jewish good-heartedness, when I stop to think about it. My family was always involved with Dereczin, even during the time when we lived in Slonim.

I fear that there are indeed very few Dereczin residents still alive who remember my grandfather, *Meir-Yehoshua Wolfowitz*, and my grandmother, *Chana-Chayeh*. My grandfather was the *feldscher* of Dereczin. My mother *Adela*, was a midwife.

Each street and byway in Dereczin remains yet so fresh in my memory, the green fields, gardens and pastures that surrounded the houses of the town, with the large, many-branched fruit trees and the clean fresh air, suffused with the odors of greenery and fruit. And I cannot forget the Derecziners themselves, close and distant, known and unfamiliar to me – each a special good-hearted person, each working at their own trade or business, in order to make a living, and often not a particularly easy living, but peaceful and tranquil, full of hope for a better outcome in life.

I see the big marketplace in the middle of town before me now, diagonally opposite our wall, where the peasants from the surrounding villages would come for market days and fairs, to sell their produce and buy those things that they needed for their homes and work. Also, on certain days, the marketplace was full of peasant wagons, with people who were sick, who had come to my grandfather for medicinal help. My grandfather inherited this profession from his father and grandfather, going back many generations, and he was an accomplished professional in his field, both loved and trusted by Jews and Christians of Dereczin, and the area far and wide. He was committed heart and soul to his patients, he helped everyone whether rich or poor, day and night, whenever his help was required.

My mother, the midwife, also followed in the footsteps of her father, She was also dedicated to her profession, and very strongly attached to those families whose children she helped bring into the world, she fully comprehended the circumstances in each and every household and each family, guarded and cared for her patients, and in turn was valued and appreciated by them. She was the closest friend to those who were giving birth in many Dereczin families.

There was another midwife in Dereczin, *Nekhama Manikov*. While she and my mother competed with each other, the children of both were good friends, and to this day I am friendly with *Nekhama's* daughter, *Sonia Manikov*, who today lives in Israel with her husband, *Dr. Rockover*.

Diagonally opposite our wall, on the second side of the marketplace, were the large, beautiful houses of the large Dereczin families, the *Rabinoviches & Alpers*, who over the course of [many] years, had a great influence on the cultural and community life

of the Dereczin Jewish populace. The *Rabinoviches*, and especially *Chaim Rabinovich*, were active, specifically up to the end of the First World War. Afterwards, they transferred their community activities to Slonim, and were also well-known there for their activities in community institutions and municipal government. The influence of the *Alpers* was especially felt in the areas of education, and Zionist and *Halutz* activities. They were the founders of the *Tarbut* School, from which I also graduated. I remember well to this day, how our teacher, *Malka Alper* took leave of us, her pupils, and how we escorted her to the train for her subsequent trip to the Land of Israel. I cried at the time, and for weeks and months afterwards was lonesome for my good-hearted teacher. We felt precisely the same when *David Alper*, and his wife *Shoshana* left Dereczin to go to Pinsk, where accept a broader mandate for the national development of Jewish youth. And I cannot forget all the other teachers, who enriched our understanding, and implanted in our young hearts and minds the love of our people, the concepts of justice, and the hope for a national rebirth in our historic homeland, the Land of Israel.

These are memories from the far, distant past. They return me to my childhood, and years of early youth. I would so very much like to show respect for the memories of all Dereczin families, especially those from which neither a trace nor survivor remains, and for whom there is no one to mourn them, or to revere their memory. I cannot forget my happy childhood years, those times when I learned and played together with the sons and daughters of Dereczin families. Later, each of us went off in their own direction, but we remained good friends and associates, and with many of them, we used to meet during the summer months in Dereczin, [while] others emigrated to America, Argentina, or made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

Also, when together with my brother, *Yosheh*, we studied at the gymnasium in Slonim, after our father had become the director of the Cantor's choir and as a music and song teacher at the gymnasium, and in other Slonim schools, – were still remained attached to Dereczin and spent our summers vacations there. Those were beautiful years of our youth, and I don't forget those summer get-togethers with our friends who came together from all manner of cities, from gymnasiums and universities, in order to take recreation in our tranquil, green hometown. And I can recall those sweet evenings, when we would all get together, sojourning on our large porch, talking and joking, singing and playing on mandolins, pianos, and listening to my brother *Yosheh* play the violin. The beautiful strains of the music would waft through our open windows, across the streets and byways of Dereczin, and lull the citizenry into a sweet sleep.

Later, after my grandfather passed away, my mother and grandmother also moved to Slonim, where my mother also worked as a midwife, both privately, and together with the well-known Slonim midwife, *Yocheh*, in the newly established maternity clinic. It was much easier for us this way, and *Yosheh* also worked as a secretary, and in time, I left to go to Warsaw for two and a half years, where I completed studies to become a midwife. After completing my studies, I took a position in Zelva, a town neighboring on Dereczin, and worked there with great intensity until 1941. I married *Chaim Pasmanik* from Kosovo, and we had a baby daughter, *Bella*, we opened a nice shoe store, "Bata," and we lived happily and in contentment.

That is how our life proceeded, quietly and beautifully, until Hitler's deluge flooded the entire Polish country with blood and destruction, annihilated cities and towns, among which was our beloved Dereczin.

From my entire, large family, I am the sole survivor, literally as if by a miracle, tossed about in ghettoes and partisan camps, losing my own little family, and built from the start my [current] family and house, with my husband *Adek Birnbaum*, with whom we survived the seven circles of Hell, until we managed to come to America, with the help of my aunt, *Rachel Rabinovich* from San Francisco.

My husband also comes from a musically gifted

family, and was together with his brothers in the choir of his father, a well-known Cantor in Cracow up to the Second World War. My husband was a graduate of the Cracow [Musical] Conservatory. It is for this reason, that my new life is also bound up with the musical tradition that so dominated the lives of the family of my parents.

The music lives again in our family, our two sons, who carry the names of both our fathers, also inherited the talents of their grandparents. They are studying music, and hope to attain their ambitions as concert pianists.

Despite the fact that our home rings with the sound of joyous music, the great tragedy that befell our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, lives within our hearts along with the terrifying memories of life in the ghettoes and forests. I bow my head in honor of my dearest, for my dear hometown of Dereczin, and for those sacrificial victims and heroes.

A Visit to My Hometown

By Rukhamah Ziskind-Abelovich

(Original Language: Yiddish)

With a warm feeling for my hometown Dereczin, I would like to relate certain specific events that have remained etched in my memory. I left my hometown while I was still young, but like everyone, there are memories that one carries around for one's entire life.

I am reminded of my very first days in school. It was an elementary level *Heder* which was founded by my father, *Yitzhak-Avraham* ע"י, who was a very intelligent Jew. When he was young, he dreamed of traveling to study at the Vilna Teachers Institute, but his father, that is my grandfather, *Reb Yosheh*, ע"י, opposed the idea. He argued that it would be necessary to write on the Sabbath there...

My father was also active in the town's community life, he was a *Gabbai* in the *Alter Mauer [Synagogue]*, and involved in the *Bikur Kholim Society* (Care & visitation to the Sick). I can still remember to this day, how those who were ill would come to him for a note to take to the doctor or the pharmacist. These were people from poorer life circumstances, who lacked the means to heal themselves. My father would do everything for them, to anticipate them, and to provide them with needed medical help.

Between the afternoon *Mincha* and evening *Maariv* service, my father would study a page from the *Gemara* with other *balebatim.*

My first teacher was a young man from Slonim, *Pinkhas Itzkowitz.* After him, we were transferred to study with *Abraham Izaakovich*, known by the nickname, *Der Mikhoisker.*

The classroom was equipped with desks and a blackboard on which one wrote in chalk. We would come to class early on a Sabbath morning. The teacher's son, *Motkeh*, who was a student at the Vilna Teachers Institute, would read to us from the works of *Sholom Aleichem*, and from the works of Russian authors.

I remember well both my boy and girl friends with whom I studied. I think none of them is still alive – whether they died a natural death, or were martyred [in the Holocaust].

After having lived in America for many years, I

came back for a visit to my hometown in 1927. This was a great experience for both me and my family. I found many changes among my family and also in Dereczin. My brother *Shmuel* came to Warsaw to meet me, and I traveled home together with him. From America, I was accompanied by *Berel* the Hatmaker's son, who was visiting *Velvel Walitsky.*

As our auto got closer to Dereczin, I could see from a distance a group of young boys running ahead of us. I then asked my brother why they were running this way, and he said to me, that my [other] brother *Hanan* was running on ahead with his friends, to tell everyone that the auto with the American guests was arriving. We drove into town early in the morning, and found all the stores [still] closed, with almost the entire town of Dereczin come to the marketplace, to see how the visiting American would greet her mother and brothers. It is difficult to describe the [ensuing] scene.

When things did quiet down, everyone went off to their respective work or business. Then relatives, friends and acquaintances began to arrive to greet me. The first to come was *Boma*, that is, *Abraham-Shlomo Grachuk*, who became the head of his family after his father's death. Among the others, *Henokh Alper* also came, a long-standing good friend of many years. *Mendel Feldman*, a good family friend also came to see me.

I found much change in the town itself. Not withstanding the difficult economic circumstances of the Jewish populace, or the pressure from the Polish regime, a young intelligentsia had developed in Dereczin, which was active on many fronts of Jewish cultural life. At that time, there was a very good library in Dereczin, which also served as a youth center, and a place to gather for discussions about all manner of issues. One was torn to go into the larger world, but there was an absence of understanding as to how this could be done, or where to go. At that time there was also a drama theater in Dereczin, which that same summer put on the play, 'The Duke' by *Alter Katsizna.* The performance was held on Saturday night in the barracks. Everyone large and small came to the performance, because everyone had someone who had a part in the play. My brother, *Issachar* was also among the artists, and I sat with our family members and worried that he perform his role well. Everything came off as intended.

I felt particularly close to my brother *Shmuel*. He was at that time already married to *Bashkeh Plotkin*, and we would sit up talking all night. From time to time, my mother would also sit and talk with us, but we would send her off to bed, since we didn't want her to stay up all night. For me, these were very special days, weeks and months. My younger brothers would go off to spend time with their friends, and in the evening, would return home to tell us what was going on in town. Once again, I went for walks to the *Puster Barg*, to the fields and parks that were the pride of Dereczin. I met with a large number of townspeople, because almost everyone had a relative in America, and wanted to know what life was like there. I spent quite a bit of time with the *Alpers*. *Malka* was already in the Land of Israel, and the other sisters would come home for summer vacations. We would meet often and keep company.

I spent six months in Dereczin, until it came time for me to return to America. I stayed for my father's *Yahrzeit*, which comes out on the 19th Day of Heshvan.

We rented a sleigh, and on a cold snowy morning, rode out to my father's grave site. In the evening, my brothers went to the Synagogue to recite the *Kaddish.* I left a few days later.

The parting was very difficult. My brother *Shmuel* again accompanied me to Warsaw, from which I departed for America.

Let these recollections serve as a monument to my town, Dereczin, which vanished with the smoke, along with my nearest and dearest who were martyred in God's holy Name.

I Was a Witness to a False Accusation

By Leah Shlechter-Shapiro
(Original Language: Hebrew)

After my aunt *Elka Savisky* became a widow, it became difficult for her to manage her store, which was a distance from where she lived. She eventually made the decision to move the store to her place of domicile. On one occasion before the Christian Easter holiday, a gentile came into the store whom she had never before seen, and asked for some flour on credit, adding that her husband would give him such without cash. When she refused, he asked to purchase grain ready for milling. She took some newspaper that was on her counter top, and used it to wrap the grain for him, and he went away.

After this, he returned again, saying that he had obtained some money, and asked her whether she had any Challah that she had baked from this flour. When she left the room to get the Challah, the gentile surreptitiously hid a package of saccharine on top of a shelf, which was illegal to sell, subject to a severe penalty. When my aunt returned, this reprobate told her that he didn't like the Challah, and he left.

A short time later, a constable appeared and asked her if she sells any saccharine. When she answered in the negative, he went directly to the very spot on the shelf, and took out a box of saccharine wrapped in newspaper. She immediately grasped that this was a setup by the gentile customer. She [also] recognized the piece of newspaper as the one in which she had wrapped the grain. The piece of newspaper matched the piece that was still on her counter top.

A trial took place in the district court in Slonim, I, together with *Resha Kulakowski*, the daughter of *Abraham Herschel* gave testimony: while we were standing in the doorway of the store, we saw the gentile reach out with his hand to the shelf, as if he was looking at something.

And he, from his side, brought witnesses who testified, as it were, that they had actually purchased saccharine from her, but the judges were not satisfied with their testimony. As evidence before the judge, the piece of newspaper was presented, together with the newspaper from which it was torn. My aunt was acquitted, and the gentile was obligated to pay all court costs.

In a second trial against him, which was conducted in Dereczin, he was asked from where he had obtained the saccharine. He continued to claim that he had bought it from my aunt. Here, as well, his witnesses were not seen to be credible.

This judgement roused considerable interest among the Jewish populace in Dereczin, that is to say that on the day of the trial, which was on Friday, the courtroom was filled.

At the end, the perpetrator was sentenced to several years imprisonment. The, [finally], we breathed a little easier.

My Brother Leibeh

By Leah Elyovich-Yatwitsker
(Original Language: Yiddish)

We had a very difficult childhood. As refugees from the First World War, relocated along with the other Jews from the war zone, we arrived in Dereczin. Shortly thereafter, our father died, and our mother was left a widow with three orphaned children, whom she had to support and raise during those harsh war years. Our bitter lot in life consisted of hunger, need, cold, and being tossed around from place to place.

Firstly after the end of the war, when contact with America was resumed, our relatives located us, and they began to provide us with assistance, and for the first time began to eat full meals to satisfaction.

My brothers *Leibeh & Chaim* studied at a *Talmud Torah*. The rabbi of Kolonia[112] arranged for them to say Kaddish for their father. I remember how *Leibeh*, who was yet a small boy, would recite the Kaddish, under the oversight of the rabbi of Kolonia, while standing on a bench.

Shortly after he completed studies at the *Talmud Torah*, my mother ז"ל, sent him to the Yeshivah in Slonim. He was a diligent student there, and the Head of the Yeshivah was very pleased with him.

Quite suddenly, *Leibeh* joined up with the *Halutz* organization. He said that he no longer wanted to eat 'the bread of charity' as a Yeshivah student, but rather to work, and support himself by working, and make *aliyah* as a *Halutz* to the Land of Israel. My mother was absolutely beside herself, wept, and begged him – but he no longer wanted to attend the Yeshivah.

Leibeh was a well-informed *Halutz*, and active in the labor movement for the Land of Israel. In those years there was already a strong *Betar* movement in Dereczin, to which I also belonged. *Leibeh* and I often had violent arguments over ideological matters. At that time, being still a very young girl, I had little understanding, and *Leibeh* would argue that as working people, we should belong to the *Halutz* movement and not to *Betar*, whom he would even go so far as to characterize as 'fascists.'

The conflicts between *Betar* and the left-wing Zionist organizations became even sharper because of the competition between these two organizing forces in Dereczin, one driven by *Betar* and the other by *HeHalutz*. I remember the *Betar* leadership having a house on the *Slonim Gasse*. There wasn't enough work even for one such organization. The leadership would undertake to hew wood, carry water, and in the wintertime, chop ice from the [frozen] streams.

At the *Betar* meetings, my brother *Leibeh* would create disruptions by interrupting speakers, and asking all sorts of questions, which would often leave the speakers at a loss for a reply.

My friends and I would take sides against my brother, and not once I would come home in tears. In the meantime, the Second World War broke out. My brothers ran off to the forests, fought with the partisans, and thanks to their brotherly concern for me, I survived, and came to the Land of Israel.

My brother *Leibeh* was an effective partisan. He was among those who attacked Dereczin, Ruda Jatkova, together with other Dereczin partisans, burned down the mill at Kozlovshchina, and carried out many other campaigns.

He fell, a victim of anti-Semitism which was not in short supply even in the partisan ranks. From being almost superhumanly tired one night, he fell asleep at his watch, with gun in hand. The Christian command of the unit decreed the death penalty for him, as they were wont to do with Jews.

It was in this way that my brother *Leibeh*, the heroic partisan, met his end in the forest.

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112 While not explicit, it would seem this refers to Kolonia-Sinaiska.

My Father's House on the Schulhof

By Liza Katz-Bialosotsky
(Original Language: Hebrew)

My father's unforgettable house stands before my eyes, along side the memories of those years that I passed in Dereczin during my beautiful childhood. It seems to me that the house stands there yet as I left it, before I left for the Holy Land, in the courtyard of the Synagogue, the *Schulhof*.
Our home was built with 'high windows.' I understood this in its simplest terms, namely, that the windows were inserted high, in order to prevent people from the outside from looking in, as opposed to the other small houses in town.

The courtyard of the Synagogue was surrounded with all of the *Bet Midrash* buildings, and on side, the pretty house of the Rabbi also stood out prominently. What else could be missing from this lovely courtyard?

The old cemetery bordered it as well on one side. With effort, protruding past the gate, when we peeked in sometimes out of curiosity, were old gravestones, overgrown with weeds and plants from the passages of days and years. We would occasionally hear stories about the old cemetery from the elders of the town, stories that they in turn had heard from their fathers before them, there grandfathers and great-grandfathers. Stories would circulate among us about demons and spirits that wandered among the graves, and these stories were enough to instill fear and terror in us. As we matured, we came to understand that this was only a place to be treated with sacred respect.

Most of our years were spent in play in this courtyard. Everything centered on my father's house. When the students would assemble to march with their flags, they would first gather in our large yard. The older folks would come out for the blessing of the new moon, with song and prayer, understandably only in this large courtyard adjacent to the Synagogue itself. And in contrast, a funeral procession taking the deceased to his final resting place would come through here, with the exclamation, 'charity will avert death' communicating something bad and frightening.

And how our happiness waxed when we learned that a wedding would be celebrated in our town! We didn't have to go look for things to do. From every nook and cranny of the town, celebrants would approach us, the people with the large yard: the young couple, their parents, and the entire town following after them, from the very young to the very old, accompanied by a band of musicians, playing traditional Jewish wedding music. The town of Dereczin was effusive with happiness and gaiety.

Now, we have obtained eye witness accounts from those who survived the Holocaust, that the Nazi murderers, may their names be forever erased, selected this beautiful courtyard specifically as the center of a ghetto for our unfortunate parents and family in order to facilitate their cruel and inhuman deeds. Thus, the ground of the *Schulhof* was sanctified by the blood of our dear, martyred parents. And that pure blood will never cease to cry out from the depth of that earth.

According to the witnesses, my father was among the last of the victims of the slaughter of the 12th of *Ab*, and he was buried – in a mass grave near his house. My mother died two weeks before the slaughter took place, and was one of the martyrs of the ghetto that was privileged to receive a Jewish burial.

The Pain of Memories

By Rivkah Saglowitz-Dykhovsky
(Original Language: Hebrew)

It is hard for me to write about the home of my father and mother, which I left while still a young girl, especially as their beloved picture accompanies me, and is literally a lamp unto my feet.

We had a simple and modest home, and we were not often fortunate when it came to matters of business, but we had a warm home, and an open door to anyone who was pressured or had a need. I was still a little girl at the time of the First World War. My parents were left penniless, because the 'Nobleman' from whom my father leased work, fled to Russia out of fear of the Germans. My two younger brothers went to gather potatoes from the abandoned fields. I remember that our mother, at that time, took in an orphan who had no parents, covered in sores and infested with vermin. With her own hands, she cut off his hair and burned all his clothing, bathed and dressed him, situated him in a *Talmud Torah*, and after the Rabbi investigated his background, discovered that he had a father in America. *Menashkeh* (that was his name) spent two years with us. We had any number of refugee families in town, among them noted and respected scholars, but without any means. My mother would draft me and my sister into preparation of food bundles, and on Thursdays, with great discretion, would send us to their homes. If a poor bride was lacking adequate dowry, my mother would approach the better off families in town who respected her, and helped her obtain bedding, some money, and our big room served as the wedding hall.

We had a simple home characterized by respect for parents. My brothers secretly supported the house for many years, with love and understanding. When I approached my brother *Jacob,* in 1933 during a visit, to come to the Holy Land, he asked me to whom could he entrust the "old trees." "I will not uproot them from their home" – my brother said. And, as a consequence, he paid with his young life for his loyalty. On the night of the slaughter, he sent my mother and sister-in-law along with the children to be among the first to flee, while he was in the rear guard, and it was in this fashion that he was killed beside the river. My mother who remained, suffered in her misery in the forests for six months, and when she was already half-frozen in body, she begged people at the time when they were fleeing the forest for fear of German attacks, "take me with you, I have good children who will reward you!" Those were her last words that were conveyed to me by witnesses who were close with her in the forest.

And this is my consolation, that in her final hours she thought well of us. Two days later, the people returned to the place where she was hidden, but did not find her.

May the souls of my father and mother and my brothers be bound up in the bond of life.

The Destruction

My Town Dereczin

By Katya Klebnik-Bialosotsky
(Original Language: Yiddish)

O town of mine, you are etched into my memory,
I see you from afar – and my heart is choked up –
I see you swaying softly in the shadows of sunshine,
Even though the black darkness reigns in your streets.

My destroyed Dereczin, you are dear and precious to me,
You were always with me in my wanderings.
My innocent happiness of youth was consumed with you in fire,
But my weeping over your ruins will never go away.

Stone upon stone in your streets, shrieking voices
Cry out from the fields drenched in blood,
The smoke of the incineration is gone, your skies again are azure,
As they were in that spring when all was good.

As on those Sabbath days, when walking by my window,
Were Jews in their prayer shawls going to the Synagogue.
The joy of the Sabbath twinkled in all eyes,
A happiness, with which each house was full.

Now, however, I know that in your desolated streets,
The joy of each house will no longer resound.
I know: it isn't there any longer, Jewish Dereczin no longer exists,
With "Hear O Israel" my little town went to its grave.

This Is How the Jewish Community of Dereczin Was Destroyed

By Masha & Abraham-Hirsch Kulakowski
(Original Language: Hebrew)

The date of March 23, 1939 comes to mind. A cold rain, mixed with snow, fell ceaselessly since the early morning hours, but the snow didn't last, and melted underfoot. A swamp-like mud covered all the streets and byways of Dereczin.

The 23rd of the month was a day for which the Jews of the town waited weeks at a time – it was the major market day, when thousands of peasants would come to town to sell their produce, buy a variety of things, such as kerosene, salt, sugar, footwear, clothes, etc. The marketplace was packed with hundreds of wagons. The peasants were in a hurry to sell their produce in order to have the time to drop in on a saloon to get some drink, have some talk with their acquaintances, buy whatever they needed, and then return to their villages before nightfall.

The First News of War

On the outside, it looked like a normal market day, but I remember it so vividly because on that day we lived through the first news of possible war, and this was the onset of the terrible misfortune that two years later befell Dereczin, and specifically its Jews.

On that day, the news of an instant mobilization hit us like a thunderclap. Before the news of the mobilization arrived, no one even dreamed of such a sudden mobilization order. But now it became clear – the smell of war was in the air.

The first of the mobilized troops ran around town putting outstanding affairs in order. Their mothers wept and wailed to the point where it was heart-rending. However, the older folks still recalled the mobilization of 1914 and remembered how tragically it was received by everyone at that time. But nobody took any comfort from this. We were all terrified. Under these extenuating circumstances, all the mobilized troops piled into wagons, and went off to Zelva to the train station.

A few days went by, and the first letters began to arrive. The young people were somewhere on the Polish-German border, intensely occupied with military affairs, but they communicated that everything was all right with them. However, the highly anxious state in Dereczin continued to persist.

It was in this fashion that days, weeks and then months went by, and the residents of our town did not return. From time to time, one or another of them would come home for a couple of days leave, but no one of our people was discharged from military service.

Life proceeded normally, but our sense of unrest did not leave us. Five months had passed, it is August already, and the state of anxiety persists the entire time, and grows more intense day by day. All manner of rumors and suspicions ceaselessly circulate among the Jews, and everyone's nerves are taut with tension.

The last week of August arrives. The remaining eligible age cohorts are mobilized, and in the air, one senses that the war is near.

The War Breaks Out

On the morning of September 1, the bitter news arrives: the German Luftwaffe has bombed Suwalk and other Polish cities. Everyone becomes heavy-hearted. At noon, we heard the words of the Polish President Maszczycki, in which he expressed the hope that God would help the Polish nation defeat its enemies. It became rapidly evident to everyone

that this was an empty wish. Hard days, filled with reports of the German victories, come along. The Jews, by and large, sit in their houses full of fear. Commerce was practically paralyzed. In the town, there is no military force. News reaches us that the Zelva railroad station has been bombed. Dereczin gets its first taste of these bombs on Rosh Hashanah. A few of these bombs fall outside of town, but apart from instilling fear, they cause no material damage.

Out of fear of the German bombardment, we leave Dereczin, and we go to a [neighboring] village. Our Polish neighbors ask us to flee from the German planes, because [they believe] they are bombing only the Jews... but we react to this specious suggestion without laughter, because we know that the Germans have a long list to settle with us Jews.

The war was already almost two weeks in progress before Dereczin received a detachment of several tens of Polish youths, who were sent as a military formation to protect law and order. You are to understand that the "ordering" started with the Jews. Several Jews fell victims at their hands, and they occupied themselves with instituting their bloody work. With armed weapons in hand, they forced several tens of the Jewish populace into an old abandoned barn, and wanted to torch it. It was only thanks to the energetic intervention of the town priest that these Jews were saved from an awful death.

The Soviets Save Us

An alarm then went out through the town, that the Soviets had crossed the Polish-Russian border, and they were coming to save us. We did not then understand exactly what would constitute their 'rescue' and as a result, a great sense of relief held sway among the Jews. And that happiness, was very understandable [at the time].

On September 17, the Red Army crossed the border, and a few days later, we were privileged to see the Soviet military arrive with our own eyes.

It is difficult to describe our sense of elation. At the time, I thought that I was living the happiest day of my life. The entire Jewish population, and also many of the Christians from Dereczin and its environs, went forth to greet the Soviet military forces. There relationship to the native population was very friendly. There ride into town made a colossal impression. They were especially inspired by the Red Cavalry, which came riding in on their white horses, with shining beautiful pelerines over their shoulders. They embraced and kissed everyone who came to greet them, giving the children little red flags as souvenirs of this great day of good fortune. Our joy knew no bounds. It seemed as if the Messiah had come...

To the celebration gatherings, tens of thousands of people from the entire area came together. Dereczin was literally too small to absorb them all. The masses found many ways to express their enthusiasm and inspiration for the liberating Red military forces, and its shining leader, Stalin.

It quickly began its work to establish control of the town. It was immediately decided to continue utilizing Polish currency, and the Polish zloty was made equal in worth to the Russian ruble. The arriving Russians began to buy up everything that came to hand. In comparison with the prices that they experienced at home, the cost of merchandise, especially clothing and footwear was very cheap.

A new 'situation' developed in Dereczin. Hundreds of Jews, who fled the German-occupied parts of western Poland, streamed into the Byelorussian cities and towns, and came into Dereczin *en masse*. Despite the fact that the Dereczin Jews did not live in the lap of luxury, they took in these 'homeless' people with open arms. Jews from Poland lived in almost every home, and they brought in a new color to life in Dereczin. Together with our *Litvak* Yiddish, one could now hear, from all sides, the musical tone of Polish-accented Yiddish. Relationships between the two groups was generally amicable.

Soviet Influence Arrives

Our ardor for the Soviet rulers began to get quenched a little at a time. Apart from continuous changes, our lives took on the character of the familiar Soviet way of life. Free trade was no longer permitted. One central store was opened, which needed to serve the entire town populace with all required products. While no official sanctions were put in place, as a practical matter, it was impossible to get a hold of anything.

When word of a product newly arrived at the store was passed, immediately a long line formed in which the 'bullies' had control. It was in this fashion that 400g of sugar was allocated to each family for several months. To the best of my recollection, I can remember only one instance in which my family received such a ration of sugar from the Soviets during the period of their occupation. There were those who happened to receive more than one portion during rationing. Few families were able to provision themselves adequately with all of the necessities of life.

Life became difficult, but this did not disturb the good relationship that had been created between the Soviet residents and the local young people. It was in this manner that we befriended a high-ranking officer, who was Jewish, who spoke a 'gentile' Yiddish, but could recite *[Ch. N.] Bialik* by heart.

Slowly, all the people fell into various lines of endeavor, wherever they had skills, as a teacher, or worker, in one of the [newly] created work collectives. It was hard for us to get used to the idea that if you were late for work, by even a few minutes, that you could be severely punished, even be liable for arrest. But, it is possible to get used to just about everything...

That is how the time passed by. Twenty-one months had passed since the arrival of the Soviet forces.

Suddenly, there came June 22, 1941.

Days of Fear and Panic

Bitter bulletins about the enemy follow one on top of the other. The Germans have bombed military barracks, airfields, railroad stations, highways and cities. The Soviet military personnel are constantly disoriented and confused.

On that sad June 22, German aircraft appeared over Dereczin as well. The Zelva railroad station was also bombed. An indescribable panic took hold among the populace, especially the Jews. The surrounding Poles take great joy in the misfortune of the Jews. They hated the Soviet rule intensely, and now thought only of revenge.

Our hearts told us that the most terrifying period of our lives was approaching.

In the evening, all the young people received orders for mobilization, and in the morning they were to rendezvous at the railroad station in Zelva. However, it appears that the Germans had good intelligence, and from early morning on, bombed the rendezvous point heavily. The Soviet authorities had no alternative means by which to dispatch the assembled young people. Whoever survived the German bombardment fled for home. With the return of the mobilized young people, the atmosphere in Dereczin became even more burdened. A deep sorrow took hold of all the Jews.

On the second day, Monday morning, all the Soviet authorities abandoned Dereczin, and began to flee eastward to the Russian border. A part of the young people fled with them as well. The roads were packed with the military and civilians. Everything was focused on fleeing into Russia. But very few were able to break through and reach areas still under Soviet control. The roads were cut up by the fire of the Germans and their troops. People fell on the roads from German bullets. Those who remained alive, managed to crawl back home.

Dereczin was left without military protection. On the fourth day, Wednesday, an alarm was given that a German tank had rapidly run through the town.

Nobody wanted to believe that something like this had happened – in Dereczin, the billeting point for one of the best Soviet battalions, and the young people who were friendly with the Russian military personnel, would relate not once how the battalion's equipment was so good and modern. Had the battalion abandoned its base in Dereczin without defense? These type of questions were posed from all sides, until we saw with our own eyes that not a single Soviet soldier remained in town.

The Germans Are Here

Dereczin was captured by the Germans on June 27. A detail of German paratroopers entered the town, while the regular German Army was still in Zelva. As they entered the town, they began shooting indiscriminately, and started to drive the people out of the houses into the courtyard of the church. Also, black uniformed S.S. troops came into town, with the white skulls on their insignias, and ordered us to march with raised hands to the church.

The entire population, young and old, Jews and Christians, had been gathered there, and one of the Germans said that Dereczin had been occupied by the Germans, and martial law was being declared in the town. 'Suspicious' people were immediately put off to the side. In order to be 'suspected,' of being a fleeing Soviet resident, it was enough to be clean-shaven, or simply to have a haircut. They also began to separate the Jews and Christians.

That is how we all stood there, not knowing what would become of us. But then, suddenly, a miracle happened that permitted us that day to stay alive, but consumed half the town in flames.

To this day, we don't exactly know who, in that hour when we feared death, opened artillery fire on Dereczin. Perhaps it was the regular German Army, which was advancing from Zelva to Dereczin, fired on the town, not knowing that the town had already been taken by their own paratroops. Other knowledgeable people say that it was a Soviet detachment that opened fire, in a move to break through the German lines. One way or another, the falling artillery shells, which set fire to the houses adjacent to the church, so disrupted these German 'heroes,' that they began to run back and forth like poisoned mice. We all fled the church courtyard toward the burning houses. We began to try and save whatever we could. It was at that point that people began to run into the fields surrounding the town, to save themselves from the conflagration. When we regrouped, we found that our house had been burned to the ground. Temporarily, we went into the barn, which had managed to survive the blaze.

That evening, the S.S. troops wanted to begin murdering Jews. We were lying in the barn, together with our neighbors and other refugees, who had just arrived from the Soviet side. Suddenly, we were surrounded by German soldiers armed with hand grenades. They entered the barn and ordered the men to raise their hands, and took away their watches along with anything else of value. They didn't touch the women. They told us to remain in the barn, and not to move. Anyone who would presume to go outside would be shot immediately.

Beaten and frightened, we sat that way, not knowing what the coming minutes were going to bring. The little children cried, asking to be taken home, not knowing that all that remained of their home were the charred walls. The adults sat and their hearts gave out. So many stories had already been heard about German cruelty, about bestial murders. If true, then these perhaps are our last minutes [of life]. The sorrow of those sentenced to death fell heavily on us. No one spoke, no one stirred from their place. The German patrol is guarding us, we hear their footfall around the barn.

It is a dark night around us. What will the night bring? Will we live long enough to see the light of dawn?

About midnight, strong gunfire erupted all about us. The shells of automatic weapons are flying over our barn. And we are sitting inside as if caught in a trap. My father, a former Russian soldier in World War I, identifies the different artillery shells to me. Out of

sheer exhaustion and weeping, the children have fallen asleep. My mother ז"ל, sits and watches over them, and tears fall from her eyes.

The coming of dawn pierces the blackness of the night, and it becomes possible to see something again. I steal quietly to the door, and peer through a crack. I see soldiers on motorcycles, and it appears as if the Germans are getting reinforcements. But as the morning proceeds, and gets lighter, I recognize these as Soviet troops. We immediately saw that our German patrols had fled. In the confusion of battle, they had forgotten about us, and we remained alive. One miracle after another.

In the morning we returned to town. There we learned that a part of a Soviet Division, which was surrounded by the German military forces, wanted to break through the German lines, and not having any other alternative, attacked the Germans in town in the middle of the night. There was a life and death struggle in the middle of the streets. The town was inundated with cannon fire. None of the residents got any sleep. At the end of the battle, the Russians were able to break through and they went through Dereczin eastward, in order to join up with their fragmented formations.

The Germans fled from Dereczin to Halinka. This was good news, but it didn't last very long. News reached us very soon thereafter that on arrival in Halinka, the Germans murdered and also buried alive 140 Jews. They had taken away everyone from Dereczin that they suspected of being a conscript in the Russian army, and to this day, no one knows where they were taken and killed. They were the first victims of German rule in Dereczin. Afterwards, there was a brief interlude without any death victims.

The Nazi Reign of Terror

About July 15, a whole camp of Nazi agents of destruction entered the town. In a matter of minutes, all Jews, men and women, age 14-60 were ordered to assemble in the marketplace. An S.S. officer gave a short speech to this gathering. He said as follows: Beginning tomorrow, July 16, all Jews above the age of 14 must wear yellow badges 10cm². The penalty for not wearing this badge of shame, or for not displaying it properly, has been set – death on the spot. All Jews age 14-60 must every day present themselves for forced labor. All we got for this work was a beating, and later – even a bullet. Jews were forbidden to go on the roads, to live next to Christians, and leaving their houses after 5PM.

This is how the litany of decrees began. The Germans established a *Judenrat* to monitor compliance with these decrees and regulations. The German authorities related to the *Judenrat* with disdain and mockery, and treated its members no better than all the other Jews.

Forced labor was varied and also peculiar. Their true goal was to exhaust the Jews to death. We dug pits, and then filled them in again, moved large heavy boulders from one place to another, and then back again. As an overseer of the women's work, one of the refugee homeless people was appointed, one *Belkovich*, a quiet and good man, who was lame in one foot. He would always beg our pardon whenever he came to summon us to conscript labor. It was no secret what was happening when a young girl went to work, and hadn't returned by the afternoon, he would try to calm us by saying that we will yet be privileged to see the murderers get their own bitter comeuppance.

It was not once that I would start up from sleep in the middle of the night, fearful that I would oversleep and be late for work. Here it is 2AM, and in three hours, I must present myself to the Gestapo Command. The Head of these murderers would personally count and control his workers, cursing all the Jews and cruelly beating anyone he felt like beating. The entire process was frightening and demeaning. You think to yourself that nothing here can be called 'human,' what with this German animal standing in front of you with hate flickering in his eyes.

There is not much time for such thinking. An order is barked to leave the yard and begin work. All day

we are transformed into robots, who do things without thinking about the purpose of the work. We become exhausted and oppressed. In the winter, for example, we had to clean the snow off all the streets, and as it happens, that winter, the Lord sent us snow without measure. I stand on the marketplace where the market fair days took place. Also, in those days, the peasants would come on the 23rd of the month, to the market day. We have to clean the snow off this large expanse, along with the refuse from the horses and wagons that was left behind. And the snow is up to our knees. The remaining peasants look at us mockingly, as if to express their will to wreak vengeance on these very Jewish girls that, not so long ago, had lived such a tranquil life, studied, hoped and dreamed about things that these peasants couldn't even begin to understand.

Once, in such a distressed time, I spy my friend *Sonya Grachuk* not far from me. Recently we have not met very often, because of the strict curfews, we would spend entire evenings in our cramped and over-crowded homes. *Sonya* is standing, but not working. When I asked her what was happening, she said to me that where possible, we must damage and sabotage whatever the Germans force us to do. And in connection with this, she tells me the following overwhelming thing: there are thousands of partisans operating in the Byelorussian forests. They are waging guerilla warfare against the Germans. At this point, *Sonya* suddenly went silent – from the distance, the Hangman of the Jews of Dereczin was approaching, in his glistening high boots and leather jacket, which he had extorted from the Jews, and more than once had been stained with Jewish blood. We immediately stooped to our work.

Several months later on a summer's day, a contingent of Estonian police suddenly arrived in Dereczin. We all became terribly frightened. The Estonians were already well known as wild animals. Every Christian who had a complaint against a Jew, or just plain hated Jews, was in a position to inform to these police, and the Estonians would inflict the murderous punishment. It was in this manner that they were sent on "guest duty" in the towns. It didn't take long before the first victims were brought to the police. They are boarded on a vehicle and driven to the outskirts of town. I am made aware that *Sonya Grachuk* is among them. Later, witnesses told that when the auto passed through the center of the marketplace, *Sonya* raised her head, in order to bid farewell to the forced laborers. An Estonian struck her violently in the head with the butt of his rifle, and she fell dead in the car. Two years later, on my way to the tomb, I came across the mass grave where *Sonya* was buried. I paid homage to her shining memory with a profound silence.

News of Enemy Actions

Meanwhile, an alarm spread that in Slonim 1000 Jews were rounded up without any cause and sent to an unknown destination. A few days later, we found out that they had all been shot not far from the city. Equally bitter news began to arrive from other surrounding cities and towns. The disquiet among the Jews grew from day to day. We lived in constant fear, until the High Holydays came, which in that year were truly transformed into Days of Awe.

On the first day of Sukkot, as usual, the Jews left quite early for their work. But this time, they were not taken to there usual work, rather the police took them to a totally different location. In vain we waited for the return of parents, husbands and brothers, and they [finally] returned after 36 hours of inhuman labor. They had dug out a mass grave 45 meters long, 20 meters wide, and 4 meters deep.

Why do the Germans need such a pit? Many speculations circulated among the Jews. We tried to submerge the awful feeling we had, and said that it would be used to make storage units for potatoes and other produce. But that pit did not disappear from anyone's thoughts. We talked about it day and night, and it often came to us in our dreams.

By that time, the command had already been given that all Jews must vacate Christian homes, and move out of mixed residence streets, and to set up residence in the so-called Jewish Quarter, which occupied one side of the marketplace and the

Schulhof. Quite often, S.S. troops would come from other cities, and the Jews would live through hours of indescribable terror. The town would be surrounded by military personnel and police, and these bandits would descend on the Jewish homes looking for gold, money, leather, and other items of value. Such plundering was always accompanied by murderous beatings. After such incidents, the Jews would temporarily breathe a little easier.

However, they were not permitted to breathe easy for very long.

During the first months of the German occupation, the local administration was in the hands of Polish authorities. Their relationship to the Jews was no better than that of the Germans. On November 17, a contingent of 11 S.S. troops arrived to take over the town governance into their hands. At the head of this group was a young, dangerous sadist named *Poritz*. He was as bloodthirsty as a wild animal. The Polish authorities are replaced with Byelorussian police, who are no better than their predecessors. The Germans set themselves up in the movie theater, and from there, spread their bloody rule throughout the town. *Poritz* was the *Leiter* for the 'Jewish Question.'

Day in and day out, hundreds of Jews would assemble in front of Gestapo headquarters, and from their go to work. For that many people, there was entirely insufficient work of any kind in Dereczin, but the Germans took pleasure in watching how hungry and driven Jews are made to stand in the rain and snow, and expend the last of their failing energies.

The Mass Grave Receives Victims

The situation became increasingly unbearable. Gentiles were forbidden to have any sort of contact with Jews, and it became increasingly difficult to procure the essentials of life. A Jew was prohibited from making any purchase in the marketplace, even in the circumstance that he had any money. It was not uncommon that in reprisal for buying a little bit of milk for children, or a bit of bread, that Jews were shot in the middle of the marketplace. Death awaited those who wanted to leave town, or approach the local gentiles in search of something to eat.

Terrifying news reached us from various sources, from the surrounding cities. The Jews in *Baranovich* and *Horodishch* (possibly *Gorodishch*) had already been slaughtered out. Life for us had ceased to exist. We spoke only of death, which stood before our eyes. Little children already understood to flee the presence of the bloody *Poritz*. Every night, two-year-old children would ask their mothers if it was safe to get undressed for bed, and if the night will be an uneventful one.

At *Purim*, a couple of hundred men were taken from Dereczin to Slonim for work. They were taken under heavy guard by Germans and [local] police, [recruited] from Dereczin gentiles. It was bitter cold, and the young Jews were clothed in tattered garments and footwear. They were led, as you can imagine, on foot, and were murderously beaten along the way for trying to stop and rest.

Some of them, after a while, managed to turn back to Dereczin without permission. The Germans found out about this, and on a specific day in April they arrested these young people and their families. Whoever was found in their homes was [also] taken off to the police. Without any charges, they were held the entire night, and beaten with the intent to kill. On April 30, they took everyone, about 200 souls, and led them off to the large pit, near the village of *Radziak*. A few understood what was going to happen, and began to run [away] across the fields. They were shot and left to lie in the fields. The others, forced by beatings, were thrown into the pit, and then they opened fire on them with machine guns and hand grenades. Dirt was thrown into the pit, which barely covered the dead and those that were still alive and lay dying.

Among those who fell in the fields was one woman who had only been wounded. With enormous effort, she managed to drag herself back into town, where Jews secretly brought her to the hospital, and when

the Germans found out about it, they took all these unfortunates out to the cemetery and shot them there.

The following morning, after this terrifying day of slaughter, the *Leiter* of the Jewish Question *Poritz*, came before the Jewish laborers, threw his leather jacket to them and ordered: "Clean the Jewish blood off the jacket."

First Reports from the Forest

The Germans carried out a registration of all Russian citizens who remained in our area. This consisted of about 100 men. These were rank and file soldiers and officers of the Russian military, who could not get out of the region after the German invasion, because this entire area of Byelorussia was in fact surrounded by German forces withing the first few days. They removed the Russian military insignias [from their uniforms], and went away to work for the local peasants.

The Germans arrested the registered Russians, and herded them of in the direction of Slonim. On the way to Halinka, they were all shot. When the remaining Russians heard about this, they fled from the villages into the forests. They were the founders of the partisan brigades in our area.

News of the partisans and their daring feats reached Dereczin. Legends were literally spun out of air about their exploits, their number put in the thousands, and that they were equipped with modern weaponry. At that time, this was pure fantasy, but later it became reality. But this news served to raise the spirits of the Jews; a small hope awoke in their hearts that now, the Germans might experience a little fear in starting up with the Jews. Many young people began to think about going to the forests themselves. However, it was not that easy to get out of the ghetto and go to the forests. A danger emanated not only from the Germans, who would have taken revenge on the families of these escapees, but also from the Jews as well.

In order to create antagonism among the Jews, the Germans divided the Jewish population into "essential" and "non-essential" Jews. The "essential" [Jews] were the ones who worked for the Germans. They implied that the "essential" [Jews] did not have to fear for their lives. In order to obtain an "essential" certificate, the Jews paid large sums of money to those close to the German authorities, and were prepared to do the hardest and dirtiest work for the Germans. Please understand, that this whole rigmarole with "essential" Jews turned out to be a gruesome ruse perpetrated by the Germans, in order to sow hatred and envy between one Jew and another, and in this fashion weaken their ability to resist the dangers that lurked for them, coming from the Germans.

The newly-minted bourgeoisie was organized into collective districts by the Germans, they emptied out a large Jewish dwelling, and turned it into a warehouse. Village residents who had need of labor, would come to these collectives. The Jews would carry out this work without compensation. There were many among the peasants who did not sympathize with this disgusting exploitation of the hapless Jews, and they would bring a little flour, a small bottle of milk for these workers – and all this clandestinely, because they stood to be punished severely for providing assistance to a Jew. The cows, which were owned by the Jews, were confiscated by the Germans within the first days of their arrival, and the little bit of milk from them literally helped to keep small children alive. I am reminded of how difficult it was to bring the sanctioned products from the warehouses, which were outside the ghetto, to our home. My little brothers ז"ל, made themselves a small wagon, and at great risk to themselves, through side streets and back yards, would bring this meager produce home with them.

It was in this manner that four thousand people lived in suffocation together, in 40 houses, consisting of 'homeless refugees' and natives of Dereczin, and Jews brought from Halinka and Kolonia [-Sinaiska]. About 500 "essential" Jews lived outside the ghetto. There was absolutely no contact between different segments of the Jewish population.

With these types of relationships, it wasn't easy to contemplate fleeing to the forests, because no one was prepared to place the entire Jewish ghetto population at the risk of death. The so-called "essential" Jews were especially opposed to this idea, because they lived with the illusion of their "essential" status for the German occupiers.

Despite all this, the youth secretly prepared itself to flee to the forests, and establish a resistance to the finish. Those who worked in the ammunition dumps, where equipment that had fallen into German hands from their engagement with the Russians, used to slowly and one at a time, carry out individual firearms and bullets. In this fashion they assembles twenty guns and automatic weapons, hiding them outside of town, in order that no Jew fall under suspicion. An agreement was made to utilize this weaponry when there was no other choice remaining. One must recall the nature of the danger involved in trying to take arms out of a German ammunition dump in order to appreciate the heroism of these Dereczin young people.

It was felt that the end of the Dereczin Jews was drawing closer. The Germans had milked the last shreds of value, through contributions, from the Jews. From time to time, under direction from the Nazi regional command in Slonim, the *Judenrat* was compelled to offer up kilograms of gold, silver, furs, and large sums of money – and the Jewish houses had become emptied of their valuables. Physically, the Jews had become exhausted through hard labor and hunger. People dropping dead in the ghetto was a frequent occurrence. Everybody participated in the shooting: the Germans, the [local] police, everyone had a grudge against the Jews and wanted to exact revenge, giving no thought to why or for what.

The situation for the Jews in Zelva was at that time still somewhat better. Zelva was officially part of the Third Reich, and Jews were permitted to live there. They were even paid for their forced labor. From the perspective of the Jews of Dereczin, Zelva seemed like a Garden of Eden. It was no wonder, then, that people did almost anything to try and steal over to Zelva. This was no easy thing to do, since for merely going out of the ghetto you could get a bullet. It was also not easy to find a Christian, who even for a large sum of money, would agree to transport Jews to Zelva. Despite this, there was an inclination among many Jews to try and steal over to this "Garden of Eden" of Zelva. I personally escorted two of my sisters-in-law and a young girlfriend, and said my farewells to them at the boundary of the ghetto, in preparation for them smuggling themselves across the boundary in order to go to Zelva. I parted from them with an eternal finality, because I am certain that our end is close at hand.

The Bitter Hour Has Come

The Ninth of *Ab* of 5702, and the following day, the tenth of *Ab*, July 24, 1942, will never be forgotten by the Jews of Dereczin all over the world.

The anxious sentiment was already palpable on *Tisha B'Av*. Jews fasted, prayed for their deliverance, and the downfall of the Germans. Neither the fast nor the prayers were of any use. The fate of the Jews of Dereczin was sealed on that day.

One sensed the odor of gunpowder in the air that day, somewhat more strongly than usual. The Germans and the police were making an incursion into the ghetto on that day. The Jews became uneasy, and began running around, one to another, seeking some insight or advice.

A certain Jew, apparently sent as an emissary by the Germans, kept constantly assuring people that there was nothing to fear, nothing was going to happen, and one could peacefully disrobe for sleep. As usual, we went to sleep fully clothed.

It was still dark when the ghetto was surrounded by the Germans and the police. There were four of us – my mother-in-law ז"ל, my husband, an acquaintance, and myself – outside the ghetto. Our eyes were not shut, and we saw everything that happened in the ghetto.

My mother-in-law gave each of us a half loaf of bread and convinced us to flee. We all left the house together, taking nothing with us, and running towards the fields. It got as little lighter, and the police spotted us. A hail of bullets flew over our heads. We ran off in all directions, and from that time on, I never saw my mother-in-law again. My husband *Abraham*, our acquaintance, *Munya* and I continued to run together. A large swampy mud plain was in front of us, and we sank into it up to our knees. Before that, we had to run through the yard of the Russian Orthodox Bishop, whose son-in-law was a known lackey of the Nazis. It would appear that they were all still asleep, since it was given to us to cross that dangerous yard by stealth.

After exhausting ourselves by crossing the swampy mud, we hid ourselves in a corn field. It was quiet all around. From the distance, the sounds of heavy gunfire was carried to us on the wind.

The Fate of the Feldman Family

By Rachel Efrat-Feldman
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Mendel Feldman (p. 257)

My parents, *Mendel Feldman*, and his wife *Pesha*, neé *Bernstein*, had one of the prominent families of Dereczin. It was also a large family – six daughters and two sons.

Only two children remained alive from the family: the author of this memoir, *Rachel Efrat*, who fortunately emigrated to the United States shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, and a son, *Chaim Feldman*, who along with his wife *Liza*, and two small children, survived the passage through seven circles of Hell, first in the ghetto of Novogrudok, and afterwards with the partisan brigades in the forest; they lived through every conceivable terrifying experience, and after emerging from the forests, reached America where they settled themselves.

The *Feldman* family in Dereczin was an institution unto itself. Everyone recalls both my mother and father ז"ל, with their cordiality to guests, and their warmhearted relationships to everyone.
My father *Mendel Feldman*, was for many years the head of the community in Dereczin, and with his wise and diplomatic leadership, earned respect from all parts of the town. Jews often came to seek his advice, because he was endowed with straight thinking and robust logic. My mother was the symbol of goodness to us and to everyone [in town].

It is therefore understandable that we, the children of the *Feldman* family household got a good upbringing, and we were active among the various youth groups in town.

My sister *Tamara*, died before the war. All the other of my brothers and sisters, except for my brother *Chaim*, were brought down by the murderous hands of the Nazis.

During the first days of the Nazi occupation, my father once again proved adept at protecting the interests of the Jewish community, but he quickly perceived the nature of the murderous plans that these butchers had prepared to carry out.

On one morning, an order came from the Nazi commandant that *Mendel Feldman* and his wife must present themselves for relocation into the ghetto.

Father packed everything and hastily arranged all our effects. At a specific time, he left home, but did not return too quickly. Suddenly, there was a cry from my mother: "Jews! Come and save us!" When the neighbors who were around came running, they saw my father hanging from the loft. A funeral was organized with the permission of the Nazi commandant. When the cortege wound its way through the streets of Dereczin to the cemetery, the lowlife of a Nazi commandant shouted out with great conviction and malice: "They are taking the smartest Jew in the town to burial..."

The sons and daughters of the *Feldman* family that were slaughtered by the Hitlerite murderers were: *Chaya Dworetsky* and her husband *Hirschel* along with two children (a third remains living in Russia); *Shayndl Blum*, her husband and daughter; *Rivkah Viniatsky* with her husband and two sons; *Elkeh Weinstein* with her husband and two sons; *Hirschel Feldman* met a hero's death in the forest as a partisan.

The Germans Have Arrived

By Sara Wachler-Ogulnick

(Original Language: Yiddish)

So many years have passed since those terrifying days, and I still cannot forget that frightening picture. Living through that first day when the Germans arrived in Dereczin.

The German attack across the Soviet border on June 22, 1941 found me in Zheludok, where I was a guest visiting my grandmother. On the third day, Tuesday, after heavy bombardment, I fled early in the morning from Zheludok to home in Dereczin. I made the 50 km journey in one day, and arrived home broken in body, and exhausted to the point that I was unable to stand on my own two feet.

A peculiar and gruesome silence pervaded the streets, when I arrived in Dereczin. I couldn't comprehend from where such a deathly quiet came to this place, at a time when all roads were packed with refugees, people were running from place to place, often without any seeming purpose, trying to find any way to save themselves from the Germans.

I was met by *Bashka Abelovich*. I studied with her daughter *Tzippeh*[113] in a small class. She escorted me as far as my home. The elation of my parents was understandable. In Dereczin, this deathly silence persisted until Friday.

That Friday is strongly etched into my memory. I remember at about nine in the morning, tanks and other *Panzer* autos entered the town, full of Germans. With arms in both hands, the German soldiers came to us and ordered Jews and Christians alike to gather in the courtyard of the church. An older German, speaking a broken Russian, outlined a variety of edicts to us, what was permitted and what was forbidden. The picked out all the men who were shaven, thinking that these were Russian troops. Those were all shot on the same day.

As we were standing in the courtyard of the church, a bombardment began, and the town began to burn. Even the Germans were frightened, and ran to their vehicles.

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[113] Yiddish diminutive for *Zipporah*.

I ran to our house, because a bomb struck the *Beckenstein* home in the wall, and the fire was spreading right toward our house. My mother ז"ל, looked after the children, while my father and I started to throw whatever contents we could out of the house. In the end I even rescued my bicycle.

Our house began to burn. In the ensuing tumult and confusion, I became separated from my family. I fled to the road leading to Slonim.

The fields were full of Jews and their children. I sat alone and looked at the devastating images about me. To this day, it appears before me like some gruesome film. It started to thunder and flash lightning, and an intense downpour of rain commenced. Airplanes flew overhead. The Germans rode back and forth in their tanks.

The town was ablaze. The smoke was heavy and constant. People screamed hysterically, cried, and wrung their hands. Women with children in their laps tore the hair from their heads. One heard the continuous shouts of a variety of names, lost people were looking for one another, parents were searching for children, and children wailed and looked for their parents. Sheep and cattle ran wild in the fields – a terrifying portrait of wartime.

From the Hideaway into the Forest

By Yehudit Yankelevich-Lantzevitzky

(Original Language: Yiddish)

As soon as they marched into Dereczin, the Germans drove all the Jews around the church, men, women and children, with no exception, and inside the church itself, they gathered captured Russian prisoners of war.

Suddenly, a bombing attack by airplanes erupted, many houses were set on fire, and we all scattered. That very evening, the Russians re-entered the town, and all night a bloody battle ensued in Dereczin and its environs. By morning, the Russians retreated and the Germans entered the town once again.

Their bloody reign ensued. They established a *Judenrat*, and made the Jews miserable with decrees, forced contributions and death threats. They would often pillage Jewish houses, and our home was among the first to be victimized by German predation.

They drafted all the Jews into forced labor for a mere piece of bread a day. Also, all the young women, according to a decree, were required to present themselves for this work. I did not present myself to them for work, and therefore a German and a local policeman came to our home, the Dereczin magistrate *Kozya Tchaplinski*, and they put my father up against the wall, intending to shoot him on the spot. My sister and I then emerged from the cellar where we had hidden ourselves, and went off to work with the other Dereczin girls – digging ditches, under the direction of the Germans, in the *Shlizer* woods, on the way to Puzovitsa.

When I returned home a couple of days later, they had already confiscated all valuables from the Jews, such as furs, gold, jewelry, etc. From us they also took away our cow and the horse and wagon.

At that point, the Germans constructed a ghetto, and confined all the Jews within it. The overcrowding was indescribable.

Many young Jews were taken for forced labor in a *Beute-lager*, which were magazines for storing munitions captured from the Russian military forces. Conditions at this work were frightening, and a number of these young people fled home to Dereczin from these locations. The German killed the entire families of those who fled outright.

In the summer of 1942, a day after *Tisha B'Av*, the Germans surrounded the ghetto, took the Jews out of their houses and hiding places, and led them off to a mass grave. It was at that location that the majority of the Jewish population of Dereczin was murdered and buried.

I had, on that day concealed myself, along with 20 other people, in a hideout. Our bunker was outside the ghetto, in the cellar of a mill. We spent the entire day there.

The [local] police discovered the bunker, tore off the cover, and demanded that we come out. We did not exit. The police were afraid to crawl into the interior, so they locked up the cellar and went away.

At midnight, we tore off the cover ourselves, left the cellar and went up to the attic, broke through the roof and fled. I fled with *Motya Bosak* and *Alter Kolonar*. [In this way] we reached the forest of *Volya*.

Barely Escaping With Our Lives to the Forest

By Pesha Feinsilber

(Original Language: Yiddish)

When the news came over the radio in September 1939 that because of the German-Soviet Pact, the Red Army was to enter Dereczin, a tumult and a shudder ran through town. Polish notables fled, and with them the police and anyone else who had reason to fear the Soviet forces.

In the meantime, Dereczin was left without police and without protection. Local Jewish youth, along with Christians from nearby villages took over the forces in Dereczin on a temporary basis, until the Russians would arrive. They had a little bit of armament.

Immediately on that first night, they came knocking on my door, and ordered me to open the store, and to provide red cloth for banners and tablecloths, in order to receive the Red Army.

Victims of Polish Revenge

On the second night, three vehicles with Polish officers drove through Dereczin, after whom were supposed to come a contingent of the Polish army. The temporary authorities detained the Polish officers, beat them up, confiscated their autos, and arrested them. In town, an uproar and panic ensued: the contingent of Polish army was expected any minute, and the Poles [surely] would take out their displeasure at the arrest of their officers on us, the Jews. Many Jews fled the town, and hid out among Christians and in the fields. We hid at *Rushetzky's*, "The American." The Rabbi, his wife and their children, were with us as well.

In the early morning, the Rabbi was summoned to the local priest. There it was demanded of him that he should try to influence the young people, and obtain the release of the Polish officers from jail, because of the impending danger attending the arrival of the Polish army contingent who might wreck all of Dereczin. Only after expending considerable energy, did the Rabbi and the priest obtain the keys to the jail, and release the officers.

At about ten in the morning, the retreating Polish army arrived. The officers singled out the *Beckenstein* home, and related how the "Reds" that fell upon them and wounded one of them had hidden themselves in the yard of this house. The Poles immediately shot into *Beckenstein's* windows. The entire family was hiding down in the cellar, except for the aged *Hirschel Beckenstein*, who asked of them from the house, what was their concern with his house. With shouts that they had been fired upon from the walls of the house, they shot the elder *Beckenstein*. When the Poles retreated to a distance, *Shmuel Beckenstein* came up out of the cellar, to see

what was happening in his brother's house. Seeing his brother lying dead, he fell down from a heart attack and died on the spot.

Elation and Disappointment

All the Jews began to emerge from hiding and began to prepare a reception for the Red Army. The following morning, the first detachments of Soviet soldiers arrived in wagons. They were greeted with joy and hand-clapping. When the first tanks arrived, they were greeted with shouts of: "To your health! Hurrah! Hurrah!" The entire town turned out to greet them.

The first few days went by, and a decree came out to open all the stores and sell everything to the old for low prices. There was no source of new merchandise. For many weeks, there were long lines in front of my store and other businesses, comprised largely of Russian officers and soldiers, and in this fashion I sold out my entire store of goods. The Soviet officers bought more than anyone else, and sent their purchases home to Russia.

A year went by this way. Many Jews arrived in Dereczin from Warsaw, Lodz, Ostrolenka, Suwalk and other cities. Polish Jews were fleeing the Germans, may their names be forever erased. {The Germans] caused them untold grief, and their ran to Russian arms. A short while afterwards, the Russians began to distribute certificates of citizenship, except to those who refused Russian citizenship, choosing rather to retain their Polish citizenship. In a couple of months later, the authorities came in the middle of the night and arrested everyone who had refused Russian passports. As they were seen to be enemies of the state, they were exiled to distant Siberia.

The remaining Jewish refugees remained with us until [the invasion by] Hitler.

Dereczin Is Bombed

Sunday morning the radio tell us: Germany has declared war on Russia. Shortly thereafter we got our first taste of the war. Airplanes arrived and bombed our town.

The Red Army was not prepared for the German assault. Germany attacked suddenly, like a wild animal leaping from ambush. The Soviet authorities and military did not know where to run. Early that Sunday, autos and wagons with Soviet commanders and their families began to pull back. Along with them, went Jews who worked for the Soviets, and Jewish women who had married Soviet personnel. Everyone fled to Russia. On Monday, many also fled on foot. However, very soon people appeared who were running back – the roads were fraught with danger, the German aircraft were raking all the roads and train tracks with machine-gun fire. Only a portion of those fleeing managed to reach Russia, and travel further. Many fell along the way, and the rest largely returned.

Dereczin was bombed yet again. The noise from the German airplanes literally deafened us, and we would immediately drop to the ground, and wait fearfully for the explosion of the bombs. One bomb hit the *Stukalsky* house, killing *Musha* and another refugee woman.

This is what it was like day after day. In the middle of a clear day, a wooden ammunition dump was set ablaze, full of Red Army munitions. Two Soviet commanders set the fire, in order that it not fall into German hands. At that precise moment, a couple of German airplanes flew by, and came down very low, for the purpose of seeing what was burning below. Many people fled the town and hid in the fields. I also ran, along with my child. On the way, I saw tow [Soviet] commanders hiding under an overhang. I will never forget the sight of *Rocheh (Rachel)* the Milliner, dragging herself across the ground, trying to save herself from the gunfire, and get out of town. Both her feet were bandaged, and she dragged herself on her back, supporting herself on her hands, and attempted to crawl to the fields.

The German airplanes would open fire with their machine guns and rake the streets. So we would crawl behind a wall in order to avoid being hit by their bullets.

The Germans Arrive

By Thursday night, it grew quieter. It is said that the Germans are getting closer to Dereczin. There isn't a Russian left to be seen in the town. That morning, we heard about two German paratroopers who were dropped along with their armored cars from their planes. Later, I personally saw how an airplane was dropping a small tank. The Germans entered Dereczin. Nobody went out into the street.

Later, more Germans arrived, and two of them undertook to go from house to house and extract the people. They came to [our house] – I was at that time at *Golda* the Butcher's wife. They shouted: "Hands up in the air!" and told us to get out of the house and go to the vicinity of the church.

When we got to the church, we met up with many Jews and Christians. Around the church were automobiles and tanks. A young German looked us over with his light murderous eyes, latched up his firearm, and said to a second German: "Indeed, we'll have to take them to Berlin yet." And we were all certain that this was the end of our lives. Standing beside me was the husband of *Cherneh* the Seamstress, *Mikhl* the Tailor's son, with a prayer shawl in his hands, asking his wife and children to hold onto him. We all thought that our death was near. On the surface around us, grenades were laid out.

An older German, perhaps fifty years old, stood up and began to speak. His false teeth rattled in his mouth: "Russians and Poles – to the right! Jews – to the left!" They had begun to sort us. The German said a few more things, took out his pocket watch, and said to us that it was twelve o'clock, and from this time on we were in German hands. Then he told us to exit the church.

We were let out through a small door, which could barely accommodate two people at a time, with everyone pushing, seeing as everyone wanted to get out of the church as quickly as possible.

Suddenly gunfire erupts outside. No one else is allowed to leave. People are running back [inside]. A panic sets in, as people fall over each other, and then I see my own 9 year-old child falling down, and a mountain of people fall on top of her. I start screaming all sorts of imprecations, and in the end, I am able to grab my child by the hand and run for an exit on the other side. My child falls again, and I am screaming at the top of my lungs. People started to jump over the church wall, running wherever their eyes were facing, to the surrounding fields.

These were the Russians, firebombing Dereczin. The side of the street opposite the church immediately went up in flames. All the houses from the church to the house of *Veleh (Velvel) Rabinovich* were consumed.

The houses burned, and the Germans stood and watched. A German asks my sister and *Beilkeh*, *Shmuel Lobzover's* daughter: "What are you, Russians? Poles? Jews?! – Slime, Slime –" he says, hearing that they are Jews. He made a sort of mark in the ground, and said that this is what they were going to do to the Jews. We didn't understand him.

Decrees and Fear of Death

An alarming report spread one day, that nine thousand Jews were taken outside of Slonim to a mass grave, where they were all slaughtered. They were told that they were being transported to another city, and they needed to take small bundles with their best possessions. Many took gold and jewelry with them. At the pit, they were ordered to take off all their clothes, their clothing and packages were tossed into the autos used to bring them there, and the Jews were laid out in the pit, and murdered in a terrifying manner.

A Polish Dereczin policeman told how the police were forced to help carry out this 'action' in Slonim.

Imagine then what sort of panic broke out in Dereczin, when one day nine Germans appeared in a fleet of automobiles. Jews ran out of town, but they were fired upon, and warned not to panic.

First, after the Rabbi went out to meet the Germans and hear their demands, one *Poritz* stood out from among them, and ordered the formation of a *Judenrat* to carry out all orders. [He threatened] otherwise, that they would do in Dereczin what was done in Slonim...

These were the first words of the Germans, may their names be forever erased.

A *Judenrat* comprised of seven *balebatim* was immediately established. Immediately, a whole series of decrees began to rain down on our heads. Each was worse than the previous one. Jews had to wear a yellow badge, first a circular one, and then later a Star of David. It was prohibited to appear in public places. Every morning, all men from the ages of 14 to 55 were driven to forced labor, and *Poritz* stood over them with his riding crop in hand. Jews were required to give up their linens, furs, silverware and other valuables. The Germans incited the local Byelorussians and induced them into helping with extorting valuables from the Jews by promising them a share of the Jewish assets.

Twenty nickel bed frames along with a variety of bedding, pillows and blankets were provided to the arriving Germans. The better houses were vacated by the Jews, refurnished, and turned over to the Germans.

Later, a contribution of 3 kilograms of gold was demanded from the Jews. A howl went up in town, as everyone brought to the *Judenrat* what they had managed to accumulate only through the expenditure of enormous energy, assembled all the gold and turned it over to the Germans. Immediately came yet another decree: the Germans demanded fifty meters of green woolen fabric for making trousers. This [merchandise] had never been seen in Dereczin stores. Each of the *balebatim* was asked for twenty dollars, and the *Judenrat* sent three men to Volkovysk, who at great risk to their lives, illegally crossed the border and returned with the demanded woolen material for the Germans.

Yet another decree: many Jews are required to leave their homes immediately, and move to another street. One packs, one runs, one grabs a corner somewhere to lie down. All of this – to delay the [inevitable] slaughter.

Entire Families Are Wiped Out

Every morning before dawn, all the men are forced out to work. One time, a couple of hundred young men are taken on foot to Slonim, for road work. Nobody knew what happened to them there, and some returned home sick under doctor's orders. Early on a Saturday morning, the Leader issued an order requiring the *Judenrat* to hand over the families of each of the young men who had returned from the work detail. Some were brought by force. They were all taken out to a freshly dug grave and murdered. Among them were *Itcheh Walitsky* and his six children, *Dvora* the Koloner and two children, *Gershon* the Dyer And his entire family, and many families of the refugees that had arrived.

When the police came to take *Itcheh Walitsky* and his family, through a window they noticed a small mound of freshly turned earth. This was a 'hideout' dug by Jews to hide from a possible massacre, behind the wall of *Shlomo* the *Kazianov Rabbi*. The police immediately informed the [German] Leader, and he issued an order to bring all the residents of that house, all together about fifty people. It was on the Sabbath. Children of other families were playing around that house. They took all of them.

Two women, the mothers of children who were taken away came looking for them. The doors of the condemned house stood open, so both women, *Alter Koloner's* wife, and another Koloner woman, went inside to look for the children. German murderers arrived, and seeing the women, accused them of coming to rob the house. These unfortunate and innocent women were taken off to the cemetery to be shot. I saw how both of them were led off. They went to their deaths bent over in terror, with heads covered in woolen scarves.

It was in this manner that the family of *Yankel Weinstein* w as cut down on that day – he, *Yankel,*

put up resistance, and would not let himself be taken away – the *Zlotagura* family, and the Ostrolenker watchmaker and his wife and child, and many other families.

This was some time before the major slaughter took place.

The decrees kept falling on the heads of the Jews, a new one each day: prohibition against entering Christian premises to buy something; prohibition against leaving the town and going to a village; prohibition against spending too much time in the streets. We were choked off in the ghetto, with several families to a room. I was in the *shtibl* of *Shmuel-Meir.*

Poritz would shoot people in the streets, and then send an order to the *Judenrat* to have the remains removed and buried.

This is the way a year went by, living with constant fear of death.

The Day of The Slaughter

The Terrible Day arrived. Very early in the morning, *Mikhl* the leather worker, who together with his wife and daughter, *Rishkeh*, lived together with us in the ghetto, and conveys the bitter news: "Children, we are surrounded! Our slaughter is imminent!"

We didn't stop to think very long, and immediately descended into the cellar, which *Herschel Kulakowski* had prepared for his mother, *Elkeh, Shmuel-Meir's* wife. It was a cellar chamber with a double stone wall, four meters deep, without windows.

Those who went into the cellar were: my child and I; *Zelik Friedman*, his wife, and daughter, *Chana-Chaya*; the *Shapiro Family* – the father, mother and daughter, *Liebeh; Elyeh-Chaim Walitsky* with his wife and four small children; the old lady *Sarah,* with her brother; *Rivcheh* the storekeeper, my mother; *Mikhl Derlekh*; the leather-worker, his wife and daughter *Rishkeh* – all told about 25 people. In the house, all that remained were an 80 year-old couple, *Berel Walitsky* and his wife. The police came immediately and took them away.

We lay and muttered *Shema Yisrael.* Suddenly we hear knocking on the side of the cellar: "Come out!" We are certain they have found the entrance to the cellar and that our end of our lives is near. We sit trembling, and the police shout over the wall: "Come out, or we will throw grenades!"

At this point the *Shapiro's* daughter *Liebeh* came close to me and whispered in my ear that the police are not banging on the entrance to our hideout but rather on the double wall. The entry to our hideout is made from a broken slate whose back panel acts as a door, held in place by a nail. Once again we mutter *Shema Yisrael.* We hear the police enter the adjacent cellar, and seeing that it is empty, they leave.

We stayed this way in our hideout for a couple of days, abandoned and hungry. There was nothing left to breathe, since the air had all been used up. *Liebeh,* the *Shapiro's* daughter, crawled out through the entranceway crevice into the house, and brought back a pail of water and bread. I attempted to eat and drink, but nothing would go down my throat – I was literally asphyxiating without air.

I have to get out of this suffocation. I think to myself that it is better to die from a bullet than from this suffocation. The people don't let me move, since it is still possible to betray the location of our hideout.

Suddenly, we hear a voice coming from outside: "Open up, the slaughter is over!" We become terrified, but I recognize the voice as that of my sister's son, *Yankeleh.* My dear one! His first question is whether my mother is with us. He had left her in another cellar, and was now trying to find her there, but he found that cellar open, inside he found my mother's shawl and a little girl who had been strangled. Pitiably, he came running to us, to try and find my mother.

We came out of the cellar.

No Place for Us

When we got close to the barbed wire at the ghetto boundary, I saw two Germans who shouted to us: "Come! Come!" and I ran back through the ghetto, to the bathhouse and again out of the ghetto. Together with my child, we hid ourselves in a potato field.

It was night. The moonlight was clear, illuminating the fields and our bullet-ridden Dereczin – lit up so tranquilly, as if there were no butchering taking place on this sin-filled earth.

My child says to me: "Let us go here, outside the ghetto, to *Leibeh Zuber's* little house. There is bedding stored there on the ground – I will be able to lie down there and sleep a bit."

My child fell asleep, and I stood watch. I watched every minute, looking for it to get light. Light meant danger.

As the sky began to turn gray, I spied in the distance a policeman dressed in black, with a gun, drawing near to the potato field where we had previously hidden ourselves. Quickly I awakened the child, and squirmed out to find a place to which we could flee. I see that *Moshe-David* the butcher's son is sitting near us, with a loaf of bread under his arm. I quietly shout over to him: "Come, come quickly!" He answers: "I have nowhere to go. My wife and children are gone, and I don't want to live any longer."

I see my brother-in-law sitting on a bench in a corner. I call to him, saying that he should run away with us. I get the same kind of answer from him: "My wife is gone. I am alone, bare and naked. I have nowhere to go."

I quickly pried open a small window on the dark side of the small house, and jumped – right into a swampy muck. My child jumps after me. We both crawled over the ground, until we reached a brook.

I look around, and I see *Shapiro's* daughter, *Liebeh* who was in the cellar with us. I tell her that a policeman is off in the distance, looking for us in the potato field, and we must run away from this place. She answers me that she has to go call for her father and mother, who lie hidden in *Leibeh Zuber's* barn, along with the *Stukalskys* and o lot of other Jews.

Liebeh went off to retrieve her parents, and I never saw her again, to this day.

My child and I crawled to the Vian fields, and went into a corn field. There I met up with *Nahum, Bertcheh's (son of Ber)*, with a loaf of bread in one hand and a child's jacket in the other. He related that the prior night, the police shot all the Jews who had hidden out in these corn fields. "Come to the forest – *Nahum* says – there is no longer a place for us here."

But how can I enter the forest when my child is hungry!

I look about, and I see a peasant woman carrying a heavy blanket. I approach her – and she becomes startled, and drops the heavy blanket. I say to her that I no longer need the blanket, but that she must give me a piece of bread. She replies: "Go to the forest. My hut is there. My children will give you water to drink."

I take my child and I go to the peasant woman's hut near the forest. Three young gentiles run out with sticks and begin to beat me. In the yard I see three wagons brimming with Jewish belongings from the ghetto. Their father helped the Germans carry our the slaughter, so they gave him permission to pillage the Jewish belongings. I fought with these young thugs, and took a blow in the head from a stick, but I managed to get away alive with a wound in the forehead.

We entered the forests of Lipov. The child is hungry and thirsty. I begged for a scrap of bread from a peasant woman in a forest hut, so she shouts to me: "Go into the forest! The police will see you here and come and kill you!"

She told me that at night, Jews come out of the ghetto and flee into the forest. I will be able to rendezvous with them at night in the forest.

I could barely wait for nightfall. I hear a stirring between the trees, and I go nearer to it. A lot of Jews, from Dereczin, are sitting there and thinking about where to go. There is no place for us anywhere.

We Were Slaves...

By Y. Reich
(Original Language: Hebrew)

The eyewitness account of Reich, the refugee from Poland, who survived the war years and occupation in Dereczin, turned over upon completion to a Commission concerned with preserving the testimony of those who survived the Holocaust.

The German occupation reached me in the town of Dereczin of the Slonim district, in the Baranovich area. There were about two thousand Jews in the town. The German "Plan" regarding the Jews manifested itself in Dereczin as a model of their intent for all the places where Jews resided in Byelorussia. Every day they drove the populace to do purposeless work, or work of little real significance. They oppressed, murdered for infractions of no significance, whether real or imagined. After a couple of weeks, the Gestapo officials arrived for a visit, all the menfolk were turned out for an assembly, from which the leaders of the intelligentsia were selected, along with the respectable people according to their appearance, sent to dig a mass grave, and were then murdered. At the beginning of 1942, about 700 young men were forcibly taken to work on the Vilna-Slonim highway. They were billeted in structures surrounded with barbed wire. They received a quarter kilo of bread a day, and soup twice a day. They were beaten there without letup.

In May, these slaves were sent home to Dereczin. The Jewish population begins construction of hideouts, influenced as they were by the earthshattering news of the bitter end that Jews came to in the surrounding cities. If such clandestine construction is discovered in a house, then all the residents are taken out to be killed. A "punitive tax" is imposed three times on the Dereczin population – a quarter kilogram of gold the first time, five kilograms the second time, and two million rubles the third time.

From the nearby towns, Ozernitza, and Halinka, and also the Jewish settlement of Kolonia Sinaiska, where Jewish farmers had lived for generations, the Jewish residents were uprooted and concentrated in the Dereczin ghetto, in which 34 houses were established in which the rooms were used to house 2880 souls. Typhus, dysentery and hunger ran through the ghetto. The Byelorussian police authority provided its complete support to the German executioners.

After this, they burdened the local Jews with the work of digging huge pits, 50 by 20 meters. The pursuit of the *shaynim* began. There were isolated instances of dealings with the Germans, but there was not one person who informed or passed the word from the Jewish population, which was unified in its misfortune – an unusual phenomenon, considering those trying times.

The slaughter was carried out on July 23, 1942. It reached all of the Jews, not leaving alive even doctors, dentists, and other "useful" Jews.

The "action" continued for two days, after which a

communication came out that no one else would be taken out to be killed. Members of the *Judenrat* went from house to house, and told people that no one would be harmed, on the word of the head of the gendarmerie, "the word of a German officer." The Jews began to emerge from hiding and their caves, into the light of the July sun. For two days it was quiet in the town, and on the third day they gathered everyone and assembled them in the market square, surrounded them and led them off to the death pits.

Approximately 250 people escaped into the surrounding forests. From this group, 80 able-bodied men joined partisan units. The rest, women, the elderly and children, were concentrated into family camps. During the two and a half years that they were in the forest, they withstood five German attacks, suffered from pestilence and disease, and not once felt the pangs of hunger. Only about 90 people returned alive from the forest.

How Tzippel Beckenstein Committed Suicide

By Pesha Feinsilber

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Untitled, but presumably of Tzippel Beckenstein (p. 267)

At the end of 1941, barely six months after the arrival of the Hitlerists, the streets were completely plastered with placards of Hitler's portrait, and his feral countenance looked down on us from every wall. Nearby, also hung a picture of a Jew bowed over from the blows being rained upon his head, and from the sport being made from him.

Jews didn't go out into the streets, not wanting to look at the German placards.

Then the Germans took the Torah scrolls out of all the synagogues, threw them out and began to tear them apart, burning and desecrating them with wild ferocity. The pain and shame was enormous. The unfortunate Jews had to stand by and observe our holiest objects being desecrated. Everyone was broken and hurt, not knowing what to do.

Mendzheh Beckenstein the Scribe lived next door to us. His sole remaining daughter, *Tzippel* was a young lady, 20 years of age who had studied for and had become a teacher.

Her two older sisters, *Bashkeh & Golda* had left the country, but her parents did not permit *Tzippeh* to travel as well, because they wanted to have [at least] one child nearby.

Tzippel saw how the sacred Jewish writings were being desecrated, the Torah scrolls. She came home entirely distraught and cried to her parents: "It is impossible to continue living! It is impossible to continue living!"

At night, she took kerosene and doused the entire house and herself. She stood herself in a corner and lit a match. She was already enveloped in huge tongues of flame when her parents started up from their sleep, and the neighbors form all around came to attempt to rescue her. She continuously begged: "Let me be consumed with you together! If our sanctity has been destroyed we have nothing to live for! I cannot continue to live after what mine eyes have seen."

She managed to survive one additional day. Everyone wanted to help save her, but she refused, and asked to be buried in the garden near their home.

I Was A Refugee in Oppressed Dereczin

By Shmuel Bernstein
(Original Language: Hebrew)

War Again

My wanderings essentially began from the first day of the war. As the enemy approached Lodz, a tumult arose in the city, and people began to flee toward Warsaw. We: my father, oldest brother, and myself tearfully parted from my mother and joined up with the masses fleeing on foot.

We pass towns and cities that were noted for their beauty. Now they had become fodder to feed the flames caused by the planes of the enemy. Remnants of houses still on fire, with horses running about in the streets that has gone astray. People keening out loud over the loss of their relatives.

We found no rest in Warsaw either. The days of terrifying siege began. The city fell on September 26, And once again there was no reason to stay there. After a month of purposeless wandering, we finally returned home. A terrible fright gnawed at us concerning the fate of our mother. To our good fortune, we found her alive and well, and it was wonderful that for a moment it seemed that nothing had transpired.

But very swiftly, depredations began to be directed at the Jews. Fines, confiscations and summary judgements. Every night, young Jewish boys are taken from their homes, nearly naked only in their undergarments: they are taken off to an unknown location.

At the end of October, news was spread through the city that there was a possibility to make transit to Soviet Russia. Every day, someone that we knew would disappear. Even two of my friends, *Arik Mollor & Tadak Kuperman* stood ready to depart. They proposed that I join them. One night, with the advice of our family it was decided: my oldest brother would stay at home with our parents; I was to travel at my own risk.

On November 12, I parted from my family with their blessings. My mother and brother stood dumbly. My father blessed me in a trembling voice:

– May God give that you succeed, my son!

And then he added:

– My heart tells me that we will not see each other again in this world. Apparently his heart did not prophesy in vain.

The path through the forest brought me to the town of Dereczin, near Slonim. I began employment as the director of a school there. I lived quietly. It was in this fashion that a year and a half went by in the Soviet sector, far from the din of war. At the outset, I would receive letters from home, but after a while these stopped as well.

Midway through June 1941, when the school vacations started, I left with my fried *Arik*, who served as a teacher in Slonim, to visit *Tadak*, who lived in Kobrin, close to the German border. Our meeting was an emotional one: We hadn't seen one another for nearly a year. *Tadak* whispered his fear to us: they observed vast military troop movements on the other side of the border. We went to be full of suspicions. —

On June 22 at 4AM we were awakened from our sleep by the sound of explosions. Once again, we found ourselves in the crossfire of battle. We left on the road to Dereczin to present ourselves at our point of military mobilization. The railroad track was destroyed. On the roads, one could sense the movement of military transports. We reached Slonim only with great difficulty. In the city – mass confusion. Contingents of retreating Red Army units are moving eastward in a disorderly fashion. All the offices of the local authorities are closed. The military draft boards ceased to function. There was nothing to discuss concerning military conscription.

The Russian soldiers told stories about the swiftness of the German army advance. According to their reports, the German army was getting close to Volkovysk. Battles were being fought at 80-100 kilometers from Slonim. I weighed the options in my mind, and concluded that it would be a good thing for me to head to the east as well. I believed in my heart that the Russians would quickly regroup and counterattack the enemy. Sadly, *Arik* was unable to join me. On the way from Kobrin, he was wounded in the leg, and was not fit for travel. It was in this fashion that I left the city by myself.

I made part of the trip in a military vehicle, but mostly – on foot. I reached the city of Minsk on the seventh day of the war. The cup of war had reached this capital city of Byelorussia. Almost the entire city was a vast island of upheaval. The street were empty. The young people had fled to the east. Those who were left behind had hidden themselves in various places of refuge. The stench of burning is in the air: houses are going up in flames.

The planes do not stop bombing the city; descending practically to the rooftops. Occasional wandering people pass me by and tell me that the enemy has captured a huge army to the east, and very quickly the city will be entirely surrounded from all sides. There is no point to continue eastward. The Germans are everywhere, and even my feet, which are swollen from the arduous walking, cease giving me support.

In one of the outskirts of the city, I enter a small house that was somehow miraculously spared. All of the surrounding buildings were completely demolished. Inside this house there was no place to move. The neighbors, whose roof had collapsed on their heads were sleeping on the floor, along with other wanderers like me. The considerate woman of this house gave me assistance: in a matter of an hour, my feet had been bandaged. As I sat there, I fell asleep. The sounds of war reached me as if from behind the mask of some awful dream.

When the rhythm of the cannonade subsided, which lasted through the night, the light of the morning came.

Our hearts told us that this was the calm before the storm. We sit and wonder what is going to happen next, and lo:

– Cr-r-rash – a window pane is smashed to smithereens. At the window, steel helmets and guns appear.

Alle Raus[114]*!!* – a German shouts in a loud baritone voice.

The first arriving German units captured the city. Like a flash of lightning, the thought crosses my mind: once again, I am in the talons of the evil beast!

An almost irreversible depression took hold of me. Pursued and sick, I was from both a physical and emotional point of view a tempest-tossed mote in an unforgiving world. What was the point of living?

In the streets, German military vehicles were going back and forth. With thundering noise, tanks and cannon made their way through the streets. In open limousines, Nazi officers rode displaying excessive effusion. On the sides of the vehicles were scrawled : "To Moscow!"

And it appeared to me that there was not a force in the world comparable to them. Warsaw, Brisl, Paris, Minsk and many other European capitals – fell. In its victorious thrust, the German army had speedily penetrated to the east, to the capital of the Red Land.

Nach zwei wochen in Moskau!

Only two more weeks to Moscow, so trumpeted the Hitlerites, drunk with their victory.

On the day after the capture of the city, notices appeared in the streets of Minsk , which contained the outlines of the new order of things, calling on all men from age 15 to 50 to present themselves at specified gathering points. Noncompliance was punishable by death.

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[114] Everybody out!!

I decide to sneak out of town and get to Dereczin. The woman of the house gave me a loaf of bread, and some provisions for the journey. With heartfelt blessings, I took leave of her, and at dawn, I went out on the road to leave.

As I neared the edge of the road, I silenced my footfall: one more kilometer, and I'll be outside the city line.

-- *Halt!!* – I heard the command barked in German.

From a foxhole, two Germans jumped up. After a thorough search, they walked me to the side. Here there were already a goodly number of 'tourists' like me, "fellow travelers." The Germans put us into a car, while cursing us and beating us with the truncheons in their hands. In about ten minutes they brought us to a large square, where thousands of the citizenry were crammed in at the order of the commandant.

The sun burned fiercely. Thirsty and hungry, we waited to see what our fate would be. People kept pouring in endlessly, and the overcrowding became greater. People had already been in the middle of this stifling condition, for several days. Once a day, a vehicle would come to the square carrying [drinking] water. Everyone would stream towards it. The pushing was terrible. Everyone sought to slake their thirst. At that time the Germans would shoot into the unruly mob, and the people would retreat. Rivulets of the water would be mixed with the blood of those killed.

After four days, the Germans transported all the people to the edge of the river where they set up a camp. With truncheons in their hands, they goaded the people along like cattle.

Hungry and exhausted from the recent weeks, I hovered like a shadow over the face of the camp. Only from time to time was I able to break my fast and satisfy my hunger; the Jews of the area would give me the privilege of sharing their meager rations still in their possession.

There were a high percentage of "prisoners" in the camp, we were [comprised of] sentenced offenders, detainees of the Soviet labor camps. All of the Christians understood quite well that the Jews stood outside the framework of the law, and they preyed on the camp like hyenas, tearing the clothes off the backs of the Jews, and grabbing their last morsel of bread out of their hands.

On day, the Germans announced over a loudspeaker that the Jews were immediately to be transferred to a ghetto. What a pleasant prospect! A ghetto inside of a concentration camp! Approximately six thousand Jews were confined on a rectangular plane within the general camp, surrounded by barbed wire, measuring 50 by 100 meters.

By the end of the second week, many of us had died from the exhaustion of our energies. During the day, the sun beat down mercilessly on us, and at night we would be drenched by torrential downpours. Quite frequently, the Germans would amuse themselves at our expense, at night they would open fire on us with machine guns, and we would all fall to the ground. After "exercises" of this nature, tens of dead would have to be buried in the morning.

On the fifteenth day, an open limousine drives up to the ghetto gate within the detainment camp. From the car, officers alight crisply dressed, their ornaments glistening down to their feet, with the death's head symbol on their caps. These were the Gestapo officials. We understood that the critical moment had arrived. They began to organize a list of the people and to sort them by occupation. Moral improved.

Ho! Ho! – the optimists said – it appears they are going to release us, and send each of us to the designated place for us to work.

After ordering us by name, the Germans separated us into two groups. One group of freed workers, and a second group. Everyone asked themselves – whose fate would be better.

It was my perception that the Germans were

particularly interested in the Jewish intelligentsia.

The following day, the Germans began to take the intellectuals out in cars. Soon thereafter, the sounds of machine gun fire reached our ears. From the non-Jewish section, we heard loud exclamations. – They are shooting the Jews – I heard one Russian say.

It was in this fashion that the Germans sealed the fate of the Jewish intelligentsia of Minsk in the third week, and the rest of us were taken to prison.

As a temporary visitor, I was commanded to return home to Dereczin. That is what I had put down as my place of residence.

So wie so wirst du erschossen!

One way or another, you will be shot – and with these words I took leave of the guards.

On the Way Back

July 1941

Where to? – I asked myself. There was only one answer: onto the necks of the Germans, right into the middle and into the fury of the hangmen. Before this I knew: It was incumbent upon me to head to the east, to flee the cursed enemy; now, the uselessness of this plan weighed on me like a heavy stone. I tried to use side roads. To the extent possible, I skipped going through cities and towns. But around nightfall, hunger forced me into the town of Zaslov, near the former Russian-Polish border. I entered the first dwelling to ask where the Jews live here. The owner of the house, an elderly and talkative gentile, whose face portrayed a kind heart, told me about the tragic fate of the citizens of Zaslov. Almost immediately after the Germans captures the town, they killed all the young men. It was in this way that they exacted revenge for the death of those few Nazis who were killed in the streets, as they fought with the soldiers off the retreating Red Army.

There were a few Jewish families that resided in Zaslov. The old Russian, who immediately recognized that I was a Jew, advised me to go to *Baruch*, who never permitted a passing guest to go through without providing him with at least a loaf of bread. I found his residence only with great difficulty. I knocked on his door with trepidation.

It had been several weeks since I had rested properly, and my feet ached to the point that they could no longer carry me. My body reeked by itself. How would this man receive me?

In the doorway of the house stood a tall old man, whose beard was streaked with gray. His blue eyes conveyed good-heartedness and understanding. He looked at me for a moment, saw that I had come a distance, that I was tired and exhausted, dirty and with torn clothing, mostly barefoot, with my toes sticking out of my shoes, and he only let me hear the words:

– Come in

Inside the house, the poverty emanated from every corner. A shaky bed, two primitively constructed chairs and a table, made from a couple of boards – that was the extent of the furniture inside. In the second room – a prayer stand, and a reading place, with thick, heavy books on them, sacred volumes. The old man immediately went about dealing with the affairs of his poor house. Quickly a rustling sound was heard, and immediately bread appeared.

– This is all I have – take advantage of it, *Baruch*. said.

After washing myself and a ritual laving of my hands, I sat down at the table. I told the old man the fate of the Jews of Minsk. *Baruch* wept when he heard my words. After the evening meal, he offered me his bed, and asked me to lie down and rest. I protested.

– I am the young one – I protested to him – and I can sleep on the floor; you only have one bed.

– You are exhausted from travel – *Baruch* replied – and you are entitled to rest. I will go sleep at the neighbor's.

Tired and exhausted I climbed up on the bed. After many weeks of wandering, this was the first time I had slept on a bed under the beams of a roof, not hungry, and encouraged by the good words of the old man. With pleasure, I felt my aching legs under me.

I awoke in the night. A small flame sputtered on the table. The door to the adjacent room was ajar, and beyond the opening it appeared to me that I saw the outline of a man sleeping on the bare earthen floor. It was the elderly *Baruch.* He was asleep with his arm under his head, on a hard place.

After resting, and eating my fill, I left that morning to continue my journey. *Baruch* saw me to the outskirts of the town. We parted with a handshake. The old man blessed me.

– Go in peace – he said – and my God watch over you no matter where you go.

On the second day, I stopped at the town of Ivnitz, near the border. On the street I was detained by a Pole who wore an insignia on his cuff. At the police station, they demanded papers from me.

– Aha – said the commandant, – the leprous Jew didn't succeed in fleeing to Stalin.

I was hit with a fist several times and ordered to leave the town.

It was difficult for me to continue on my way. In the villages, the Christian children would throw stones at me and sic their dogs on me. At infrequent intervals, homeowners would permit me to drink water, and I did not have the nerve to ask for a slice of bread.

– Dirty Jew! – is what I heard around me wherever I went.

On the fourth day I reached a train station. It was full of Germans. I decided to sneak on board the garbage car. This was laden with life-threatening danger, but I really had no choice. In a matter of an hour, I had managed to get inside the car. On the floor there were crusts of bread rolling around. In my ravenous hunger, I wolfed down this scattered debris.

The following day I got off at a small station near Slonim.

In a few hours I was with friendly and familiar faces. In the house, the mood was one of oppression. Three nights prior, the Germans had taken out about a thousand young Jewish men and marched them off to an unknown destination. Rumors abounded that they were shot to death in the nearby woods.

Hunger pervaded the town. The farmers stopped bringing their produce. It was forbidden for the Jews to go to the villages. Anyone who broke this law – his blood was on his own head. Despite this, a number of mothers risked their lives, and took from their valuables to go to the villages and exchange them for foodstuffs.

A day didn't go by with some tragedy for the residents. I decided to rest a bit, and then continue my journey. It was less than 30 kilometers to Dereczin.

The Cauldron of Misfortune

Aug - Nov 1941

The appearance of Dereczin, that had been at times full of yearning and gaiety, had absolutely been transformed. One no longer heard the sound of children playing in the streets; instead, here and there, someone would flit by hurriedly, trying to steal across the street with their head bowed down, glancing furtively from side to side, trying to unobtrusively slip by. The storefronts are closed up. The tumultuous noises that were the hallmark of the small towns of Byelorussia had completely fallen still. In the air hung the terrifying fear of the mournful new times that were upon us.

As soon as I arrived, I underwent the Ivnitz experience a second time. As soon as a policeman

saw a "new face" he detained me and marched me off to the police station.

The police headquarters were in a very fine building that housed the 311th Red Artillery Guard on its ground floor. In place of the Red Flag, on the pole that was in front, flew the flag with the swatstika. In the guardhouse in front of the gate, a single Hitlerite soldier sat, and on his cuff were written the words, *Hilfs Polizei* (Helping Police). His face manifested a haughtiness that conveyed his sense of importance regarding the position that had been accorded him.

The foyer was completely filled with people. Among the Jews present, I saw an individual who was known to me. In a whisper, he related to me what had transpired in the town prior to my arrival. When the news spread that the Germans were getting nearer, the young people fled to the east. A few days later, a brutal battle took place between the Russians and German paratroops. In the end, on the third day, the regular German army entered Dereczin. The Nazis put a new administration and police force in place. First priority was given to people who were on the list of suspects compiled by the Russians. Apart from these, people were attracted into this police work who were looking for an easy way to make a living.

A bitter fate awaited those who were successful during the Soviet era. The newly installed constabulary did not cease to pick at and uncover old misdeeds, and to arrange for mass arrests. The cells in the prison were rapidly filled to the point of no space being left, and they taunted the frightened prisoners. Many who had a grudge against someone that they knew were encouraged to inform on their political leanings. In so-and-so's house, one used to see visiting Soviet officials, in the house of another lovers of communism were seen; such a person said something once that was anti-German. The tiniest suspicion was sufficient: the suspect was imprisoned and all his assets were confiscated.

From time to time, the constabulary would empty out its prison, and hand over the inmates to the Gestapo that was headquartered in nearby Slonim. The Germans didn't waste much time with investigations and defense speeches. Prisoners were taken out for immediate execution. Terror roamed the streets of the town, and the air was thick with the screams of those who were innocent of any wrongdoing. The circumstances of the Jews was particularly bad.

A short while before the outbreak of the war, after I had left town to find my freedom, the Soviets arrested *Lewandowski*, the local newspaper editor, and removed him from the town. It was subsequently revealed that he had a secret radio station in his house. War broke out while he was on a train to Siberia. The train he was on was bombed by the Germans and the spy, who miraculously survived, returned home unharmed. In assessing his "credentials," the Germans appointed him as the head of the town of Dereczin. This newspaper publisher, who had previously been a quiet and self-effacing man, now revealed his true countenance. He turned over many Jews to the Germans, with the representation that they were conspiring with the Bolsheviks.

In a short span of time, this head of the town managed to amass a large fortune. Those who understood his lust for valuables would redeem themselves at his hands with all that they possessed. Many families that had heretofore been wealthy, were left destitute in their quest to save the lives of a relative or dear one. There were times when even money was of no help, especially in situations where the heat of the town held a specific grudge against an individual.

As his deputy, Mr. *Lewandowski* picked a very compatible helpmeet for himself, a tanner named *Limansky*, who had at one time been a Polish policeman. He was an incredible drunkard without a conscience, who during two years had managed to hide himself from the Soviet regime. Now he had a high position: Head of the police constabulary.

And I am [now] a prisoner. The hours go by. Finally the duty officer called my last name. A while later, I found myself in the office of the Head Constable.

The room was furnished beautifully. On the wall – a large portrait of Hitler. Under the portrait, *Limansky* swung around in an armchair in a careless pose, manifesting his dominance. The probing questions started to come. I showed him the transit papers that I had in hand, given to me by the Germans to permit me to return to my home. I lied, and said that I had used this time to travel to Minsk where one of my family relations lived. I knew that my fate hung in the balance. If the slightest shred of suspicion entered the heart of the Head Constable, he would without hesitation turn me over to the Germans.

– I recognize these made up stories quite well – *Limansky* said to me persuasively. – You would be best off to immediately admit that you fled to the Bolsheviks.

I grasped that behind these soft words a terrible danger lurked for me. It looked out form the cunning little eyes that darted back and forth without rest in his fat face, the product of his good fortune. I fell silent. I refused to speak. This reaction caused the Head Constable to lose control of himself. Suddenly he was transformed into a malevolent beast. The softness vanished from his face. The silence gave way to a tumultuous outburst. A hailstorm of invective cascaded down onto my head. He yelled: "Communist! Accursed Bolshevik!" He hit me with an outpouring of anger and anything that came to his hand. Finally, he saw that this line of inquiry was not having any effect on me, he retreated and sat down again in his place. I sensed that a new idea had entered his mind. He called the duty officer and whispered something in his ear.

– We will know the truth soon enough: you have fallen my little bird into an old and well-seasoned jail, – face me.

Barely an hour went by, when the sexton of the school in which I previously had worked appeared. The old sexton, who had seen generations of students and teachers, winked at me out of a sense of participation in my sorry situation. In response to the question of the Head Constable, he indicated that I had left Dereczin before the outbreak of the war, and in this he gave credibility to my story. At the end, I found myself outside, cleared but beaten, wiping off the blood that was dripping from my nose.

– And now, where to go? – I asked myself.

There was no point in going back to my old place of residence, which was a Polish home. I knew that it was forbidden for Jews to be found in the homes of "Aryans." My status in the meantime had also changed: before I was a teacher, a person who commanded respect; but now, as a Jew, I found myself outside the framework of the law; I was worse than a dog in their eyes.

I set my sites on the communal hall across the way. Now, the *Judenrat* is located there. In a tight and dirty little room, tens of people are milling around. At that hour, the head of the town had issued an order to the Jews to produce within the hour, beds, blankets and pillows. And these things in substantial quantities, and an enormous amount of money for the needs of the Germans who were delayed in their transit in the town. Incidents of this sort would be repeated with variations almost on a day-to-day basis. There was no end to these different demands. People would quarrel with one another. Everyone would exclaim that he had surrendered everything he had the day before, and that he had nothing left. Tens of people wailed that they had absolutely nothing left; the indigent who surrendered their pennies last, cursed those who were not forthcoming.

Hungry and tired, I sat on a bench. I was indifferent to everything around me, and did not try to catch the attention of people who were ignoring me. I saw that everyone was totally immersed in their own personal misfortune.

Standing next to me was an elderly woman who wept because they had come and arrested her daughter in the night. A Polish neighbor had informed on her that a Russian officer used to come and visit her. There was no money in the house, and it was not possible to obtain her release.

At the side, two little girls slept. On their pale and tired faces were the signs of undried tears. The women clucked about the misfortune of these orphans. There was some sort of disagreement between their father and the Head of the town that reached the courts. The Head, *Lewandowski*, then made use of his position, and ordered him arrested as a communist sympathizer. Yesterday he had been taken out and sent to the Gestapo in Slonim. Nobody comes back from there.

In one house, the Germans smashed up all the movable possessions. In another house, the son was killed at his work. The depredations skipped no one.

From time to time, people who recognized me approached me and asked: where, when and how. I repeated to them all my tribulations. Someone gave me a slice of bread. A woman offered me a bowl of warm soup.

Some people came and offered me a place to sleep for the night. I preferred to spend the night on the bench in the *Judenrat* office, sunk in my own thoughts. In the evening, as the hall emptied out, I laid down to sleep. Despite my great exhaustion, I could not fall asleep for a long time. Those nearest to my heart were probably lost in faraway Lodz. My circumstances were difficult. I had no money. There was no possibility to earn money. There was little hope for any support to be had from those who knew me. And I was too proud to hold out my hand to beg for charity.

In my heart, the thought of committing suicide began to take shape.

Aloud, my heart told me that this was just a weakness of resolve. My suffering – was no different from that of the remainder of my people. I brought to mind the history of our people, which was laden with incidents of terror, oppression, that seemed to be our constant companion, but that our strength stood us in good stead and allowed us to overcome those who would bring us down. In the end I fell asleep.

The following day, early in the morning, I heard a knocking at the door. In front of me stood my friend, *Paula Rosenzweig* , the wife of the local doctor. The circumstances of fate brought her and her husband in the year 1939 from Warsaw to distant Dereczin. I recalled her to be a high-spirited person. It was said of her that she was prepared to render assistance to anyone in need, no matter what the problem. She would help the poor with whatever means she had at her disposal. In 1939, she especially looked after refugees, who would arrive hungry and exhausted seeking refuge from the Nazis. Without spending too much time discussing it, she took me, almost by force to her home.

Here she prepared a hot bath for me. *Paula* gave me clean underwear and a change of suit. I took off my old and dirty underwear and my suit that had been torn completely to shreds from the vicissitudes of my wanderings during the past few weeks. Clean and properly dressed, I felt like someone who belonged in the place. I sat down to eat breakfast. I felt like I had returned and found a family setting after many years of wandering. After noon, *Paula's* husband returned home from the local hospital where he worked. He also greeted me with a warm welcome.

– Stay with us – the two said to me. – The company is welcome in these trying times.

A day didn't go by in Dereczin without some new decree against the Jews. The constabulary was rampant. Jews were taken into forced labor. I also worked in the cleaning of the houses of the Russians. In general, it seemed that the sole purpose of the regime was to make life miserable for us, the Jews. At the end of September we were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks. "Jews are permitted to walk only on the paths where cattle are driven," – *Limansky* informed the *Judenrat.*

At that same time the rule was enacted to wear badges on which the Star of David was drawn. Very quickly, the badges were altered to be yellow, so that Jews could be identified at a distance. Night after night we would go to sleep, terrified of what the next day would bring.

One day a rather luxurious limousine pulled into town in front of the police station. A commotion developed in the town:

– The Gestapo is coming!

At that hour, I was engaged in cleaning a wrecked place to the side of the police station. The policemen that guarded us cursed at us with all manner of foul epithets, not sparing us from beatings with their sticks, in order to prove their enthusiasm and diligence to their masters. We worked as hard as we could, while quietly attempting to assess the implications of this visit. After each visit by the Gestapo, a hue and cry of despair would spread through the town.

After a while, the Gestapo officials got into their car with *Lewandowski* and drove off somewhere. The following day *Lewandowski* ordered the *Judenrat* leadership in to see him.

With lightning speed, the news of the Gestapo's new order sped through the town. In two week's time, it would be necessary to dig a huge pit in the nearby woods. Why do they need such a pit? And what's the rush? The optimists among us said that the Germans wanted to prepare a line of defense in the event of a counterattack. But their theory didn't make any sense. We were aware that at that time that the German army was engaged in battle near Moscow; the majority tended to agree with the pessimists, who saw the ominously approaching end in this new demand.

– We are digging our own grave – this was the prevailing opinion.

That night, in a stifling heat, people began to dig under their houses to create hiding places, to protect them from all manner of trouble.

The depth of the pit that the Germans had ordered to be dug was five meters; it was fifty meters long and 20 meters wide. The job of digging in the hardened ground, full of roots, was filled with many difficulties. We worked by the sweat of our brows in driving rain; We became caked with the recalcitrant earth. And woe betide anyone who stopped his work to mop the perspiration from his forehead. The police would immediately fall upon him and beat him senseless. We worked tight-lipped. But in our minds the words that went back and forth were: you are digging your own grave...

At the end of October the pit was finished. On the last day we left that terrifying place. We were emotionally disturbed by this huge maw that stood ready to receive thousands into their final resting place. Shortly after the completion of the excavation, the limousine returned again to the police station. A terror spread through the town, like never before. People vanished into their hideouts; those who were on the streets looked from side to side in fright, sizing up in which direction to run away. The *Judenrat* officials were called to meet the Germans. In less than an hour, the members of the board ran distressed in to the streets.

– Jews, a calamity! They are demanding an enormous contribution. If we fail to respond – they will take us out to the pit and shoot us to death.

Mothers took their last pennies out of their kerchiefs, that they were saving for a time of crisis. Wedding rings, watches and other valuables were collected. On that terrible day, most of the Jews were reduced to abject poverty and destitution.

Towards nightfall, the Gestapo officials left.

– And with what will we redeem our lives tomorrow? – We would ask ourselves.

New Masters

Nov 1941 - Feb 1942

At the beginning of November a terrifying communication reached Dereczin; very soon, German police would be coming; they are going to take over the town administration. The people tasted the brunt of the administration of *Limansky* and *Lewandowski* on their flesh: it was understood that

one could not expect any relief from the Germans. There was total despair among the masses. On everyone's lips was heard the sentiment: – let it be better – let it be , it can't get any worse than it is.

The Head of the town and the constabulary were not particularly happy with the arrival of the new regime. They recognized that this would diminish their own importance. Even the resident Polish citizenry was not happy when they heard this news. Everyone knew that the Germans also hated the Poles. Until now, the entire burden fell on the shoulders of the Jews: from now on the others will also have to shoulder the yoke.

The Head of the town ordered the *Judenrat* to clean up the house in honor of the conquerors. Tens of workers were drafted into this labor. The house was completely cleaned out, the walls were strengthened, and the floors swept. Quickly, this house was turned into a palace. Finally, the new owners arrived.

On one day, several automobiles arrived at the police station, and ten gendarmes disembarked. The bark of command from the new arrivals was immediately heard. That evening, a new sign appeared on the side of the police station. Terrifying words looked out on us from it:

S.S. und Ortspolizei
(S.S and Local Police)

It was a difficult winter. The residents had nothing with which to fuel their stoves, and the inventory of foodstuffs ran out. Hard times befell us, with hunger and cold, no bedding, no clothing, and with snow falling endlessly. Formerly, I used to see the winter as a pleasant season; on the roads, we would see sleds with their bells ringing gaily; happy children would play in the streets, throwing snowballs at each other, and making snowmen. Warmly clothed, I would go outside early in the morning and with pleasure taste the wet virgin snow lying about.

Now the winter had turned into a curse. In the houses – a penetrating cold. In the streets, large crowds of people were standing about, dressed in thin clothing, bedecked by the onslaught of nature. The head of the gendarmes, *Poritz Pigass* issued an order: it is forbidden for the streets to be covered in snow for even an hour. This brutal Prussian, dressed in warm winter clothing, would pass by in a winter sled, drawn by a brace of horses, meting whipping people left and right to cries of: *Arbeiten, verfluchte Juden!* (Work, you accursed Jews!).

Women, children, the elderly, battled the snow with all their might. Some piling it up into piles, others carting it off in wagons.

– Lord in Heaven! – God-fearing people would groan, – must the snow fall endlessly, all the time?

Poritz, who runs about like a beast of prey, issues new orders every day to torture the exhausted people. The work continued from morning until evening. All the shacks were cleaned, all the snow was removed. Skilled workers are performing all manner of jobs for the Germans. These craftsmen set up cooperatives that employed the tailors, shoemakers and carpenters. No one dared to complain for lack of work. However, the only wage was a daily ration of 150 grams of bread, for which people labored by the sweat of their brow, with the knowledge that at home, hungry children were waiting.

At that time *Poritz* also established a doctors cooperative. All the Jewish doctors and their families were moved into one house, and they had to be at every beck and call of the administration. I, who had lived all this time at the home of *Dr. Rosenzweig*, was appointed as a watchman for the house.

The owner of the house in which the doctors were moved to was an intelligent man, a Zionist and a venerable person by the name of *Feldman*. He was for many years the leader of the town in Dereczin. Seeing as he had the respect of the Jewish community, the Germans initially appointed him as head of the *Judenrat*. However, after a while, when *Feldman* saw that this [responsibility] was causing

him great vexation and sorrow, he found an excuse to vacate his position, claiming that he could not keep up with the demands of the job by virtue of his advanced age. And indeed, he was too old for this kind of burden.

This was a man with very set ways, not knowing how to relax his standards. He took great care of his external appearance. Even in those difficult times, he was fastidious about his personal hygiene, and took care to arrange his clothing and tie properly. His wife *Pessia* would complain to him: What is the point of you dressing yourself up that way in times like these? And he would answer:

–Fool that you are, one must never submit to them!

This Jew at that time remained with us in his house along with the doctors.

Our custom in the house was communal in nature in all matters: we ate together in a large room, the women cooked, each woman in accordance with her particular skill. On the eve of the Sabbath, *Feldman's* wife *Pessia* would light the candles, and the spirit of the Sabbath could be felt throughout the house. Old man *Feldman* would shuttle back and forth between the rooms of the doctors, humming Sabbath melodies. As the Passover season drew close, one of the doctors bestirred himself, a *Dr. Rosenthal* – a man with a warm Jewish heart, intelligent and a Zionist – who turned to *Feldman* and all the other doctors with a proposal that they organize a communal *Seder* for all the residents in the house. The gentiles, who would come from the surrounding villages to our home to receive medical care from the doctors provided us with foodstuffs. It was in this fashion that matzoh was baked, in a primitive fashion. There was even sacramental wine over which to recite the ritual blessings. And *Dr. Rosenthal* gave an emotionally moving speech about our condition, which brought a number of us to tears.

I grew closest to the son of this *Dr. Rosenthal.* Seven years younger than I, he captured my heart. He looked younger than he actually was, somewhat pinched, short in height, a high forehead, a long nose and big black, deep eyes. By intellectual development and maturity, he was in every way already like an adult. He managed to educate himself, even in those trying times. During the daytime, he would come near me and help out with my keeping order in the house, and in the evenings we would go into one of the rooms that was used to receive patients during the day, and there the young lad would play the violin. With us also was a sixteen year-old girl named *Bella*, the daughter of *Dr. Hirschenson* the dentist, who during the war had been blown into Dereczin from Grodno.

It might appear somewhat surprising that I kept company with people significantly younger than I. But, the other residents in that house were significantly older than I was, and naturally I was attracted to the young. Our fate, our closeness to one another, and the presence of a young woman, all contributed to flavoring our talks.

In the middle of the winter, the farmers, who came to us in stealth, began to tell of miraculous feats performed by *Pavel Bulak* [115]a resident of the nearby village of Ostrovo, who in his time was the head of a Kolkhoz.[116] He was a stout-hearted man, who concealed himself from the Germans in the forest. Woe betide any of the Nazis that fell into his hands! He would shuttle between the villages, and call for the farmers to rise up against the Germans and go into the forests. There hidden in the forests, there apparently were also a small number of Russian soldiers, who remained there after the fall of the Red Army. It was in this way that a new word was added

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115 The heroic exploits of the *Pobeda* partisan battalion, led by Commander *Bulak* are recorded in the annals of the Russian military history of the time. Reference to this resistance unit has also been documented by our *landsman, Murray (Moshe) Salutsky,* who together with his brother *Casrael (Katriel)* fought in this partisan battalion.

116 A Soviet farm collective.

to our vocabulary in our area: partisan. The thick, heavy obscuring forest was already serving as a staging area for Jewish youth.

In those days, at the beginning of 1942, news reached the forests concerning the [initial] victories of the Russians in the heartland; these offered a little comfort to the people, and helped to keep their hopes alive.

Ah, but woe unto us! The coming spring brought with it evil tidings: in our midst, in the midst of the Jews, there was no outlook any better than the blackest of the black.

The Youth Organizes Itself

Mar - Apr 1942

At the beginning of spring, the bad news came raining down on us, one item after another. The Germans initiated the general extermination of all Jews in Byelorussia. Despair welled up from within. A loss of spirit and a loss of will pervaded everyone.

– There is nothing that can save us – was the prevailing opinion. Bitter tidings reached us from nearby Slonim, where the headquarters of the *Gebeits-kommissariat* was located, the district command. The head of the section that dealt with 'Jewish issues' was a young Nazi named *Heik*. The 18 year-old Prussian who had the face of an innocent child, was nothing less than a bloodthirsty wild beast. He always carried out decrees on the residents with extra zeal; this is how he advanced.

At that time, a census was taken of the all the Jews of Slonim. A list was prepared, in which the Jews were sorted into several categories, in accordance with their skills. Ordinary laborers were envious of those craftsmen that were in demand by the Germans. Those craftsmen received yellow cards, who were designated as 'cards for the living.'

A short while passed after the census was completed. And here came one day when the Jewish quarter was surrounded by drunken S.S. troops, with the support of Ukranian soldiers and local Byelorussian and Polish police. The Jews were evicted from their homes, and taken to the outskirts of the city. There, they were thrown down into the pits that were prepared in advance, and they were shot to death. These trampling executioners were occupied for two days in the murder of [these] people. Only the people with yellow cards remained alive. They were herded into a small area surrounded by barbed wire, and that is how the Slonim ghetto came into being.

In abject terror, we listened to the stories told to us by those few escapees that managed to reach Dereczin clandestinely. But even here, circumstances did not bode well at all. By us, the gendarmerie began its preparations. The Byelorussians moved into a specific section of the town. Not far from the police station, formerly the poor section of town, the Germans set aside a section, not very large, in which there were several tens of buildings, largely run down. This section was designated to serve as a ghetto in the future. With deliberate speed, workers began sinking posts around the buildings and connecting them with barbed wire. That is how the cage for the human birds was begun.

The transfer to the ghetto was accomplished in several stages. We, who were living in the doctors' house, were moved as part of the last stage. At first, people without work cards were driven into the ghetto. It was in this fashion that one family was taken from our house. It was the family of *Feldman*, the homeowner and his wife.

Early in the morning, a representative of the *Judenrat* came to us, and read the names of these two people from the list in his hand. *Feldman*, for whom no decree had caused him to leave beyond his gate, was shaken to his roots. His upright stance collapsed immediately. His wife stood and wept, as he silently began to assemble their belongings, to pack them for transport, and even in this instance, went about it with crisp discipline. He gathered up his books, religious texts, and arranged them in a precise order; he packed up the clothes in a suitcase,

folding one shirt on top of another, so they should not –God forbid– get creased. We, the other residents of the house spread out, each to his own task. Afterwards, we discovered that in the middle of organizing and packing, *Feldman* had suddenly disappeared. A search began to find him. After a little while, we heard screams of alarm from *Feldman's* wife:

– At the sound of the screams, people came running; in the year of the woodshed, the seventy year-old man was found hanging by a rope.

His funeral was held several hours later. With the permission of the Nazi commander, *Poritz Pigass*, the deceased was escorted to the cemetery. He was placed on an old wagon, hitched to an old horse provided by the *Judenrat,* and he was taken out of the yard. As we passed the front of the house, we saw *Pigass* standing and looking at us. The Nazi called out in a voice calculated to assure that we would hear him:

– They are taking the smartest Jew in this town to be buried!

Events were propagated with electric speed. Fragmentary reports reached us from all sides. There was an 'aktion' in Baranovich – (that is what these killing sprees were called); *Heik* and his band were at one time reported in nearby Kozlovshchina. There a sorting took place along the lines of Slonim (these to life and work, the others to death). The Germans did not stop with murdering the local residents. On one day refugees entered Dereczin from faraway places. Their stories made our flesh crawl.

Here is what happened in the town of Ivatsvich: one night in February, *Heik* arrived suddenly with his band. A strong icy wind was blowing. The residents were driven from their homes, and half-dressed marched on foot to Slonim. On the way, all the children froze to death; old people and women fell by the way. Woe betide anyone who wanted to stop and rub their frozen feet. They would be set upon as if by beasts of prey, and beaten severely enough to cause death. Those that survived envied the dead laying by the wayside. Those that reached Slonim were sent into the ghetto.

Our hearts told us that this bitter cup was soon to pass before us. No one took off their clothes to go to sleep at night. Feverishly, we busied ourselves with the digging of bunkers, and in the event we were to have an unexpected visitor look into our windows in the middle of the night, he would be astonished at the level of activity there. On the other side of the glass pane pale and frightened faces peered out; they were the upright but tired, standing watch to make sure that no death-battalion was coming near.

The news of Russian victories in the interior did not gladden our hearts. In the *Jewish* interior, the Germans were reaping one victory after another.

In the month of April, the Germans disseminated an order to all Russian soldiers who were in the conquered zone, and who had moved into the villages after the defeat of the Red Army, to present themselves to the authorities. Most of those summoned in this fashion fled to the forests. They trusted the farmers not to reveal where they were hiding.

From time to time, word would reach us concerning the partisans. The farmers, who had a tendency to exaggerate, would tell us secretly that a full division of Red soldiers was circulating in the forest, equipped with the latest weapons, and ready to wage war. We had no remaining capacity to believe such stories, because we were not disappointed in this regard only once. For example, there was a period during this winter, where we had hopes of seeing a day when the Germans would flee before the Russians. Instead, *Heik* and his band initiated their depredations. Consequently, we were used to having good news not materialize, while bad news always did. If an extermination campaign was rumored for example in a Polish or xxx Aleman town, it always turned out that it was really the case. But if it was told that after the capture of Minsk that the Red Army was nearing Baranovich, in the end it turned out that the battle was being fought at Stalingrad. It

was in this fashion that people came to see everything for its worst, and believed that only evil would transpire.

Nevertheless, we began to see hints, evidence, that something was really going on in our area.

A day did not pass that the police did not come to Dereczin from neighboring area police stations, worn out and upset, with tales of partisan attacks on their tongues. The Germans were of the opinion that these were nothing more than bands of robbers and thieves, intimidating the smaller constabularies, so as to be able to pillage the local farmers without fear of serious retribution. The Germans would yell at the police and order them back to their stations, but the threats, shouting, and even severe blows did not serve to influence the frightened Byelorussian policemen.

– We fear for our lives – they would argue stubbornly, – We are ultimately going to be killed by the partisan army.

Occasionally, a miserable farmer, who was sympathetic to the Germans, would come up the narrow trail to the army headquarters in town, and inform on 'bandits' operating in his village. Immediately a 'posse' would be formed, at the head of which the local police would ride out in their cars, followed by the [German] gendarmes who were concerned for their own lives. It is understood that by this time the attackers had long since vanished from the village, and the loose-lipped farmer got severely beaten for misleading the authorities.

At that time, a new spirit began to course through the hearts of the Jewish youth. Longingly, they raised their eyes to the forests, as a place where people lived who refused to submit their necks to a yoke of oppression. The concept of revenge, that had been sown in their hearts already, germinated and began to bear fruit. A period of dreaming began – about freedom, and of exacting retribution from the enemy.

After the days work, we would gather in a tiny group to assess our chances for escape. One thing was clear: If someone 'disappeared' then his entire family would pay with their lives. It was difficult for a person to undertake an act that would doom his own parents and younger brothers and sisters to death. And the idea of an entire family trying to escape was enmeshed in a variety of constraints and pitfalls that could not be overcome, since nearly every family had someone who was underage or old, who simply did not have the personal resources to bear the burdens of an arduous trek full of unknowns and danger.

There was no way to resolve this issue.

We decided at one point to begin accumulating weaponry. This task fell to those who were at work with the Germans in overseeing the weaponry that had been left behind after the defeat of the Russians in 1941.

It was a difficult assignment. If even a single bullet was found in the possession of a Jew, the sentence was certain death for the head of household and all the members of his family. But how wondrous were those moments, when we became proficient in stealth, in caches, in hiding places that we reached, and then afterwards transferring this to secure hiding places. With painstaking attention to detail, we would put together the parts of rifles and revolvers and clean and polish the rusty bullets. At night on our beds, we would see in our dreams how we would take our revenge on the enemy from whom we had stolen our arms. And indeed, those very rifles that we hid at that time, more than once were responsible for killing many Nazis.

For me, a new life started. My circumstances were better than that of my companions. The Germans did not know that I was connected to the family of *Dr. Rosenzweig*. They thought that I was alone and unattached, and if I left town, they would be inclined to think that I had returned to my family in some faraway place. My idea was to get out into the forest at the earliest opportunity.

To the Forest

May - Jul 1942

The incidents began to arrive one on top of the other, which sped the coming of the critical moment. At the beginning of May, the partisans attacked the nearby police station in the town of Halinka. Several police were killed, and the remainder fled in disarray to Dereczin, where they told of "huge forces" of Bolsheviks that has surrounded the town and attacked the police station using all the stratagems of warfare. This time the Germans exhibited real fear, and from that moment on anticipated that the partisans would attack Dereczin, and consequently strengthened their guard; they placed heavy machine guns on the roof of the police station: at night they would continuously conduct maneuvers and drills.

The more the Germans suspected trouble, the greater the satisfaction grew in the Jewish quarter. Even the greatest of the pessimists began to believe that the partisans would effect a liberation. In addition, we had "political commentators" who constructed proofs out of various indicators that the Russians had dropped many paratroopers to surround the Germans.

In the meetings of our secret organization, we would prepare, in great detail, the plan for an uprising that we would initiate, upon an appropriate signal from the forest.

As usual, after a period of flowering hope, the disappointment was not late in coming. At the end of the winter, the gendarmerie send about sixty young Jewish boys to a labor camp near the village of Puzovitsa. For a number of months, they worked on paving the road from Slonim to Kozlovshchina. From their secret letters sent back to us, we learned of the terrible tortures to which these exiles were subjected. They were assaulted with murderous brutality. The Polish police would steal more than half the inadequate food portions that were allotted to them. They would work from the first appearance of the sun until late into the night. For their evening sleep, they were escorted under armed guard to a barracks surrounded by barbed wire.

And suddenly, a few days after the police station in Halinka was attacked, these young people who had been forcibly taken away, began to return to Dereczin by stealth. From them we learned that on one of the nights, the partisans burst into their labor camp, arrested the command, and ordered the workers to return to their homes. According to the words of the those who told of this, the partisans were wearing Soviet insignias, and their movements were shrouded in secrecy.

We gulped down every word that they uttered. We waited with bated breath: when finally, would the partisans "pay a visit" to Dereczin.

Clearly a piece of news of this import could not be kept a secret for very long. The head of the gendarmes finally felt that the ground under him was giving way, and he began to roam about like a beast of prey. He devised a diabolical plan whose sole purpose was to demonstrate that the Germans were still in control. One night, all the families of the workers in Puzovitsa were taken as prisoners. At dawn, the Germans led the prisoners, about 160 people, the elderly, women and children, to a nearby village. Near a grove of trees, these unfortunates were ordered to dig a pit for themselves: afterwards, they were put into the pit, and began to shoot them with machine guns.

That night, a woman returned to the Dereczin ghetto who had miraculously escaped. The Germans thought she was dead. She was however, only heavily wounded. The woman got up, and crawled out from under the corpses. Her tale measured up in terror to everything that we had heard up to then. The Germans tortured the people without mercy before killing them. *Poritz* with his own hands smashed the skulls of little children against the trees of that grove. The suffering was so great that each and every person prayed in his heart for a swift death.

A few days later, these evildoers got their comeuppance. Together with police personnel, the

Germans went out on a sortie against the partisans, who according to reports were at that hour to be found in one of the villages at the edge of the forest on the opposite bank of the Shchara River. However, after a couple of hours, the Germans were seen to have taken to their heels in disarray, retreating as if running from death itself. It appears that the partisans were ready for this attack, and anticipated it by meeting it with rifle fire from ambush.

Poritz was severely wounded, and that night his hand was amputated, the very hand that was responsible for the murders of tens of Jewish children only days before.

I decided to wait no longer, to flee, and find my way to the partisans.

The Escape

July 5, 1942

At last, the day arrived. That morning, I left for work as usual. This time [however], the work seemed more difficult than usual. In my mind, tens of schemes bounced back and forth as to how I would effect my escape from the town. The police who were guarding us beat me generously for my wandering attention span.

Two other members of our combat group were supposed to leave with me : *Herschel Zuckerman,* age 29, and *Anka Kaplan* age 24; they too, were refugees like myself. We had decided not to take any weapons with us. The Germans, who feared a partisan attack, set up strengthened guard patrols around the town, and consequently patrols were circulating along the roads. The police, who were on duty at the edge of the river at the town line kept the ghetto under tight surveillance. If they found us with weapons in our hands, then scores of Jews would pay for it with their lives. We felt that the partisans did not lack for weaponry, and it would not prove difficult for them to arm us. At the final meeting of our clandestine organization, a decision was agreed to that it was up to us to be the official representatives of the organized Jewish youth in Dereczin to the partisan command. It would be necessary to convey the state of the morale of the Jews to the Russians, who were ready to fight, and to persuade the partisans to attack the occupying forces in Dereczin. In the event of an attack on the town, they could rely with complete confidence on the help of the organized forces from within.

That day, all the members of the organization were occupied with the details of our escape. Lookouts were dispatched to determine those points where the surveillance was most intense.

The day began to wane and grow dark. The people had already returned to their homes from work. Silence pervaded the ghetto.

The critical moment drew near. We stood by the barbed wire and looked longingly at the adjacent fields. From time to time, the silence was broken by the shouts of the police. Finally, the lookouts returned, and were received the needed findings from them orally. We hugged our comrades with intensity. Farewell!

In a little while, we found ourselves outside the barbed wire perimeter. With deliberate speed we forded the small rivulet, which was narrow and shallow. On the nearby hillock, we spied the outline of several figures. It was a German lookout point. With quick steps, we directed ourselves to the nearby field of rye grain.

At each and every minute there was the possibility that the erect watch would detect us. But the hour was with us, though tired and sweaty, we hid in the end in the tall growth. We paused momentarily to catch our breath. I looked over at the ghetto one last time. I am free! There, in that accursed trap, there were pursued people who had no certainty in what tomorrow might bring.

Exhausted, we parted a path for ourselves through the mature sheaves of grain. We sped up our pace. Now we stood in front of a great difficulty: we had to skirt the Polish neighborhood, the settlement of Kamienka.

In the lead was *Herschel* who was thoroughly familiar with the area. Night fell. Suddenly, dogs began to bark. From nearby, we heard the voices of people.

– Maybe they detected us – as *Anka* whispered.

We fell to the ground. After a minute has passed, the voices fell silent. We continued along our way. In front of us, the hospital appeared that was opposite Kamienka, at the outskirts of Dereczin. There was a German lookout post there. We had to pass by this obstacle, and once done, we would be outside the town line.

I checked my watch. It was 10:30PM. *Herschel* strode forward with confidence, and we followed in his footsteps. We proceeded according to plan, that we had worked out from the beginning in all its details. In the end, the silhouette of the hospital was behind us. We crossed the Dereczin-Zelva road with conviction. We completed the first part of our dangerous journey successfully.

We headed toward the edge of the forest opposite the town of Ostrovo. It was known to us that partisans frequented this locale. *Bulak*, the leader of the partisans, whose name had become well known already at that time, was born in Ostrovo.

Exhausted from the forced pace we kept all night, we finally found ourselves in a village. The dogs who detected us as strangers, began to bark. Until now, we were fairly confident, because we knew that at night, the Germans were not likely to leave their quarters. But now, dawn was breaking. Through the melting darkness, we could see the tower of the church in Dereczin. In a little while, we anticipated the arrival of the 'night visitors' that we awaited with such eagerness. And here, the village awoke from its slumber. Once again, we could not tarry, and set our sights to the adjacent forests at the opposite side.

Quickly we entered *Boralom* (this was the name of this particular forest). It was a hot July morning. The forest gave off a fresh aroma. Everything was covered in dew. Around us sprouted greenery. We gulped the fresh air into our bodies, after continuous months of suffocating existence in the confining and stinking ghetto. A giddiness possessed us. *Herschel* answered the birds with his own whistling. *Anka* suddenly started to laugh hysterically, as she pointed to the large lurid yellow badges that stood out against the fabric of our clothing. With heartfelt zeal we tore off these badges of slavery from our clothing. We started a new life.

However, our elation didn't last very long. In this huge forest, unknown to us, there was no sign or trace of human life. We walked in depressions, attempting to utilize the tracks that were in them, but all our searching was in vain.

On the third day our provisions gave out. We were wary of entering a village. We had no arms. Despite the freedom we had obtained, our prospects looked dismal.

Finally, we approached an old man, who seemed to be gathering branches from which to make broomsticks. Nearby we heard the voices of children, and of dogs barking. The old man told us that we were near Dovorovka on the banks of the Shchara River. To obtain clarification, we then asked the old farmer:

– Tell us, grandpa. Where are the partisans to be found? The old man looked at us with a blank stare and answered:

– I don't know, my dear sirs. As God is my witness, I don't know.

All our coaxing was in vain. The old man stubbornly argued that he did not know a thing.

Rain began to fall. Discouraged, hungry and tired, we decided to enter the village. Only very few of the houses offered us a piece of bread.

– These are Jews that have escaped from the ghetto, – the news would go before us as we approached each little hut. We also picked up bits and snatches

of the women's talk:

– These are spies, sent by the Germans. We recognized that the farmers understood how cunning the Germans were, and simply didn't believe wandering strangers who were not known to them. It was clear that this was not the way to reach our intended goal.

– But maybe the partisans are not known here, maybe its just a story? – we asked ourselves.

We decided to go to the nearby forest of *Kazibar*. – Perhaps the partisans can be found there? – we consoled each other with this thought.

After many hours of wandering, we finally reached the small village of Slizhi, opposite the *Kazibar* forest. We were standing at the outskirts of the village. And suddenly my attention is caught by a young, blond man, tall and blue-eyed, who was tramping through the grass and singing the song, *Katyusha* in a loud voice. There was nothing surprising in his appearance, except for the pistol that was sticking out of his belt. I immediately called the attention of my companions to this unusual farmer.

– From what we can see, this can only be a partisan, – *Herschel Zuckerman* whispered.

We drew near to him. On the pilot's cap that was sitting jauntily on the young man's head, there was a red star affixed, along with a hammer and sickle. At the sight of this insignia, all our doubts vanished. We stood in front of the first partisan that we had encountered. With great difficulty, I formed the question:

– Are you a partisan? –

– Yes, I am a Red partisan – the young man proudly replied.

We told the partisan what we had been through. The youth listened to us with great feeling. At the end, he began to tell us about himself. With bated breath we listened with great care to each and every word that he uttered.

Among the Partisans

July 1942

And this was the partisan's story:

– My name is *Mishka Dubokov*, and my origin is from the line of Kuban. Before the war, I was drafted into the army. My unit was literally on the German border. In June 1941, after the defeat suffered by our army at the hands of the Germans, I was separated from my mates, and was swept up by chance to this particular village. Older farmers took me in, and for some time I was able to live here quietly, doing farm work. Recently, this past spring, the Germans issued an order that all men who at the time were in the Red Army but remained behind in Byelorussia, were to report to them. At that instigation, we dug up the weapons we had hidden, and fled to the forests. A small detachment of us is located in the *Kazibar*, consisting of 21 people. *Bulak* and his division of 40 people are located in *Boralom*. Units slightly larger than this are decamped across the river from Dereczin. The Germans think that we number in the thousands. And the farmers deliberately spread exaggerated tales about the partisans in order to deter the occupation forces from coming into the villages. I am currently here in Slizhi as a forward lookout on behalf of my unit. At night I will have returned to the forest, to our camp. Tomorrow, I will report your presence to the head officer of the camp, *Vanya Zaitsov*. He is in the habit of receiving all manner of people graciously. For the entire winter, he blundered about alone in the snow-covered forests in order not to surrender into German hands. In the spring, he organized our unit, and from that time on, the Germans have known no peace in Dereczin. He will most certainly welcome you into his unit.

It was already towards sunset, and *Mishka Dubokov* stopped his work and said:

– And now lads, let's go to eat.

He brought us into a small house set apart that was outside of the village. As he opened the door, we saw the woman of the house: a fleshy farmer's wife of great girth, who filled the entire room with her presence, in contrast to the farmer, who was a shrunken man of small stature. Both of them do not look us in the face. *Mishka* turned to them and said:

– Is there something here for them to eat.

And to us:

– Sit down and make yourselves at home.

The farmer's wife went to the oven with a sour look on her face, took out a plate that she put on the table, bearing pancakes made from rye flour that were cold from the morning.

Misha's face that had previously been full of good-heartedness and affection, turned stern. He pushed his hat back with a violent move, hit the table angrily and proclaimed:

– Since when are you in the habit of eating cold rye pancakes?

The farmer's wife and the farmer whispered to him:

– In the name of God, the young men were here and they ate everything.

Mishka relented and said:

– Well, we shall see.

The farmer's wife then changed her attitude, hastened to the window and said:

– *Marusya,* bring what we have in the case. Now the door of the oven was opened, and from a hidden place, good warm pancakes were hauled up, and the table was quickly covered with goodies that we hadn't seen in a long time: sour cream, cheese, wheat bread, eggs.

After we had finished eating, *Mishka* took a basket, the handiwork of the farmer, and ordered the farmer's wife:

– And now, give them provisions for their travel, for a few days.

The order was filled. It was in this way that we learned about our portion regarding life among the partisans.

Mishka accompanied us to the nearby thick underbrush where we were supposed to conceal ourselves to await the command.

We waited for two consecutive days for *Vanya* to show up, lying among the reeds. It rained the whole time, and we shuttled around in the underbrush, gathering field strawberries. We spoke about what we had heard from *Dubokov*. Now, we realized, the situation was quite different from that which we had conceived. In place of a huge partisan army, there are only small units which are instilling fear in the German occupation forces in Dereczin.

Finally, on the third day, we heard an elongated whistle. In response to this signal, we emerged from the reeds. Before us stood *Mishka*, and another partisan whom we did not know.

– I am *Vanka* - the stranger introduced himself, while extending his hand.

This indeed was the head officer that *Mishka* had told us about.

We saw before us a short, scrawny young man, wearing a short officer's jacket, whose appearance was very much like that of a Jew: dark hair and dark eyes. A slightly protruding nose. He had a couple of false teeth, sharp cheekbones, and a sharp facial appearance.

Vanka pointed to the felled tree trunks and said:

– And now lads, we must go back.

He waited for us to sit, and then also sat down.

Turning to *Misha Dubokov*, he asked:

– Do you have newspaper?

We, the novices, thought that he wanted to read us the political news.

Mishka took a folded newspaper from his pocket and gave it to the leader. Instead of spreading it out for reading, *Vanya* used his nails to tear a long sliver from the paper, and handed it to me, without saying anything. I did the same, taking a piece of the paper and handing it to *Herschel.* Then *Vanya* stuck his hand into his pocket and pulled out a plug of tobacco, 'ersatz,' and extended this hospitality to me and my companions. He also offered this to *Mishka*, and then took some for himself.

Now his request for the newspaper became clear.

– I see – said *Vanya*, blowing out smoke from his hand-rolled cigarette – that you are enterprising. You succeeded in escaping from the Germans and reaching us. But I must caution you at the outset, that our lives are not easy, and there is no way to know what the future will bring, or the ultimate outcome of all this. I would like to see good partisans in you.

Vanya's demeanor and sincerity made a profound impression on us. We told him that we hoped he would not be disappointed in us. We told him about the tribulations of the Jews in the ghetto, about our clandestine organization, and the preparedness of those who remained behind to do battle.

The leader then took his leave of us, and ordered us to fortify ourselves with patience. The following day *Mishka* arrived with two rifles.

– Now lads, – he called out gleefully, you are real partisans!

We gave him a big hug, and didn't really know how to thank him. *Misha* continued to train us in partisan techniques:

– The rifle – he said – is like the soldier's wife: he must never be separated from her, she will sleep with him and rise with him.

We fortified our spirits with this precious gift. Only a few days ago I was still wearing the yellow badge on my clothing, and now here I am a free man, a protagonist.

(From the Book, "The Battalion of Dr. Atlas)

Escaped from the Slaughter

By Gutka Boyarsky-Salutsky
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Those sunny and happy years that I spent under the aegis of my parents – the first sixteen years of my life in tiny, warm Dereczin – come back into my memory like a distant, sweet dream. Along with myself, my two brothers, *Moshe & Abraham* and my sister *Beileh* were raised by my parents, *Israel & Devorah.*

The bloody years from September 1939 on, when a black cloud covered our skies, are etched into my memory like an angry and desolate dream. The Germans attacked Poland, and the bombing drew closer to Dereczin. The entry of the Soviets saved us from German occupation, but for barely less than two years. I am attending a Russian school, but there no longer is any normal sort of life. The tranquil way of life in Dereczin has already been disrupted.

My father, a fabric dyer traveled to distant Siberia – he volunteered to work on painting tanks in a large factory. In the spring of 1941 he returned, and our family was filled with elation. But what a short elation indeed! A couple of months later, the murderous Germans arrived. Burning, shootings, hunger and forced labor – we live day-to-day in terror. Decrees follow one on top of the other.

We. The children, became old overnight, we know and understand everything that is going on around us, and what is waiting for us. We do everything we can to achieve rescue, but we are not in a position to help. As a fabric dyer, my father is counted among the 'necessary Jews,' and we are moved to live in a house on the other side of the ghetto, on *Deutsche Gasse*, near the Kamienkas. A number of other families are situated together with us in this house. We are the envy of the ghetto, where we are called 'the living Jews,' but we don't feel at all like we are alive.

Late at night after the fast of *Tisha B'Av*, our mother wakes us up: "Get up, children, I see a great deal of military around the ghetto and everywhere. It is a slaughter! Let us flee..."

We cannot flee. Because a watch has been posted in our courtyard. A little while later, the watch is transferred from our courtyard to the Schulhof, and we make ourselves seen long enough to crawl into a hideaway. We lie there, and can see everything that transpires outside.

Night falls, and we flee this town of slaughter. Our entire family flees into the forest. Our mother weeps, she has lost her mother, five brothers and sisters and their children. She is certain that we have saved ourselves, but her closest kin have all been wiped out. But the forest exudes the smell of death.

Out of the Mass Grave

By Musha Novitsky-Grachuk
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Our family lived in Dereczin for many, many generations. My grandparents were born there, my parents were born there, and I was also born there.

We were six children, five boys and a girl. My father died as a young man, and left my mother with six young children, of whom the eldest son was 12 years old, and the youngest, age 2. I was six years old at the time.

My mother did everything possible to raise the children in Dereczin. We received an upbringing highly appropriate for Jewish children. This is how life went on until the outbreak of the war.

As I recall it, it was in the year 1941 on a pretty summer day after *Shavuot*, when airplanes suddenly appeared over the town. People became disoriented and ran to hide.

It didn't take long before the Germans entered the town. Immediately on the first day, they assembled all the residents near the church. Amidst great shouts, they separated the Jews and Christians. After that, they took out *Feivel Meshels* and his wife, and a couple of others from amongst the Jews, and we never saw them alive again.

One German gave a speech and shouted that the Jews are responsible for the war. He heaped fire and brimstone on the Jews.

Afterwards, we heard gunfire, and they ordered us to run. We ran to wherever our eyes pointed. I ran behind the grave mounds, and hid myself in the bushes, I ran this way with my little two year-old daughter, and I was then eight months pregnant. We laid this way in the field, and from a distance were able to see that from a number of the streets of Dereczin, high flames began to shoot up skyward.

I decided that regardless of the consequences, that I must return home. At that time, I lived in the Cantor's house. My mother was looking for me everywhere, and later, she too ran home. The Germans were constantly driving the Jews towards the streets that were engulfed in flames from the conflagration.

Upon arriving home, we immediately went down into the cellar to hide. At the time, we didn't think we would ever emerge from the cellar alive.

My husband, *Shmuel* had worked for the Soviets, and it was a great risk for him to show himself in public. He sat for long days in the cellar, emerging to get a breath of fresh air only when it got dark outside.

A couple of months later, my husband screwed up his courage and went out during the day to bring us back some water and food. A local gentile by the name of *Hatcheh* apprehended my husband, and dragged him off to the police station. I had a woman gentile acquaintance, whose husband, a certain *Rublevsky*, was a policeman. So I went to her to ask her help in seeing that my husband would be released and allowed to return home.

When I came to the police station, I met with *Rublevsky*. He told me that in a few days they will take a large number of Jews to Slonim, my husband among them, and my husband will be hanged there. He promised me, however, that he will see to it that my husband would be turned over to the Slonim *Judenrat*. Indeed, this is what actually happened.

My brother, *Chaim*, lived in Slonim. I sent him a letter through *Velvel Hanch* who transported the Germans to Slonim. I told my brother that my husband was under arrest, and that he should try to do everything possible for him. Indeed, my brother was able to effect a rescue of him.

The Jews of Dereczin suffered from the German decrees. From their depredations. From hunger and

oppression. In the confining ghetto, it became more and more crowded with each passing day. When the day arrives – one prays for the night, when night comes – one prays for the coming day.

Weeks and months flew by in this manner. My little newborn was already four months old, and my mother didn't even know when our child was born.

We had a gentile acquaintance in Dereczin, *Petrusza Rushetsky*. Once, he secretly brought in some flour and grits to us in the ghetto. I begged this gentile, falling to his feet, that he should help me to leave Dereczin and bring me to Slonim, to my husband and brother, and I promised him all my worldly possessions. My assets consisted of my bedding and 20 yards of material. The gentile promised me that in two days, his brother would come and take me to Slonim.

And he kept his word. On the second day, his brother came at five o'clock in the morning, when it was still dark outside, and indicated that his wagon was on the hillock, and he brought two suits of peasant's clothing, for me and my mother. Quickly we changed clothing and left the ghetto. I myself don't completely know how it was that we succeeded, but we reached the wagon safely. The gentile told us to bury ourselves into the hay. He did not go through *Slonim Gasse,* but rather by way of *Zelva Gasse,* using the Zelva highway to ride around the woods, and thereby reach and come out onto the Slonim highway.

Having traveled 12-15 verst from Halinka, we heard a shout: *Halt! Stehen Bleiben!* – A darkness looms before my eyes. I am sitting in this manner on the wagon, holding one child, with my mother and the second child. I look, and see that *Moteleh Sinyiss* is driving the German, *Poritz* to Slonim.

The German asks the gentile: Whom are you driving? The gentile replies: I am taking my ailing mother to the doctor in Slonim. And of me, he said: This is my sister.

As the children cried, *Moteleh Sinyess* said to the German: The children fear us, let us continue with our trip. The German mutters, *Donnerwetter,* and they ride away.

It was as if a boulder rolled away from beneath my heart. Plodding along this way, we arrived in Slonim, entering the small ghetto. There we met up with my brother, *Chaim.*
Three weeks after we arrived in the Slonim ghetto, the first slaughter took place there. Those who remained alive were transferred to another ghetto.

There, in the new ghetto, I met up with my brother *Itcheh.* He had fled from Dereczin to Minsk, though for what purpose, I don't know. From Minsk, he returned to Slonim. My second brother, *Meirkeh* fled with him, but he was killed on the way to Minsk.

In the ghetto to which we came there was a terrible overcrowding. There were natives of Slonim, as well as displaced refugees from Poland. We were 40 families in one house.

At night, hideaways were constructed inside the ghetto. They were constructed in the cellars, under which, even deeper cellars were dug.

Several weeks later, the opportunity arose for my mother and I to move over to a less crowded house. We remained there until the slaughter of the children was upon us. On that terrifying day, I lost both of my children. There is no ink that is suitable to record the feelings of a mother, who loses her children all on the same day.

My husband went out of the house one day to search for a bit of food, and I never saw him again after that.

Everything around us was closed and locked up, nobody heard the groans of the Jews. As soon as the Germans occupied a place, the Jews were immediately sentenced [to death].

In the last house where I was with my mother, we lay for 14 days without food or water. A number of Jews from Lodz were together with us. On of the Jews proposed that we get out of there, and my mother and crawled out like frogs.

About a week later, the Germans arrived with transports to collect the Jews. The took my mother and I as well. As we were riding, my mother said to me: Jump out, my child, save yourself!

I don't know where I got the strength, but I jumped out. At that point, the Germans let the Jews out, and we returned to the ghetto.

A few weeks later, they once again collected the Jews. This time, they were being taken to their death. The pits had already been dug.

They shot, and people fell into the pit. My mother fell on top of me.

When the Germans left, I had the opportunity to crawl out from under my mother's body. I did not know where I was, I was so disoriented.

I implore: Help me! But I do not see a living person around me.

Suddenly, I see that a man is lifting himself up from the midst of the mountain of corpses. I see that one of his hands is halfway severed. He extends his other hand to me, helps me stand up on my feet, and pulls me out of the pit.

Terrified and covered with blood, I began to wander. It was getting dark. Dragging myself in this way, I crawled to the outskirts of the city. In the distance I see a house, it was a farm house. As I approach, I see a gentile woman milking a cow in the barn. She looks at me and says nothing. I say to her: Have mercy, please let me in. She takes me by the hand and leads me behind a shed, and says to me that I should stand there and wait until her husband returns from the fields. The gentile woman went away, and I thought – perhaps they will call the Germans and turn me over to them? That is what I think as I stand and wait.

I observed from a distance how her husband came in, and how she gave him food. She then brings me a bath pan and two pails of water, and tells me to wash myself. Then she brought me a dress of hers, and told me to take off my bloodied garments. She gave me a place to sit, and gave me something to eat, and said that I could spend the night there.

Very early in the morning, she came to me and said to me that I must go away from this place. She did not want to risk her life for a Jewish person. She demanded that I leave immediately, since she and her husband had to go work in the fields.

I began to weep and begged her not to drive me away, but to let me stay here. She said: Very well, then. Spend the day here, but you must leave this night.

And she added: Go back to the ghetto, and your fate will be the same as that of the other Jews.

Where should I go? To whom shall I go? The enemy lies in ambush all around. I have no one left in Slonim any longer. The gentile woman permits me to take the dress that she had given me yesterday to wear. I leave my own blood-stained clothes with her. She comes with me part of the way. I go back to the ghetto.

On the way, I see a horse and cattle grazing. They are free, eating with gusto, and I am on the run like a poisoned mouse through this horrible world, without purpose, having emerged from the grave.

In the ghetto, I acquired a pair of shoes and another dress, and a couple of days later, on a Sunday, when the Germans and other gentiles were good and drunk, I left the ghetto.

We had agreed to meet near the cemetery. We went by way of the Nevsk. Somewhat further along, Germans spotted us at a distance, and began to shoot at us. We dropped to the ground and proceeded by crawling.

We wandered this way for a long time, crawling through mud, streams and fields, until we reached the forests of *Valtchenar*.

The Destruction of the Dereczin Jewish Community

By Sh. Nieger

(Original Language: Yiddish)

The gruesome day of slaughter in Dereczin is also described in Sh. Nieger's book, "Kiddush HaShem."

It happened on the tenth day of *Ab* in the year 1942.

It fell on a Friday. Despite the fact that it was strictly forbidden to pray, the Jews nevertheless assembled in the cellars and recited the *kinot (prayers of lamentation)*. The destruction of two thousand years ago was mourned, as was the present destruction...

After the night of *Tisha B'Av*, when day began to break, the Gestapo, along with Ukrainian and Lithuanian police surrounded the ghetto and began to shoot into it from all sides. Jews ran to hide in the pits they had dug under the houses, which they had previously prepared [for this purpose], but the Germans, with the assistance of the local police, extracted the Jews from these pits, led them to the Schulhof and to *Blizniansky's* fields, and killed them with rifle bullets, machine guns and hand grenades. They set the ghetto on fire.

The yelling and screaming could be heard for miles.

A portion of these were buried in three grave sites, and the others lie in six grave sites in *Blizniansky's* fields.

A small number had the opportunity to save themselves and exact revenge from these murderers.

The escapees joined up with the partisans, and two weeks after the slaughter, a group entered Dereczin on a dark night and killed the entire garrison, captured weapons and ammunition, burned the houses in which the police were stationed, and returned to the forest...

The Bloody Tenth Day of Ab

By Tsirel Kaminetsky-Friedman

(Original Language: Yiddish)

It is with a pain in my heart that I undertake to describe that terrifying period in which my town, Dereczin, that town of such prominent Jewish connections for many generations, was destroyed and everything in it was lost.

Fear and terror dominated the Jews of Dereczin in 1941 when the German airplanes bombed the town. Our hearts told us that terrifying days were drawing close, especially for us Jews. And the terror was not in vain – we could not begin to conceive or imagine how pathetic and gruesome our condition would become.

Who among us does not remember that Friday, when the Germans entered Dereczin?! Who does not recall the scene in front of the church, when the town was aflame, people were treated like discarded rubbish, and one saw death staring at you before your eyes!? A miracle occurred then, we remained alive – to a life of oppression and fear of death.

A short time later, the succession of decrees was initiated. Every time a new decree – yellow badges, Jews driven together, from the very young to very old into the market square, hungry and frightened to death, driven to work with beatings and force. It was

not once that a bullet from a revolver proved to be the solution to that hateful terrible life.

From time to time, alarming reports would circulate that the Germans were shooting entire Jewish populations in surrounding cities and towns, killing innocent people only because they were Jewish.

The Great Pit

The High Holydays arrived, and they were truly Days of Awe that year. On the first day of Sukkot, the able bodied Jews were driven to another district. For the entire day, people thought of the worst and most terrifying of fates for them. A panic gripped the town, especially after parents, brothers and sisters, waited in vain for the return of their near ones at the usual hour after the end of the day's forced labor, – they did not return at the appointed time. It was only later that they returned, exhausted and broken with a mournful tale: under beatings and force, they had worked strenuously to dig out an enormous pit...

We wanted to dispel the suspicion we had, and we conjured up all sorts of reasons that the Germans would want to have such a pit, but the pit remained fixed in everyone's mind. Jews went about like bare shadows, pale and frightened. Death would be preferable to a life of this kind. But almost on purpose, normal death didn't come in those days, as if it had been decreed from heaven that we would be brought down by these murderous hands.

Behind the Ghetto Walls

In the meantime, the ghetto was erected in Dereczin. The overcrowding, filth and hunger were terrible. There were also acts of murder on the part of the police. One of the first victims in those days was *Moshe Kostellyansky* (*Moshe der Kvossnik*). He entered the premises of a Christian to obtain some potatoes. A policeman saw this, and got involved in the matter, implying that there were people ill with typhus in *Moshe's* house, and that *Moshe* should be shot in order that no one would catch the typhus from him. It was no sooner said than done – the innocent Jew was taken away to the cemetery and shot there. Subsequently, no one survived from that entire family.

Jews at that time already perceived how terrifying and unfortunate their situation was. Everyone thought to themselves, surely the end is right at hand.

The news that the Slonim ghetto was going up in flames hit everyone like a thunderbolt. It didn't require much discussion, young and old alike understood the implications: thousands of Jews are losing their lives and are being asphyxiated in their hideaways in the Sanctification of the Name. It is not possible to describe the feelings of the Jews of Dereczin during those days.

The Bloody Tenth of Ab

That terrible hour finally arrived for the Jews of Dereczin as well. The surviving Derecziners will never forget that *Tisha B'Av* and the Tenth of *Ab* of that tragic summer. It seems to me that those days were more terrifying than the days of the destruction of the First Temple.

Pious Jews fasted, and prayed for deliverance and a downfall for the Germans, but it came out exactly the opposite. In our hearts, everyone felt as if the air was laden with gunpowder. So many Germans and police came driving into town that the Jews understood that something terrible was going to happen.

My dear father, *Reb Zelik Friedman* returned home from synagogue after *Tisha B'Av* prayers and a whole day's fasting, but we were so broken that no one could open their mouths to eat. I said to my father: "Dear father, the fate of the Jews of Dereczin is sealed." To which my father answered: "Deliverance from the Lord can come in the blink of an eye." But the deliverance did not come.

My father was then seventy-six years old, but he looked like a man of fifty, and not only once did he receive murderous blows as he was driven to work.

The following morning after *Tisha B'Av*, while it was still dark, the police surrounded the ghetto. They were dressed in black, and joked with one another: "Give me a watch, and I will let you live," and other such bloody taunts.

My husband and I with our three young children were in the home of *Leibeh Zuber*, outside of the ghetto. The *Stukalsky* family was with us.

Shema Yisrael!

They dragged my dear mother out of the house and beat her murderously, to which she screamed *Shema Yisrael! Vikhna Stukalsky* rebuked the policeman with the words: "Why do you beat me? I helped to bring you up!"

Pesha Feldman, Chaya & Zvi Dworetsky with their two children, were among the first victims. With us were *Cherneh Stukalsky, Leizer & Izzy Stukalsky* with their wives and children, and *Avigdor Ratner.*

Saved by a Miracle

We saved ourselves by a miracle. We ducked into a small cellar under the kitchen. When they had shot everyone, one policeman asked a second one if he had thoroughly searched the entire house. The other said that he had been into the cellar and up into the attic. Meanwhile, we sat stuffed together in this small cellar.

A couple of hours later, my small children wanted to eat. Having no choice, I had to crawl on all fours, so I would not be spotted through the windows, to see if I could find something for the children to eat.

We sat in that cellar from Friday before dawn, until Saturday night. These two days seemed like an eternity to us, and I can never forget those terrifying two days.

On Saturday night, my dear sister, ע"ה came to us. She had been certain that we had all been shot, because it was nearly impossible to conceal my small children.

She wept and shouted, and the sound of our reply from the depths of the little cellar nearly made her faint. My sister and her husband moved the large bundles away, that the Germans had prepared for themselves.

We also met up with my dear father, but he shouted to us: "Dear children, run! Save yourselves! I will not go with you. I have lived together with your mother for 54 years, and we must now both be together..."

On Sunday, my father and his two sisters were shot to death. My father met a violent end. He was ordered to dig himself a grave. Out of sheer terror, he could not control his own hands, and he was beaten murderously, until they knocked his brains out. He was buried on the Schulhof, near the *Hiltzener Bet HaMidrash*, where he had spent his life.

To this day I remember the blessings he bestowed upon us in connection with our flight into the forest, and the tears with which he bestowed those blessings. Accompanied by his blessings and tears, we made our way through the fields and entered the forest directly.

From the Memories of a Refugee

By Y. Krimolovsky
(Original Language: Hebrew)

I came to know the town of Dereczin under overly tragic circumstances, having arrived there already a refugee (*Beznayets* in the local [Russian] language) for more than a year and a half. I left the capitol city of Warsaw in 1939. In crossing over to the Russian side, to a town called Zarembi Kuchylna, I suffered pursuit and oppression that words do not have the power to describe. I was in the town of Zarembi with my wife and her parents for over two and a half years until I was able to get a Russian passport with 'paragraph no. 11' that was known – this section according to a standing order, because as refugees, we were not permitted to live close to the German border. Once again we took up the staff of the wanderer, and went at least 100 km to Slonim and then from there to Dereczin.
In Dereczin, we moved into the abandoned quarters of the *Boltotz* family, on *Soytska* Street. It is hard to describe this place as a residence, since all that remained of it was abandoned wreckage. There were many refugees that found refuge – of one sort or another – in Dereczin. Carrying on any sort of business in the town was forbidden, and especially with our arrival, our economic condition deteriorated significantly to a low level. Over a period of time we either sold or bartered a garment or some other possession that had some value for a little bit of flour or some potatoes.

Today, after all these years, I must underscore with gratitude the selfless assistance of the *Nozhnitsky* family ז"ל, that lived in my neighborhood, and especially the help of their grandmother, *Rivkah Weissberg*, ז"ל who stood by us in our hour of need.

And so we lived this way under Soviet rule in Dereczin, hoping for the end of the war. We toyed with the hope that the Soviet Union would not remain sympathetic to the terror of the Nazi regime – but these hope dissipated rapidly in the face of the way cruel events unfolded.

The Germans reached us in 1941 at the time they opened their war against the Russians. It is superfluous to describe – as others have already done so – the 'welcome' the Germans had prepared for us when they entered Dereczin. I will simply note that the 'straw castle' in which I lived went up in flames at the sound of the first shot. Once again we were left without a roof over our heads, and with no belongings to pack, and so we turned to the synagogue that served as a sort of central refuge for those with no place to live.

News began to circulate through the town that the Germans intended to establish a ghetto in Dereczin, and everyone set about seeking refuge and making themselves a hideaway from the Germans. *Rabbi Bakalchuk*, ז"ל took us in under his care, along with four other refugee families in addition to his own.

And so the days past, in which hearts fluttered and ached at the news of the depredations that were ordered in other cities and towns: every day there were new decrees, killings and mass murders...

I recall that we arranged a night watch, and every night, someone would volunteer to sit at the window, keeping an eye out in the event that troubled would break out. We knew that our turn to death would come, yet there seemed nothing that we could do, everyone arranged a hiding place for that hour of extermination. Undoubtedly, many others have already told of the great pit that we dug with our own hands. A number arranged a hiding place in the cellar of the Rabbi's house, whose entrance was inside the bottom of a closet. I found an awning on the Rabbi's porch, and organized a spot for myself there. In that same spot, the Rabbi ז"ל hid his sacred texts as well as some of his own writings on the Torah.

I remember how several times *Rabbi Bakalchuk* ז"ל hugged me to him, put his hand around my throat and recited the biblical injunction: "and you shall erase the memory of Amalek," and asked me to answer "Amen" afterwards. It was not only once that the Rabbi offered me a little tobacco for a

cigarette in order to help raise my spirits.

In order to forget and suppress the terrifying happenings in our lives, the Rabbi ל"ז, who received his ordination from the well-known Yeshivah at Mir, and an outstanding Torah scholar by the name of *Zuckerman* ל"ז from Ostrolenka, and my father-in-law, *Reb Ephraim Hoffman* ל"ז, who was also an outstanding scholar – would sit and engage in dialogue over the complex arguments of the Torah and the *Gemara*. But it was impossible to insulate oneself from what was going on, because every day people were being murdered and entire communities were being wiped out. Once again, we attempted to console ourselves with the aid of political ideas. We would carry on discussions about the conduct of the Russians – I recall my father-in-law ל"ז accusing the Russians arguing that they were just like the Germans; I need to point out that this was at the time when exile to Siberia was running rampant through all the Jewish communities; and the Rabbi ל"ז argued forcefully against him – in what turned out afterwards to be true – that the Russians were ten times better than the Germans.

As we were sitting and discussing political issues, trying to live each minute of the hours in a day with the clear understanding that a day would soon come when we would no longer be able to argue and discuss, we heard the siren summoning us to assembly. Precisely the day after *Tisha B'Av*, with the break of dawn... they are going to come! Immediately a panicked stampede began to get into the hideouts and secret getaways. My neighbor argued that they would not take him to be slaughtered, and kept a knife in his pocket, and I went to the awning over the porch, from which I could see, but not be seen. And as a result I saw and witnessed with my own eyes what has been termed "the slaughter."It is hard to describe in words the stirrings that took place when the Germans entered the ghetto. But that image is very much alive in my eyes... men, women and children, taken from places of hiding amidst shouting and cursing, pushing and beating. Those who resisted, or tried to fight back against the Germans were shot on the spot. – that is exactly what happened to my neighbor who swore that they would never slaughter him, and to *Mrs. Dubinchik* ל"ז, who tried to defend her life, but to no avail. They were shot trying to climb up to the roof...

...I sat in my hiding place, trembling all over like a buffeted leaf. On all sides Germans are on the prowl ready to kill, and I was afraid to even breathe lest I reveal myself. Minutes seemed to me to last forever... but the nearing sound of the voices of Germans accompanied by the local police, the Lithuanians, who were all liquored up, reminded me every second that my end was near.

I will never know from where I, and two other men and one little boy who joined me, found the nerve and strength of spirit to offer the person who found us the material that saved us from death. The police, who lusted after wealth, gave us our lives in return for the money we had in our possession.

Towards nightfall, when they finished their handiwork, the Germans shouted over the houses: "All those who remain hidden are ordered to come out! There will be no more killing!" We held back in terror, after one person who came out of hiding was immediately taken away. All his efforts at resistance were to no avail, and he fell with the words *"Shema Yisrael!"* loud on his lips, and his blood was added to the enormous flow of blood in the courtyard.

It is difficult to describe, especially after so many years have gone by since that day of slaughter, the details of the terrifying sights that we saw with our own eyes. We sat bent over, terrified and trembling at the edge of the roof. Hoping that no one would find us – we had nothing to lose – the only thing of value left was a gold watch and chain that I had received from my grandmother. We attempted yet again to cause the police to turn a blind eye using this gold, and as if from heaven, our hand was guided to success. As I left our hiding place, I raised my voice to a shout: "Good sirs!" – the police on guard immediately gathered around me with their rifles cocked to fire – I raised my hands and drew near them, offering them the watch and chain in

exchange for my life and the lives of my companions who remained behind in the awning. After an argument and negotiation among them on how they would divide these spoils, they agreed to let us go, and initially we did not believe that we had saved ourselves.

It was hard for us to understand the significance of what had happened, especially since the attitudes were not particularly clear after a day like this one. We perceived that the only path to safety was to go to the forest. The companions who were with me did not want to subject themselves to the dangers of the forest, and they decided to return to the Germans, in the hopes that it will still be possible for them to be saved. I don't know why or for what reason, but I decided it was better to flee into the woods. And that is what I did. In the woods I ran into several other people from Dereczin, who like myself, had succeeded in escaping from the slaughter.

The Fate of My Family

By Chaya Levin-Glicksfeld
(Original Language: Yiddish)

I will tell of the bitter fate of our large family, of *Shlomo Rudenstein's* family, their sons, daughters, son-in-laws and grandchildren.

Our troubles began with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. When the Soviets took over Byelorussia, they nationalized everything , confiscated everything and took away the [flour] mill from us. In this manner we were left without so much as a piece of bread. Each of us went to work at jobs. My husband, *Yaakov Glick(s)feld*, became a *Vesovchik* (weighing-master) for the Soviets at the mill. *Rivkah's* husband, *Simkha Hendlisch* became a teacher in the village of Ugrin. *Itkeh's* husband, *Hirschel Gurvich,* worked as a the head of a factory that was near Sczuczin. My brother, *Elyeh-Chaim* went to work as an engineer in the mechanical operations in Baranovich. My younger brother, *Yosef-Shmuel* worked as a broker in the forestry collective. It was in this manner that we all became gainfully occupied...

It didn't take very long, and the mill burned down under their supervision. The responsible parties were the 'specialists' and the director that they had set over the mill to run it. You can understand that they tried to transfer the blame to my husband. He was arrested, and before we could demonstrate his innocence, he was taken off to jail in Zelva, and there the NKGB used to arouse him every night, and demand that he write как это было,[117] meaning: to confess how he had set the mill on fire.

After this pack of trouble, we were afraid to remain in Dereczin, and moved to Volkovysk. There, we worked at jobs in military conscription in the Russian aerodrome as freight-handlers, and the children remained behind in Dereczin. Do understand that life was not exactly all sweet honey for us in Volkovysk either. And this was the way we continued in drudgery until the outbreak of the German-Russian war in June 1941.

When the terrible Germans entered Dereczin, my husband and younger daughter *Olya* were in Volkovysk. Somewhere in a cellar, they managed to survive the bombing there, while people around them fell. I, along with our older daughter *Mina* were in Dereczin.

It was not easy to get from Volkovysk to Dereczin in those days. Roads were full of German military forces, which constantly was pulled toward the front in the east. Jews were very fearful of even stepping over their thresholds to go out into the public thoroughfares.

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[117] Russian for 'that's the way it happened.'

My daughter *Olya* who was 12 years-old, did not want to wait for the roads to clear, and set out alone to go home to Dereczin. She told her father nothing, because he would have never let her undertake such a journey.

Along the way she was detained by the Germans who asked her if she was Jewish. She answered that she was Christian. When my husband saw that the younger daughter was not to be found, he ran to seek her. And the Germans apprehended him, and had already taken him aside to shoot him. A miracle happened, because the entire echelon was in a hurry, and from the rear command a shout went up not to block the passage forward – and only thanks to this was my husband saved on that day.

He arrived in Dereczin a half-hour after our daughter did, scared to death after such an experience with of the Germans.

In those days, my brother *Elya-Chaim* decided to return home to Dereczin. On the way, he was detained by the Germans, who discovered a German textbook of higher mathematics on him when he was searched, and seeing that he was an engineer, shot him right on the spot.

He was the first victim from our family.

When the Germans entered Dereczin, they immediately established a *Judenrat.* Its leadership was placed in mortal danger every minute of the day. The *Judenrat* was tasked to produce gold and silver, furs and jewelry – every time a different decree. All Jews lived in terror day and night.

Our street, *Deutsche Gasse*, was outside of the ghetto, in which the 'needed Jews' lived – shoemakers, tailors, mechanics, bakers, blacksmiths, doctors, etc. About 90 people lived in our house. We slept in the attic, on the sides and in the cellars. It was thought that whoever lived on our street was to be spared from death...

Every morning before dawn, the men were driven to work in the various labor centers or to dig pits in the forests. If one survived till the evening, and saw the men return from their work, one counted oneself to be fortunate. Many were taken away to forced labor camps.

One such camp was between Slonim and Kozlovshchina.. My younger brother *Yossef-Shmuel* was sent there. He never returned from there. They did him in there.

Using all manner of stratagems, they deceived people, exhausted them, starved and killed them. It was not possible to earn one's bread by working for them. It was not permitted to exchange something with a Christian in return for bread – it was punishable by death. A Jew was forbidden to show himself in the marketplace. So, my daughter would dress up like a Christian, and bring home something to eat concealed under her kerchief.

Entire nights were spent looking out the windows, to see if the S.S. troops were not coming to take and slaughter all of us at the pits. We were too fearful to attempt escape, because the Germans held to account that if anyone was missing, the Germans would shoot their whole family, and it was indeed for this reason that no one fled.

In our house we prepared a hideaway for ourselves in the event of an 'action' against us. Our floor had been laid on concrete supports, so a couple of boards were taken out, and we dug out the earth from under the floor, and carried it out at night and spread it out near the mill. The construction of this hideaway occupied my sister *Rivkah,* my brother-in-law *Simkha, Sonya Manikov*, who happened to be found with us along with her mother and child, and I also helped. My husband, at that time, had departed for Volkovysk, to determine if there were better possibilities for concealment there. It was said that in the cities that bordered on the Third Reich, the Jews were not being killed. Consequently, Jews from all manner of cities and towns fled to Volkovysk and Bialystock to save themselves from death.

My husband had sent me a guide who was supposed to take me and the children over the border which was at Zelva. On the night I was supposed to go over the border, there was a wedding of a police officer on the Aleksandr farmstead, which was near the road to Zelva. I therefore remained in Dereczin.

Before dawn, the Germans along with their bloody supporters surrounded the ghetto. We descended into our hideaway. In concealment were: myself and both daughters with my mother, *Sonya* with her mother and child, *Itcheh Shelovsky* with his wife and 4 children, *Leah* from Kolonia [Sinaisk] and her 4 children, the Tanner and his family, and many others, whom I cannot bring to mind. My sister *Rivkah,* her husband and two children *Zyama & Yisrael-Meir* were hidden in a second hideaway under a crevice near us in the yard.

Thursday had been *Tisha B'Av*, and the slaughter started on Friday, the tenth of *Av*, immediately in the morning.

The Germans came in transport trucks into which they forced everyone without exception, whoever they ran into, or found. Everyone was taken out to *Blizniansky's* fields, where they were shot and thrown into the 7 pits that had been prepared for this purpose.

From the vantage of our hideaway, we were able to see how they loaded up the people from the house next door onto the auto transport. The Germans were terrifying.

We sat like this until Saturday. My daughter *Olya* and *Leah-keh* dressed themselves as Christians, and went out to see what was going on in the town. They saw no people in the streets. Only in the pharmacy did they run into two Jews.

The militia approached our hideaway a couple of times, and attempted to get us to come out by subterfuge. They lit the area with electric lights, and one of the militia, a *Volksdeutsche*[118] who had worked as a miller for us, and then for *Shelovsky*, promised the *Shelovskys* that he would let them live if they would come out of the hideaway. They wanted to really go out, but my children began to cry and scream that the *Shelovskys* would save themselves, and the rest of us would be shot. We begged them to stay with us. And so we sat this way until Sunday.

When we no longer heard the sound of shooting, we came out of the hideaway. We ran into a lot of Jews in the *Ratner's* house, whom the Germans had extracted from their concealment, and led to the *Ratner* house, promising them that these remaining people would not be killed.

We did not believe the German promises and went to the fields toward the forests. The Byelorussian police apprehended us, and brought us back to the *Ratner* house. We gave them money, but this also did not help. They took the money, and brought us back to the other surviving Jews.

We didn't stay there very long, and once again set out to reach the forests. My eldest daughter could not move her feet from sheer terror, and thereby we agreed with the *Shelovskys* that we would rendezvous at the *Presada*, and as we didn't want to lose one another, our youngest daughter went off to the meeting place to ask that they wait for us. We couldn't reach them any longer, and my little daughter *Olya* did not return. So I went into the forest with my mother and oldest daughter.

I looked for my little daughter all day, but I couldn't find her. Later, I was told she was beaten to death with rods.

It took us a long time to reach the forest. My mother, then 66 years of age, dragged herself along with exhaustion, having to stop frequently. We helped her to the best of our abilities, waiting for her while she caught her breath.

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118 An ethnic German who lived in territories that were predominantly Slavic.

My sister and brother-in-law carried their children on their backs. We did not know the way, and made our way in the darkness. We were afraid to stop, because the Byelorussian peasants were turning over lots of Jews into German hands.

Also in the forests, we fled from one place to the next, as we eluded German retaliation. In the retaliation for the partisan reprisal attack against the Dereczin murderers, my mother, sister, brother-in-law and their children were brought down by German bullets.

My daughter and I went of to a combat battalion, and with this army group we survived all of the tribulations that were set before Jewish partisans in the Byelorussian forests.

During the Days of Slaughter

By Katya Bialosotsky-Khlebnik

(Original Language: Yiddish)

– *Tisha B'Av*, July 23, 1942.

The day of *Tisha B'Av* passes quietly. Everyone speculates why the German murderers seem to have retrained themselves to be more subdued than in past days.

But there is a thought in the air that does not give us rest. Nobody wishes to be a seer and forecast what the coming day will bring to us. A great weight lies on our hearts, our minds are working ceaselessly, and an angry premonition roils within us without any letup.

It is twilight. The sun is setting toward the horizon. It gets dark, and a spiritual darkness begins to steal into the soul.

We go out into the yard to snatch a word of conversation with one another, perhaps some consolation, some news... one wants to know what a second person is thinking.

Suddenly we see two silhouettes at a distance in the darkness, that are heading out of town in the direction to Kolonia [Sinaiska]. There is a side road there that leads to Zelva. The border to the Third Reich is in Zelva. There are no pits dug there – it is rumored...one hopes to rescue oneself from certain death [here]. The silhouettes leave a dark shadow on the soul. Do they know something, and are therefore fleeing? A slaughter? – a cold shiver passes through all extremities.

That night, from the 23rd to the 24th of July, almost no one slept in the ghetto.

The ghetto is comprised of the entire Schulhof, the premises of the Tailor's *Bet HaMedrash*, called the *Hayatim Schul*, up to the *Kamienitzya*. The area is cordoned off with barbed wire. The entry to the ghetto is through the yard between the wall to *Slutzky's* house (where the *Edelstein's* lived) and the wall to *Bebbeh Rabinovich's* house. Our house is the first one in the ghetto, our stairs are a few steps from the ghetto gate.

Even before the dawn begins to break, we observe how the ghetto is being surrounded by hundreds of police troops that had been brought up from Slonim. It becomes clear what is going to happen. We have to hide ourselves.

Our hideaway had been prepared by my father ל"ז, in the following manner: to the right of our kitchen there was a *Sukkah*, a small room with a removable

roof. From the *Sukkah* there was an entrance into the attic by way of a ladder. The window from the *Sukkah* looked out at the yard of *Bebbeh Rabinovich's* [house], and as long as I remember, there never was a pane of glass in this window, rather it was nailed over with wooden boards. My father did away with the way up the ladder into the attic, and he moved the ladder into the yard, where there was a passage into *Bebel's* property. Under the roof of our house he constructed a small door, through which it would be possible to crawl into the attic. My father blocked the door from the kitchen to the *Sukkah* with the kitchen buffet, which at its full stance completely blocked off the door. He arranged that the very bottom panel on the buffet could be raised and lowered by pulling on a rope.

It was through this lift-door and into the bottom shelf of the buffet, I led the residents of our house into the *Sukkah*. I was the last one to crawl in. At the last minute, I pushed the door to the street wide open to give the murderers the impression that we had all fled from the house. I had also provided several loves of freshly baked bread. Before crawling into the hideaway, I wanted to be sure of what was happening around us, because it was deathly quiet in the ghetto. So I ran into the bedroom and leapt to the window, from which it was possible to have a good view of *Chava Itcheh's* house where the barbed wire boundary of the ghetto ran.

A shudder ran through all my limbs. The police stood there with their guns aimed, and I was still able to see how people who lived in the *Bet HaMedrash* premises began to run back and forth like poisoned rats, deathly pallid, with bulging eyes. The police train their guns on them, laughing cynically and in jest.
Instinctively, I tore myself away from the window, and upset and trembling I let myself into the hideaway. I closed the door to the shelf put a floorboard in place, placed several pots on it, and closed the lift door to the buffet, pulled the ropes to me, so they would not be noticed, and closed the *Sukkah* door.

That is how we all sat, deathly still and waited...maybe a miracle from heaven will occur.

We were 12 people there: My father, *Moshe Gelman, Hasia Gelman, Sheplian*[119] and his son, *Sasha, Zina Blizniansky,* a young man from Suwalk and his wife, *Herschel Zarnik* and his wife, *Pesha,* brother *Shmuel* and me.

The bloody play began at about 6AM. *Max Sheplian* took the first bullet, who also lived with us. He did not enter the hideaway with us, he wanted to try and get out of the ghetto.

Heartrending screams and wailing reached us from all sides. They literally cut you to the heart, filled your mind and paralyzed your limbs. We sat as if mortally wounded. Outside we heard the engine roar of the motor transport trucks, that were taking people to the killing fields. One can hear the sounds of beating and shooting, and over the din from time-to-time, one can hear the hoarse broken cry of *"Shema Yisrael!"*

And here they are almost at our front door, up in the attic. They are searching, throwing things about, breaking things, stabbing at things with their bayonets. Debris falls from above onto our heads, and all of our limbs are trembling as if from an ague, and it is only by sheer force that one can keep one's teeth clenched together, so they won't chatter noisily, and we hold our breath, we sit in anxiety with our nerves taut, full of terror that something inside of us is going to simply burst. The air in the hideaway gets stuffier minute by minute, creating suffocation in the throat, since it is impossible to breathe continuously through the nose – but nobody dares draw a breath with an open mouth. Every rasp from a mouth can give us away – better already to choke to death...

It gets quieter in our house, they go away. But here they come again, it must be other bloodthirsty two-legged beasts. Again the searches start, and once again hearts start to beat like trip-hammers. We hear how they approach the kitchen buffet and how the

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[119] Very likely that *Sheplian & Shaplan* are one and the same families.

buffet doors are opened, two smashing blows from rifles push out the lift door, the door to the *Sukkah* falls down – and the four eyes of policemen look in at us – –

The end has come, they will take us to the pits – this is what each of us is thinking.

Even now, many years since that terrifying moment, as I write these lines, I still cannot believe that a miracle could indeed happen.

At this time I am amazed at my temerity. In that tragic moment of my life, I took stock of what awaited me. It entered my mind that if a man is to drink, he has to grab a straw.

I flew out of the hideaway with the speed of a cat. Two police, who were not local, stood before me. I took them both by the hand and addressed them in Polish: *panawie, zlituczieszie.* Not another word came out of my mouth at that moment. Both stand and silently look at me. I don't lose my composure, and hop back in through the entry into the hideaway, *Sheplian* gives me a watch, I gather up my few valuables, the Suwalk young man gives me a finger ring, and I run out back to them – both are standing at the same spot as before. I give them these things, which at the time were of absolutely no value to us. "*Tilko to?*" – one asks, "Is that all? How many of you are in there?" I anser him: "Twelve." I run into my bedroom, because there I had hidden a few hundred rubles, my mother's golden chain and a watch. But I found nothing. The whole house looked like it had been hit by an earthquake.

I address the two police: "When it quiets down, you will be well taken care of." The second one answers me: "You're lucky you ran into us." – and in a moment, they give me a push through the shelf and close the doors [to the buffet].

A ray of hope flashed through my thoughts. Once again I replaced the floorboard, put the pots on top, repaired the lift-door, and closed the [*Sukkah*] door. Again I sit among those who were scared to death. They knew what was going on with me, and now they stood over me, with frightened and awed stares. "What [now] Katya?" – the young Suwalker asks. I was tongue-tied, and it was hard for me to keep my head on my shoulders.

What they lived through, and what they thought in those minutes until I returned to the inside of the hideaway, is hard for me to say. For the time being, apparently everyone thought, we have for now avoided a certain death...

Friday night was quiet. Very early on Saturday morning everything started anew. Through the boards hammered across the window, once again came the cries and wailing of the Jews who lived outside the ghetto, near the bathhouse street and the market square shops. It appeared that the murderers had finished their handiwork in the ghetto, and now fell upon the "necessary" Jews who had been designated to be left living. The entire Sabbath day they were shooting, and once again we lived through a day of distress and pain.

We agreed to flee that night. As soon as evening came, I opened a container, took out several pieces of underwear for the men, put a few bolts of fabric into a small sack, which would always come in handy, put aside some underwear for my father, and got myself ready to leave.

I presented myself to my father and said: "Papa, come, we will flee." My father does not move from his place. "Go – he says – run, save yourself if at all possible. For me it is all the same now. Either here or there, I will in any event fall..." I was seized with a shiver. I tried again and again to argue with my father, but he stubbornly said: "I will remain behind..." I said my final goodbyes to my father, never to see him again.

Herschel was our guide, he was well acquainted with all the roads, villages and farmsteads. On our way we met the *Petrukhoviches.* Mr. *Petrukhovich* was a good guide, and was able to offer counsel in many areas.

This is how we saved ourselves from the slaughter. This was the beginning of our life in the forest, full of dangers and tragedies. Of all those who escaped from our hideaway, only two remained alive – *Herschel* and I.

It was *Isser Lev* who told me of my father's bitter fate.

Sunday, on the 26th of July, my father left the hideaway with a loaf of bread under his arm. He was walking this way, calmly and sadly in the vicinity of *Judah Wolfowitz's* house.

He was approached from the opposite direction by *Albin*, a local policeman who had been a miller in *Shelovsky's* mill.

"Where are you going, *Bialosotsky?*" – he sternly asked my father. My father answered him: "I am going where my eyes are taking me. I am bringing bread to the hungry..."

My father fell, shot by *Albin's* murderous bullet.

This Is How I Was Saved On the Day of Slaughter

By Sarah Wachler-Ogulnick
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: The ghetto passport of Sarah Lev (daughter of Dvoshka Daraliner)

It is several day now that there are rumors that the day of slaughter is imminently approaching. From mouth to ear, the word is passed that in nearby towns the Jews have already been taken out to be killed, and despite this, people are unable to conceive that such an awesome thing is likely to happen. People wait for a miracle, there are arguments and explanations, attempts first to convince themselves, that it is inconceivable that the Germans would take out and kill innocent people, who are prepared to do any an all sorts of difficult work under any conditions.

Yet the awful day does arrive. To this day, tears well up in my eyes, as I recall after all these long years, that most bitter of all days, the day after the fast of *Tisha B'Av*.

With the coming of dawn, we were awakened by the report of gunfire that we heard close to our house. We lived, at the time, in an office building that had at one time served as the post office. In the same house with us were the *Sinai & Beckenstein* families, *Moshe Kwiat*, and other Jews from a village near Dereczin.

At 6AM a transport truck neared our house. The Germans and their Byelorussian helpers began to urge us along with their rifle butts, getting us up into the transport. It is impossible for me to describe my emotions at that moment, as the vehicle began to move, taking us to this cruel death.

At a pre-arranged moment, *Mottel Beckenstein & Velvel Kwiat* jumped from the transport, followed by *Moshe Kwiat*. After several days in the forest, I found out that the first two were killed by gunfire from the guards on the trucks.

I turned and looked for the last time at the faces of my parents, my beloved brother and sister, and I jumped from the truck immediately after *Moshe Kwiat*. Perhaps I didn't think that I would save my life, but my entire being was focused on assuring that I would get myself away from the terrible fate of a mass killing. A hail of bullets rained down at my heels. At one point, I was concerned that I had been hit in the back, but it turned out to be a light wound in the shoulder.

My father ז"ל, never even gave thought to running from the Germans and death. He was certain that all was lost. The Germans had reached the gates of Moscow, all the Jews will be slaughtered, and therefore it was appropriate to go with the community and share in the fate of the entirety of our people.

I ran with all my might, certain that any second I would be found by the bullet that would kill me. I reached the yard of *Antonovich* the gentile, and crawled into a dog house that stood in the yard. To this day, the receding screams of all my loved ones echo in my ears, as the vehicles were taking them off to death.

A silence pervaded the area afterwards. I hadn't even gotten used to my circumstances, and to the idea that I had saved myself, when I see the woman of the house, the gentile's wife, running straight to me in the dog house. As soon as she saw me, a Jewess, she hastened to call a policeman to reveal my hiding place. The policeman raised the corner of his jacket and displayed the booty he had looted from the houses of the Jews, and the woman admitted him to her house. The two of them were certain that I would not succeed in escaping their clutches.

I fled the dog house and hid in the thorns and grass in *Torovitz's* field. I lay there until I saw the wife of the field owner who was cutting down the thorns near me. To this day I cannot believe how I was saved, and why this woman with the scythe in her hand didn't spot me.

Suddenly shots rang out from the nearby abattoir, where some Jews had hidden themselves and had been discovered by the Germans. Once again silence reigned about, and a light rain began to fall – and I lay without moving. I remained in this field of thorns until midnight. The rain stopped, and a bright moon emerged from the clouds. I began to crawl on all fours, until I reached the wheat fields. The wheat was high, and I could accelerate my pace even standing up at my full height.

On my right ran the road, and at its side – a stand of trees. Behind these trees, the pits had been dug, in which hundreds of Jews from my town lay at eternal rest, among them the members of my family.

I continued along my way, heading for a nearby village. I trembled from the cold and the terrible sights that came into my view. I reached the yard of a farmer who knew my parents. A dog ran out of the yard and ran at me while barking, I then proceeded slowly towards him, until the dog quieted down. I reached the door, and I knocked – no one answered. Tired and exhausted from running, I collapsed on the doorstep. The dog lay down next to me, being the first creature to show me any friendliness on that night of terror.

When dawn broke, I left that place and went to the village of Mikhovsk. There, I hid myself for the entire Saturday in a farmer's silo. On Sunday, the farmer took me to the forest, ands showed me the path that would take me to the partisans.

On the way, I ran into a group of people, and as I got near them, it became clear that these were the fortunate ones that had managed to escape from the abattoir building. I entered the forest. It never occurred to me that I would remain alive. Days came afterwards, when we were certain that our dead were better off than we were, to those oppressed and pursued in the heavy growth of the forest at war. But we lived, and it was given to us to exact retribution. And we took it.

Remaining the Only One

Avraham-Yitzhak Medvetzky
(Original Language: Yiddish)

I am the sole survivor of my entire family in Dereczin. My wife was *Dobeh* of the *Chernitsky* family, *Beileh-Hannah's* daughter. I concealed myself in a table that had belonged to *Elya Wilenczyk* from the market square stores, during the day of the terrifying slaughter. My wife and children were killed.

It is therefore incumbent on me, as it is on all those from Dereczin who were spared and remain alive, to assume the duty of remembering Dereczin, her well-mannered Jews, her youth, her religious and community life, in order to leave this as a memorial to everyone.

Dereczin was small, but it was suffused with Torah scholarship, and it was full of diligent ans lively young people. The Dereczin Jews earned their livelihood through hard work and much expenditure of their energies. Now all of us know very well, that Dereczin showed the Jewish world at large how to exact retribution from a murderous enemy, who carried out the slaughter of our brothers and sisters, parent and children, in cold blood, in our town, and in hundreds of cities and towns of the Jewish Pale of Settlement, in Poland and other European countries. Dereczin was surrounded by many forests, in whose depths our young people carried out a bloody struggle against the German foe, a war that can be likened to that ancient one carried out by Mattathais and his sons [the Maccabees] in that story of old.

I am so strongly moved, with both love and respect to enumerate the tens of names of those fine Dereczin heads of households – scholarly Jews, replete with knowledge and wisdom, *Yiddishkeit* and piety, goodness and friendliness. And I want so much to enumerate an entire list of the sons-in-law, who came from other places to Dereczin, who grew into the Dereczin community, and contributed a cosmopolitan and Jewish beauty. I also feel compelled to tell of the hundreds of sons and daughters of Dereczin, young people with ideals and faith, from whom grew the strong partisan forces in the surrounding forests.

Every Jew in Dereczin had his own way of life, and was recognized by his own special characteristics and with his own manner of expression and way with words.

Unfortunately it is not so easy to account for everybody, and since we should not in any way discriminate against those who we lost whose names we cannot recall, we will also not record the names of those that are deeply etched in our memory – *balebatim*, sons-in-law, young people; scholars, rabbis, religious functionaries, people who engaged in community work, intelligentsia, craftsmen, business people, mill owners, and grain merchants, and *melamdim* and teachers – all together [comprising] a beautiful Jewish community, that was cut down, and from which only a few tens of people survived.

Among all of these people from Dereczin, who come to mind, were personalities of a stature that we don't see anymore in our present generation.

From year to year, it becomes increasingly clearer what the true extent was of what our people lost in the Second World War, when that dark time of Hitler's hegemony came upon us. Now the single-minded objective of the young people from Dereczin becomes so clear – they will to take revenge on the murderers.

The End of Halinka

By Mina Liebreider
(Original Language: Yiddish)

When the accursed Germans entered Halinka, immediately on the first day, they drove all the Jews together in the church, and on the spot they shot anyone who showed any resistance. Many victims fell that first day of the German occupation.

When the ghettoes of the entire area were set up for the Jews and enclosed, the Jews of Halinka were sent to the ghetto in Dereczin, and that is where they met their end. They lie in the large mass grave with their brothers.

The bitter end of my family also came swiftly. When it became known that the Jews were going to be taken to their slaughter the following morning, many Jews hid themselves in bunkers. My mother, *Liebeh*, my sister *Freydl*, my brother-in-law *Jonathan* and his three children – *Mikheleh, Yosseleh, & Esther-Michal* – went down into the bunker along with others. My sister *Leah* remained above, in the house, because she was caring for an infant, and didn't want to take him down into the bunker, in the event that he might begin to cry, and give away the hideout of a lot of Jews. In that same bunker, a father choked his own child to death when it began to cry. My sister *Freydl* remained standing on the ladder which led into the bunker, in order to determine what would happen to *Leah* and the baby. It was then that she heard the last outcry...

My mother, brother-in-law and the children made their way to Slonim, thinking that somehow they would be able to save themselves there. My mother gave every bite of food to the children and grandchildren – "Eat children – she would say – you are still young, and perhaps you will be able to stay alive." She became swollen form hunger. When the children left the hideaway once, they did not find their mother upon returning. The Germans took her away...

The Germans killed my brother-in-law *Jonathan* in Slonim. He possibly could have saved himself, since the partisans proposed to him that he go with them, but without the children. He did not want to leave the children alone.

After his death, the three little children were left alone. *Esther* was 8 years old, *Yosseleh* – 10, and *Mikheleh* 12. The two older children agreed with one another to go into the forest. They left little *Esther* with a Christian who lived not far from our mill. They believed that no harm would befall her. The gentile, with whom they left the little girl, turned her over into German hands. The Germans questioned her, and then turned her over to a Byelorussian gendarme, a former neighbor of ours, to take her out and shoot her in the forest. The gentile took a rifle and a staff, led little *Esther* off into the forest, and from there to a distant village to a Christian of his acquaintance, warning him that no harm should befall her, because in retaliation he will torch the entire village.

The two little brothers, *Yosseleh & Mikheleh* were sought by their little sister, but she didn't find them. In the forest, they attempted to get near to the Dereczin people, but there was no one to be found who could care for them and protect them.

Only that dear Jew, *Shimon Lusky* would from time-to-time bring them some food. Both brothers expired on the same night from hunger and cold in the forest.

Esther lived as a Christian in the home of the peasant, wore a crucifix, and went to church to pray. At that point she no longer wanted to even know that there were Jews. As a child, she had already walked over the bodies of her nearest and dearest, and those of other Jews, and she had become certain that the fate of all Jews was – death.

After the war, when *Shimon Lusky* learned that little *Esther* was alive and living amongst gentiles, he went there and wanted to take her to him. She didn't

want to see him, or listen to him, arguing that she didn't understand Yiddish. *Shimon*, the loyal Jew did not give up, and after a lengthy effort, he was permitted to take her out of the peasant's shack. She was given to the *Sobol* family. Not only one survivor from Halinka was given a warm reception in their home. But little *Esther* felt strange there, and fled back to the Christian family.

When *Shimon* and others of the surviving remnants from Halinka and Dereczin were preparing to leave Poland, they decided that at any price they would take *Esther* with them.

They showed her a card from me, in order that she know that she still had an aunt who stands ready to do anything for her. She went with them.

After an extended period of wandering all over Europe, after being in a youth halfway house for refugees, little *Esther* arrived in the Land of Israel. Today she has a happy family life, has a good husband and two lovely daughters.

Tribulation, Torture and Death

By Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Hitler's anti-Semitic agitation hit us hard long before his murderous soldiers arrived in our area.

By the end of the thirties, anti-Semitism had waxed in Poland, under the influence of Hitlerism, which also reached Dereczin. The Polish regime and various Polish unions wanted to first hit the Jews in their livelihoods, commerce and sources of income. There were already many instances where Christians would take merchandise from Jews and refuse to pay for it. I cannot forget the instance when my wife, *Hadassah* ה"ע, came to me in the bakery with tears in her eyes to tell me that a Christian had come into the store, took three loaves of bread and refused to pay. He even went so far as to joke about it and laugh, when my wife demanded payment for the bread. When we refused to give him bread without money, the Christian went to the police and brought back a note from the police officer, *Dombeck* to the effect that if we didn't arrange things with the Christian, he would come and inveigh against the Jews.

This was not the only incident that occurred to us in our business, and certainly not in the case of other Dereczin people in their stores and places of business. It was not only once that groups of young Christians would stand about and deter peasants from coming into Jewish businesses. In the outskirts of town, near *Bliznianskyʼs* grain operation, there were 'rustlers' and they used to confiscate the wagons and horses of the peasants by force, not even asking the permission of the peasant, and take it off to the cooperative.

At that time, we already felt the Hitlerist hand at a distance – the people were well acquainted with anti-Semitic methods.

It was in this way that anti-Semitism impoverished the Jewish masses, and robbed them of their livelihood.

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Afterwards came September 1939 and the outbreak of the Second World War. I will not describe the fear in those days, when Dereczin was left literally with no one in charge, the people fled, and the Soviets had not yet arrived, and when groups of young people together with a few Christians tried to assert control in the town, and just plain started trouble for no good reason, which nearly led to the outbreak of a pogrom in Dereczin. In the end, the Soviet 'leadership' finally arrived.

The truth of the matter is that we were all very fortunate that the Soviets rescued us from the

Germans. For a little under two years, they liberated us from the clutches of the Nazi beast.

But as soon as the Soviet regime was installed, we immediately recognized that they also 'liberated' us from our livelihood. The mills were confiscated from the Dereczin millers. There was no flour for the bakeries. What was one to do? I went to a second baker, to *Shmuel Abelovich.* He and his wife *Bashkeh*, both intelligent people ע"ה, comforted me, and said that the new regime would look after the workers. Soon the trains schedules will be modified, and when the trains start to run again, grain will be shipped into the mills. We, the bakers, will only work for 7 hours a day, without night work, and we will have a fortunate existence...

Days and weeks went by – and there was no flour. Until *Shmuel* told me one day that he had never met such liars as these Soviets. The simply had no grain, and they were bringing nothing into Dereczin.

So all 12 bakers in Dereczin get together, and travel to Zelva, to the *Isvolkom*[120] where the chairman argues continuously that our land is now a country of свобода[121] where every individual is free to do whatever work he pleases. He exhorts us to take out licenses, and to start baking. Well, we took the licenses – but this did not turn into flour.
When a peasant would finally bring a little bit of corn or flour, I would offer to pay him with money – but, the peasant would argue that he has more money than I do, and that what he wanted for his flour was – salt, sugar... and from where could we get him these products which had already long ago vanished from the market?

We practically did no baking, but two months didn't go by, when we received a bill from the *Isvolkom* for the licences that was so large, that we were badly disappointed.

So once again we traveled to Zelva and lodged our complaint before the 'Chairman.' Once again he argued that we had full freedom, and that we had been given licenses for independent bakeries. In the end, he encouraged us to form a cooperative bakery on behalf of the *Solkhoz,* but regardless, we would have to pay our license fees. Our cooperative, with *Berel Sacker* at the head began to function, baking bread for the military – but the town residents would stay in line from 8 at night until daybreak and only part of them would get a little bit of bread. Unable to bear the sight of some many hungering in Dereczin, I would set some bread to the side, putting my life in danger, and distribute pieces of it among the hungry.

I am telling here [what happened] from the perspective of my own business under Soviet rule. But this is the way they managed the business affairs in every sector and enterprise. Businesses were cleaned out, and people became impoverished – and in this fashion, the Soviets brought down on us the same troubles that had been dealt to us by the anti-Semitic Polish regime.

I will demonstrate in this way that these troubles began well before the War. But it was the German regime that led us to our graves.

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We thought that at the beginning of the German-Russian War, that the Russians were both strong and heroic, and would not permit the Germans to penetrate so deeply into Russia. But we were quickly disappointed in this regard.

Two days after Hitler attacked Russia, Tuesday at nightfall, two small German tanks had already entered Dereczin. A number of people came out of their houses, raised their arms and shouted: "Heil Hitler!" On Wednesday there was still fighting between the Germans and the retreating Russians, Friday, a substantial detachment of Germans entered Dereczin.

When all the residents were driven together at the Russian Orthodox Church, the Christians already were separating themselves from the Jews, and even

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120 Apparently an administrative seat for the collective.

121 The Russian word for freedom.

the most familiar of them no longer wanted to greet us, and instead turned their heads away from us.

It was then that fires broke out in many of the Jewish houses. My wife *Hadassah,* ה"ע, began putting the fire out. She said" "I don't know how much longer we will live, but even if it is only overnight, I want to live in my own house." We put the fire out, and remained in our own home until the annihilation of the Jewish community of Dereczin.

A great deal has already been told of the terrifying days and months under the yoke of the Germans and their allies. We know that our fate was – to go under. As early as the first days [of the occupation], a German citizen working in the field post office (our house was right next to the post office) said to us: "Too bad that you are Jews. Our *Fuhrer* hates the Jews, and his program is to root out all of you..."

The first months of the German occupation passed in this manner. There were, in fact, no Germans in Dereczin at that time. Their allies, the Byelorussians ruled on their behalf. People did not work or engage in commerce, rather, they sold off their assets to the Christians – for a meager piece of bread. Nobody was secure about their lives, or more appropriately said: everyone was quite certain about their impending death.

Children did not study, and didn't even play. There were no *simkhas* celebrated in Jewish homes.

Around harvest time, orders began to arrive from Slonim relative to providing the Germans with soap, furs and gold. The *Judenrat* was created. And I will never forget the picture that I saw through my window: on a rainy day, an auto with three German officers arrived, who commenced shooting birds in the air while shouting: "*Judenrat! Attention Judenrat men!*" The members of the *Judenrat* came running, and the Germans demanded that they immediately provide 300 bars of toilette soap, and 200 bars of coarse soap – and commenced to beat them with their swagger sticks and threatened them with death if the soap wasn't produced at the specified time. The Jews ran from house to house, pleading: "Fellow Jews, save us! Please give us your soap!" And when they returned with the soap, the Germans thanked them with blows and whacks with their sticks. From my window I was able to see how the Jews fled as they were receiving blows, falling to the ground, and picking themselves up again to continue fleeing. And the murderous Germans beat them, shoot to the left and right – and laugh.

In the wintertime, 8 Germans came, accompanied by 40 Byelorussian police, and took charge of running Dereczin. At the head of them was *"Der Meister;"* the second was called *Poritz* – a murderer from the land of murderers; the third was a Polish *Volksdeutsche* and he stood at the head of the police. A routine of forced labor was initiated, with tight control over the number of the Jews [participating]. They began to divide the Jews into 'needed' and 'unneeded' [categories]. Bread was distributed only on presentation of ration cards – literally hunger abaters.

After shooting all the Gypsies that they found in our area, the Germans set upon the Polish citizens and shot a large number of them. At the same time they set upon former Soviet officers and soldiers, who were to be found in the neighboring villages. A portion of them, who had presented themselves to the command in Slonim, were shot by them, while the rest had already gone into the woods to form the initial partisan brigades. That is how the war began between the partisans and the Germans. The Germans attempted to launch raids on the partisans, but without success. Once even, the partisans prepared an ambush for the Germans and the Byelorussian police, and surprised a lot of them. Their horses fled, and they were forced to return to Dereczin in disgrace.

In town, legends began to spread about the partisans and their heroic deeds.

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"Der Meister" went on furlough to Germany and arrived just at the time of an American air attack – so he returned to Dereczin before his leave time was up.

And in our area, the partisan groups grew in strength, and they would carry out sorties that caused the Germans and the police trouble.

The Germans took their anger out on the Jews. *Poritz* began to murderously beat and also shoot anyone he met on his way. Then that dark and dismal Sabbath came when they took away the families of those young people who had returned from the labor camp, after partisans had attacked that camp and freed the Jews that were there. All the members of their families, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, were taken out of town and shot.

Jews began to flee Dereczin and go into the forests to the partisans. The watch around the ghetto was beefed up, and the ghetto was enclosed in barbed wire. As a baker, I still could move about freely, from the bakery into the ghetto and back. I was still able to bring a variety of things into town, which the Christians would send to various people, with whom they had bartered products for household articles.

Circumstances grew worse from day to day. The police and the Germans beat us without rhyme or reason. It was so bad, that we all suddenly had become very religious, praying whenever we could, and fasting every Monday and Thursday. The Rabbi comforted us, and calmed us, making a variety of calculations in which he indicated that the war would end in a short time. But, the war dragged on, and the day of slaughter arrived...

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We all fasted on *Tisha B'Av*. In the afternoon hours, rumors began to spread through the ghetto, nobody knew exactly what or when, but a great unrest dominated everyone. The Germans had used selected Jews to spread a rumor that a sortie against the partisans was being organized...

But people stood watch through the night, nobody took off their clothing. My family, along with a number of other relatives remained with me in the bakery outside the ghetto.

There were a number of Jews, who that night, with the help of Christians that crossed the Zelvianka [River] to save themselves by going to Zelva or Volkovysk, which then belonged to the Third Reich. It was believed that slaughtering would not take place there. I would have also attempted to get out with my dear family, but every day I was required to provide the Germans with baked breadstuffs, and if they were not to receive this early in the morning, who knows how many Jews they would slaughter for this. So I followed my own counsel, and remained in Dereczin.

We were all up in the attic, with our packages by our sides, ready to run in the event of danger.

At exactly 9PM, the supervisor of the bakery arrived, a Christian from Slizhi. He happened to be in Minsk during the time of the slaughter of the Jews, and he came into possession of a lot of booty. Now, her certainly was waiting for the slaughter in Dereczin...

We prayed to God that he would go away, but he sat and sat. He argued that he was afraid of the partisans, and because of this he didn't want to go home. It was only at 1AM in the morning that he finally left.

At 5AM, *Chaim-Shia* and *Rachel* came running and began to shout that the town is surrounded by police, who are shooting into the houses of the Jews.

We all went down into the cellar and blocked the entrance with a board. I went up to the attic, opened a few of the roof shingles, and saw how they were driving the Jews to the vehicles, which had arrived from Slonim, being beaten with rifle butts to the point of death, and taking everyone out of town to be shot at the side of the pits. After midday, when the vehicles had left, the Christian neighbors came out of their houses to search for hidden Jews, in order to turn them over to hands of the police.

I went down into the cellar. My wife ת"נ, and I took up axes and positioned ourselves near the entrance in order to be able to break open the heads of

anyone trying to break into the cellar. In the meantime, the police began to chop at the floor and the walls with iron tools. One of them began shouting: "Get out of there!" – at which point *Bashkeh Lifshovich* ran over and began to convince us that she recognized the voice of *Vanka,* her neighbor's son, whom she helped bring up. We put down our axes. As *Janek* entered the cellar, *Bashkeh* began to plead for mercy: "I brought you up and raised you, do you now wish to kill us?!!!" *Janek* argued that he didn't, God forbid, want to do anyone any harm, but he must obtain something of value in order that he can divide it up among his companions outside.

We gave him whatever we had in our pockets, he grabbed it and ran out shouting: "Out of there, if not – I'll shoot immediately!" We began to flee through the windows and doors.

First me, and then after me *Chaim-Shia, Elik, Taibl & Gershon,* managed to get out through a window and hid themselves in a former shed that had later been turned into an outhouse. We did not know what happened to the rest. It appears that they didn't make an attempt to flee the cellar, and they were all done away with.

At about 7PM we emerged from the hiding place. I went into the cellar and found nobody there. I began to wail and cry over my terrible loss and couldn't move from the spot. *Elik* then came over to me and began shouting: "If we ave managed to save ourselves, then we have to do everything we can to take revenge from the murderers!" From the bakery, we took bread and cleavers, and crawling literally on our stomachs, we went away across fields and through swamps, in the general direction of the forest. Along the way we found *Hella* (today the wife of *Shmuel Bornstein*) and *Izza,* the doctor's children. They were left alone after their parents had been murdered.

We wandered for a long time, until *Dr. Atlas* helped us be assimilated into a partisan brigade.

Only I Remained from My Entire Family

By Chaya Einstein-Osterovitz
(Original Language: Hebrew)

On that very *Tisha B'Av*, the eve of the day of slaughter, people ran from hose to house, and in every location, spoke of the impending evil that could descend on us any day. Upsetting conversations like this had already taken place ten times before this. Every time that a rumor began to circulate about the slaughter of the Jews in Dereczin, my father ל"ז, would take us children to the house of gentiles. My mother never went with us. She would say: "You are young children, I will stay here with my parents and brothers, their fate will be my fate."

After the *Tisha B'Av* fast, when a fright seized the Jews, we said to one another: there have been many times that terrifying rumors were circulated about impeding things that might happen to us, and until now, none of them have materialized. Let us try to believe that this night and the day after will pass uneventfully. The truth was that our hearts trembled, but we didn't want to believe, and therefore we did not believe. We went to bed.

With the coming of dawn, we awoke to the sounds of auto engines running, and terrible screams.

We understood what was happening in the streets of Dereczin and in its houses. All the time I thought

that if it was ordained that I must die, let it be on the run, especially that I not have to witness the murder of my nearest and dearest.

My parents and youngest brother, *Velvel*, went up to the higher reaches of the roof. My brothers, *Moshe-Peretz & Boruch* stayed with me at the entrance to the house. At an appointed moment, we had decided – myself, my brother *Moshe-Peretz*, and with us, *Moshe-Chaim Ogulnick* to run towards the wheat fields. *Moshe-Chaim* succeeded in escaping, but my brother and I were caught by the police and the police ordered us back to our house.

As we entered our house, a policeman was standing there holding a rifle, and he had just murdered *Yankel* the carpenter, who lay dead across the threshold into the house. The policeman turned to me and said:

– "You look very much like a gentile, why do you have to die?"

To this, my brother *Moshe-Peretz* answered: "If you really care about her life, it is in your hands."

–"I will let her go at a time when the Nazis won't see," – the policeman answered him. He ordered me to take the yellow badge off. I stood dumbfounded, because I didn't believe what he said. I thought that he would surely shoot me at the moment I tried to follow his orders.

My heart was torn when I saw my brother *Boruch* attempt to sneak through a crack in the entranceway door, something that was impossible to accomplish. He tried to evade the bullets of the murderers like a hunted animal.

The policeman ordered me to walk. For the last time in my life I saw both of my brothers. I did not take my leave of them, because not for one minute did I believe that I would remain alive.

I drew away and hid in the wheat field, lay down in it, not raising my head until sunset.

As it got dark, I stood up, and espied out house in the distance. All the household goods were scattered about outside. I understood that I had no one to go back to. My entire family was murdered by the Nazis – my father, *Shmuel-Aryeh Einstein,* my mother *Esther* from the *Vlitsky* family, my three brothers, *Moshe-Peretz, Boruch* and the youngest, *Velvel.*

As the darkness deepened, I went to the home of the gentile that knew us, where our father would take us into hiding. There was only one room in this house, in which the man, his wife and many children lived. He himself was with the partisans. At night we were stuffed together, and during the day, I his in the nearby wheat field.

This is the way I passed some time at the home of my rescuer. I decided not to put their lives in any further danger, and head for the forest, to the partisans. The woman of the house tried to detain me, arguing that the partisans do not accept women into their ranks. Nevertheless, I was stubborn. My generous hostess prepared provisions for my journey, brought me to the principal road, and explained to me how to reach the partisan brigade.

It was in this way that I was saved, the only one of my family,. And I reached the forest.

I Saw All This With My Own Eyes

By Nekha Petrukhovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

My son, *Yossel Petrukhovich* was a Yeshivah student. He studied at the Yeshivah in Slonim, but when the Germans arrived, he returned home. Afterwards, he was in the Puzovitsa [labor] camp, together with all the other young people, and when the camp was dismantled, he remained at home. Every day, along with all the other Jews, he was driven to dig pits. Occasionally I would pay off someone else with flour who then go in his place. Afterwards, we paid with money, and with shoe leather, to gain our son admittance to the carpentry works. He worked in the *Labzov* yard, and every day he would return home with everyone else.

On the last day, *Tisha B'Av* he fasted, he came home, bringing beets and cheese with him. He says to me: "Mother dear, this *Shabbat* we will have something to eat already." I also baked up a full array of breadstuffs."

He was killed the next day.

I personally hid him, but they found him. And I personally heard how he pleaded with the Germans, telling them he was a craftsman. They answered: good, we need the likes of you. And they took him to be put to death. And I was able to bear all this!

My daughter *Gisha* was up in the attic. So they took her, along with about another twenty people down from there. The policeman, that had at one time worked for *Shelovsky* in the mill, beat and pushed them, shouting: "Move you worthless scum!" And pitiably, she cried for help: "Jews, Jews!" And as her mother, I could live through all this, hearing this but being unable to offer any help!

We sat in the bunker at the home of *Finiya* the metalworker. We lived in his barn, because [by this time] we had no other place to live. It is impossible to describe what we lived through in those days!

The following morning, after the first slaughter, my husband fled to the forest with our 10 year-old son. They had lain in the attic, underneath some boards, [and when] they took everyone else down and shot them to death, they remained alive. In the end our son was lost in the forest.

I did not know if my husband was alive, and he had no knowledge of my circumstances. On the first day, everyone was driven to the pit. On Saturday, the second day, all the shooting was done at the cemetery, and [the dead] placed in the pits.

Sunday morning, town residents went to get water. I saw this from my hiding place. Afterwards, at about 10AM, they started shooting again.

They brought out *Shapiro* with his wife and son, and a woman refugee, and *Dobkeh Lifshovich's* two sons, and *Tzira Freidkeh's* husband, and *Riva's* husband, and *Mendusheh Beckenstein's* son-in-law. They were ordered to dig graves, but they could not, and the policeman beat them with his rifle. After this, the village gentiles began to dig.

It was in this manner that Jews were brought from all locations and hideaways, and shot to death. I saw this all with my own eyes!

I saw how *Yankel Weinstein* was brought, wearing a fur coat, and a brother of *Shayneh-Reizl*, an American. He was stripped naked as the day his mother bore him, and the gentile *Garvik* from Alekshitz took away all his possessions. I saw all of this.

Afterwards they brought a woman refugee carrying an infant. They shot them and threw them into the pit. The head and forehead flew upward. They [then] did the same to a woman and child from Kolonia [Sinaiska]. I will never forget these two sights until I die.

They then brought the wife of the wagoner and shot

her, and there was no more room in the grave for her, so they crammed her body in. And many other Jews were brought and murdered in this way. And [through this] the head man stood and took photographs without stopping.

Then they brought ten men out of detention. *Yeshea* from Halinka was already wounded, and *Leibkeh Shulkovich* walked beside him with a bowl to catch his blood, so it wouldn't spill on the ground. As soon as they reached the pit, they were all stripped naked, and they were all shot in the pit.

Elyeh Goldenberg began to speak: "Who will do all your work for you?" – the deputy leader came over and indicated that they should be spared. They were then taken out of the pit.

Beyond this point, I could no longer bear to watch.

We sat crammed into our bunker, which had been a *Sukkah* with one wall facing the cemetery. Through the cracks in the wall we saw everything, I and my younger daughter *Chaya Judovich.*

Sunday night we fled into the forest. We were shot at. Along the way we saw many dead lying about, unburied, shot in their attempt to flee from Hell.

To the Entire World

By Regina Rabinovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

(Written during the time of the Trial of Adolf Eichmann)

קומען וועם נאך אונזער אויסגעקומענע שעה, – *– Our long-awaited hour will yet arrive,*
Our tread will thunder – we are here!
א פויק פון אונזער טרויער – מיר זיינען דא !
מ'וועט

We come from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Lithuania,
We come from cities and towns made *Judenrein* after the slaughter!
From ghettoes, bunkers, pits, barbed wire,
From every place we were extracted from;
From Auschwitz, Sobibor, Treblinka and Majdanek,
Where we countenanced thousands of deaths;
From ice and snow, from winds, rain, burning rays,
From stormy waves, from well springs boiling with blood.

We come now as the appointed judges
To write a new chapter in world history.
World, observe the death march,
Listen to the gruesome din –
We are the six million dead that are awakened,
To you, an entire world, with our fists stretched out.
We come from that far, distant byway,
From those bloody nights and terrifying days.

Take off those white gloves, which protect your hands
So they are not, forbid, dirtied with ashes or sprayed with blood.
A world, you that are so cynical, raise your head and look about,
Open your eyes – filled with trepidation shame and sadness,
Observe carefully you world, pay attention with some effort,
We are a flow of blood streaming in fury,
We are the hot ash from long burnt-out ovens,
We are the smoke from the chimneys of the crematoria;
On all the roads and ways, our bones are spread and sown,
Golden teeth were torn from our mouths,
Mixed into earth and loam, with brick and lime,
With scattered brains of children;
Shot to death and buried alive,
Poisoned to death by *Zyklon-B* gas;
Ravaged to death by angry dogs,
Dogs that the S.S. dignified with the appellation of "Human Being;"
We are a product – soap,
Our flesh and blood were transformed into salable products;
We are lampshades made from the skin of human beings,
Taken off us while still alive – or immediately after death.

O, 'civilized' world,
Self-deluded and misdirected!
How you were willing to go along with the Nazi sadism,
How casually you stood by and observed the Nazi cataclysm!
No help, no resistance, and no countermeasures.
Where was your cognizance at that time, your protest,
When full of fright and terror, small children,
Scrawny and pale, only skin and bones,
A blink from death
Did live: give us a piece of bread, a piece of bread!
And where then was your human responsibility
To rescue at least children from the wild Nazi beast?

A world of fathers and mothers! Children just like yours,
Little boys and girls, sweet and dear,
Dark-haired, blond, light-haired heads,
Some with short hair, others with long tresses,
With tentative dimples in their little cheeks,
Laughing eyes, as blue as the sea,
That shined with the light of the Garden of Eden.
They wore the same clothes your children wear,
Played and fought like your children do.
Did this disturb or upset the world,
That they took [the children] of others?
Was this a great sin
To be born and become a Jewish child?

Oh! This Devil's Play ended only too soon,
The humanitarian feeling awakened too late,
A sigh and a tear went astray, much too late –
The regret expressed by the world no longer comforts.
Because the air above resounds with the sound of bullets,
Over the ground that swallowed up six million.

Brothers and sisters, as long as we live –
Never forget, never forgive!
Revenge will ignite your skin with flames,
Until the Nazi Mother will be punished with shame!
The sacred souls of little children command us: ***Remember Forever!***
They demand: ***Revenge, Revenge,*** do not forgive, ***Not to Forgive!***

In the Forests

Two Years in the Partisan Forces

By Masha & Abraham-Hirsch Kulakowski
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photos: Eliyahu (Elik) Lifshovich ז"ל as a Polish soldier. (p. 320, Top)
Elik ז"ל after coming out of the forest (p. 320, Bottom)
Chaim-Yehoshua Lifshovich ז"ל (p. 321)

We spent the entire long day of the slaughter lying in the high corn. As soon as it got dark, we left the field and went off to the *Lipov* forest. We spent the night there, but before dawn we crawled back into the corn field, because the forest was very muddy, and we could not [satisfactorily] conceal ourselves.

Once again, we lay in the field for an entire day, giving sustenance to our famished hearts with a couple of ears of corn. When the second night fell, *Abraham [-Hirsch Kulakowski]* went to a Christian whom we knew, and obtained a loaf of bread. It was by this means that he learned that his brother-in-law *Isser Lev* had remained alive.

We agreed among ourselves to enter the forest to seek the partisans.

Where Do We Get Weaponry?

We walked the entire night, and by morning, reached the village of Dubrovka. We ran into several Jews from Dereczin in the Dubrovka forest who had already been in a partisan group headed by a Christian from Ostrovo, *Bulak*. He received us warmly and gave us several days in which to rest and eat. Afterwards though, he said he was no longer able to support us, and from now on we would have to fend for ourselves, and first of all procure some weaponry.

But how does one procure weapons with empty hands and pockets? As the leader of the partisans, this question did not concern him: "Go, buy weaponry with your money..." – and we didn't have so much as a cent over and above our skin and our lives, excepting the torn clothing that we wore.

This was how our life among the partisans began. Approximately 300 souls saved themselves from the slaughter in Dereczin, among them quite a number of women and children. In order to procure weapons for those who were able to fight, we needed to do something. We appointed a committee of three people to devise a plan one way or another to procure weaponry. It was decided to make a raid on Dereczin, attack the Germans and the police, and in this way obtain some amount of weaponry.

After extensive discussions, we were impelled to present the plan to the Russian commander, in order that he lend us the use of a little weaponry to be able to carry out the attack on Dereczin.

The Assault on Dereczin

In the meantime, we arranged a contact with a number of young people from Dereczin who belonged to *Dr. Atlas's* partisan group. After a discussion with them, we decided that we would carry out the assault on Dereczin together.

Much has already been told of *Dr. Atlas* and his service on behalf of the Jewish partisan movement in the forests of Byelorussia. One of his greatest accomplishments was – procurement of weaponry for the Jewish partisans, for those who already were in the forest, and in anticipation of those who would yet arrive. As a doctor who was beloved by all in the surrounding villages, with the help of the peasants, and a variety of different means, he was able to uncover a variety of ammunition dumps and caches that had been left behind by the retreating Red Army. *Dr. Atlas* provided arms to any Jew that came into the forest with the will and capability to exact revenge from the Germans. For hundreds of young

Jews, *[Dr.]Atlas* served as a role model of an energetic, serious and committed warrior.

Approximately 200 men, of which only a small percentage were armed, and the majority with sticks or just bare hands, attacked Dereczin less than two weeks after the slaughter.

The attack caught the Germans unawares – and was a victory for the partisans! After a two-hour battle, 50 police and 2 Germans were killed. Thirteen police were taken prisoners. The content of all the powder magazines and ammunition dumps fell into partisan hands.

On our side, five fighters fell: *David Dombrowsky,* who before his death, exhorted his brother to avenge the spilling of Jewish blood; *Chaim Shelkovich, Hanan [Elkhanan ?] Kresnovsky,* from Kolonia [Sinaiska], and two refugees.

We had control of the town and its entire environs for four weeks. We burned almost all of the houses, and we shot all those who participated with the Germans in the annihilation of our fathers, mothers and children. A terror fell upon all our enemies in the Dereczin region.

Partisan Activity Is Activated

Partisan activity in our area was invigorated by the assault on Dereczin. [At this point] a series of daring exploits begin under the leadership of *Dr. Atlas, Bulak*, and our own Dereczin resident, *Eliyahu Lifshovich.*

The circumstances of the Jewish partisans after the attack on Dereczin eased a great deal. The aggressive attack on the German garrison awakened a respect on the part of the Christians, who began to show a sense of cordiality and respect for the Jewish partisans.

The Jews perceived that it would be much better to disperse the Jewish fighters among several Russian partisan units. It was in this way that several mixed groups were formed. Only one group, the one of *Dr. Atlas,* remained as a Jewish unit.

In the forest, there remained a group of a couple of hundred older men, women and children, who could not participate in fighting, who constructed a family compound.

Four weeks after the assault on the Dereczin garrison, a German division arrived and retook control of Dereczin. This only slightly disturbed the partisans, who still, from time-to-time, would enter Dereczin for the purpose of paying a short "visit" and cause the occupying Germans much grief.

German Counterattack

It was only then that the Germans took to the forests where the partisans had free rein. The German military apparatus had concentrated a formidable force, which put the forests under siege, and after a short skirmish enabled them to penetrate its interior.

The fight in the forest lasted an entire day. Many victims fell on our side. About 20 partisans and 70 residents of the family compound fell into German hands, and it is easy to imagine the terrifying death that they had. The Germans lost many more, they literally filled their autos with the corpses of their dead.

Just at the point when the partisans had run out of ammunition, they broke through a German wing, and escaped into a second forest.

A couple of days later, we returned to our original forest and took up our task as partisans with even greater ardor. It was then that we began to "go at the trains," meaning: we would lay charges under the rails, in order to blow up the German trains which largely carried soldiers and ammunition. The same fate befell the larger factories, those manufacturing facilities that produced materiel for the Germans. We would not permit the Germans to extract any tribute from the peasants, and the Germans never got a single Mark from any of the villages that were close to the forests.

Our Inventory of Munitions Grows

One day, while going along the banks of the Shchara River, our partisans came upon an armored vehicle that had been abandoned by the retreating Soviet army. We examined this armored car carefully, and decided that we would repair it, so that it could be used. And it was so. In a short time, the partisans would go to battle accompanied by an armored vehicle. The first test of this armored car was made in Halinka. There too, the partisans wiped out the Germans and the police force, burned the houses and settled the score with those who helped the Germans carry out their murderous agenda.

It was in this fashion that the partisan movement grew in our area, and strengthened itself from day-to-day. In time, Soviet prisoners [escaping] from German prison camps came to us, and in increasing numbers, more Byelorussians abandoned their villages, leaving behind their meager assets, and fleeing into the forests.

No more Jews came into the forests. There were no more Jews left in our area.

Our inventory of munitions grew, as a result of our planned attacks on German garrisons and police stations.

We Assault Kozlovshchina

We decided to attack Kozlovshchina on a specific day, where a large strongly armed German garrison was stationed.

We really pulled out to go to Kozlovshchina.

As it was worked out by our planners, the attack came out on the eve of *Rosh Hashana* 1942. We concentrated our forces at a point about 10 km from the town. It was a cold, dark fall night. A cold rain wet us clear through to the bone. We initiated our march to the town.

We stopped a kilometer from Kozlovshchina, and the commanders gave their final instructions. A single shot fired from our cannon was to be the signal to open the attack.

At exactly 2AM, the first shot was fired. With shouts of "Hurrah!" we fell on the enemy positions. The battle lasted from 2AM in the middle of the night, until 8AM in the morning. The enemy fought bitterly. Despite this, the town remained in our hands, but not for long. The Germans received considerable reinforcement, and the partisans were forced to retire from the battlefield. In the retreat, a large cannon and a mortar remained with the enemy. A group of Jewish fighters decided to wrest this precious weaponry from the enemy's hands – and they accomplished this. This cost the lives of three, young 16-year-old Jewish partisans. The rest, who remained alive, brought back the cannon and mortar from the battlefield. For their daring behavior, the partisan leadership cited the fighters. These were the Dereczin fighters, *Gedalia Bosak* and *Chaim-Yehoshua Lifshovich* ז"ל, and the Warsaw refugee, *Krimolovsky*.

At this point we also need to recall the Jewish partisan from Kozlovshchina, *Abraham Kozlovsky*, who personally shot 11 policemen, until he was brought down by a bullet from a twelfth.

Jewish Feats of Valor

Winter is drawing close. A fright falls on the partisans. They are already used to fighting against the Germans, but against the frost!? Who can guess at what difficult battles lie ahead of us? People engage in debate, bringing forth the various alternatives: we should try to break through the front, which at that time stretched somewhere from Moscow to Stalingrad; and perhaps, to go in the direction of the west? The Jews, along with the Christian partisans decide to winter in the forests. We begin preparations for the winter. We create dwellings, salt meat and fat, and prepare for the battle with the winter.

But before this, we have the opportunity to fight the Germans. In the very heart of our forests lies the village of Ruda Jaworska. In order to weaken our

forces, keep them fragmented, and deny us the ability to make contact between our various partisan groups, the Germans stationed a well-armed garrison at Ruda at the beginning of November. The garrison had barely arrived to arrange its new quarters, when the partisan command became aware of it, and already on the following morning before dawn, partisan forces stood waiting at the entrance to the village.

The attack caught the Germans by surprise. They were almost all still asleep. The partisan victory was substantial: the Germans and Ukrainians fell in the battle. Magazines of clothing, food, and ammunition fell into partisan hands. In this planned attack, the Dereczin partisans excelled, at the head were the brothers, *Chaim-Yehoshua & Eliyahu Lifshovich*, together with their sister, *Taibl*, ע"ו.

This took place on November 7, the anniversary of the October [Russian] Revolution. Our partisans sat around on boards and thought as to what sort of present we could present to the Soviet Motherland in honor of this holiday. Suddenly we hear a droning noise above us, and an airplane appears over our heads, of course, a German plane. How nice it would be if it was given to us to shoot that accursed airplane down – the partisans thought. But before anything could be done, the plane vanished far over the forest.

With lightning speed the news spread the following morning throughout the forest, that because of a mechanical defect in its motor, the plane had gone down not far from the edge of the forest, into a bog. Not thinking very long, *Dr. Atlas* send a group of Jewish partisans, led by our *Eliyahu Lifshovich* from Dereczin, in order to carry out this mission. After a short engagement, the German fliers were killed, and the plane was burned. Once again the Jewish partisans demonstrated their heroism.

The Death of Dr. Atlas

That same month, the Germans sent a punitive expedition against the peasantry of the forest villages, who had not paid any taxes. About 300 Germans drew near to the village of Volya. The first to greet the Germans with a hail of bullets was *Dr. Atlas* and his group.

On the other side of the river, *Dr. Atlas's* group stood alone, a detachment of only 30 men. The battle was, naturally, not evenly matched. This did not intimidate or deter the *Atlas* partisans. *Atlas* divided his group in two, one he took under his own command, and the second – under the command of *Eliyahu Lifshovich*. When part of the Germans crossed the Shchara [River], the partisans opened their attack. The battle was fierce. The river ran red with blood. Hundreds of Germans and Ukrainians were shot.

The Jewish partisans then received support from the second side of the Shchara, and it was in this fashion that the Germans found themselves trapped in a vise between two cross fires, their retreat was cut off, and many of them jumped into the river and were drowned.

The partisans won the battle, but they lost the best and most loyal heroic figure and organizer of the Jewish partisan movement, *Dr. Atlas*. He was wounded in the foot, and before the necessary help could be administered, he lost too much blood, and gave up the ghost.

The death of *Dr. Atlas* elicited a tremendous outpouring of sorrow among the partisans, but the loss was felt most strongly by the Jewish partisans fighters in the forest. After his death, a strong wave of anti-Semitism arose from the side of the Christian partisan allies, which despite the heroic exploits of *Eliyahu Lifshovich*, did not let up for a single day and even grew stronger. The partisans threw themselves into their diversionary work with even greater fire and fierceness. All the train lines in our area were blown up, and not a single transport could get through on those lines to the front. A fright seized the German garrisons, and they began to alert the higher military command to the need for help. And the help was sent to them.

Bitter Fighting in the Forests

On December 24, 1942, five divisions of German front line forces, armed with the latest technology, drew near the forest villages. They surrounded the forest. Our forces then numbered about 800 people. A life and death struggle began. For three consecutive days and nights, we fought for every patch of ground, for every tree. We threw ourselves on the Germans like wild animals, and literally demonstrated miraculous behavior. We blew German v\tanks and cars into the air. Hundreds of Germans were killed. But we could not long hold out against so large an enemy force. So we decided to retreat into a different forest. We broke through the enemy lines, and went several tens of kilometers away, into a second forest.

The [fighting] partisans did not take heavy casualties, but the toll among the family groups and the village population was high. The Germans sated themselves on human blood, and retreated from the forest.

A couple of weeks later, we returned to our former forest location. And as usual, when Christians look for the reason misfortune befalls them, and find the Jew, so it was the same thing in the forest. A strong anti-Semitic incitement was initiated, which caused special suffering in the family camps. The Russian command did not want to let them [sic: the Jews] remain with them, and drove them from one place to another. Because of this, the Jews had to bear much trouble from all sides. The partisan groups stopped supporting them, in part because after the bloody engagement with the German divisions, they themselves were critically short of supplies, and for this reason, they didn't want to permit the Jewish partisans to assist their own family groups.

Victims of the Winter and Hatred of Jews

The first winter of life in the forest was a severe one for the partisans, because they did not have adequate provisions yet. The non-combatant family groups suffered especially badly from the cold. They dug themselves shallow trenches, and spent the winter days and nights lying in them, mostly naked and hungry. They had no means to dig any deeper cellar-like shelter, so together, a couple of families would dig out a bit of the frozen ground, and cover it with a scrap of lumber to provide some sort of roof. A lot of people lay in this sort of beastly shelter, crowed, hungry and filthy. It is no wonder that their exhausted and starved bodies could not withstand the onslaught of various bacteria, and many perished in various epidemics of disease. Not a few expired from hunger and cold. A frozen potato was considered a holiday meal. Very often, entire families would expire together in one of these winter pits, and they would together be covered with the earth in their common grave. As if to spite us, that was an unusually severe winter, with temperatures falling to 30 degrees below zero.[122]

Everything around them was working against these unfortunate people, and only a small portion of them survived all these tribulations.

In February 1943, when the news of the victory at Stalingrad reached the forests, conditions changed a little, and once again, support for the Jews in the forest was renewed. Notwithstanding that many had already departed to another world, and others were permanently crippled with frozen feet and hands. It was not only once that the partisan doctors had to perform an amputation of a foot in order to save the individual in question from gangrene.

We could really take pride in our partisan hospital. It was organized in a far-flung location deep in the forest, with a secret entrance. Only a limited number of partisans knew the location of the hospital. In large earthen bunkers, the Jewish doctors *Myasnik, Rockover & Rosenzweig* worked with complete commitment, and the nurses, *Manya Manikov* and her mother ל"ז, along with other medical workers. The various medicaments were provided from the attacks we made against various German garrisons. Only later, when we succeeded in establishing contact with Moscow, the hospital began to receive medical supplies dropped from the air by parachutes.

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122 Confirmed in all WW II histories as one of the worst winters on record.

Patrols and Sorties

We rarely had a quiet day in the forest. Almost every day we went out on patrols, and very often we would clash with German search patrols. But wherever there was a German garrison in the area, we went to attack it and to disrupt its operation.

In the summer of 1943, the Germans carried out several sorties against us, but were met with strong resistance on our part. At the time the partisans repaired and were able to deploy a large tank, which was left behind by the retreating Soviet forces in 1941, the Germans entered the forest with a large force of their own.

About September 3, 1943 the Germans clashed with us in the forest. They were supported by airplanes that bombed the forests continuously for two days in advance of the attack. The partisans did not surrender, they fought the Germans for a couple of days, and then left the forest. Many Germans were killed in the forest battles. In one of the battles, our own *Taibl Lifshovich* from Dereczin was wounded. As it was not possible to provide her with the needed help, she became seriously weakened, and afterwards got blood poisoning, and died in our forest hospital. She was brought with great honor before the partisan brigade command, and interred in the partisan cemetery.

In the meantime, an opportunity came along for us to establish contact with Moscow. The partisans organized a radio station, and special radio operators transmitted details about everything that transpired in the forests. Our partisan command received orders from Moscow. We would hear the news by radio. Our isolation in the forest came to an end, we were connected to Moscow, and received news from all over the world. Apart from this, we would often be visited by Soviet aircraft in the night, who in accordance with pre-arranged signals, would parachute down to us ammunition, newspapers – and people. Special sabotage groups were established in our ranks, who occupied themselves with diversionary actions.

It was in this manner that the second winter came upon us. The partisans had made preparations from the prior year. It was no longer necessary to dig shallow holes, instead, large spacious earthen bunkers had been created, with windows and doors, often with curtains for the windows, and also with ovens. It was in this way that underground dwellings were put in place in the forest, which ran on for kilometers. A sports and dance hall was even put in place. This was how our quality of life rose.

The fighting against the Germans continued. We once again attacked Ruda and Ostrovo achieving a great victory. Once again, Jewish partisans distinguished themselves in the fighting, and once again, the instigation of anti-Semitism intensified. A significantly large percentage of Jewish fighters from the mis-directed bullets of their Christian colleagues. That is how life in the forest went, until —

The Great German Blockade

Entirely unexpectedly, we received news on June 4, 1944 that large military forces of Germans were drawing themselves into our area. This time, it seems the Germans did not stint, and had pulled about 85 thousand Cossacks off the front, armed with the latest and best and most powerful weaponry, and turned them loose on the forest. It took them several days before they reached the Shchara [River]. At the river, they were confronted by *Bulak*, the hero of the partisan forces in our area, and his fighters, among whom the Jewish Dereczin partisans had distinguished themselves. For a couple of days without letup, our partisan howitzers and mortars fired continuously. German artillery responded from the other side. Many of the enemy fell in those battles, but this only incensed them further. However, the partisan forces could not hold out for very long against so large a force, which had surrounded all our groups. No help arrived from any quarter. Commander *Bulak* then decided to use his brigade to pierce the German forces and traverse the so-called "Vilna Tract."

During these couple of days of fighting, the

Germans dug themselves in very well, but having no place to go, our forces fell upon the Germans. The battle lasted for a couple of hours and it was the most terrifying and bitterest fight of our entire partisan era. It was a battle between thousands of partisans and tens of thousands of the enemy. It became such a mish-mash of fighting, that it was impossible to use firepower. We fell back on bayonets, and the Germans and Cossacks were stronger.

Many partisans were killed in that merciless battle, and that many more on the side of the enemy. Along the sides of the 'Tract,' the Germans had dug out pits and hidden them by covering them with the branches of trees, and many partisans fell into their hands alive.

Our own *Chaim-Yehoshua Lifshovich* was killed on that day. He was wounded in both legs, and not wanting to fall into the hands of the murderers, shot himself with his own revolver. *Sima Shelovsky* also died a heroine's death, who had worked as a nurse. Not willing to leave a wounded Soviet Major behind, she was felled by the enemy's bullets. *Moshe-Chaim Ogulnick* also fell that day, who during his entire time in the forest had distinguished himself as one of the most important of the partisans. On that same day, *Vitya Shelovsky* was killed also, and also many others from Dereczin.

Bitter Days & Good News

Despite the heavy losses, a very large portion broke through and joined up with partisans on the other side of the river. From Moscow an order came not to abandon the forest, and not to engage the Germans. The partisans then stopped shooting, and did not return the German fire. They circled around from one forest to another. Our silence only served to provoke more unrest among the Germans. And then began to enter the forest and occupy our campsites.

In the meantime, the food situation got more severe. It was impossible to get to the bases where food was stored, because they had been occupied by the Germans. It was not possible to exit the forest as well, because all the surrounding towns were occupied by German garrisons. All the passages were cut off, and the forest was placed under a heavy, onerous blockade so severe, that we had to eat horse flesh and suck on old bones [for nourishment] that we found in the forest. Our outlook looked bleak.

Through the radio, we then received fresh, heartening news from the front. Marshall *Rokossovsky* had opened his victorious offensive on the northern front. This raised the morale of the partisans: if we would only suffer a little more, we will be relieved.

Unmindful of all these difficulties, we had a chance to break through the German blockade, and to confiscate 60 cows, and other foodstuffs. You need to understand that this planned action immediately called out a reaction from the enemy's side. The Cossacks spread themselves throughout the forest. They were on all roads and paths, and they pursued the partisans through mud and water. Despite this, hope grew in our ranks from day to day.

You can imagine our joy when we heard on the radio that Baranovich had been liberated by the Soviet military. We started to count the minutes. We no longer paid attention to the continuous German cannonade – we listened for the more distant thunder roll of Russian *Katyushas*. And the *Katyushas* drew ever closer.

The Day Has Arrived!

And suddenly – what happened? The sound of the German guns fell a bit, true the bombardment goes on day and night, but we sense that this is something different. The thunder of the *Katyushas* overpowers the German howitzers, shells and mortars.

The day has come! The Germans retreated from the forest, and they set up a front line at the Shchara [River]. The Germans are now fighting directly with the Russian Army, the Soviet soldiers are filling the forest, and the entire area. The Germans retreat in an unorganized panic, leaving behind thousands of

their dead.

Finally, after a five-week blockade, we are liberated.

Yes, the joy was great, but the grief was also deep. We had been freed, but our nearest and dearest – where were they? To whom can we go back?

The Only Imperative – Take Revenge

By Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky
(Original Language: Yiddish)

It is not so easy for me to convey in words all that I lived through with the partisans in the forest. Consequently, I will only be able to relate a part of what I lived through. I know one thing: for the entire time that I was in the forests, I had one dream, one imperative – to take revenge!

Our initial time in the forest was very difficult. *Dr. Atlas* did everything he could for us, supplying us with ammunition, giving us guidance on how to conduct ourselves, where to obtain food, etc. We were already at that time a group of 18 men. The brothers *'Nioma*[123] *& Velvel Dombrowsky , Chaim Shelkovich, Yisrolik Kwiat* and others joined us.

The Doctor [*Atlas*] told us that we would have to take foodstuffs from the neighboring farmsteads. Five of us went off, myself, with *Alter, Elik, Nioma, & Gedalia Bosak*, to the farmsteads, and were able to obtain a small amount of food. We had expressed our gratitude everywhere. But we were constantly pressed to bring more food, because our remaining comrades waited for us in the forests, hungry.

Once we came to a peasant in Dobrovshchina. He began to shout and ridicule us: "It is impossible to get rid of these Jews! No matter how many of them we kill – there are still more of them, and they come demanding food from us!" And the peasant grabs me by the collar, in order to throw me into his shed so that he can later turn me over to the Germans, because the Germans paid well for having a partisan turned over to them, and a Jewish one on top of that. The peasant's son was a member of the police force.

Elik immediately discharged his weapon into the air. A commotion arose among the peasant and his neighbors, and they immediately began bringing us bread and cheese. Despite this, it was insufficient for all of our comrades. And when we later related what had happened to us, *Elender* from Suwalk began to carry on heatedly: "You are tying yourselves to these peasants, and they will betray us all and turn us over into the hands of the Germans! I don't want to die for a small piece of bread that doesn't satisfy my hunger in any event!"

So we sought an alternative. *Alter, Moteleh Bosak* and I went off to a potato field and began to uproot potatoes, taking the root and putting the top of the plant back into the ground. We baked the potatoes, and managed to get by this way for a while.

This condition prevailed until the Doctor came to us one day with two partisan commanders. From that time on he remained in the forest, and it is quite difficult to describe everything that he accomplished, and how beloved he was, both by the partisans and by the village peasantry. The latter would kiss his hands, because he would heal them when they were sick. They paid him not with money or produce – but with ammunition! They had their own ammunition, and knew who possessed it. Every night, one of us would accompany the Doctor, in order to deliver firearms somewhere, machine guns and ammunition.

The two Russian commanders, *Kolka & Vanka,* immediately organized an expedition against

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123 Yiddish diminutive for *Benjamin.*

Ozhorki, taking a horse and wagon there, and bringing it into the forest along with a well fattened pig, bags of flour, and a variety of [other] products. Slowly, the life of our partisan group fell into a routine.

On the other side of the Shchara [River], there were tens of survivors to be found, who had rescued themselves from the slaughter in Dereczin. Along with *Yisrael Kwiat & Elik* we set out to make contact with our fellow townsfolk. There we heard wondrous tales about the commander, *Batka Bulak,* who zealously guarded the family compound. *Bulak* was a peasant from Ostrovo, and during the time of the Soviet regime, he was the [sic: communist] party secretary, and when the Germans arrived, he went into the forest. He was a simple and decent Christian man, always cheerful, on horseback accompanied by other riders, visiting the surrounding villages, carrying on conversations with the peasants and their wives, obtaining news from them about the Germans in the surrounding villages and towns. Young people followed him both as a leader and a friend.

He was like a father to the Dereczin remnant.

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We returned to our base, and took three Dereczin people with us from the family compound. As a result of a conversation with the Doctor, *Shmuel Borenstein* joined us at that time. *Shmuel* had left to join the partisans earlier, before the slaughter. He wanted to join us, because *Bella* was with us, along with several other of his good friends.

And I cannot forget how I was sent to a second base camp in order to receive a letter from them to bring back. I followed the commander who took me there in bare feet. At nightfall, I began to return with the letter, and I couldn't find the right way. I stopped off in some woods, and waited until dawn started to break. But when I arrived at the place where our group was staying, I found no one there. Like someone bereft of his senses, I blundered around in the forest, looking for my partisan comrades. A peasant who knew me ran into me, and brought me bread and milk. I searched for my group for so long that I eventually ran into two partisans from another base, and they took me back to their commander. He interrogated me, until it became clear to him that I was one of the Doctor's partisans. He asked me to wait, because the Doctor was expected there soon.

In the end, Doctor *Atlas* did arrive, took the letter from me and told me that our group had abandoned our original location, because preparations were being made to attack the Dereczin military and police garrisons.

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Much has already been told about the partisan attack on Dereczin. I also had a part in it with a machine gun. That night I was able to partially slake my thirst for vengeance.

We brought back three severely wounded troops from Dereczin. The doctor, *Bella*, and *Sima Shelovsky* did everything they could to save them, but they expired in the forest under the trees, and we buried them with the oath to exact vengeance yet again from the murderers.

We also brought out a lot of weaponry and ammunition, medical supplies and various products.

I also brought out a pair of good boots. I was no longer a barefoot partisan.

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The Germans wanted to even the score with the partisans over the Dereczin incident, and they launched a sortie against the family compound, because *Batka* Bulak, who commanded the groups that had attacked Dereczin, had ordered us to disperse to other places in the neighboring forests. The Germans prosecuted a terrifying pogrom in the family compound.

The Doctor did not rest. He continued to plan even more daring feats of attack against the Germans. It

was in this fashion that the attack was carried out that destroyed the train trestle across the Neman [River], at the precise time that a train full of German soldiers who were being taken from the front back to hospitals in Germany was caused to fall into the river. I took part in this action along with the Doctor, *Elik Lifshovich, Gedalia Bosak, Kolka* the commander, and a new partisan, *Shubin,* who came to us from the German sector, and did the most important work in preparing the bridge to be blown up.

I cannot forget how we gathered all the necessary parts and materials for the mine and the battery materials that were needed to bring about the explosion: and then when everything was assembled, we thoroughly analyzed the object of our attack, the bridge across the Neman; we had a long and difficult way to go, until we reached the bridge; once there, new difficulties surfaced – we needed to mine the bridge in a way that the German patrols would not see the mine; and one brings to mind the long hours of waiting for the military train, until it arrived, in order to bring it down with that mine, and cause all of its cars to fall into the river; the wild shrieking of the Germans rang in our ears at that time like the music of revenge; the way back was not any easier, but we were suffused with the elation of victory.

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The Germans perceived that partisan might was growing, and its feats were causing them trouble and costing them in material loss. They decided to station a punitive garrison in Ruda [Jaworska], in the center of the forest, manned with 300-400 well-armed soldiers, in order to be able to fight the partisans. We found out about this in good time. [However] we were also well-armed by this time, having even an armored vehicle, with artillery pieces of various calibers and machine guns. Several of our partisan fighters were specialists in the use of all sorts of machine guns. *Dr. Atlas's* group was already well known in our vicinity. We receive explosive materiel along with saboteurs who were sent to us from the other side of the front.

We attacked the German forces immediately upon their arrival in Ruda, and before they had a chance to unpack their ammunition and materiel. I remember that battle quite well, during which we wiped out the entire German force, and took all their assets back into the forest with us, as yet unpacked.

The saboteurs saw that we fought well, And showered us with all manner of equipment, such as rifles, revolvers and automatic weapons. The local commanders began to quarrel over possession of the captured booty – and it was we, the Jews, who suffered from their quarreling, whom they singled out for every little matter.

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Our attack on Kozlovshchina was not well planned, and we suffered a defeat, a lot of us were wounded, and several were killed in battle. I was hit in the left hand, and it took a long time for my wound to heal.

Meanwhile, we received word that not far from the village of Riniki, a German plane had put down, and remained stuck there. It appears that something mechanical had gone bad, but it was said that repairs had been effected, and it was to take off soon.

Our group volunteered to attack the plane. A peasant, who had been thoroughly interrogated by *Shmuel Borenstein & Monyek* (*Monyek* looked like a gentile, and spoke exactly like a gentile), guided us to the location of the airplane. We got to that place with the greatest of difficulty in pitch darkness. We opened fire on it, and the Doctor demanded that anyone inside come out. No answer was forthcoming.

I volunteered to enter the airplane, to determine what was going on inside and to appropriate the fuel for use by our tanks. Just as I approached the airplane, a man jumped down from it and vanished into the darkness. I girded myself with courage, and let myself inside. I looked for a long time, but found no fuel. In the end, the Doctor ordered the German flying machine to be put to the torch.

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Our group carried out many more acts of sabotage until the great German sortie was launched [against us]. In the distance, we heard the sound of gunfire, so we left, dividing ourselves up into small groups, to determine where the gunfire was coming from, and to respond if need be. I went with the Doctor's group. On the way, we spoke with optimism about our long-range fate and goal. When we drew near to the Shchara, we could already see the Germans firing at our positions. The Doctor took us out, even though the danger was great, and the field between us and the enemy was open and exposed. Suddenly a hail of bullets rained down on us. We fall to the ground, asking one another if anyone was hit. All answer, except the Doctor. I ran to him with *Bosak*. The Doctor lay severely wounded. We tore open his clothes and began to massage his heart, upon which he opened his eyes and said: "Take revenge!" We both picked him up and carried him over to the second side of a small hill and attempted to help him, trying to do something, to stanch the streaming blood. But I was called back almost immediately to my machine gun. The Doctor was taken back to the camp by a tank. We fought until nightfall. We, the Jews, gathered together at the time the gentiles sat down to eat. We buried our beloved *Doctor Atlas* and swore that after the war, we would see him properly interred in a Jewish cemetery.

In the meantime, the order came to abandon the camp, and transit to another part of the forest. We said our farewells at the grave of the great Jewish warrior *Doctor Atlas* with tears in our eyes.

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Hard days arrived for the partisans. At this time I began to work in the bakery, which had been established in the forest, in the center of the various base camps. The demand for bread was filled during those years in the forest, foodstuffs, both dairy and meat, were possible to procure from the peasants, but they had no bread. The bakery produced good bread, and we the Jewish partisans were able, with great danger, to supply the family compound with a little bit of bread.

So I am standing in the bakery one day, getting ready to knead dough for some baked goods, *Bella* who was the chief cook was in the bakery also, when suddenly a tall, vigorous looking gentile enters the premises and asks for the way to the commanding officers. He wants to tell them that the partisan troops are not treating the village gentile girls with courtesy. There was something about him that seemed put on. In the meantime, *Herschel Zlotagura* arrived, and taking me aside, inquired as to who this unknown Christian might be. When I related what the gentile had said his business was, *Herschel* advised us to keep our arms at the ready, in the event that he attacks us, because we anticipated a sortie against our camp by the Germans, and it was really unclear as to what this unfamiliar person was doing here. *Herschel* personally transported some ammunition to the family compound, in order to give them the capability to resist an attack during a sortie.

Herschel returned sometime later, and ordered the stranger to leave and go into the forest with him. *Bogdush* waited for them already outside. Later, it was discovered that near the bakery, a white horse had been tethered with a sign – apparently intended as an indication to the Germans, who had sent this vigorous peasant to act as a spy and to convey intelligence to the Germans.

Shouts were heard from all around: "The Germans are surrounding us!" We ran outside and began to run. The Germans spotted me when I was about one hundred meters from them, and they opened fire on me. A bullet hit me in a finger on my left hand. Blood flowed from me and the pain was sharp. I ran on further, but could not find the way to our camp, and met up with a second [partisan] group. They bandaged my finger and I went off to my own camp. On the way, I heard shooting coming from the direction of the camp I had just left. It was later determined that the Germans had been following the trail of blood that had come from my wound, and had in this manner stumbled into an ambush that had been set for them at that camp. Several tens of Germans were shot as a result of that ambush.

After spending one night, along with other wounded in the earthen bunkers, we were taken to a second location that had already been prepared to receive sick and wounded.

That night in the earthen bunker was a frosty one. Many of the sick had either their feet, hands or fingers frostbitten. I made my way to the new field hospital on foot, and on arrival in this new location I was running a fever of 41.5 °C (106.7°F). *Dr. Rosenzweig* determined quickly that I had typhus. He undertook to heal me, looked after me, and felt fortunate when I [successfully] got through the crisis.
When I regained my strength, and was preparing to return to my camp, he asked me if he could have my boots, because he was practically barefoot. I gave him my boots gladly, even though I caught a scolding from *Elik,* our commander, for this.

It didn't take long before we enfiladed a German provisioning transport consisting of about twenty vehicles. I did a good job with my machine gun, we took a lot of booty, and I got a new pair of boots.

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Around Passover of 1943, the Germans again launched a sortie against our forest. Our camp was alerted in a timely fashion, and everyone removed themselves very quickly to a second location. Everyone – except me and another couple of our comrades who were on watch at the time, remained in the forest. We hid ourselves for a couple of days, and having nothing to eat, we set out wandering about the area, and ran into a group of the *Orlansky* Brigade.

A peasant from a nearby village brought us a group of Jews from the Lida ghetto, whom we hid in the forest until the return of our [own] partisans.

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New troubles started for us, the Jewish partisans. Rumors were spread throughout all the forests that the Germans had especially liberated Jews from Minsk and had sent them as spies into the partisan brigades.

The suspicion that was thrown upon us by the Christian partisans created such pressure on us that we began to intensely watch and scrutinize one another. This continued up to the point that it was discovered that young gentile women, who were consorting with the Christian commanders, had been sent as spies into the forest. These women were shot, but the distrust of the Jewish partisans lingered on for a long time, despite the fact that our Jewish groups carried out difficult and important missions, which other groups were not capable of handling.

I am reminded of the sabotage of the German train that I carried our together with *Monyek.* The lines and stations were heavily patrolled by the Germans, along with watchdogs and Byelorussians. It was very difficult to get close to the train tracks. The trains took a long time to come. When we finally spotted the train, *Elik* was afraid that we would be spotted from the locomotive, and they would open fire on us, but *Monyek* and I quickly placed the charges and hid in a pit. A large part of the train was destroyed.

I was called to the partisan command. There I met *Moshe Kwiat & Simkha Kresnovsky,* and I was told that the Head of Command wanted to meet the heroic partisan, *Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky.* After the war, I was in Minsk, received the partisan medal, and I was promised that I would receive my official recognition from Moscow, but I didn't want to wait for it.

Other exploits of our Jewish partisans come to mind, as for example, the ambush attack on a German transport, consisting of vehicles and armored cars, which we allowed to get between two mined locations that were then discharged remotely, and then we shot up the Germans and their allies for several hours. There were extensive swamps on both sides. The Byelorussians and Ukrainians who attempted to escape through the swamps were apprehended and taken off to the forest. They fell to our feet and begged for their lives. *Resha* screamed

at them: "When our mothers begged for your mercy, you killed them – now you beg us to have mercy upon you?!" – and *Bulak* dispatched about twenty of these traitors on the spot with his machine gun.

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Then, the last German sortie against the forest came. It was in the month of March 1944. The enemy had decided to wipe us out, and had surrounded the forest. We couldn't even find food for ourselves and went out on missions.

Once, on a Saturday, we were all gathered together in one location – many of us, entire camps of partisans, all of the brigades from the surrounding forests, hungry, thirsty, and exhausted.

Commissar *Ivalev* gave a speech, telling us that we are totally surrounded by the enemy, and our only way out is – to break through the German line and enter the Pinsk swamps, or to the Red Army. He called upon us to hurl ourselves at the enemy with the Russian battle cry, "Hurrah," that would then take us on to victory.

Night fell, and the great mass of partisans made its move toward the line of the German encirclement With a cry of "Hurrah!" we began to run at the line – and immediately this attracted a hail of fire from all sides; Those running fell like cut corn. German rockets illuminated everything around us. Where was one to go?

I am lying with my firearm, and with me is *Joseph Blizniansky & Gershon Lifshovich.* They look to me for my advice and help, because I am older than them. I shout to the commander, *Abramov*, that we have to stop shouting "Hurrah!" because we are giving away our positions to the Germans. It would be better to quietly try and penetrate the line. But *Abramov* no longer responds. He is in a sitting position, his body up against a tree – and is silent.

I look about. To crawl out, it is necessary to ford a small stream, and afterwards drop down a high bank. And it is at this spot that the German tanks are patrolling. So the three of us made our way backwards. There are dead and wounded all around us. The latter beg us to shoot them, and not let them suffer. We went off to a peasant, obtained bread and milk, and headed for the great forest of Dobrovshchina, along with many other partisans.

Then German airplanes began to bomb the forest. We can hear shouts: The Germans are coming! And then a political officer called us together and directed us to conceal our weaponry and disperse among the villages, to those families and acquaintances, [to hide] until it quiets down, and then return to reclaim the weaponry...

This was good advice for the gentiles, but not for us Jewish partisans who had remained alive. Under no circumstance was I prepared to relinquish my firearm, because only with it can I fulfill my prime objective – to exact vengeance from the German murderers. The political officer demanded, cajoled and then ordered – but to no avail, I did not surrender my weapon, and eight other partisans stood with us. We did not know to which area we should go, until *Joseph Blizniansky* began taking us in the direction of a large bog, behind which there was a wooded area. We spent the night there, and the following day, without food, without drink, and with no hope of reaching a safe place where we could hide from the Germans and their tanks and airplanes.

On the second night all eleven of us went to find out what the status of this sortie was, and to find a little food. In the surrounding farmsteads we are told that there are no Germans in the area any longer. We approach the German line, nearing the bunkers with their slit windows from which only a couple of days before we were fired upon – now it is quiet all around.

Henokh, the blacksmith from Kozlovshchina had Christian acquaintances somewhere in the area, so we headed toward them to obtain bread and milk. A peasant tells us to show ourselves and to take us where the other partisans are. Meanwhile, he took us to spend the day in a nearby wooded area. We can't

stay there very long. Germans are patrolling the area.

So we returned again to the swamps, after having found out that the Russians had broken through the German front and are drawing near to our area.

After additional searching, we finally were reunited with our unit, from which not even half the people survived. We know that any moment now, the Russians will arrive and liberate us, but in the meanwhile, the Germans continue to shoot. Until they began to retreat.

It was on a Saturday. We are lying in the forest, suspecting that there are no more Germans – and we wait.

And then a mine caught me. I woke up in a Russian army hospital. My head was bandaged. I was told that I was dug out of the debris. That is how I came to remain alive.

Hunger and Death in the Forest

By Tsirel Kamenetsky-Friedman
(Original Language: Yiddish)

There is nowhere to go – that was our first thought when we came out into the fresh air, which freshened our outlook and mind after the terrifying two days in the bunker.

Slowly the light of day appeared, even if it was dark for all of us, black and lightless. From there we went into the corn field and then on to the Lipover forest, and met many people at that place.

With Small Children To Care For

The first question that was put to us was: you want to save yourselves with such small children?

That same night we went to the forest of *Ostrovo*. My husband and I, and our small children were consistently the last ones. My dear sister was fearful that we would be left alone in the forest. It was *Herschel Lobzovsky* who led us, and waited for us, and did not let us remain behind and God forbid, get lost. And this is how we straggled along with our three small children: the oldest, *Lizinkeh*, a doll at age 6, our older son, *Moteleh* age 4, and the youngest, *Yankeleh*, 18 months old. Try to imagine the position of the parents, with three young ones, when you are asked: do you really want to save yourselves with such small children?

It is impossible to document what we suffered. Those not capable of fighting, along with women and children, found themselves in a family compound. We were constantly hungry, sick, broken and frightened. A terror would seize us at every movement, from every rustle of a leaf. We immediately were struck with Pharaoh's third plague: lice. The filth alone could have easily consumed us.

A month after we entered the forest, the Germans decided to launch a terrifying reprisal against us for the partisan attack on Dereczin. The Germans launched a sortie against the *Ostrovo* forest, and about 80 innocent people were shot, many of them were taken alive, and one can only imagine what sort of terrifying death the German murderers arranged for them.

For every day that we managed to live through, I thanked God: Blessed be God each and every day.
And so we made the time pass in a state of fright and hunger. Not only once did I think that it would be better to be dead already, because often death often seemed a much easier and better alternative than our dreary existence.

During the cold season, we lay in shallow small trenches, full of people, exhausted and starved, and

it was from this that a typhus epidemic broke out in the camp. Entire families would expire in the trenches, which constituted their [only] 'residence,' and were transformed into their common graves. Only a small portion of the Jews survived this entire ordeal.

My two sons and I contracted typhus. It was in the month of March, on the eve of Purim. There wasn't even a thermometer with which to take temperature. We had no form of food. The snow began to melt in our trench, and we lay in the watery melt. My husband, *Moshe-Zvi Kamenetsky* went off to a nearby village to obtain a small amount of potatoes, literally risking his life to do so. God helped him, and he succeeded in getting some potatoes and a little bit of salt. My children and I each received two potatoes to help stave off the hunger.

After such a frightening illness, I was left without strength, and I could not stand on my feet. I was literally carried out of the trench by hand and brought to the fire. The fresh air revived me somewhat. Sitting this way by the fire, I see a Jew who had just arrived from the village of Volya, bearing bitter tidings: military forces had ridden in and surrounded us from all sides. I wept bitter tears the entire night. What is going to happen now? Will I never again see my husband and children? It was necessary to run away from this place, and I did not have the strength to keep up with everyone else.

At daybreak, one could already hear the sound of shooting coming form all corners of the forest. It was necessary to flee as quickly as possible from our current location, with its well-marked pathways. I took my leave of my husband and children, begged their forgiveness, asking them to go with the others, while I would stay behind alone. We all knew that staying behind meant certain death.

In the middle of this, a howitzer shell whistled over our heads, and I suddenly began to run. We were literally almost in German hands. We ran through a large swamp, and I remained stuck in the muck. We even heard the voices of the enemy behind us, who raced through the forest searching for the innocent victims.

To this day, I do not know what sort of a miracle was wrought. My husband took me and the little baby on his back, and with all his might, pulled us out of the muck, and brought us back into the forest. We no longer saw any Jews around us, we only heard the sound of the racing German murderers. They ran from the right side, and we hid ourselves to the left, digging ourselves into the ground, and literally not breathing.

It was not only this once that such miracles occurred in the forest.

The first winter in the forest was a hard and bitter one. We had no tools with which to try and dig ourselves the deeper earthen shelter bunkers. We fled even in this great cold, at the time of a great sortie against us, naked and barefoot, in deep snow from the *Volya* forest to a second forest. I carried one of the children. The cold and the snow cut through to the heart. Peasants and their womenfolk, who saw us fleeing this way from one forest to another, would cross themselves out of fear of what we looked like.

That was the occasion of the great sortie against us, when the partisans fought an heroic life-and-death struggle. *Dr. Atlas* fell in that bitter struggle, a dear Jew and a friend to the family compound. Not only once did he protect us from the Christian partisans.

We survived this sortie as well. We returned to our old location in the *Volya* forest, and we encountered a veritable destruction. It was the family residents that suffered the most.

On the 12th day of Shevat, the shooting broke out again on all sides. People ran straight into the hands of the Germans. Not knowing that the Germans were attacking the partisans, many of us ran to seek protection from our partisan fighters, but instead of protection, they ran into heavy German gunfire.

Many of our Dereczin comrades were killed on that day, and I will never forget that 12th day of Shevat: my dear daughter *Lizinkeh* was killed, along with my sister, *Hannah Friedman*, along with the families of *Shmuel Butinsky*, with his wife and child,

Yochi Butinsky with her son, *Israel Salutsky* with three children, – the Yahrzeit for all of these people falls on the 12th of Shevat. May their souls be bound up in the bond of life.

It is hard to describe everything that we lived through in the forest, until the onset of summer in 1944.

At this point new sorts of trouble materialized. The Russian commanders began to pick a bone with the residents of the family compound, not wanting to support or protect us any longer. They literally abandoned us to God's will.

That summer we were cut off and separated from everything and everyone. We remained a group of 22 souls, and so made ourselves a camouflaged earthen bunker, deeply dug into the ground. Hungry, exhausted, without enough strength to even utter a word, we sat all day in this pit, listening to the shooting all around us.

We had no idea of who was shooting or why. At this point we no longer knew where the partisans were to be found, and had no idea of where we ourselves were. At night we would sneak outside, but we could not permit ourselves to make a fire.

I personally was so weakened from hunger and exertion that I barely could see with my own eyes.

We were sitting this way in the bunker, when suddenly outside we heard a shout: "*Kamenetsky! Kamenetsky!*" And the shouting did not stop, repeating itself and echoing through the forest.

My husband did not answer, and also did not let me answer. But I thought: there is nothing left to lose, – and I responded. It then became clear that these were two peasants who knew us, the *Karenko* brothers who were looking for us.

When they saw us, they made the sign of the cross out of sheer fright. One can only imagine how wild and disheveled we must have looked to them.

To my question as to what it was that brought them to look for us, one of them told the following to everyone who was in the bunker with us, that his wife *Stepka* had a dream in which long-bearded Jews came to her with staves in their hands, and said to her that we are to be found in a birch-wood, and that my children are dying of hunger. If they personally would not bring food for our children, then all of the *Karenkos* would be put to death. The gentiles were terrified by this dream, and brought us a loaf of bread and a jug of milk, which you can understand, we divided up among al the Jews in the earthen bunker.

From them we received the gladdening news that our redemption was drawing closer, and that the Germans had suffered the most substantial of downfalls, and are retreating through the forests.

The peasants took pity on us, and we went with them to their barn. In the distance, we could already hear the Soviet *Katyushas.*

Dr. Yekhezkiel Atlas – The Partisan Doctor

By Dr. Y. Rockover
(Original Language: Hebrew)

The ignorance pervading the chapter pertaining to the heroism of the Jews during the years of the Holocaust is noteworthy. It embodies a combination of both a national and personal insult.

– B. Dinor

Few doctors in our country know that *Dr. Ezekiel Atlas*, the young physician from Poland, was the central figure behind the organization of the Jewish partisan movement during the period of the Holocaust.

The fury of Jewish resistance to the Nazi conquest consisted of two aspects: the stand in the ghettoes, and the war in the forests. Just as *Mordechai Anielewicz* came to symbolize the movement of revolt in the ghettoes, so did *Dr. Ezekiel Atlas* come to symbolize the fighting on the part of the Jewish partisans. In the ghettoes, the decrees and outright murder, uprooted the will to resist from most of the Jews [so confined]. The recognition that it was impossible to defeat the Germans, and that there was no refuge to be sought from total annihilation, sapped the will to live among many. They saw no purpose to offering resistance whose only end seemed to be suffering and annihilation. The Jewish leadership in most centers of Jewish life were immediately wiped out at the outset of the Nazi conquest, in the first actions against the Jewish intelligentsia, and afterwards there was no leadership left in those centers. Despite this, individual groups were formed, who attempted to preserve the one reaction left to a human being with any sense of self-worth and dignity, that also survived in the ghettoes – a great spiritual readiness to fight. But these groups lacked weaponry, and especially a location, where they could organize themselves for battle. Each partisan unit was compelled to seek ties with the populace in the villages. The Jews, who were surrounded by enmity, lacked any standing with the populace, to the point that it was not possible to sustain oneself in these hostile rural surroundings. Various groups pervaded the forest: Polish fascists (A. K.), Ukrainians (Bandera), Byelorussians (Samokhova) and unorganized bands of pro-Soviets. There were deep-seated antagonisms that existed between them, but among them they also had a general unwritten agreement – the annihilation of the Jews.

Therefore, the organization of the partisan movement was much more difficult for the Jews than for any other people. The essential foundation of effective partisan force was to operate in small groups, and with surprise. In line with this, success depended greatly on the luck of the individual and especially on the good luck of the leadership.

Dr. Ezekiel Atlas was a fearless partisan. Everyone who knew him was mesmerized by the persona of this Jewish leader, by his enormous dynamism, his boundless commitment, modesty and simplicity. A thin man of medium height, with blue eyes that looked out beneficently and brightly, he first and foremost gave the impression of being a physician, and not as the leader of the partisans, that for the most part required a cruel and arrogant demeanor. But when he was instructing his young men in the understanding of the struggle, and the heat of vengeance, it was not possible to recognize him [as the same man]. His voice was penetrating and his visage was calm. In battle, there were no bounds to his willingness to undertake personal sacrifice, or to the strength of his spirit. Among the substantial ranks of the partisan movement, his unit was but one of many. But one must not forget, that before this movement arose, there was no opposition to the mighty German war machine. The bottom line assessment of the Germans was that the partisan movement weighed in as a heavy factor in their eventual defeat.

A Jewish Partisan Unit

Dr. Ezekiel Atlas was born in 1913 in the town of Rawa Mazowiecka in Poland. After completing his medical studies in Milan (Italy), he returned to Poland and worked in a hospital in Lodz. With the outbreak of the war in 1939, *Dr. Atlas* and his family fled to the east, and reached the town of Kozlovshchina in Byelorussia. With the cooperation of the Soviet regime, he organized a hospital there, and served as its head. He became well known in the area as a skillful doctor. With the invasion of the Nazi army, he attempted to flee into Russia with his family, but all avenues of exit were sealed off by the German army, which had accelerated its penetration like a deeply imbedded spike. He remained as a doctor in Kozlovshchina, and increased his visits to the surrounding villages, establishing ties to the farmers, who admired him greatly for dedication to the sick under his care, and his willingness to help at all times, whether day or night.

In the beginning of the spring, all the Jews of Kozlovshchina were wiped out, and among them the family of *Dr. Atlas* – his parents and sister. The Germans let the physicians live at that point in time, as 'necessary' Jews. The German wing was greatly fearful of typhus – a disease that always accompanied armies in Eastern Europe.

Because of this, *Dr. Atlas* was sent to a sanitarium location in Wielka Wola to combat typhus. In Wielka Wola, which is in the Slonim area, *Dr. Atlas* continued to extend assistance to the rural populace and also to the initial partisan units that had been formed, and with whom he formed fast relationships.

On July 22, 1942, the Germans organized a slaughter in the town of Dereczin, that is near Slonim. About two thousand five hundred Jews were killed, and only about 300 fled into the forest. The survivors blundered through the unfamiliar forest, without hope, hungry and without strength. That day was picked by *Dr. Atlas* as the day to realize his desire: the establishment of a Jewish partisan unit to wage war and exact vengeance. From the refugees of Dereczin that were able to bear arms, he formed a fighting brigade. He centralized the old, women and children in a 'family compound.' The first three rifles that were brought by *Dr. Atlas* breathed life into the members of the brigade. Armed with rifles, the *Atlas* troops went out with their leader to wage punitive actions against the nearby villages that were cooperating with the Germans. The possessions of the families of the police were confiscated, and both utensils and foodstuffs were brought to the family compound in ample quantity. The Doctor spent entire days in the villages, and was able to obtain weapons from the farmers of the area. The loyalty that was shown to him in every quarter because of his role as a doctor, helped him greatly in obtaining weapons, and with the organization of an information network in the area. The youth of the villages, and the cattle herders were valuable sources of weapons which was terribly hard to find in that period. In 1941 the Russian army left behind a great deal of weaponry, during its disorganized retreat, that the farmers, and especially their youth, had hidden in the ground. *Atlas* would bring arms from them every day. The strength of the brigade continued to grow. Six light and two heavy machine guns were procured. Cannons also were procured that the Russians had left behind, and shells for them were also found. Among the young men in the *Atlas* brigade, there were cannoneers who served in the Polish army, and also those who could repair an abandoned artillery piece. Even the 'family compound' was allocated several rifles in order to be able to defend itself.

The sustenance of a 'family compound' initially created a burden for the partisan [fighting] group, which had to be nimble and mobile, but with the passage of time the compound was transformed into a workplace for the partisans and a supply point, repair of clothing, white goods , shoes, etc.... During sieges, they would prepare subterranean hideouts which also contributed to saving many lives. The partisan district that *Atlas* was active in stretched from Slonim to Novogrudok. This area was covered with heavy, thick forest, surrounded by natural swamp, and served as a natural base for various

Jewish, Polish, Byelorussian and Soviet partisan units. Between the course of the Neman and Shchara Rivers, can be found the great Lipiczany forest – that served as the base for *Dr. Atlas's* unit, and Jews from all the surrounding towns reached there: from Dereczin, Zheludok, Byelitsa, Kozlovshchina, Novojelnia, Molchad, Dvorocz, Zhetl (Dyatlovo), Novogrudok, Lida, and others. When the first of the Jews arrived in the forests, they ran into unorganized units of Soviet partisans – the remnants of the Red Army. These units had only robbery and plunder on their agenda. Under these circumstances, the groups of Jews stood in danger of being annihilated. [Indeed], it was in this way that a small group of partisans under the leadership of *Alter Dvorotsky* of Zhetl was totally wiped out. The value placed on *Dr. Atlas* by the rural population, and the regard for him among the unorganized units, helped to overcome the anti-Semitism that pervaded the forests and confronted those who came out of the ghettoes.

Avenging Spilled Jewish Blood

On August 10, 1942, 16 days after the Dereczin massacre, *Dr. Atlas* led a group of 120 partisans against the town to exact vengeance for the Jewish blood that had been spilled. The operative plan was to surround the town and cut it off from Slonim and Zelva, to neutralize the police station of 160 policemen and 15 gendarmes that were in it, and to divide up the weaponry among the refugees. Together with the unit of *Dr. Atlas*, the attack on Dereczin was joined by the Soviet unit of *Boris* xxx, and the unit of the local farmer – *Bulak. Shmuel Borenstein,* the author of the book, *The Brigade of Dr. Atlas*, who participated in the battle, writes: "It was exactly four o'clock. Dawn broke. Machine guns began to bark and the ground shook from exploding grenades... we stormed ahead. From the other side of the gendarmerie we were answered with gunfire... The young men with the *Atlas* brigade ousted the frightened police from the station, and were led ashen-faced and shaken, with their hands in the air. From the side, I saw *Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky* with a machine gun in his hands, his head disheveled and blood running from his nose...his shirt was torn, and he laughed a wild hysterical laugh and shouted as if he were insane: "Hey, do you like this -- hah?!" And the police were shot down on the exact spot that two weeks earlier the Jews were murdered. Beside the gendarmerie, a hard battle was fought. *Shelkovich* the shoemaker who had gone to battle with just a stick in his hand, now had a new German submachine gun... the boys loaded the wagons with the wounded, the weaponry and rest of the booty – and returned to the forest... the German army that arrived from Slonim found the town in flames"...

After Dereczin came the turn of Ruda Jaworska. This village lay at the intersection of roads between the partisan forests. Substantial forces of Germans and Ukrainians captured this town, something that caused the differences among the various partisan groups to be set aside. Allied units of Jewish and Russian partisans stormed the town. The resistance of the enemy was unusually strong. *Bogdush*, one of *Atlas's* boys, heaved a grenade into the Ukrainian trenches and wiped out a heavy machine gun nest, took control of it and turned it against the enemy. The breaking of this guard's nest by the *Atlas* unit was a determining factor in the outcome of this difficult conflict. The Nazis fled, leaving behind many dead and a lot of weaponry.

In the course of the following weeks, *Atlas* managed to drive the Germans out of his district. He attacked the locally billeted enemy force in Halinka, and Sankveshchina, and neutralized them. The attack on Kozlovshchina was not carried out with complete success. The Germans entrenched themselves well in the surrounding towns, and the partisans ran into strong resistance. A frontal attack was not advisable, since it was fraught with the possibility of heavy losses. The most effective partisan tactic was the approach of 'hit and run.' *Atlas* attempted to exploit every opportunity for surprise. In instances when he ran into superior enemy forces, he would attempt to refrain from direct confrontation.

Continuous Sabotage

Within our district, the partisans operated without

constraint. Every village had a resident partisan representative. His job was to secure food and lodging for those fighters that were asked to come into that area. In these villages, it was forbidden to take supplies. The German forces, step by step, lost their dominance the region, and in the end their control became limited to the major cities and towns only. After the enemy had been cleaned out of the area, *Atlas* committed himself entirely to the acquisition of explosives for purposes of engaging in sabotage. He began to send out sabotage units beyond the forests to strike at critical military targets: railroad track, railroad stations, manufacturing facilities and warehouses. In a short period of time, all the dairies ceased to operate that supplied the Germans with butter and eggs. Similarly, a cement factory in the village of Rosh was blown up. The destruction of the bridge across the Neman, which for a long time cut the connection between both sides of the river, brought him much praise from all wings of the partisan movement in the district. Every day, *Atlas* wound bring wagons filled with cannon shells that had been left in the fields, or in the middle of the Shchara River, near Wielka Wola. He removed the explosive from these shells, created mines and deployed them for use.

The battlefront was far away on the banks of the Volga, and away from the front we saw an unending procession of German train transports taking weaponry to their army. One of the well-known acts of sabotage carried out by *Dr. Atlas* was the blowing up of the bridge at the Ruzianka railroad terminal, at the time that a train was crossing it, that led to many enemy dead and wounded. In another incident, he had a German airplane destroyed at his command, on the occasion of its landing due to a mechanical accident, about 30km from his base. The connection of the Brest-Baranovich-Moscow line was disrupted frequently by *Atlas*. All train lines were totally taken out of service after an unending series of sabotage attacks. The caravans that brought supplies to the front were attacked by *Atlas* units. The Germans ran out of ways to secure the rails. In order to make an approach to the tracks more difficult, they cleared about 300 meters on either side of the track. Any citizen seen in this stretch was shot on sight. The Germans [also] built bunkers along the rail lines, and manned them with continuous guard patrols. Patrols, using mine detection equipment constantly patrolled the length of the tracks. The increased the number of trains during the day, and cut down on the night runs. Responsibility was allocated to the villages. Local residents were designated to be responsible for the condition of the strip of track near their village. In the event of an act of sabotage, these designated people were taken out and shot. These acts of terror did not achieve their intended result, rather they intensified the hatred of the enemy, and accelerated the rate of escape into the forests and adherence to the ranks of the partisans. The Germans resorted to siege from time to time. On December 15, 1942, the Germans, accompanied by Ukrainians from the Vlasov Battalion,[124] a combined force of about a thousand men, launched a punitive expedition against the partisans. *Atlas* seized a position and took a stand beside the town of Vala-Zuta, which was beside the Shchara River. A part of the enemy force decided to cross the river. When the column, together with its vehicles found itself in the middle of the river, *Atlas* opened fire on it with a cannon and machine guns. More than seventy Germans and Ukrainians were killed in battle, and much booty and war spoils fell into partisan hands. A short time afterwards, three thousand German and Lithuanian soldiers laid down a siege line in the forest. Acts of terror and torching villages, mass murder – all these contributed again to bolster the partisan movement. *Dr. Atlas's* brigade retreated, and broke up into smaller units. After two weeks, when the enemy left, the units returned to the forest, reorganized themselves anew and resumed their war against the enemy. The December siege was especially difficult. Winter, and falling snows made movement especially hard. There were many victims in the family compound. The German force numbered thirty thousand men. They had airplanes, tanks and heavy cannons with which they ceaselessly shelled the Forest.

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[124] The notorious Ukrainian General, who defected to the Nazi Germans after the June 1941 invasion.

The People Did Not Go Like Sheep to the Slaughter

The fate of the village residents was like that of the Jews. The Germans ordered them to dig deep pits, then forced them into those pits and shot them there. This slaughter was carried out indiscriminately, whether one was a partisan sympathizer or their opponents -- the Kulaks. The brigade of *Dr. Atlas* continued with its routine, guarding the passage over the Shchara River near the town of Wielka Wola. The Germans concentrated heavy automatic weapon fire on the brigade. Only during the brief lulls was it possible to crawl a couple of meters. The battle continued in this location for two days. Conditions grew increasingly dire. *Atlas* looked for a way to break through the encirclement. In this battle Atlas was wounded in the leg. The bullet appeared to have pierced the femoral artery. Blood ran from his wound without stop. Notwithstanding the efforts that were expended to close the artery, the doctor could not save himself.

He lasted long enough to pass command to *Eliyahu Lifshovich*, and exhort him: Revenge!... and lost consciousness. He died about a half hour after being wounded.

Despite the sense of resignation that came with the death of the leader, the brigade succeeded in escaping the danger of the encirclement and regroup at a new base. The year 1943 was a year of diversionary actions done at Soviet direction, and a reorganization of the partisan movement, with the establishment of [new] units. From a practical standpoint, there was no longer any need for Jewish partisan units. The *Atlas* brigade passed under Russian command, but it continued in the Jewish tradition, and the name of *Dr. Atlas* continued to serve as its symbol. In the Forest [forest] they continued to call them 'Atlasovtsii' – the *Atlas* Boys.

The value of *Dr. Atlas* in the Lipiczany Forest was not only in the military sphere. He laid a foundation for bringing together those Jews who fled the ghettoes that stood in flames, and strayed aimlessly through the forests. He would bless them on their arrival, comfort the bereaved, and above all, give them the feeling that an armed Jewish presence was looking over them. Added to this he was a physician. The Angel Raphael to the ill and wounded.

It is up to the historians to reflect the role of *Dr. Atlas* in the telling of the Holocaust period. The assault on Dereczin, in which those who fled death and escaped to the forest from the ghetto, attacking the town two weeks later, and arranged their own slaughter of those who murdered their fathers and children – this story is worthy of inclusion in those chapters that are chosen to be read in books about the Holocaust by young people. Those chapters of Jewish heroism in the Holocaust years are worthy enough to find their way into the hearts of our young people, so that they know that the Jewish people did not go like sheep to the slaughter, but fought for its survival and honor.

With the Dereczin Fighters in the Forest

By Shmuel Borenstein
(Original Language: Hebrew)

July 24, 1942

I returned late at night. For a long time I couldn't fall asleep. The third anniversary of the war was drawing near. A period of great tribulation had gone by me. It is difficult for me to admit it, but I have finally accepted the idea that my parents and brother were dead. At this moment, I speculated about the people I had left back in Dereczin, who were close to my heart, who are oppressed by daily suffering. And my reach is entirely too short to lend them a hand.

At dawn, a noise wakens me from my sleep.

– Something is going on around us – the lads are up.

And from the direction of Dereczin we hear the ceaseless rattle of machine gun fire. I glanced at *Herschel*. Pale as white plaster, he listened to the echoes of the shooting. Everyone understood what was going on in the heart of his neighbor. In Dereczin, Jews are being put to death. Our hearts were very heavy within us that day. Our food stuck in our throats, and everything fell from our hands. Our trepidation about the fate of the Jews of Dereczin oppressed us.

That evening *Misha* returned, who had been sent to reconnoiter the area. It became clear that our suspicions were proven correct. It became known to *Misha* from the words of the area farmers that from early morning on, the Jews of Dereczin were being shot.

His notification to us hit us with the force of hammer blows. At that precise moment, we sought to be by ourselves, and we waited impatiently for the silence of the night.
I recollect the words of one of the Russian boys who saw me in my sorrow. In his desire to console me he said:

– Soldier! At another time, you were saved from there. It was hard for them to understand our pain.

The following day, we discovered from the boys returning from their post, that the remnant of the Jews from Dereczin who had managed to save themselves from the slaughter, were in [the] Boralom [Forest]. We received permission from our command to go look in on the refugees.

We left immediately for the Boralom Forest. We were hurried in our pace. A terrible fright ate at us regarding the fate of those close to our hearts. We tried to imagine the morale of these refugees, who fled into unfamiliar forests, leaving behind the dead bodies of their fathers, mothers, brothers and children. We wanted to console these unfortunates and offer them what encouragement we could.

We ran into the first group of Dereczin residents as we entered the forest. A little girl jumped out at us from behind the trees. I recognized the daughter of my friend, the teacher, *Landau*. I hugged the nine-year-old girl in my arms. Despite the fact that I was wearing military garb, with a rifle on my shoulder, the little girl recognized me immediately. She clutched me about the neck, because she sensed that I would protect her. Two big black eyes that gazed out in terror, moved me emotionally.

On that terrifying day, at the hour that the Germans entered their home, little *Manya* was hiding behind a wooden box. With her own eyes she saw how strange men took to beating her father, mother and grandfather. A sixth sense told the little girl to sit behind the large box without making a sound. The Germans took the weeping people outside by force. *Manya* knew that something awesome was afoot, because those nearest to her were leaving and would not return. She had an immense desire to scream out, to approach these evil people, and ask them to stand down from her loved ones. But the scream remained stuck in her throat. Afterwards, everything was silent.

Quickly, shots pierced the silence. *Manya* understood: now they are murdering [her] father, mother and grandfather. Germans are entering the house in an unending stream, searching for [more] people. A fat gendarme even glanced at the large box, behind which she was hidden. She saw him, and the look on his face, but he did not see her. At night someone stealthily entered the house. It was her uncle, who had come out of the bunker to see what had transpired. Together they stole out of town and went out to the forest.

The things that the refugees told us surpassed anything and everything that one could imagine in their terror and cruelty. At somewhat a distance, a woman sits, with a dulled facial expression. Her young face, ringed with graying hair, makes an eerie impression.

– I have sinned, I have sinned, – the woman repeats, stubbornly, over and over again.

People sitting next to her told the following: at the hour of slaughter in the town, this woman was with an infant in the bunker. In a matter of minutes, police broke into the house looking for Jews. The infant did not stop crying, and those hidden [in the bunker] feared that [the cries] would reveal their hiding place. The mother suffocated the child with her own hands.

And here is a young man sitting, saved from death by a miracle. With his own eyes, he saw his little son pleading with the murderers:

– Look, I am so young yet, and I haven't lived very long in this world, let me live!

These people told me that there were perhaps two hundred Jews in the depth of the forest: a part of them had taken a path to the Shchara River.

The smoke billowing above the trees indicated to me which direction to take me to the refugee camp. In about a half hour I was at the place. How different this camp was from the partisan camp! Here, no man sang; there were no joyful, motivated people. The refugees sit sullen and silent: they cannot take their minds of the incidents of that terrifying day for even a moment. Every one of them left behind the people that were most dear to them. And here – there are parents without children, children without parents. Family life that had been constructed over a period of many years was completely destroyed in one day. And now: an unfamiliar forest; wide-open skies with no roof over their heads.

Yesterday, the commander of all the partisans of the area came to this place, *Boris Bulat.* [125] He promised to absorb all those able-bodied men capable of bearing arms into the partisan ranks. The remainder would constitute a 'family camp' as they were called: they would get a couple of rifles for self-defense, and they would be provisioned by the partisan groups.

A Successful Expedition

July 28, 1942

One evening we went out as a complete group to do battle. The commander explained to us the purpose of the expedition. In the village of Jaziorki Velika about four kilometers from Dereczin, there was to be a wedding of a police officer with the daughter of a farmer. We were to use this opportunity to kill as many Germans as possible. This was the first time I participated in a mission of such danger.

At nine in the evening, we approached Jaziorki. With us we had two machine guns, several submachine guns, and two grenades apiece. First, the commander sent *Kolya*, a veteran soldier, and myself to reconnoiter the area. Silently, and by crawling, we drew near to the shed at the edge of the village. From afar we heard the clang of cymbals, the stamping of dancers' feet and the sounds of carousing drunkards.

I was boiling:

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[125] Not to be confused with *Pavel Bulak.* Of Ostrovo.

– They have just barely erased the traces of Jewish blood from their hands, and already they are celebrating!

Kolya knocked on the door of the shed, and from the other side of the window a figure appeared, dressed in white.

– Who's there? – a frightened voice asked.
– Open up, partisans. – *Kolya* answered quietly.

I remained outside. I flattened myself against the wooden wall of the shed, and I strained to hear every sound coming from the street.

Kolya returned in about a minute, and we went back to our waiting comrades, and conveyed to the commander what we had learned.

The commander organized the people. At the edge of the village, near the shed where *Kolya* obtained his intelligence, two men were left with machine guns. They were given responsibility to guard the road to Dereczin. We, who remained, drew closer to the objective on the field grounds behind the sheds. The dark of the night worked in our favor. At the end, we found ourselves about twenty meters from the point where the wedding feast was being held. Indoors there were many people, and the din was loud. In front of the house, sat young boys and girls who were enamored of each other. In the middle of the street, the figure of a person became visible to us because of a lit cigarette.

– It appears that he is standing watch, and was detailed to this place, – the commander whispered.

We then had to resolve a difficult dilemma. It was impossible for us to randomly fire into the house, since we were likely to kill innocent people. *Kolya* was therefore given the mission of sneaking up on the sentry and shooting him, the sound of that shot being a signal for us to start shooting into the air. The thinking of our commander was that the surprised police would attempt to escape toward Dereczin, and fall into the trap of our machine guns hidden there. We reasoned that the farmers would learn a lesson, that they have no need to participate in celebrations of this kind, and the police will halt their night visits from this time on.

– Just a little longer, and the joy here will be unparalleled – *Misha* whispered to me.

Suddenly the shot was heard that stopped the sound of the merry polka. I saw that the lit cigarette in the mouth of one of the men fell to the ground. The light went out in the windows. We heard the sound of screaming and crying. Several people rushed outside. We opened with heavy fire. Tracer bullets whistled over the houses. We began to heave grenades into the middle of the road. From the edge of the town we began to hear the report of machine gun fire.

– They are ours! *Misha* called out gleefully. Also, from the direction of Dereczin we heard the sound of heavy machine gun fire.

In the end, silence pervaded the area. We entered the street forcefully. At the side of a corpse soaking in its own blood stood *Kolya,* a black policeman's cap on his head, and a brand new holstered German pistol in his belt.

– Apparently he felt that he was safe from all harm, if he was smoking at his post – said *Kolya.*

Vanya sent me to reconnoiter the second side of the village. The lads took the new footwear off of the corpses of the dead police.

– Well, it looks like we did it – *Misha* said to me. – We don't have to go to the quartermasters: they have to come to us, – he continued, as he looked with raised spirits at the new boots, which the lads put on in place of the shoes that were falling apart and hurting their toes.

I returned to my post. Light again appeared in the window. From the shed came the stern voice of the commander. In the street, the lads conversed regarding the battle that had lasted less than an hour. After about a minute, *Vanya* appeared in the street.

– And now lads, – he said, let's go: reinforcements inevitably will come from Dereczin.

In the hour since we exchanged fire with the sentries on watch at the edge of the camp, dawn began to break.

A day after the Jaziorki mission, I received some gladdening news from the mouths of two new members of our brigade that were inducted from the Jewish refugee camp: A Jewish fighting brigade was being organized on the other side of the Shchara River. The head of the brigade was *Dr. Atlas*, and my friends *Bella & Izzy* are found there, who were saved from the slaughter, and other companions who were taken into the underground organization in Dereczin. I immediately turned to my commander, and he granted me permission to leave camp for a number of days.

The Brigade of Dr. Atlas

August 1942

At the noon hour I was on the banks of the Shchara River. On the opposite side of the river, the great Ruda forests loomed, that served as the refuge of the partisans. The town of Wielka Wola was there. I knew that the nearest occupying German army force was billeted in Kozlovshchina. But the Germans and the [local] police had learned a lesson not to infringe on "Red Territory." Not inviting trouble, I asked the ferryman who took me to the other side of the Shchara, but the Germans are not visible here.

– These dogs are frightened of us, enough to leave – answered the farmer with pride.

The little town looked like an impoverished settlement. The meager soil barely sustained the resident populace. The woven nets hanging on the fences of the houses gave a sign that the local people engaged in fishing. From the way the citizenry looked at me, I could see that they were accustomed to visitors of this kind. I found myself in the middle of the town, and was weighing in my mind which direction to head toward, and at that moment a man stepped out of a hut with a rifle in his arm. From the way he was dressed, I could tell he was a partisan.

– Hey, comrade! – I called out.

The partisan turned his head to me. We each peered into the other's face, and immediately ran toward one another. This was one of my buddies from Dereczin, a member of the underground, *Chaim-Yehoshua Lifshovich, Chaim-Yehoshua* had come to town in a wagon. He was in charge of supplies for the brigade, and had brought flour to the peasants so they could bake bread for the brigade. We immediately jumped up onto the wagon, and headed for his camp which was about four kilometers from the village. We traveled speedily along a forest pathway. The wagon bounced and was thrown about going over large tree roots. This was a large forest, the size of which I had never seen before. The old tall trees were overwhelming, carrying themselves up to majestic heights, giving off a mournful emanation from deep in the underbrush.

Finally we turned to the side. Under the branch of a tree stood a sentry, with a machine gun beside him. Even this was an old familiar friend, the Dereczin baker, *Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky*.

I covered several more tens of meters along the path, and found myself in the camp of the Brigade of *Dr. Atlas*. All around us were tents. Next to the fireplace, beside the water pails, the young woman cooks stood and labored; under the trees, men were sitting, occupied with cleaning weapons.

– *Shmuel! Shmuel!* – I heard cried to my side.

I hugged *Izzy & Bella* to my breast; a group of my friends gathered around me. I felt at home.

Bella told me her story. With a trembling voice, she spoke of "that" day.

– With daybreak the Germans arrived in town by autos. The police surrounded the ghetto with a tight chain of sentries. She, *Bella*, hid herself at the last minute, along with *Izzy* in the eaves of the roof.

With a great effort, they drew up the access ladder behind them, and from below, the shouts of the Germans were already reaching them. Through the cracks in the floorboards of the attic, they gritted their teeth and watched what was going on below. A transport vehicle stood in front of the house. The Germans drove the residents into the street and forced them up into the vehicle, accompanied by curses and tumult. *Bella's* mother cast a glance up at the attic. This was her parting blessing to her daughter.

Crying and wailing broke out on all sides. From the other side of the flour mill, shots were heard. On the square that was in front of the mill, the Germans were shooting Jews. Those who were hidden waited until nightfall. Then they descended on their ladder, now having only one alternative: to the forest.

After many adventures, they reached the Boralom Forest. Here they joined up with the *Lifshovich* family, and *Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky*. They decided to set their course for the opposite side of the Shchara River. Along the way, they were joined by additional refugees. Finally, they reached the village of [Wielka] Wola. From the distance, farmers working quietly appeared in view. The sun beat down on us. The children of the village scattered at the appearance of the strange visitors. From all around, one could hear the scraping of doors as they were being shut. From out of the windows the curious village women peered.

Suddenly a voice speaking in Yiddish was heard:

– Jews, wait!

An unfamiliar person approached them. He was *Dr. Ezekiel Atlas*. He led them into the forest, and gave them directions as to what to do by the hour. After this, he departed and was not seen for several days. They were hungry, and they cast about here and there, searching for something to eat, so as to still their hunger pangs. *Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky* who was known to be a lover of food, went out one night to a nearby village, and with a loud trumpeting of victory, returned with a large tureen that he swiped off of a sill. They would then go gather potatoes from the field and cook them in the large pot, and this was how they managed to sustain themselves.

On the third day, the Doctor returned, bringing with him three additional people from Dereczin: the brothers, *'Nioma & David Dombrowsky, & Herschel Zlotagura.* They too, ran into *Atlas* as they fled the town.

– Lads! – the Doctor cried from a distance – I bring good tidings! The partisan group recognizes you as a fighting unit, [and] from this day forward I am your commander.

Dr. Atlas, a man of medium height, about 27 years old, was born in the town of Rawa Mazowiecka. The war between Germany and Russia broke out while he was in the city of Slonim. He served there as a hospital physician. At the beginning of 1942, the Germans organized a massacre of the Jews of Kozlovshchina, and it was at this time that the members of the *Atlas* family were killed – his mother, younger sister 17 years-old. As a physician, the Germans spared his life, and sent him to a central point in the village of Wielka Wola. But he also tied up with the partisan command. He secretly carried arms, on the chance that perhaps the Germans would make a move against him, and he stood ready at any moment to lay his life on the line in order to escape into the forest. Now, he was placed in command of the partisan group that consisted of Dereczin refugees.

From that point, *Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky* and the *Lifshovich* brothers told us about the negotiations that *Dr. Atlas* conducted with the Russians. He sought to create a fighting unit from the Dereczin refugees. The Russians were reluctant and evasive, arguing that most of the refugees from Dereczin coursing through the forest were women and children, and it would be better to find a single general solution.

In the end, *Atlas* returned with the first three rifles. A new spirit started to pervade the hearts of the people. They immediately set to work.

Armed with tow rifles, the lads went out to "pay a call" at the family of a specific policeman who had demonstrated extra zeal during the Dereczin massacre. They returned bearing needed vessels and foodstuffs. By schedule, the Doctor would spend entire days and nights in the villages. He was able to obtain arms from the farmers. *Atlas* derived special value from his relationship with the shepherd boys. In 1941 the retreating Red Army left a great deal of war materiel behind, which the farmers, together with their children, buried in the ground. A day didn't go by when the Doctor would not receive some of these arms. At this point, the *Atlas Brigade* numbered about twenty people, and in short order, all of them were armed. They even had a machine gun.

Dr. Atlas was indefatigable. No one knew when he rested. He was constantly worrying and on the run, remembering everyone and everything. From the first moment on, he led his brigade with an iron discipline.

– We are soldiers – he would say. – Soldiers taking revenge. On the day of the slaughter, on July 24, our normal lives ceased. If we remained alive, its only purpose is to exact vengeance from the enemy.

On the day I visited the camp, the Doctor vanished. I was told that he traveled to the Group to convinced the command that it was necessary to attack the German position in Dereczin, and to take revenge for the spilling of Jewish blood.

– This was the single thought, and the only thought that filled our hearts, and what gave us the motivation to live on – said the partisans of the *Atlas* Brigade.

Blood for Blood

September 8, 1942

When I returned to my camp, I found that all the paraphernalia was packed and loaded on wagons. The group was ready to move out.

– We are going to a new location – *Herschel* told me.

It was known to me, that the practice of the partisans was to periodically relocate its base camp. Consequently, I was not surprised. This was done for security purposes. The tread of the walkers who came and went from the camp turned the pathways to the camp into marked conduits of passage. If the Germans found them, they could come upon us suddenly. Even the farmers of the district were not particularly loyal to us. There was no lack of informers who maintained contact with the Germans.

Consequently, it was difficult to conceal the location of the camp from people in the nearby area, particularly the shepherd boys, who would bring their flocks to graze in the tracts of the forest. Even the farmers, who would come into the forest to cut wood, would periodically trip across a concealed partisan sentry point. And even if up to now we were attacking the Germans and causing them damage out of proportion to our real numbers, and they did not know our numerical strength and were filled with fright at the mere thought of entering the forests – we didn't ease up for a minute regarding our focus on the work we were doing, and why we found ourselves at the enemy's neck. Danger lay in wait for us frequently. But the camp served as a point of tranquility, except for being there too long. It was for this reason that the lads were sent out to seek out a new location for us, and when they returned, the order was given to move.

The new location was in the Boralom Forest. We hurried to get there, with the thought of reaching the road that we needed to use in the dead of night. And at night, we reached the place designated for the camp.

Tired from the journey, I was late in getting up the next day. The camp was already alive with activity. The lads put up the tents, the cook was making the rounds of his pots according to his routine, and the food dump was set up in a shed made of tree branches. Only the tall straight pines that I saw in

place of the white birch proved to me that I was in a new location.

In this forest, at a different point, the 'family compound' of the Jewish refugees from Dereczin was also located. I walked off to visit them at my first opportunity.

From the time of my first visit to their camp, many changes had occurred. It could be felt that people had come to terms with their terrible misfortune. Talk about the massacre had entirely ceased.

This camp did not have a military air about it. The huts, set up to serve as dwellings for the people, were spread out; the people were divided into groups, with several families in a group. Each group, generally consisting of about ten people, would cook its own food. Foodstuff was in very short supply, not like at the [fighting units of the] partisans. I found old people and children too, who had been saved from slaughter. Here and there, I would see Jews standing in prayer. As was the case in the *Atlas* Brigade, there were many here, old and young alike, who yearned to take revenge on behalf of those who were murdered. A number of people had already procured arms. Most had bought them from farmers with their last pennies, from the pittance they managed to take with them as they fled: a few rifles were also given to them by the partisans.

At the time of my visit, I sensed a stirring of action in the camp.

– *Dr. Atlas* is coming! – my friend called out in a loud voice.

Finally, I had the opportunity to actually see this Jewish commander, whose name had already received high praise in the forests.

I looked him over with care. The horn-rimmed glasses perched on his nose bespoke a doctor more than a partisan commander. His visage was very young, his carriage erect, the features of his face and head matched: his eyes blue and friendly. His hair thinning and tousled. His legs were somewhat long, but his step was small. And I swear that his day-to-day gait did not look steady (which was not the case during battle, as I would later discover). Frequently, a smile would appear at his lips, then his lips would rise, revealing closely spaced white teeth. When not in battle, he would not speak in a loud voice, but [in a voice] that was ringing and compelling. When he was puzzled about something, he would push up his glasses and arch his eyebrows.

He wore extremely modest military dress: high boots on his feet, of too large a size, and at times the fabric would work its way out of the boot. In contrast to his dress which was not particularly elegant, he was armed from head to toe. He also carried with him a submachine gun with seventy rounds, which was at that time of the highest value in the forests, an automatic pistol, a reserve clip for the submachine gun, a leather military briefcase, and the tops of grenades stuck out of his jacket pockets.

Atlas turned beneficently to the children that gathered to see him. Afterward, he signaled with his hand to the adults that he wished to speak with them: silence reigned.

– Fellow Jews! – *Atlas* called out, and now his voice and face changed. The benign, soft appearance disappeared, as if it had never existed. He brought his eyebrows together and his voice became sharp:
– I can take twenty of your men into my brigade. I have weapons for them. Thousands of our brothers, who have been murdered, burden us with a great responsibility. The brigade that I command is a 'Brigade of Despair.' We, all the members of this brigade, see ourselves as 'lost.' We harbor no other thought other than to take revenge. Which of you is prepared to follow me?

It was only with difficulty that I squeezed myself between other people and got close to *Dr. Atlas*, who was surrounded by tens of volunteers. I introduced myself, and implored him to turn to the central command to have me transferred to his brigade.

I returned to my camp, enchanted by the persona of this Jewish commander carrying the hope in my heart that I would be able to join his camp.

Several days went by in which nothing noteworthy happened. And suddenly on August 7, a young man on horseback arrived at our camp, from the central partisan command. Our commander read the letter that he brought with interest.

We felt that something important was afoot. *Vanya* ordered *Herschel* and myself to prepare for a journey. We were to accompany him to a task, and immediately, the entire group was to leave in a couple of hours, fully armed, under the command of *Kolya*, to the designated rendezvous point.

After departure, *Vanya* told us that, with the concurrence of the central command, he was to Assume temporary command of the groups of Jewish refugees. *Herschel* and I were to be his deputies.

On the way we passed a partisan group that had dispersed into the forest. The lads had a heavy machine gun.

– These are the partisans from the other side of the Shchara River, – *Vanya* explained.

Finally we reached our objective, the camp of the Jewish refugees.

At this point it is necessary for me to underscore a specific detail regarding the way of life in the forests: in the forest, important news moves with lightning speed. A great ferment was evident among the Jews. An acquaintance of mine told me that since morning, all the partisan groups were entering the Boralom [Forest]. It cannot be other than they were getting ready for a "most important" mission.

Vanya ordered *Herschel* and me to immediately organize a fighting unit out of those people that seemed capable of bearing arms, and commanded that we make ready to move out. Oh! – how few were the rifles; the hands of most of the men were empty. When the older people saw what was going on, an emotion welled up inside of them. And here, an elderly man came out, *Shalkovich* name, a shoemaker from Dereczin, drew close with sprightly steps, a cane in his hand, and said:

– We know to where you are heading. Our place is also there. There, we should be able to exchange the cane for a rifle.

They began to ask of *Vanya* that he should take them as well. The central command was nearby, and *Vanya* went there to consult on the issue. After he returned, he formed an additional unit, armed with canes.

The women took quiet leave of their husbands, and parents of their sons. Once again, we went out on our way. It was already late afternoon by the time we reached the edge of the great forest. Next to the fires, the various brigades stood. From afar, I could see *Dr. Atlas* at the head of his brigade, preparing to leave the place.

I drew near to him. *Dr. Atlas* gave the first-aid kit to *Bella* and said:

– You will be the field nurse. To his warriors he said: – Know friends, we are going into battle!

The general commander, *Boris Bulat* came close to us, riding on his horse escorted by members of the central command.

This *Boris* lost his right hand at the front; despite this, he was an excellent marksman. He gave us a short speech:

– Today, lads – he said, – an opportunity is given to you to exact vengeance from the Nazis. Before dawn, our united group of partisans will arrange to launch an attack on Dereczin.

We walked in silence, each man sunk in his own thoughts. Exactly two weeks had passed since the day of slaughter in Dereczin. Our feet rolled through the large expanse of the Ostrovo forest. At the head

went our commander, *Vanya Zaitsev* and the compass is in his hand.

At 3AM, before dawn, we finally reached the church that was situated at the edge of the town. The commander ordered us to lie down on the ground. From the side, on both the left and right flanks, one could see the silhouettes of people, and the heavens with their attitudes toward the town. They also lay under them.

– Those are the units of *Dr. Atlas* and our *Kolya* – *Vanya* explained in hushed tones. – The *Atlas* brigade had the mission to silently take out the German guard posts on this side of the town. The town is completely surrounded by our people. The telephone line has surely been cut by now. Apart from this, large forces of ours lie in ambush, toward Zelva and Slonim.

– At 4AM the signal to begin fighting was to be given – a foot messenger advised us from central command, who reached us by crawling on his belly.

In the distance, we can see the outline of a station. There is a common grave there, where hundreds of Jews were shot by the Nazis. I imagined that the sound of the screaming and wailing of the murdered was reaching my ears. The sound of a shot ended my reverie. The voice of *Boris Bulat* was heard:

– Lads, to the battle! In the name of our motherland!

From the side, where the *Atlas* brigade lay, came the sound of a different command:

– Jews, forward! In the name of our beloved!

It was exactly 4AM. Dawn broke. Machine guns began to chatter, and the ground shook from the explosion of hand grenades. Rat-tat-tat-tat! – a heavy machine gun chattered away. We stormed ahead, firing ahead of us. From the other side of the building that served as the gendarmerie, we received return gunfire. The sun was fully risen by the time we seized a position behind the houses, precisely opposite the station house. From a top floor window, a heavy machine gun sprayed its bullets all around.

I asked *Vanya* for permission to operate on my own. In about a minute, I was at the side of the house, in which the *Hilfs-Polizei* was located. The lads from the *Atlas* brigade extracted the Byelorussian policemen, the servants of the Germans, from the building. The police walked pale and trembling, with their hands in the air, and their eyes held the look of the fear of death. From the side, I saw *Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky*, a machine gun in his hand, his hair disheveled and blood dripping from his nose, his shirt torn, and trousers disarrayed, and he was laughing hysterically and yelling in Byelorussian:

– Ho, it's good for you, ha?

I joined the *Atlas* men, and together with them took the police out onto the plaza that was in front of the station.

They were shot, and fell on the spot where two weeks prior, they had murdered our loved ones.

Afterwards, we returned to the gendarme station. There, heavy fighting continued. On the road, I saw the two *Baranovsky* brothers from the refugee camp being carried wounded on stretchers. *Shalkovich* the shoemaker who went out to battle with a cane, now had a brand new German submachine gun. With an excited face he told me what had happened:

As soon as *Yudel & Ephraim Baranovsky* reached the town, they immediately ran over to the residence of the German munitions officer. On the day of the massacre, this murderer killed their only sister and elderly parents right in front of their eyes. Now was the hour to take vengeance. Even though they were unarmed, the brothers broke into his residence. The German managed to wound both of them before he fell from a partisan's bullet.

We decided to put the town to the torch, in order to prevent an occupying military force from being billeted there. We threw incendiary grenades into

the houses. They went up in flames. Those living in the houses came out crying to us, falling on their knees and begging for their possessions to be spared. But our people didn't pay any attention to their entreaties. And there were those who replied: we don't have anything either. And you drank no little of our blood...

And the Jews among us, who owned houses in the town, sought to burn them as well with their own hands.

From all sides, policemen were brought out and taken into captivity; there were those who were shot on the plaza in front of the flour mill, as previously described. All points of resistance were neutralized, except for the one large building in which the gendarmerie had barricaded itself. These Germans, who had no other choice, fought for their lives, and gave battle with an outpouring of great ire.

Suddenly a group of the lads burst through the gates of the gendarmerie. I recognized these as the *Atlas* troops. I ran after them, shouting, 'Hurrah!' We entered the foyer of the building, from which the gendarmes continued to fire at us. One German appeared at the ground floor stairs. The sound of an exploding grenade filled the air. On the ground, in a pool of blood, a number of our men lay writhing. Among them I recognized *Herschel Zlotagura*. We took the dead and wounded out to the street.

The battle continued. The gendarmes continued to hold their positions. This was a stone structure that was well fortified, and we tried in vain to penetrate it from the outside. *Boris Bulat* stood beside the house, and next to him stood a Jewish partisan, *Abraham Koplovich*. *Abraham* was continuously throwing incendiary grenades up above, into the room where the gendarmes were. At this time, our scouts arrived and told us that large forces of Germans were drawing close from Slonim and Zelva, to reinforce the gendarmes. The sound of a trumpet was heard – giving the signal to retreat. It was 7AM. In the distance one could see people fleeing.

– These are our [men], open the doors to the jail, – one of the partisans called to us.

In the meantime, the young men loaded up the wagons with the weaponry and other booty that had fallen into our hands. *Dr. Atlas & Bella* were totally occupied with caring for the wounded. After their wounds were bound up with temporary bandages, they were loaded on wagons and taken out of the place. The doctor walked along side them, and even the grievously wounded did not utter a sound, they did not groan – possibly because the heat of live battle was still upon them, or because of the faith that they placed in their doctor, who did not move from their side.

In departing the town, I stayed behind for a moment on that plaza in front of the flour mill. On the ground lay tens of dead police: a fitting revenge...

On the road leading to the forest stood a legion of farmers, who came out to welcome us and wish us well, to offer us hard liquor, white bread and pancakes. Even we were elated by the outcome of the battle. We knew that we had put an end to the occupying German army in Dereczin.

The First Sortie

August 14, 1942

Several days afterwards, news began to reach the forest concerning the consequences of the victory. The German army that came from Slonim to the rescue of the gendarmes, found the town engulfed in flames. The police had largely been killed; those who remained alive, emerged from their hiding places after the partisans had gon e a distance, and dispersed in terror to the four corners of the wind. The Byelorussians and Poles who served as the appointed members of the German [civil] administration also fled. Apart from the police that were put to death, five additional Germans were killed, and six others were heavily wounded. The Germans put their wounded into their vehicles, and quickly left the town.

After the occupying army in Dereczin was neutralized, the entire area became free [to us]. The partisan victory spread for tens and hundreds of kilometers around. The booty taken in the battle was of considerable value: a great deal of weaponry, and the food stores of the Germans fell into our hands.

Once again, I arranged a visit to the brigade of *Dr. Atlas*, and I had a conversation with the lads. They were particularly happy about the weapons that they had taken from the enemy. *Jekuthiel Khmelnitsky* was occupied at that moment with cleaning a submachine gun that had fallen into his possession during the battle. When he saw me, he called out to me:

– *Shmuel, Shmuel,* how do you like my new little 'machine?' Pretty? No?

During the battle, several of the lads who were members of the secret underground in Dereczin, succeeded in extracting weapons that were hidden in the ground, and understandably, this raised their spirits. With all of this, it was difficult to tell whether the thirst for vengeance had run its course. Consequently, together with his troops, *Dr. Atlas* organized a routine to continue the struggle.

That same evening our spirits were hurt because of the death of *David Dombrowsky*, who had been wounded in Dereczin. Before he died, he called his younger brother to him, *'Nioma.* In a hushed voice, almost a whisper, he said to his brother:

– *Nioma*, I am going to die before my time; I have not adequately taken revenge from them, those murderers, having taken only little. Remember that it is your responsibility to take revenge on my behalf.

The funeral was arranged the following day. In the forest, under a tall majestic oak, on a principal road, a grave was dug, and the deceased was brought to rest there. We stuck a stake in the ground, with a small board attached to it, with the following written on it: "*David Dombrowsky,* born 1912, fell in battle fighting the Germans."

No man cried. But here and there, one could see clenched fists.

At the end of two weeks after the battle in Dereczin, on the 24th of August, with the coming of dawn, our entire camp assembled: our scouts that we had sent out came back and advised that large forces of Germans had arrived in our area, and they are preparing a sortie against the partisans. We set out immediately at a quick pace for the other side of the Shchara River. Apparently, according to the plan of our central command, we were to reach the other side of the river and conceal ourselves there in the large Ruda forests. It was clear that there was no purpose in trying to confront the superior German forces directly with our meager resources, since they outnumbered us by ten times, and were equipped with tank and cannon.

The day was light by the time we reached the tall and thick bulrushes by the banks of the river. From the shore, the voices of the Germans reached our ears. The throbbing rhythm of the tanks and the mobile armor proved to us that we were uncomfortably close to the aggressor. We could hear heavy gunfire coming from the Boralom Forest.

We took a stand. It was clear to us that we were surrounded by the enemy. The shots that were reaching us from the trees gave evidence that the Germans had entered the forest perimeter. The place where we found ourselves was now dangerous, but it had one redeeming feature: it was difficult for the Nazis to conceive that partisans were hiding in the high growth.

Every minute, our scouts would come to us, tired and exhausted from running, bringing reports that were not encouraging. The Germans had established control in all of the villages in the area, and had exacted punishment from the farmers. Their core forces were in the forest. *Pavel Bulak's* troops were under siege, and the sound of the shots reaching us were the sounds of the battle taking place there.

We lay down and concentrated from the heavy undergrowth. We saw steel-helmeted German troops

walking behind a small tank at the river's edge. They could stumble upon us at any moment.

However, we could see that the Germans were also possessed by fear: without stopping, they kept shouting in a loud voice:

– Hey, bandits, give yourselves up!

Toward nightfall, the sounds of the tanks died down, and the shooting stopped. The Germans left the area. At this point, lads from the *Bulak* unit came to us, exhausted and sweaty. They had participated in an all-day battle, and had crossed the river only with great difficulty. Quickly, we also found ourselves on the second side of the Shchara River. Night fell when the great Ruda forest offered us concealment.

The following day, I learned the details of the battle of the day before. The Germans found the Jewish [family] refugee camp. The farmers of the area had revealed its location! Very few succeeded in escaping.

The majority were annihilated, and were also tortured cruelly by the Nazis. And the *Bulak* brigade extracted a victory. In this battle, one Jew, *Joseph Mayerovich* especially stood out, who had come to our environs as a refugee from Poznan. During the battle, he climbed up a tall tree, and despite the fact that the bullets did not cease to whistle past his ears, he didn't move from there, and relayed his intelligence about the points from which the enemy's machine guns were operating, and from which side the Germans were approaching. The Germans pulled back, carrying several tens of their dead and wounded. In this battle, ten Jews who were refugees from Dereczin, were killed, who had joined the *Bulak* brigade.

(Excerpted from the Book, '*The Brigade of Dr. Atlas*)

The Whole Family Lost in the Forest

By Gutka Salutsky-Boyarsky

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Killed in the Forests: Sima Shelovsky, Liba Miller, Mirel Ogulnick (p. 351)

The forest reeked with death, which surrounded us from the first day on.

My father, together with me and my brother *Moshe*, went into the forest to a [fighting] partisan company. Our mother, together with the two smaller children, *Beileh & Abraham*, remained in the 'family compound.' We provisioned them.

After a month in the forest, we made it through the first of the bloody German sorties. I happened on that night, to be sleeping at my mother's in the family compound. My mother woke up from her sleep and told me that her younger brother *Herschel* came to her in a dream, and said: 'flee, or they will kill you!'

And that is what happened. Our settlement was attacked by Latvians with large dogs. Out of terror, we lay there, my mother, myself, and my younger brother and sister. With us was *Nekha*, [the daughter of] *Yankel-Aryeh*, and her little daughter. *Peysha*, the husband and father, they had lost along the way, and they were certain he was no longer alive. And so, all of us are lying there until they come for us, and they shout: *'Hende Hoch!'* We rise to our knees, with our hands in the air. They start to shoot. The first bullet hits my mother. Out of terror, we all fall on one another. I am lying on my mother's body. I hear how the murderers say that we are all already dead. They go away.

In the Forest Without My Mother

I remain lying for a while, and I feel that someone else nearby is still alive. I raise myself, and see my little brother still alive, but his face is covered with the blood of our mother. I gird myself, wipe off his face, and embrace him, being certain that he is the only one else who remained alive. At that point I hear my younger sister's weak voice: 'I'm alive too.'

All three of us sit around our mother's dead body. *Nekha* and her little girl are also lying dead near us. We don't know what to do, or where to go. We know nothing of our father and older brother, but deep in our hearts we believe that they are alive.

Night falls. Little sister has a bullet wound in the hand. We begin to go, not knowing where our tearful eyes and tired feet are taking us. We go a piece and then sit to rest – only now to we understand our bitter misfortune: we have lost our mother.

The three of us sit there and weep. Suddenly we hear footfall, and someone is passing through the forest. I say to the children: 'Let us ask, who is going there, in any case we have nothing to lose. Maybe they are ours?' I thought to myself, if they are our people going there, perhaps we can fall in with them. And if they are Germans – at least it will be an end to our suffering.

A miracle happened, and they were Jews, *Shmeryl* and his two children. We ask him where he is going, and he says, to cross the Shchara, believing that the partisans have gone there. We ask him to take us along, and he agrees.

We walk the entire night. In the morning, we remain seated on the other side of the Shchara. It is hot, and the sun is burning down on us. My little sister is faint, and I have nothing to administer to her. We send the small children to see if they can find some berries, in order that I can have something I can give my little sister as refreshment in her mouth. They go away, and return almost immediately to tell us that partisans are moving on the [nearby] road.

First-aid from Dr. Atlas

I run there, to the road. My elation is indescribable, when I see *Moshe-Chaim* there with *Dr. Atlas*. I tell them about my little sister. *Dr. Atlas* comes to her and administers first-aid. He tells us: 'Go quickly, not far from here the partisans are camped, and they have a doctor with them who will know what to do for your sister's wound.'

I was so overwhelmed by this encounter that I forgot to ask about my father and brother, but *Moshe-Chaim* tells me that they are alive, and are at another point, together with the partisans. They tell us to go as quickly as possible to the area where the partisan camp is, because as soon as it gets dark, the partisans are making preparations to move off into a second forest.

We walk at a faster pace, content with the knowledge that our father and older brother are alive. It is not possible to describe our reunion with them. We all cried out of pain for our mother, and for the miracle that somehow left us three children alive.

My little sister was taken to the hospital. I, along with my younger brother, go to the 'family compound.' Our older brother *Moshe*, provides us with some food. He often goes out on missions, fighting against the Germans, taking revenge for the blood that was spilled.

Periodically, when he has to go out on such a mission, he comes to take his leave of us. Each time he comforts me: 'Don't cry, *Gutka*, I will return. I saw our mother in a dream, and she said to me, that I must go take revenge on the German murderers, and in addition she said to me, that I will come back. Don't cry, my sister.'

I Lose Everyone

I cannot forget the last time I took leave of my brother. Before leaving on a particularly difficult mission, he came to say goodbye. He wept, saying quietly to me: 'Who knows if we will ever see each other again.'

I never saw my brother again. It was 1942. Immediately after this, a great sortie was launched by the enemy on our forest position. I, my father, and little brother were together. We know nothing concerning little *Beileh*, who was in the hospital. We hear nothing about our brother *Moshe*.

We run in the forest from place to place. When the attack is over, we all come together. We ask about *Moshe* – everyone has seen him, but nobody knows where he is. Everyone says that the forest-hospital is OK, but we still know nothing about our little sister. And so the days go by.

One time at night, I have a dream that I am home, and that I am going to the Schulhof. My grandmother approaches me and asks me why I am crying. She says to me: 'You have lost your mother, but you are not alone. There are thousands of Jews in your situation. But, do not weep for your brother and sister, they are alive. You will see your sister shortly, but you will not see your brother.'

The following morning, I relate this dream to *Leah Lozer's*,[126] with whom we live together in the earthen bunker. As we sit and talk, my father comes running and shouts from the outside: 'Come quickly, *Beileh* is here!'

Imagine my happiness when I saw my little sister returned to us with her hand healed! But along the way, she had lost a foot to frostbite.

But my joy did not last very long. A short while later, the Germans captured a little Jewish boy, and forced him to lead them into the forest, to the partisans. We hear shooting, and we don't know what to do. As usual, we run toward the [fighting] partisan group – and fall into German hands.

I see the death of my brother and sister. I say to my father: 'We don't have the children any longer.' My father says to me: 'Soon we won't be here anymore as well.' A couple of minutes later, my father also falls from a bullet.

I see all my beloved ones lying dead before my eyes.

I run, run into the forest, and I hear that I am being chased. I see that it is a gentile fro Dereczin. He catches up to me and grabs me – he is a German policeman. I recognize him, having been together with him in a class.

I beg him to spare my life. He answers me that he cannot spare my life, and that all the Jews must die. He orders me to lead him to the compound. As I begin to go, I think that I must not take him to the compound, there are Jews there who are old and weak, that did not have the strength to flee – and he will shoot them all.

I decide to go no further. I fall down on the snow and say: 'Shoot me, I can't go any further!' He empties an entire cartridge of bullets around me. I lie still, not moving. He is certain that I am dead, and he leaves with his comrades. I pick myself up, not knowing if I am dead or alive.

Alone in a Forest of Corpses

I stand alone in this huge snow-covered forest, full of the dead, Jews who have been shot, fathers, mothers and little children. Everything about me is dead. The night is lit up, but for me there is only darkness in my eyes, my head, and in my heart. This was the darkest night of my entire life.

I go, not knowing where my feet are dragging me. I go in sleet and snow, and I return to the [family] compound. I find there, all the people who remained in their places and didn't attempt to flee anywhere. The Germans did not reach the compound. Only I, and my dearest fled into the hands of the Angel of Death.

This is how I came to be the sole survivor of a large family with many branches. Was ir perhaps ordained that one member of this family would stay alive, in order to tell about the killing of the entire family? Was it ordained perhaps that some memory of our family would be preserved?

My husband and I, and our two beloved children hold onto the thread to faraway and beloved Dereczin. We will never forget our little town and its martyrs.

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126 Yiddish diminutive for *Elazar*

I Saved Myself Along With My Children

By Kayla Azaf
(Original Language: Yiddish)

I, *Kayla Azaf* [127]which to describe for you the dark tale of how I saved myself, along with both of my children, may we all be well, from the terrifying death that the German murderers had arranged for us, may their names be forever erased. I write these recollections in memory of my husband, *Moshe Azaf* ל"ז, who fell in the forests as a partisan hero, after he had exacted vengeance from the murderers.

The Dereczin [Yizkor] Book tells about many of the Jews of our town, and therefore I also wish to tell about my husband, may he rest in peace. He was a worker his entire life, and came from a working-class family. We all took great pride in him. He would be seen in the *Alter Mauer* [Synagogue], in which he prayed. That was the place, as you know, where *Rabbi Bakalchuk* ז"צ also prayed.

My husband was very good at leading the prayer service, on Rosh Hashana he led the *Musaf* service, Yom Kippur – *Kol Nidre*. He was often invited to other synagogues. More than one of our Dereczin townsfolk can recall with what savor and with what a fine voice he would undertake to lead the *Musaf* service, how the eyes of the worshipers would be full of tears, as my husband intoned the *Hineni* prayer.

The *Azaf* family, to whom I was a daughter-in-law, was a well-branched family, and had resided in Dereczin for three or four generations. We lived over the marketplace. That is how life went on, until the Second World War broke out in September 1939.

We all recall the last few weeks before the outbreak of the War, when the Poles called up a very large number of men into the military. The crying and screaming by the womenfolk and their little children were indescribable in those days. From the outset, the Germans began to bomb cities and towns, and our Dereczin was also hit hard. During the day, we would run into the fields, as far from town as possible, and return at night. Rosh Hashana came, and the men went to prayers, and also to *Tashlikh*[128] – at which point a squadron of airplanes suddenly appeared, and a hail of bullets came down on our heads. People ran toward wherever their eyes happened to be directed.

A couple of days later, fleeing Polish military personnel began to vandalize the Jewish houses, and only thanks to the commander, was this pogrom squelched, but not before several martyrs fell. We lay hidden away in the cellars – the women and children – while the men stood watch, guarding the houses and valuables from the [marauding] Polish soldiers, who for entire nights stretched in long columns to the eastern Polish boundary.

It was the Soviet army that liberated us from this fear of death. We welcomed them gladly, carrying flowers and fruit.

A new order gradually was established, with new ways of doing things. Life was not so easy, but we got used to it a little bit at a time. The plight of the dispossessed refugees was worse, who had come to Dereczin from the cities occupied by the Germans. The Jews did everything they could to help them, rooms were allocated to them in which to live, but nevertheless, they were like uprooted trees.

The Soviets decreed that anyone wishing to travel to their hometown needed to register. Many of these refugees did indeed register. On one specific wintry and frosty early morning Sabbath day, we heard

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127 Although there is no ambiguity in the spelling, the *Azaf & Azef* Families would appear one and the same.

128 The service of casting bread on the water to expiate sins.

crying and shouting – many wagons had been arrayed in the marketplace, packed with refugees and partly with Christian landholders. The registered ones were being sent 'home' – to Siberia.

We had great sympathy for the deportees, but it is those who remained behind that needed to be mourned, those left behind in Dereczin.

The German murderers arrived in the summer of 1941. Their first action was to drive all of the Jews together in one place. They were definitely ready to shoot all of us immediately, but at that precise moment, the Soviets launched a bombardment of Dereczin, and the murderers fled, not even knowing where to flee.

That is how we were saved from the first fire, but from that time on, the German purgatory began.

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A whole litany of decrees began, each one worse than the other. Other Dereczin residents, who survived the ghetto, have already written about our somber existence under the German occupation.

Who can forget the First of May, the day the gendarmerie forcibly assembled the families of those men who returned from the work camp at Puzovitsa! Fathers, mothers, children, were led away outside of the town and were shot. This was the first Dereczin massacre.

The gruesome incidents after this began coming one after another. Until the day of the Great Massacre, the Tenth of *Ab*. About fifty of us crammed ourselves into a hideaway underneath the cellar. The first day, the murderers were very occupied, and didn't search the cellars carefully. But living through that day in our hideout, with the fear that any minute we would be discovered and dragged away to the mass graves; lying down this way, being afraid to even breathe, lest we be heard from above; not having anything to breathe in such close quarters, dark cellars – this was an experience we lived through that is hard to forget to this day.

We barely survived until nightfall. We knew already that if we remained where we were, that we would be discovered the following morning, therefore there was nothing to lose. We all crawled out of our hiding place, and quietly crawled through the death-filled plundered ghetto, where there was not a living soul, and went into the fields, through bogs and byways, laying still during the days in high corn, and dragging ourselves along unfamiliar byways and paths – until, after three days of blundering around, we arrived at the Slizhi forests. Some additional time went by before we met up with *Bulak's* partisan group.

Four of us arrived in the forest – my husband, myself and our two young children.

We came out of the forests as a threesome, without my husband ל"ז. He had fallen in battle.

When we came to the partisans, the commander, *Bulak* offered us these words of comfort: "The cities are in German hands, but the forests are ours" – he said. The men were given guns, and they were drilled and taught the use of firearms. At night, they would travel to the surrounding villages in order to bring back foodstuffs.

Once the men were told: " This night we have to go to battle, but don't tell your womenfolk, because they will cause a panic." I knew why the men were being taken, and I said my farewells to my husband. He left with all the partisans who attacked the Germans and their allies, the police, in Dereczin. They killed a goodly number of the bandits, and came back with much booty. My husband returned alive from the attack on Dereczin.

But a couple of weeks later, the Germans launched a sortie against the forest. Almost half of those who had saved themselves from the Dereczin massacre were killed in this sortie. Among these was my dear husband, after having fought heroically and taken revenge from the murderers.

I was left a widow with my two children, in the forest, under a tree, naked and hungry. We suffered

once again, along with the entire family compound.

After the attack on Dereczin, the partisans came by a sizeable amount of provisions, which they brought back from the German magazines. We, in the family compound, were made to go forage in the potato fields, which the peasants planted on behalf of the Germans. We were given two armed partisans to stand guard over us, and we went off to fields of *Lobzov* to dig potatoes. There I met with peasants whom I knew, one of whom told me that his son, a partisan, was sent to inter the fighters who were killed during the attack on Dereczin, the son knew my husband and told that my husband was buried along with other partisans. But I never saw his final resting place. Once again, I had a good cry, even though I had not ceased weeping for the entire time, because the [emotional] wound was still too fresh.

The peasant and his wife comforted me, gave me a loaf of bread, and a blanket with which to cover myself at night. As I was standing and talking to them, several other peasants came running and told us that German forces had re-entered Dereczin, 3 km from where I was standing, and they urged me to leave as quickly as possible.

So I began to run. I was attacked and bitten by a dog, and blood flowed from me – and I ran with my last reserves of strength. I came back to the field where I had left the other peasants, – but there was no one there any longer.

So I stand there in the field all alone, not knowing the way back to camp. I think to myself that I will surely meet my end here, the Germans will capture me and shoot me on the spot. And then, what will happen to the children?

So I ran from the field until I reached the *Labzov* swamps. There, I lay under shrubs until nightfall. I wandered aimlessly the entire night, and in the morning, I saw that I had returned to the same spot. The second night, again I went through fields and bogs, being fearful of moving from my location. Before dawn, I ran into a gentile. I nearly fainted from fright. The peasant questioned me as to who I was, and how I got there, he calmed me down, telling me that he knew my husband and showed me the way into the forest. He accompanied me to a small wooded area, told me to spend the day there, and to go out on the road at night, until I reach a certain village. I thanked him and blessed him, because he had been sent to me by the Almighty like an angel to rescue me and show me the way to my children.

In that village I met up with partisans. They took me for about 10 km in their wagon, and I went another few kilometers on foot, until I reached the partisan camp. A miracle happened, and the commander of the partisans knew me and the entire family, and only a day earlier he had been in the family compound, and had heard from my children, that I had been missing for a number of days, and it was not known if I was still alive. He ordered that I be given food to eat, and to give me some time to rest. A couple of young Jewish girls took me off first thing in the morning to our family compound, to my little children.

I don't have to describe the joy of my children, when they saw that I was still alive. They wept constantly for four days, neither eating nor sleeping. People could not countenance their sense of grief. Now they all celebrated with me – and I was fortunate, holding my children in my arms.

That same night, all groups crossed the Shchara, and took up quarters in the thick forests of Volya and Dobrovshchina. Had I returned a day later, I would have found no one at our prior location in the forest.

In the new forest, the family compound was divided into two, and we began preparations for the winter, because it had already begun to rain. Everyone exerted an effort to dig out an earthen bunker.

A couple of months later there was another attack upon us. It is hard to describe our trials and tribulations while being on the run for 7-8 days through the forests, following wagons and other vehicles, in order not to lose the trail of the partisans, eating nothing, drinking nothing, not

sleeping – only running, running, and running, during freezing days and nights.

When we finally returned to our earthen bunker, we saw that many of the residents in the family compound had succumbed, among them whole families.

With half-frozen hands and feet we lay for days in our earthen bunker. Everyone around us was sick, exhausted, covered in scratches and lice. The *Bitenskys* were with us, and they helped us, they cooked potatoes for us from their stores that they had accumulated.

[This continued] until there was yet another attack on the bakery, which was a couple of kilometers from us. The *Bitenskys* fled, me and the children, could not run on our frozen feet, – so we hid ourselves in the snow, under a shrub, all three of us sitting together and crying, expecting that our end was imminent.

When the shooting died down, we found out that the *Bitenskys* were all killed except for little *Moshe*. I could not believe that thanks to our disabled feet, we had remained alive.

This is how we lost the *Bitensky* family, the sole remaining [family], who were of my husband's cousins. People fell like flies. Every attack cost a lot in human lives.

And how many died in the forest from hunger and epidemics of typhus? My children also became ill, bedridden with high fever and no doctor or medicines, no food – sipping a bit of beet juice with their parched lips. And I looked after them, along with other small children, and orphans who had been left in the forest alone without anyone.

This was how we rescued ourselves from death, which stalked us each and every day, on all the highways and byways, and in every nook and cranny. I cannot stop thanking the Almighty, who rescued my children and myself, until we [finally] arrived in our Land.

In the Partisan Camp

By Yehudit Yankelevich-Lantzevitzky

(Original Language: Yiddish)

In the Volya Forest, where we arrived, we met a group of Dereczin Jews, among which were *Elya Lifshovich* with the family. We had no weapons, and the following morning we began to head for the Shchara [River]. On the other side of the river, there were partisans, whom initially we took for policemen. The partisans took us across the Shchara on a ferry.

We were taken into an unorganized group that did possess weaponry. The group had an immediate priority objective to obtain foodstuffs, clothing and ammunition, and save themselves from the Germans. We then became aware of a second partisan group in the Slizhi [forest], and we went over there. There, I found my brother, *Tuvia Lantzevitzky*, and you can imagine my sense of good fortune, because we didn't know whether or not he was still alive.

A short time thereafter, along with other partisan groups, we carried out the great attack on Dereczin. Much has been written about it already, and I do not have anything further to add. During this attack on the murderers of our brothers and sisters of Dereczin, several partisans fell in battle, and not a few were wounded. But this planned attack brought significant results for the partisan movement and for our area. Organized detachments of partisans started to be formed in our vicinity our area.[129]

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[129] Отряд in Russian, pronounced *Otryad*.

My brother and I went off to one such *otryad* first called *Abramov's otryad,* and later – *Kolka's.* I remained in this detachment until the end of the war. I worked in the kitchen. My brother was killed as a partisan of the detachment, in the battle of the Ruda Forest, after which that location was taken over, and about 250 police were captured, a large part of whom were shot by us. My brother returned to the camp wounded after this battle. He lived another two days and then expired, not receiving any medical help.

Our detachment would base itself in the vicinity of the Lipiczany Forest, operating out of its bases against objectives in the neighborhood. My bother *Tuvia*, who was active for two years in a partisan fighting brigade, and distinguished himself in a variety of battles, and in derailing many enemy trains, lost his life three months prior to the liberation, and did not live to see the German downfall.

There were other detachments of partisans in the vicinity with whom we cooperated. The Germans frequently carried out sorties against the partisan forces in the forest, and bitter fighting took place between us and the enemy, who would surround our forests, in order to kill us. It was in this manner that in the fall of 1943, our camp was surrounded by the Germans on all sides. The enemy attacked us with strong forces and with heavy fire from their artillery. The situation became very critical. We had to abandon our camp. The men left first, and the women remained alone, until two partisans arrived from the *Komarov* command. We followed them, and attached ourselves to their group. We headed toward the vicinity of Baranovich, and in the end, we managed to escape the enemy's encirclement. We would move at night, unseen by the Germans and their local allies.

In a prior sortie, the Germans had surrounded the Slizhi Forests, and many Dereczin residents in the family compound fell into the hands of the murderers alive. The Germans dragged them off to Dereczin, tied them up using barbed wire, and murdered them all in a bestial fashion. Many Dereczin residents met their end through such a terrifying death.

At the beginning of 1944, Soviet paratroopers began to appear in our area, and we were able to feel a little more secure about our lives.

Anti-Semitism practically vanished, which had spread with vigor throughout the partisan detachments, and had caused us no little pain, terror and martyrdom.

On one summer day in 1944,on a bright early morning, we saw a regular detachment of Soviet military troops, who liberated us.

Along with another few women (among them *Leah Shprintza's*, who was close to me during all this time in the forest) we came out of the forest. I returned to Dereczin to our house. The men were immediately taken into the [regular] military, and a large portion of them fell in the battle for Bialystock, near the town of Svislutz.

I slowly began to do work in Dereczin, after I had reclaimed my sewing machine from a peasant who had hidden it. In December 1944 I left our town and traveled to Slonim. Only a few families remained behind in Dereczin.

After working in Slonim for lest than a half year, where about 30 Jews were located, together with my husband, *Moshe Yankelevich*, I left Russia, traveled to Poland, from there – to Germany, from whence I came to America in 1949.

Two Out of the Entire Family

By Moshe Kwiat
(Original Language: Yiddish)

In Dereczin there was a ghetto and a labor detachment. I and my family – my wife, three sons and a little daughter – lived in the barracks, in one room with three other families. On the other side of the wall three other Jewish families resided, but in the same building there were also non-Jews, and because of this we could not prepare hiding places for ourselves, which we could have used to conceal ourselves during that bitter hour, which could arrive any day.

Prior to the time that we were in the barracks, I once went up into the attic, and discovered that there was a double floor up there, between which there was an empty crawl space. I decided then, that in case of a misfortune, I will send the two older children there to give them the chance to hide themselves.

Only few people had the ability to escape into the forests, those without families, because the Germans would kill the entire families of those people who went over to the partisans. Now, when the terrible day of the massacre came, all the Dereczin residents who saved themselves, about 300 people, went into the forest. About 60 Jews [ultimately] came out alive from the forest, who were from our town.

All of us were beaten and oppressed. From time to time, non-Jews whom we knew would tell us that in this and that neighboring city or town, all the Jews had been killed. So we sat, and awaited our bitter fate.

And that sad day did arrive, from before dawn, the shooting reached us. And I immediately saw through every window of our building that there were Byelorussian police standing there. I immediately dispatched my two older children to conceal themselves in the attic, but the older boy came back down – he could not crawl into the space between the double floors. The second son remained concealed there.

The Byelorussians began driving us to the transport and hit us with their rifle butts. Seeing that our end was near, together with my eldest son, and with another couple of the men from the other families, I began to run from the transport to the fields. The Germans began to shoot after us, and to my great misfortune their bullets struck my son and he fell dead in front of my own eyes. I ran on, not knowing where to go. That is how I ran into the potato field of one peasant, and I lay there 6AM to 10PM.

At night, I emerged from my hiding place and began to flee to the forests. I was confused and disoriented from the great tragedy that befell my son, and from thoughts about the fate of my wife and the two children, and of my son who was hidden in the attic crawl space of the barracks. So I wandered aimlessly a night through the fields, and during the day I hid myself in a field of corn. I was certain, at that point, that my wife and the two children had been killed.
After they led the Jews away to the pits, my second son came out of his hiding place and went off to the Volya Forest. There he was taken in by the group of *Dr. Atlas*. But I didn't know about this until the partisan attack on the enemy in Dereczin.

After blundering for three days and nights, I came to the Ozhorki Forest. I ran into many of our Derecziners there, until Russian partisans found us, gave us two revolvers with which to protect ourselves, and more importantly, to allow us each evening, to leave the forest and go into the surrounding villages and farmhouses, and obtain food from the peasants for the Jews that had saved themselves in the forest. Then a number of partisans on horseback arrived, and they indicated that men without families could come and join their detachment, older people and families had to go to a family compound. I was alone, and I went away with many other men from Dereczin into the partisan brigade. There we obtained firearms, and went out on " missions."

Our detachment, with me in it, took part in the famous attack on Dereczin.

In the heat of battle, someone ran by me who was together with my son in the brigade of *Dr. Atlas*, and he shouted out to me: "*Moshe,* your *Israel* is with us in *Atlas's* brigade!" I shouted back at him: "I am in the Ozhorki Forest! If we live through this battle, have him come to me!"

God helped us, and we lived through the battle. The following morning my son came to me, and I went to the *Atlas* brigade. And we survived – two out of the entire family.

We Were Saved from a Terrifying Trap

By Masha Kulakowski

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Gala Sheplan, killed in the forest (p. 360)

It is the end of December 1942. About five months have passed while we were in the forests. Slowly, we began to accustom ourselves to the idea that this was our life now, and that we would never again see our dear ones. These forests that surround us, constitute our new home.

As strange at it seems, I recall the fact that every time the Russian partisans would raise the subject of their distant homes in conversation, and impatiently wait for that fortunate moment when they could return to their birthplace, I was shaken to my roots by that very same thought, that perhaps we also would also do the same on that day of all days, to return to Dereczin to live among the graves of our brethren and among islands of ruin.

The winter was slow in coming. Until December, we got hardly any snow. Heavy rains, accompanied by cold winds pelted us continuously. During the freezing nights, the byways of the forest would become covered with thin sheets of slick ice that would impede all movement.

On December 12, news reached us that all the villages in the area had been seized by the Germans and Ukrainians, and they were preparing to launch a large scale manhunt against us. It was not long thereafter that the cannons of the soldiers and their allies began to thunder away. The partisan movement at that time had not yet reached great numerical strength, and in our forests consisted of a couple of hundred men. The Germans reached the forests with their vast host, and closed off all the entry points. A life and death battle ensued. The partisans deployed all their force against the Germans, but after a while, were unable to sustain their attack, and after several days it was decided to abandon the bases in the forest and move to the east.

I recollect the retreat very well. Exhausted after several days of bitter fighting, the partisans set out along the narrow paths. A darkness pervaded the forest, and only occasionally would light break through the dark. The roads were covered with ice. I was then in my later months of pregnancy, and after a number of days of exhausting travel, I felt my strength taking leave of me, and that I didn't have the wherewithal to keep up with everyone else. I beseeched my husband to leave me behind, and to continue with the others retreating eastward. My husband refused to consent to my plea. Our commander, a wise and loving man, a Russian from the Soviet Union that had already managed to befriend us, saw my condition, and strongly urged my husband to stay behind with me. He provided us with extra ammunition, giving us an additional 120 rounds of Sten gun cartridges, that were then of the highest value, and demanded of my husband that he stand guard over me, and then parted from us. In that same circumstance, suffused with futility, I was forced to part with my good childhood friend, the marvelous partisan, *Taibl Lifshovich.*

The two of us, my husband and me, remained alone in the vast forest. The last of the company passed us by. A silence pervaded the area around us, disturbed only by the sounds of the plentiful wildlife around us. My heart grew tight inside me: would we ever have the privilege of again seeing the partisans when they returned to our forest? Will the two of us succeed in surviving the difficult days that awaited me, or, God forbid, would we fall at the hands of the murderers, and on my account would my husband be killed? It was these kinds of disturbing thoughts that beset me after we were left alone in the vicinity of the camp in the forest.

After several hours had passed, we decided to leave the place, because we felt that the location of the camp must certainly be known to the Germans. And this suspicion came to be. We covered a substantial distance, whatever was in my power to do, and sat down at a side road in the forest. My husband picked out a point from which he could stand watch, and I sat myself in a hole in the ground by a post that was a road marker. For further security, my husband concealed the hole by putting dried out tree branches over it. With kisses on the hand, we sat awaiting what would come.

The short winter day began to reach its end. The cold penetrated to the bones. Suddenly, we heard the sound of horses' hooves. My husband was certain that the riders were men from the surrounding villages, who also were victims of the current tribulations, and had fled to the forest to escape the murderers. Because of this [certainty], my husband went out onto the road, to find out from these villagers what the condition was around in the forest. After several seconds, he returned disconcerted and upset: a caravan of about 20 sleighs was wending its way slowly along the road, surrounded by several tens of Germans.

I must admit that my spirit fell at that moment. How could it happen that along this way, in the heart of the forest, the Germans could move around with such impunity? Apparently they had not run into the partisans, and their brazenness was heightened. My heart stopped beating. When would this accursed caravan pass already? I hid myself in the hole, which was no deeper than 30 cm. The seconds passed by excruciatingly slowly.
Here comes the first of the winter wagons. And now the second, the third. Suddenly – what has happened? They are not moving ahead! The location appealed to them, and they had decided to camp here for the night!

At a distance of less than a meter from where we lay, they began to set up their temporary camp. Details are flying around on all sides. Bushes and branches were cut, and a giant campfire was lit.

Meanwhile, night fell. It was clear to me that these must be the last minutes of our lives. Quietly, I beg my husband not to allow my agony to be prolonged, and that he should shoot me, but he postpones this from minute to minute. Does he still expect somehow to emerge from this terrifying trap?

Images of atrocities that I had seen and heard about pass before my eyes. I had heard that the way the Germans inflict themselves on captured partisans exceeds even all the satanic bounds of imagination. It was well known that with pregnant women, they would cut open their bellies and rip out the unborn child.

I see a shadow. Once again I beg *Abraham* to shoot me, and once again he denies me that shot which would liberate me.

Suddenly someone walked over to our hole, and picked up some of the dried branches that covered it. It was a German who nearly stepped on me as he gathered branches for the campfire. A sharp pain pierced my heart. My death would come, somehow at the hands of these murderers, and who is to know how long they will torture me before death would provide me with release. This is the end. *Abraham* did not succeed in saving me with his revolver from the hands of these evildoers...

A blackness surrounded us. We can hear the shouts of the Germans well, and their conversation with the Byelorussians – but our end is imminent. A giant

campfire is lit, and they are all sitting around it, preparing coffee, apparently. And we two are sitting in the middle of this deathtrap! We do have weapons, but what can two do against a force of several tens [of men]?

The minutes pass by with mounting tension. It is totally dark around the campfire. *Abraham* had decided to try and escape from the trap. He begins to crawl, telling me to follow after him. *Abraham* has already gotten out of the hole, and after a couple of minutes, I try my luck – but suddenly, I see at a distance of a meter or so, a German whose face is turned toward the fire. The strong light [from the fire] blinds him, and makes the surroundings that much more dark, to the point that he cannot see what is happening literally at his hands. My hope of leaving that accursed place dwindled to nothing.

Abraham had crawled several meters already, but when he saw that I was not crawling at his heels, he returned to me. We waited a couple of minutes, and tried our luck again. This time we managed to get several tens of meters away, but apparently the soft scraping sounds aroused suspicion among the Germans, and flares began to illuminate the way around us. How they didn't see us – I cannot understand to this day.

When we got to a goodly distance from the Germans, we got up, and began to run with all our might. We entered an unfamiliar part of the forest. It was almost entirely frozen, with long distances between trees. The place was not suitable to hide in.

Without intent, we managed to reach a large tree, and were preparing to sit under it, when to our surprise we espied a wild boar. It seemed to us at the time that nature itself was pursuing us. We fled from there, and eventually found sanctuary in the root system of a tree that had fallen during one of the storms, that dotted the forest since the days of fall.

We sat for a whole day there. All the time, we heard the sound of shots, and from the direction of their voices, we knew that the Germans were in our campsite and were engaged in destroying it.

It was the third day in which even a crumb of food had not passed our lips. Soaked to the very marrow of our bones, frozen and shivering, with no change of clothing, without a match to light a fire to create a campfire with which to warm ourselves – we were in a condition beyond hopelessness.

We went to look for people and food. We reached a shack in which farmers had quartered themselves during the hostilities. We entered and found –warm ashes, but without so much as a single spark. People had left the shack less than a half hour ago. We did not know who the visitors were that had warmed themselves by their little fire. Were they perhaps Germans? There was no time to tarry. We continued on our way, hungry, wet, frozen and hopeless.

In the end, we ran into some partisans, who also remained behind in the forest, and had hidden themselves in an abandoned, decrepit old shack.

Several embers were burning inside, and we dried our clothing, and for the first time in what was a week, we warmed ourselves and ate something warm.

When we told the partisans what happened to us in the forest, they crossed themselves, and urged us, that when the war was over, we should go back to our hiding place and put up some sort of memorial to our miraculous salvation.To this day I do not understand how we managed to escape the talons of the murderers.

My Life in the Forests

By Haya Beckenstein-Pilzer
(Original Language: Yiddish)

The year 1942 was both a bad and gruesome one for us. After the Germans came to Dereczin, we all worked and did everything that was demanded of us, sweeping the streets, cleaning the roads and gardens. This continued until I went to work in the kitchen of the S.S. Together with several other girls, we washed the floors, peeled potatoes and rinsed foodstuffs from 4AM until late at night – we had to serve them and look into their murdering faces. At that point we were prepared to do whatever they asked of us, so long as they would let us live. At first, we did not know what they were doing to the Jews, that they were wiping out whole cities and towns, sending thousands into camps, until the bitter truth did come out, and it became clear that we too, would be wiped out.

Every night we expected a massacre to occur. Hideouts were prepared in cellars, but this was of no help to us, because we were evicted from our houses and sent to the barracks with several other families.

The day we were surrounded, many of the young children had begun to flee into the fields, and among them, my brother *Mottel*. I became disoriented, and in a second, found myself on a transport truck with my parents and younger brother, *Yankeleh*. They ordered us to lie down in order that the people in the town should not know what they were doing. A German who lived in town recognized my father, and ordered him, my mother, and little brother to disembark from the transport. I was not allowed to disembark, saying that I was old enough to fend for myself. Tears did not help, and my mother was chased away from the vehicle, and we drove away. Not far from the house, I worked up enough nerve to push a policeman off the transport who was sitting on the car trunk, and jumped off after him, hoping to be shot from behind. The Germans, however, didn't want to create a tumult and discharge guns in the middle of town, and deliberately took no note of the incident, continuing to drive onward. That was my good fortune, and I ran into a garden behind a house, waited a while, and ran home, where my parents were mourning for me. They didn't believe their eyes when they saw me.

We then all went to the house of the Polish family, *Klimashousky*, which had agreed to conceal us. A day later, I went with one of their sons to look for my brother, *Moteleh*, and in going several kilometers through fields and woods, we found him lying dead in a field. The Germans had shot him, and the local Christians had taken off his boots, they left nothing behind that was of use to them. I asked local Christians in the area to bury him, and put a mark on his grave. I returned home with the news that I did not find him. It was only a day later, that a Christian came by and told my mother that her son was dead.

We decided that we would go to the forest no later than when it would calm down, and the streets would be free of Germans, but our waiting didn't last very long, because Sunday morning our house was surrounded, and they wanted to take us all away. I could not stand and look at death in eye yet again. I jumped out of a window, and ran to the fields. I could feel and hear the bullets flying by me, and I ran and fell, and ran again. A couple of miles from town, I met up with the two sons of the Christian family where we were hidden; they also ran out of fear, and from then on we went together. We came to a village where one of them had worked, and it was easy for him to approach a peasant to obtain food, and also to obtain a pair of trousers for me, because my legs were completely scratched up by thorns, and my dress was full of bullet holes. There sister came running almost immediately to call them home, because if they leave their home, their mother would be shot.

I remained alone in the forest.

It became dark, and I was seized with a fright. At

every rustle of the leaves I thought that here they were, coming for me.

I had a small length of rope that I was using [as a belt] to hold up my pants, and I wanted to throw it over a branch and hang myself, but something held me back, and I recalled the words of a Russian officer, who said that dying was easy, staying alive was much harder. And remembering this gave me the courage to live, and I drew strength from the thought of taking revenge from those murderers of my family and of all Jews. I crawled to the edge of a small village, and saw a fire burning at a forge, so I entered and lay down on the ground and fell asleep, until voices woke me up. I spied *Itcheh Shelovsky* along with a couple of other Jews from town. Imagine how pleased I was to see that someone else was still alive, and that I was not the only one left alive from town.

We began to wend our way together, until we met up with other residents of Dereczin, and in a couple of days, those that had survived were together. We heard about the Russian soldiers, escaped prisoners of war, who had formed partisan units, and we wanted very much to join them, but they didn't want to take any women and children, and in addition we had no firearms. We promised them that we would procure firearms so with one gun and mostly sticks, we went to the Christians in the villages and demanded weapons. Slowly, we acquired weapons, and the Russians agreed to organize us. The women and children as well as the older men were put to the side, forming a family compound, the men they took to them, and us young girls, organized ourselves in a group, under my direction, and we learned to shoot and march like soldiers.

It didn't take long before the youth from Dereczin put forth to the group commander that Dereczin should be attacked and the Germans wiped out in the attack, along with all those who had ruined our homes. A plan was worked out. They decided to take me along with one other young woman. I was in a position on the Zelva road, in order to fire on those Germans that sought to escape [in that direction]. It was a difficult night, but without fear we went to take revenge on those bandits. The town burned, and the sound of gunfire carried all over the area. We had our losses, who fell heroically in battle against the murderers. Dereczin remained without rule for a long time. The Germans were afraid to come into the town, because the word had been spread throughout the entire area that heroic partisans were to be found in the area round the town.

My life among the Dereczin partisans didn't last very long. When the Germans surrounded us on all sides, and launched a sortie against us, we decided to break ourselves up into small groups and to go through the forests independently. I was with four men, among them two Jews, *Chaim Grachuk* and *Nahum*, a refugee from a town in Poland. We circled in the forest, getting further away from our neighborhood, and after a week of wandering, met up with another group of partisans who didn't believe us, and we had no trust with them. After a while, it became clear that this was a group that had come from the area around Lida in order to search for firearms in the Shchara region. These were the *Zolotov* troops (that's what they were called), all young Russian men, excepting one Byelorussian, who served as a scout. Our quintet made quite an impression on them, not with how we looked, but with the amount of firearms in our possession. In a group of five we had a machine gun and everyone had a rifle, a gun and grenades. They asked us to accompany them, and we agreed to do so. It didn't matter from where we would hit the Germans – our intent ran in the same direction.

Being young and small, I felt a little lost among all these young men, but I immediately let them know that I hadn't come looking for a groom, that I had come for the same purpose as they had – to exact vengeance from the Germans, and therefore, they didn't have to treat me like a girl, but rather as one of them. Indeed, that is what they did. *Chaim Grachuk* really protected me as if I were his own child. All the boys immediately befriended me and treated me with great respect. In the group there was a concertina, and we would sit around the fire, play and sing. Having spent two years with the Russians,

I had already learned Russian songs quite well, and also their language, and I felt very much at home.

It didn't take long before our group attacked a police station, and our commander was killed. His deputy and two others were wounded. Having no medical help, the partisans, understandably, turned to me for help. To tell the truth, I could not stand the sight of blood, but in this case, I had no alternative, and I had to tend the wounded, who looked to me with the hope that I would be able to help them. So I screwed up my courage, washed them, and bandaged them with what I was able to find in our medical kit, and hoped to God that everything would turn out all right.

The cold and wet days and nights in the forest had a bad impact on the wounded, and their wounds did not heal. For this reason, we left the commander of the unit in the care of a Christian at a farmhouse, as if he were a member of the family, and that night, I rode to him on horseback to change the bandages on his wounds. His wounds healed well, and in time, so did the others.

We sustained killed and wounded in every encounter with the Germans. I was their companion in battle, and did not abandon them if they needed my help. I became a 'professor' to them, to the point that even when a doctor joined the unit, they didn't trust him until I asked that they permit him to assist me.

When our group, *Zolotov* came back to its region, we met up with a smaller group , *Grozny*, and we decided to ally ourselves with it, and carry out actions together. Once again, I tended the wounded in both units. I did not sit in one place to wait for the wounded [to come to me], but accompanied the men in every battle and mission. My personal life at that time didn't play a great role. We knew we were fighting with the enemy, and that he feared us as much as we feared him.

In 1943, the partisans began to organize themselves into larger groups – brigades, and their base was established in the *Nalibocki Forest*. There, we constructed earthen bunkers, a bathhouse, a bakery, and a variety of utilities to service the needs of the partisans. There we could rest at ease, and get undressed when we went to sleep. This was the meeting place of the fighters after all the battles and missions. From there, we also had radio contact with the base of the army in Russia.

The Byelorussian populace in our area was of mixed allegiance; some villages were against us, while others were for us. The latter helped us greatly, and thanks to them we had connections to pharmacies in the larger cities, where we also were able to get information for our saboteurs about newly established outposts of German soldiers and other military targets. When we obtained the necessary information, it was relayed to Moscow, and the following morning we could see how the German military points were being bombed.

An interesting event occurred in 1943, at the time the Germans sent a great deal of ammunition and soldiers into Russia. An order came from Moscow to blow up the train tracks for the line from Lida-Baranovich to Minsk. The operation was code-named 'Concert,' and none of the partisans knew about it, until they reached the train line. Each of us was given dynamite that looked like bars of soap with which to wash ourselves. In each, a waterproof fuse had been set. To the end of the fuse, a cotton fuse that was long-burning had been attached, to afford us the opportunity to run away [before the explosion]. We pack the dynamite in, because the rails were laid on wooden ties, around which was bare earth, to see if there wasn't a mine there. The dynamite was laid in a zigzag pattern under the rails. Lying still near the rails, we were able to see a far distance to the horizon. When the leader of the group gave a signal with his hat we were to light the fuses with a cigarette, which was kept in the sleeve of a jacket. As soon as the fuse began to burn, we were to run into the forest and wait for the explosion. We barely made it to the trees when the 'concert' began. We heard the report from all sides, and the rails flew into the air. The order was that after the explosion, we were to return to the rails and reclaim all those pieces of dynamite that had not

exploded, in order that they be used again, and if that were not possible, to take them away, so the Germans would not be able to figure out who perpetrated the 'concert' and how it was done. The following day we heard the news, that the Germans ran from all points, without their pants on, looked to the skies believing they would see airplanes or finding a whole army of soldiers around them. Seeing no one and nothing around them, they were totally confused and frightened from the event, not understanding how all this had happened. When they attempted to repair the rail lines, another small group went out the following morning and blew them up again. This went on for a long time, and it prevented them from sending soldiers and ammunition to the front.

And [here is] another episode from my life in the forests, which I will call 'the will to live is very, very strong.' In the gruesome winter months, when life in the forests and fields was especially harsh, when the partisans wandered from village to village, from one mission to the second operation, and the snows were deep, we had to wear white-colored clothing, to remain camouflaged from the enemy, so he couldn't distinguish us from the snow. Our objective was to surround a village, which held a large concentration of German military forces. We were also a large group divided into three parts, needing to surround the village from all sides. We went at night, and the attack was set prior to dawn. Everything went according to plan. Our group divided itself into two parts. One went closer to the village, while the second covered the first. I was with those who were closer to the village. It became evident that the German forces were much more extensive than we had anticipated. They also appeared ready to call for reinforcements from a nearby base. The group that had attacked from the other side of the village fought valiantly, and after sustaining heavy losses began to withdraw. Meanwhile, we had come very close to the town, and it didn't take long before we were cut off from our second unit, that was supposed to guard us and give us cover. We were shot at from all sides. I remember how I ran and fell in the snow, and then began to run again. One of the partisans took my machine gun from me to lighten me [for running]. I couldn't run much more quickly, and the greatcoat was long and dragged along between my feet. It became still around me. My comrades were far ahead of me already, and when I turned my head, I could see a couple of Germans pursuing me. They were quite close to me and believed they could capture me alive. Knowing what awaited me if they took me alive, I took out a revolver from my belt and wanted to shoot myself. I don't know what instinct restrained me from pulling the trigger, but a spark of hope gave me courage not to do this, and to try and run. I could not understand why the few men who were together with me and were already far ahead of me, didn't turn around and shoot. But it didn't take long for me to hear shots from the vicinity that I had run from. My comrades had gone to a place from which they could open fire on the Germans. I also fell in the snow, and I don't know where I got the energy to reach my comrades, who did not believe their own eyes that I had remained alive.

That same winter, taking part in a mission with a group of men, I myself was wounded. The men dragged me through the snow on a leather strip, and brought me to a farm house. None of them had the wherewithal to attend to me, and I myself, after downing a glass of whiskey, cut open my boot and my pants leg, and bandaged myself. When I couldn't stand on my leg, I understood that something must have happened to the [leg] bone. I was dragged from one place to another in the hopes that we would find a doctor. A week later, a doctor was brought, who had fled from Baranovich, and he concluded that he had to properly set my leg, otherwise I would remain crippled.

I had a good laugh over this, as if it would be a big difference for them to shoot me as a cripple or with normal legs. The doctor carried out his cure and set the bone. I lay immobilized with wooden braces around my leg. Unable to sit still any longer, after a couple of weeks I sprang down from bed and let myself out free. If your destiny is to live, then the devil himself cannot change this.

My life among the partisans was full of the satisfaction of taking revenge on the enemy, with affection for my comrades in battle, and with the feeling that I could help them when they needed me. Their love and respect for me gave me the courage and energy to carry out my work.

In the hardest times, after a long night's march, when we approached a house, without paying attention to the exhaustion of the people, the concertina began to play, and the Russian songs filled the house by the small flame of a kerosene lamp and the heart yearned, forgetting the hard hours that had gone by, and not thinking about what tomorrow would bring.

In the Forest With My Brother

By Musha Grachuk-Novitsky
(Original Language: Yiddish)

In the forest I met up with partisans and also old people and children from Kosovo. Whoever in Kosovo was able to, fled into the forests.

How great was my emotional reaction when in the midst of this vast confusion and upset, I ran into my brother, *Itcheh*! We fell into each other's embrace, stood that way motionless in pain and joy, without a tear in our eyes.

My brother says to me that we must decide what to do, and do it swiftly. He personally is not part of the Kosovo contingent, but to the mixed 51st brigade. He says that the commander of the brigade is Jewish, *Feodorovich.* My brother takes me with him, and instructs me to say that I am unmarried, and that my name is *Grachuk.*

Women Are Not Accepted

When we arrived at the camp of the 51st brigade, the commander advised that they could not keep women with them. It was then that my brother told the commander that wherever he would be -- his sister would also be. We are both ready to fight side-by-side, and if it was necessary to die, then to die together.

It is necessary to note that my brother came to the brigade with a lot of firearms, which he got out secretly from the ammunition dump where he worked. Without ammunition, it was not that easy to join a partisan group, that is how important the role of a piece of firearms was.

When the commander heard from my brother that he wanted to keep me with him, he gave an order to take away my brother's weaponry. They left him with one rifle and two bullets.

There were several other men with their wives in this group. We nine people – 4 women and 5 men – who were committed to one another, decided to leave the 51st brigade and go to a second partisan brigade. But before we left, it happened that we took part in a hard battle with the enemy. This was the battle of the tenth brigade near a large bridge surrounded by a lot of water. The commander *Feodorovich* fell in this battle.

We Seek Another Brigade

After this, our group of nine left the 51st brigade and began to search for contact with other partisans. Going through the forest in this manner, we encountered a peasant woman. She told us that not far from where we were. There is a farm house, and that partisans were expected there that evening. We decide that two of the men will go that night to meet the partisans, and discuss with them the possibility of joining their group.

But who is to go? Perhaps the peasant woman is deceiving us, and Germans will be waiting for us there? The risk is great, and death lies in wait for us in every corner. So lots were cast, and my brother and one of the others were selected to go to the meeting.

With tears in our eyes, we took leave of them, and escorted them along to for the risky mission that had fallen on them to carry out. As they went off toward the vicinity of the farm house, we were left waiting with our hearts beating, and every minute that went by seemed like a year.

They came back pleased – indeed, and they had conversed with partisans. But those others didn't believe them, and demanded that all nine should come to them, so they could talk with everyone. When we arrived there, they subjected us to an intense interrogation. The partisans wanted to assure themselves that we were not some kind of spy for the Germans...

Late at night, they ordered us to go to sleep in the barn, and they went up and slept in the loft.

We held our guns at our sides the entire night, and didn't sleep out of fear that even this little amount of arms would be taken from us.

An Oath and A Grenade

Early the next morning, when we got up, they told us where to go and stand. When we came to the spot, the commander came to meet us. He swore us to the partisan oath, and took us into the partisan camp. There, each of us was given food and a hand grenade, with the instruction that the grenade was first to be thrown at the Germans, and if it becomes too late to use it on the enemy, we are to blow ourselves up with it, in order not to fall into the hands of the Germans alive.

It was in this manner that I spent more than two years in the partisan brigade, and served as a soldier at the front. I fought with the enemy, was wounded in my side, took part in battles in the Pinsk swamps, and crawled in the muck up to my neck. Almost every day I stared at death in the face. I spent both summer and winter in the forests – until the Soviet army liberated us and brought us to Pinsk.

I Find My Second Brother

My brother *Itcheh* was mobilized into the army, and I worked in a collective. I was the only Jewish woman among 28 workers in the collective. In the collective, we sewed [clothing] for the partisans.

On a certain day, I became aware of the fact that my brother *Chaim* was alive and in Minsk. I traveled there immediately – and my reunion with him is not to be described.

Also, he had lost his wife and children. So we both allowed ourselves to travel to *Zhetl,* where our brother *Itcheh* was stationed. We didn't come by the trip to *Zhetl* so easily, but in the end we got there, and spent an [all too] short couple of days when all three of us were together.

Chaim had to travel back to work in Minsk. *Itcheh* remained in the army. What am I to do? Where shall I travel to? To my mother, to my husband, to my uncles and aunts who are no longer alive? I am nevertheless drawn to Dereczin. So I travel from *Zhetl* to Slonim, from there to Zelva, where I arrive on a dark and rainy evening. I drag myself through the streets – until I meet *Foyka Gelman.* He tells me to spend the night and very early in the morning, we will both go to Dereczin.

In the Ruins of My Hometown

First we went to the cemetery – there is not a trace of any headstones. Cattle are grazing there. We arrive in the town – almost everything is burned down, broken. Here and there a house is still standing. We go to the mass grave in the fields behind *Mesheleh's* house.

I couldn't spend even another minute in Dereczin, or walk on the ground that had absorbed so much of the blood of our dearest.

With the Memories of the Past

I travel back to Pinsk and stay there to the end of the war. Then I went to Lodz, and was together with other refugees. From Lodz we traveled to Italy, and from there, relatives brought us to America.

In this way, I lost nearly everyone.

That is why I was drawn to relatives, to my own flesh and blood – and since 1948, I live here in America with my sad memories of a terrifying past.

Anti-Semitism in the Forest

By Moshe Kwiat
(Original Language: Yiddish)

There is much to tell about life among the partisans, and of everything that we, the Jewish partisans went through in the forests, but I believe that others from Dereczin have already written about this. I wish only to add several recollections that give me no peace since I lived through them.

I was a good, committed partisan, even though I was not as young as the larger portion of our fighters. I was appointed as the overseer of the transport detachment. Among the partisans, there were Jewish 'wagoners' with horses and wagons, among them, *Simkha Kresnovsky* from Kolonia Sinaiska (he arrived a week before the liberation), *Yankel Dzhentzelsky*, a former shoemaker (today in Israel), etc. We were three Jews in the base, in which *Boris* 'without the hand' *[Bulat]* was the head officer .

Being a flour miller, I was often sent to various locations to set up ovens for baking bread and cooking food.

For my commitment to the partisans, I received a medal. It is necessary to remember and constantly remind [everyone], that the Jewish partisans were among the best fighters in the forest and carried out the most difficult missions. Within these, the Dereczin partisans stood out the most.

Despite this, we were often victims of anti-Semitism, that also dominated the forest. It was not only once that it happened for us to hear such comments about our origins that our blood would boil.

The anti-Semitic sentiments in the forest, particularly among the officers, would rise during difficult periods in the forest, during the times of German sorties against our compounds.

The head officer of the Brisk brigade shot two Dereczin girls, *Beileh Becker*, and *Sima Shelovsky*, for losing their firearms when they fled a particularly intense German attack. When such or equivalent incidents would happen to the Christian partisans, it was wiped out and covered up, and only for the most serious infractions were they sentenced to death.

And I cannot forget the instance, when two brothers, young Jewish men, were shot because they were accused of falling asleep while on watch duty. Even for such infractions, it was rare to see a Christian partisan sentenced to death.

It was not only once that we thought we had run from water right into the fire, by fleeing Dereczin and entering the forest. But we had a sacred mission – to exact vengeance from the Germans, and this helped to sustain us in the partisan movement, even in those times when anti-Semitism flourished. Our thirst for revenge drove us to daring exploits against the Germans, doing our best to fulfil our obligations to the partisan movement.

With the Partisans

By Abraham-Yitzhak Medvetsky
(Original Language: Yiddish)

The morning after the great massacre, an opportunity presented itself for those Jews who were hidden and managed to stay alive, women and children, to break out of the ghetto from their bunkers and hideouts and using all sorts of ways, reach the forests near Ostrovo, Slizhi and Volya. Several weeks after this, the Germans surrounded our camp and subjected it to heavy fire. Then about 120 Jews were killed, among them my brother-in-law, *Elya Shulkovich.* Then came the great partisan attack on the Dereczin police and gendarmerie. Before dawn after an intense encirclement, a heavy partisan fire was opened up on the enemy. The police who were captured alive were shot on the burial mound. The German gendarmerie was also shot apart. We brought back much ammunition from the action against Dereczin, also from materials that our young people had secretly concealed in the ghetto-factory in the *Bliznianskv* house.

A short time afterward, the partisan forces attacked Kozlovshchina. A heavy battle took place there.

Around Hanukkah time, we were once again surrounded, by about 35 thousand Germans, who were on their way to the eastern front. We fought with them for two days near Volya. Many partisans fell then in battle, among them their beloved commander, *Dr. Atlas.* In the end, we were forced to leave our forest and transit to other forests, in order to save ourselves from the German fire. When we returned to our forest, we found our camp burned and destroyed. For a couple of weeks, in that cold winter, we lay day and night on the snow-covered ground.

Many 'missions' come to mind, which we had to carry out, and how our strength grew, [with] the acquisition of new weaponry, mostly confiscated from the Germans and their allies; I recall the acts of revenge that we took against those peasants who informed the location of our camps to the Germans; the mortal blows we inflicted on the German echelons more than once; and I am reminded of all those battles, in which our daring comrades were killed or wounded and those known to us from the partisan ranks. One wan partisans, of the leading role that a few of them had in the forests ts to relate the heroic deeds of the Dereczin , and of the good name of those valiant fighters, that were renown throughout all the forests of the area: *Taibl Lifshovich,* who in every mission, crawled into the face of the heaviest fire, together with the valiant partisans, until she fell in a bitter battle against the Germans; *Chaim-Shia Lifshovich,* who just like Joseph in Egypt, provided all the partisans with food, – he took his own life in order not to fall into the hands of the German oppressors, about a month before our liberation;

The generally known and loved *Elya Lifshovich,* who met his end in already liberated Poland; *Yosefkeh Bliznianskv,* who lives in Boston today; *Sima Shelovsky, Motkeh* the tailor's son, *Yankel Dykhess,* our best saboteur, our *Moshe-Chaim Ogulnick* and more dear sons and daughters of Dereczin, who did not rest by day or night in the forests, not in the summer's heat nor in the winter's cold, derailing trains, cutting telephone lines, attacking enemy columns, and provisioning the fighting forest with ammunition and food.

And when we were finally liberated by the Soviet military, the young, able partisans were sent immediately to the front in Bialystock and many of them were killed and wounded.

That is the sum of Jewish Dereczin. May the names of our good Jewish people and daring fighters never be forgotten, and may their memory be a blessing for the Jews in general.

My Sister Ruzha Falls in the Forest

By Katya Khlebnik-Bialosotsky
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Nekha & Mikhal Petrukhovich, emerged alive from the forest. (p. 372)

The month is May 1943, and it is prior to the German sortie against the village of Krupitzi and its environs. My sister *Ruzha* and I find ourselves at this time in the Lipiczansker Forest, among people from *Zhetl*. The part of the forest where the family compound was located was called 'Mayak' because not far from there stood a tall tower from Polish times.

We gird ourselves patiently and wait, [hoping] that the circumstances of the partisans will improve, and that everything will return to the status quo ante.
May 22 in the evening. Everyone is in improved spirits, even though we know that the danger that had stalked us a few days ago had not entirely passed. It is still risky to go out on the roads. Word reaches us that the following morning, May 23, the partisans are preparing to attack the German fortification in Nakrishok, a village near *Zhetl*. News of this nature always raised our morale and cheered us, despite the number of casualties we knew we would have to take in such a battle.

The young people around the fire ask *Ruzha* to sing a song. *Ruzha* immediately fills the request, and the dark still forest rings with the sound of her sweet voice rendering the song "Heimland." I feel a sudden pounding of my heart, and a shiver runs through me like a spasm through all my limbs.

– *Ruzha* – I say, – It is not yet the time for singing. The wound is still fresh, and who is to know what the coming day will bring us...

– Don't think so much, *Katya* – *Ruzha* answers me, – you are a pessimist. You'll see, tomorrow we will hit Nakrishok, and things will return to what they were.

I answer nothing, let down my head and sink my eyes into the dying fire.

At 12:00 midnight, the fire finally goes out, only the smoke curls skyward, just as if the Lord were accepting a sacrifice... We say, 'good night,' to one another and retire to the earthen bunkers to sleep.

It is 7AM on the morning of May 23. I crawl out of the earthen bunker, and from the top rung of the ladder I look about the still forest. The day looks like it will be nice and sunny, but chilly. I go out and prepare to light a fire, in order to brew some coffee. *Ruzha* is already also awake. She says she has a headache. In the earthen bunker, a woman lies ill with blotches of typhus.

Around 8AM a shot from a gun is heard in the far distance. I descend to *Ruzha* and tell her about it. 'It's nothing' – she says, 'certainly a shot by a partisan.' All agree with her and are sure that no danger lurks in this place. I return to the fire, because I felt a chill in my extremities. Twenty minutes go by – and a second shot is heard, this time closer already. I go down to *Ruzha* and tell her that it is necessary to come out of the bunker. 'Those are the sounds of partisan attacks on Nakrishok,' – *Ruzha* decides with certainty, and adds: 'I'll come up in a half hour.' I go out again, and in 15-20 minutes we are beset with gunfire, with bullets flying from all directions. I run to the earthen bunker and shout: "*Ruzha,* save yourself!" And I am driven from the place by a strong instinctive force.

I run, the bullets flying over my head. I run with all my might in an unknown direction, avoiding all the ways and well-trodden paths, over bogs and waters. After running for several kilometers, I met up with several others who had saved themselves. I ask them about *Ruzha* but they don't know, they hadn't run into her while fleeing. An ominous feeling gnaws at me. We seat ourselves in a swamp in a damp wooded area, being certain that in that location we would not be hit by a bullet.

And so we sat, each of us sunken in our own memories, for more than half a day. When it quieted down around us in the forest, we slowly returned to our former location. Along the way, we stumbled across people that had been shot. My heart beat like a trip-hammer. When we got closer to the earthen bunkers, a tragic picture unfolded before my eyes. *Ruzha* lay dead, she had just emerged from the bunker and gone about 30 steps and fell.

That is the way *Ruzha* lost her life, not knowing that her song of the prior night would be her last. And she was just last night so full of life and energy!

Poor sister, you parted from life with a song. With your death, you opened a permanent wound in my heart, a painful memory, a mourning for my dear sister, who fell on a spring morning in a faraway alien land.

The Zionist Dream in the Thickness of the Forest

By Masha Kulakowski
(Original Language: Hebrew)

In the evenings when there was respite, around the fire in the forest, when spirits were up, at times for no rhyme or reason, not only once was heard 'The Land of Israel,' from the lips of the partisans, and surprisingly the singing stopped, and conversations were stilled. And only in the eyes of the participants a bolt like a special lightning shone: God, is it conceivable that we could get out of this predicament alive and reach Our Land? Are we even permitted to think something 'impossible' such as this?

And this aspiration grew strong in our hearts even as all our [other] hope waned. The silence enveloped all of us on nights like this by the fire, until one of the company would open up with fragmented sentences about the years of preparation, about his desired over the years to go up to the Holy Land. Little by little, the atmosphere warmed up, a wave of memories and experiences, hopes, expectations and dreams would well up and rise in the heart, and the conversation would flow with vigor, and everyone was anxious to add and tell on his deep ties to the liberation movement of our people, of the expectations for a new life in the Land of our Fathers, and about all that was dreamed – until the Holocaust came and severed that skein of dreams.

A group of Jews sat in the thick of the Byelorussian forest, who had no place in the land where they resided, where even the wilderness would not offer them its harsh face – to the point where a physical pain would eat at them at the thought of the Land of Israel.

When the ache intensified, and the free-flowing conversation didn't mollify it, someone would very, very quietly begin to sing an Israeli song. His fellows sitting around the fire would immediately join in, and periodically the song would lighten the ache of longing.

In June 1944, the intensity of the pressure of the Germans on the partisans in our forest increased. Knowing that their downfall was at had, the German troops and their loyal allies, the Poles, Byelorussians and Ukrainians, began to penetrate the forests, pursuing the partisans without stop, and inflicting heavy losses on them.

Even when the sounds of cannon from the approaching front began to reach us, and when the sound of the Soviet *Katyusha* rockets were reaching our ears, even in those days of the disorganized retreat of the Germans, many victims still fell among the partisan ranks. Many fell, with the yearning for the Land of Israel in the final beats of their hearts.

We were liberated. On July 14, 1944 the forest ceased being our home, and the fortress that was created by the enemy. We went out onto the roads, the humming highways – to the desolated cities and towns.

The dream of three years came to being after our liberation from the Nazis. Will our dream for a life in the Land of Israel come to be as well? Will we continue to live on the ruins of our towns, or will we reach the shores of the Designated Land?

They Fell With Their Guns In Their Hands

Note 1: The order in which these names appear has been made to conform to English alphabetization, and therefore does not follow the same order as they appear in the original Hebrew text.

*Note 2: There are multiple references this text to the **Pobeda** Partisan Brigade. 'Pobeda' is the Russian word for 'Victory,' and this unit was under the command of **Pavel Bulak**. Further background concerning the exploits of this unit may be found in the memoir of **Moshe Salutsky** in the Zelva Memorial Book and in the Shapiro Family Book of Remembrances.*

Agulnick - (see ***Ogulnick***)

Alyovich, Chaim - Born in 1912 in a village adjacent to Dereczin. Fled from Dereczin with his brother *Leib,* and his sister *Leah.* He was a partisan in the *Farkof* unit. Shot after a trial on the grounds of falling asleep while on watch. This was almost at the point of liberation, a few months after his brother, *Leib* was shot on the same grounds.

Alyovich, Leib - Born in a village adjacent to Dereczin. Before the war, his family moved to Dereczin. Fled the ghetto with his brother *Chaim,* and his sister *Leah.* He was a partisan in the *Farkof* unit. At the beginning of 1944 he was sentenced to death under suspicion that he had fallen asleep on watch. Shot by a partisan firing squad.

Azaf, Moshe - A scion of a venerable Dereczin family. Fled with his family from the massacre into the forest. Fell in the forest battles under the command of *Bulak.*

Bardakh, Cherneh - Daughter of *Reuven & Masha.* Her parents owned a woven goods store. At the time of the Soviet occupation, she was a teacher at the Russian school. She reached the forests at the end of July 1942, originally in the *Bulak* Brigade, and afterwards joined the *Kozeyev* Brigade. In one of the German sorties, she was captured alive and tortured to death.

Barnovsky, Berel - Born in Suwalk in 1920. He was in Dereczin during the time of the Nazi conquest. After the great massacre, he fled to the forest and was taken in by the *Atlas* unit. He participated in the attack on the Dereczin military garrison. He was the first to break into the quarters of the *Sonderfuhrer.* The German shot and wounded him. He was brought back to the forest where he died from his wounds.

Beckenstein, Eliyahu - Born in Dereczin in 1926. His father was a tailor.

At the time he was being taken together with other Jews to be killed outside of the town, he jumped from the vehicle, and reached the Lipiczany forests on June 22, 1942. He joined the unit of *Dr. Atlas* in the *Pobeda* Brigade, under the command of *Bulak.* Despite his youth, he was given a mortar to operate. He participated in every single battle, and always stood out for his bravery, and readiness to put his life on the line. He provided assistance to the family compound that was set up in the vicinity of the Brigade.

In the battle beside the village of Sliza-Podgrovolna, he fought fearlessly, ceaselessly raining fire down on the enemy forces; When a small tank drew near to the partisan positions, he stopped it with his mortar fire, and forced it to retreat. As a memento of his exploits, he was given a watch from the booty taken from the Germans.

On October 25, 1943, he participated and distinguished himself in the sabotage of a German train near the Ozernitza train station. It was a train fully loaded with troops and supplies. The train was totally wrecked with many Germans buried under the debris. For this feat, he received a medal citing him 'For Courage.'

In February 1944, he went out with 8 other partisans to lay an ambush for the Germans, who were scheduled to pass the village of Ostrovo, near Dereczin. Their number was estimated to be about 150 troops. A bitter and heavy battle ensure for an hour and a half. The partisans could not maintain their position in the face of superior forces, and were forced to retreat. By firing his mortar, *Beckenstein* covered the pullback of his comrades, but he himself fell, along with the head of his unit.

A few hours after the end of the hostilities, several partisans went and retrieved the bodies of those who were killed, and they were buried with full military honors. *Beckenstein* was awarded the Red Flag posthumously.

Beckenstein, Shmeryl - Born in Dereczin, a shoemaker. Married and the father of two children. A partisan in the *Pobeda* Brigade. Fell with gun in hand during the first great sortie in January 1943.

Becker, Eliyahu - From Dereczin. A partisan in the *Pobeda* Brigade. After the liberation, he was drafted into the Red Army and died at the front.

Becker, Bella - Was shot in carrying out her duties in the forest, along with one of *Shelovsky's* daughters, because they did not return with their arms after fleeing the Germans, which they had hidden in a secret place.

Becker, Sonya - Born in 1923 in Kolonia [Sinaiska], beside Dereczin to a family of Jewish farmers. Worked as a cook in the camp of the *Pobeda* Brigade. Fell in the fierce fighting of the great sortie of the *Vlasov* troops against the partisan forests, days before the liberation came.

Bernicker, Herschel - Son of *Shmuel*, killed by enemy bullets at the time he was shepherding the partisan cattle flock.

Bialosotsky, Ruzha - Daughter of a large family from Dereczin. She was in the *Zhetl* forests together with her sister.[130] Was felled by an enemy bullet during a sortie against the compound in the forest.

Bitensky, Shmuel - Son of *Herschel Bitensky*, fell in the forests of Ruda Velikaya.

Bogdanovsky, Aharon - From Dereczin. A partisan in *Bulak's Pobeda* Brigade, in the Ruda Dobrovshchina forests. Fell in one of the battles.

Boyarsky, Shmuel - Born in the town of Piesk, near Volkovysk in 1916. A carpenter by trade.

He was in the Dereczin ghetto. At the end of July 1942, he fled to the forest. He was in the partisan unit that was active on the left side of the Shchara [River], and from there went over to *Bulak's Pobeda* Brigade. When the *Krasnoyarmisk* Brigade was organized, he joined it along with other Jews. He participated in all the battles in which the brigade engaged. He was cited for distinction several times by the command of the Brigade. He offered considerable assistance to the family compound that was situated beside his unit.

On September 25, 1943 he was sent along with several other non-Jewish partisans to mine the rails of the Lida-Mosty' link. The group stopped to rest in a grove of trees beside the Sakribuba train station. The guide, who was a Pole, informed the White Poles who controlled the area, and they surrounded the group and took them as prisoners. The Polish

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130 See the memoir of *Katya Khlebnik-Bialosotsky.*

partisans joined the Polish unit, and these in turn murdered *Boyarsky* in the most gruesome fashion. He was awarded the Red Flag posthumously.

Busak, Motkeh - Worn in Dereczin in 1908 to parents who were laborers. A tailor by trade.

A partisan in the *Bulak* Brigade. Distinguished himself in the battle of Ruda-Jaworska on June 30, 1942. He was beloved by all the partisans for his caring after all the needs of the unit, and especially – food. Everyone nicknamed him, 'Mother of the Brigade.'

He was cited for bravery four times for his valor in combat. After the liberation, he was drafted into the Red Army and fell at the front.

Dombrowsky, David - Born in 1915 in Dereczin. A cabinetmaker.

During the years of the occupation, he took advantage of his work in the warehouse of the gendarmerie, and by many means, brought over parts of firearms and weapons into the ghetto. On the day of the massacre, he fled to the Ruda-Dobrovshchina forests, joining his brother, *'Nioma* in the *Pobeda* partisan Brigade, under the leadership of *Bulak & Bulat.*

He was badly wounded in the attack on the military garrison in Dereczin. He was brought back to the forest where he passed away after much painful suffering. Before he died, he called over his younger brother, *'Nioma* and said to him: 'I am going to die shortly. I have only managed to take a small amount of revenge from our oppressors. Remember, it is your duty and it is the responsibility of all the Jews to exact vengeance for the blood of our family and our people.'

Einstein, Moshe Peretz - Born in Dereczin. Fell in the forests of Vilcha Nury.

Feldman, Hirsch - Born in 1910 in Dereczin. After marriage, he moved to Lida, where he owned and ran a food store market. He was active in all Zionist movements, and in the *Poalei Tzion* branch. The Russians engaged him in military provisioning. During the time of the German occupation, he worked at forced labor in factories.

He fled to the Lipiczany forests (Nov42), and joined the *Burba* Unit (*Orliansky*). There was a decidedly unsympathetic atmosphere toward Jews that pervaded the *Burba* unit. Rumors spread about how Jews were relieved of their arms. *Feldman* fled with 22 well-armed combatants to Nalibock. They joined the *Kalinin* Brigade (under the command of *Belsky*).

When the *Ordzhonikidze* Brigade was established, the young fighters from the *Belsky* Brigade were drawn to it, along with some of the better combatants, especially those who had fled from Lipiczany. *Feldman* was put in charge of the good minelayers in the sabotage unit. The combatants of his uni t and of the *Oktyabr* unit laid an ambush for a mechanized caravan of German vehicles that was moving along the *Koshlovo* Road. The first shot was fired by the partisans, much too early, and the Germans [were able to] arrange themselves for battle, and the partisans who were wary of a possible encirclement, elected to fall back in the middle of battle. *Feldman*, who had stormed the Germans, was killed (26Nov43 or 23Dec43).

Garzhevsky, Shmuel - Was born in Dereczin in 1920 to a family of merchants.

In 1942, he escaped from the ghetto in Dereczin, to the Dobrovshchina forests. Her was a partisan in the *Pobeda* Brigade of *Bulak.*

He fell in 1944 in the last of the sorties, a Ukrainian who had deserted the partisans revealed a signal to the Germans and that was how about 200 partisans fell into a trap.

Glick(s)feld, Mina - Daughter of *Yaakov & Chaya.* Born in Dereczin in March 1926. Studied at the high school.

During the great massacre in Dereczin, she hid herself, along with her family and tens of other people in a bunker that they had been prepared in the cellar of their house. From there, she fled to the

forests of Dobrovshchina, the place where the *Bulak* Brigade began getting organized – *Pobeda.* Despite being only 16 years old, she was given a rifle, and was an effective combatant. She would also help out her mother, who worked as a cook in the Brigade.

She would secretly bring food to the family compound of the Dereczin Jews, which was near the Brigade camp.

During the large German sortie of 1944, two days before the arrival of the Red Army, she was among the attackers on the 'Vilna Tract,' and fell in battle.

Goldin, Yudel - Son of *Shmuel-Leib,* killed upon arrival in the forest at the beginning of the first [enemy] sortie.

Grachuk, Yaakov - Born in Dereczin in 1925.

On June 22, 1942 with the destruction of the ghetto, he fled to the forest, and was accepted into the *Abramov* unit of *Bulak's*, Brigade, in the Lipiczany forests. Even though he was young, he was given a mortar, and he participated in all the engagements of the Brigade. He was a role model to others in his dedication and courage, and was beloved by everyone in the Brigade.

In August 1943, he went out with a group of ten partisans to derail a train on the Maycht rail line. He was sent by the leader of the group to reconnoiter the area. He found the exact location of the German watch post, and shot and killed the German guard on duty. The remaining Germans panicked and fled. The group continued with its mission and derailed a train. After this feat, he earned the decoration 'Battle of the Homeland.'

In November 1943, he was standing watch with his comrade, *Berel Becker* in one of the sections of the Ruda-Jaworska forest, dressed in the insignias of German police that they had taken as booty in a mission. The commander of the detail, *Shubin* was then in the area where the two were standing guard. Their dress caused their identities to be mistaken, and they were taken for Germans and shot.

Grachuk fell dead, and was buried with full military honors. His companion was wounded.

Grinkovsky, Naftali - Born and resided in Dereczin. Fled from the ghetto on the day of the massacre to the forests, and taken into the *Pobeda* Brigade. After the liberation, he joined the Red Army, and fell in the battles to liberate Bialystock.

Huberman - A refugee from Lomza, who came to Dereczin at the beginning of the war. He was a fighting partisan. He fell in battle.

Kresnovsky, Honna - Born in Dereczin in 1921.

Fled the ghetto on the day of the great massacre along with many other Jews, and reached the Ruda-Dobrovshchina forests, the base of the *Bulak* partisan Brigade. The command did not agree to accept him at that time because of the acute lack of weapons that was then prevalent throughout the area.

At the encouragement of the Jewish combatants, the command decided to attack the German military garrison in their hometown. The battle resulted in a complete victory for the partisans. Approximately 50 [local] police and Germans were captured and taken out to be shot on the market plaza. The rest fled for their lives. For a long time, the town stayed under partisan control, and the Germans did not dare to return. In that battle the Jewish partisans that were killed were *David Dombrowsky, Chaim Shelkovich & Berel Barnovsky. Honna* was wounded during the course of battle, and was taken back to the Brigade base in the forest, and he died there of his wounds.

Kresnovsky, Simkha - Born in Dereczin. A partisan of the *Pobeda* Brigade, he worked in the unit that felled trees in the Ruda forests.

He distinguished himself in the battle of Dereczin. He succeeded in capturing Ukrainian policemen, frisked them and disarmed them.

He fell after the liberation in the mop up action of clearing out the isolated pockets of Germans that were scattered through the forests.

Krieger, Abraham-Mordechai - Born in 1927 in Mishintz. A Yeshivah student. When the war broke out, he moved with his family to Dereczin.

He fled to the Ruda forests. In the forest he met his friend, *Meir Steinberg*, and the two of them joined the *Pobeda* Brigade. They were given responsibility to obtain food provisions for the partisan hospital.

He participated in the battle of Dereczin. In going out with *Meir* to bring food from Dereczin, the two of them fell into an ambush set by the police, and in the ensuing exchange of gunfire the two friends were killed.

Kushnir, Shlomo - Born in Dereczin. Went to his brother-in-law in Baranovich. A talented locksmith. Was taken to the labor camp at Koldichvo. In this camp, expert workmen were concentrated, both Jewish and non-Jewish, after all the ghettoes in the area had been emptied. Jews were killed in this camp on a daily basis.

As a result of his effort, a 'Rescue Committee' was set up with him as its head. According to his plan, a hole was punched out in the wall of a factory that was beside a pond, the watchdogs were poisoned, and on a night of falling snow, all 93 Jews escaped through the hole broken into the wall, across the frozen pond and from there to the forests. The Germans organized a sortie, and exposed the bunker in which *Kushnir* was hidden with 20 Jews. *Kushnir* killed himself, the twenty were murdered, and the others joined the *Belsky* Brigade.

Lantzevitzky, Moshe - Born in 1915 in Dereczin. A tailor. Fled to the forests and was taken in by the *Pobeda* Brigade. In the beginning he dealt with supply, and afterward transferred to a combat unit. He participated in all the missions of that unit. He received three citations by the command. He fell in the battle for the Vilna Road.

Lantzevitzky, Shmeryl - Born in Dereczin. Fled to the forest with his wife and two children. He was appointed the lead of the family compound that was adjacent to the *Pobeda* Brigade. He participated in all aspects of provisioning.

During the time of the sortie against the Dobrovshchina forests, when the Brigade retreated to the *Grabski* forests, *Shmeryl* remained behind with his family in the bunker. When the people of the compound eventually returned, they found only his two children, who related that their father had been killed in an exchange of gunfire with the Germans.

Lantzevitzky, Tuvia - Born in 1911 in Dereczin. A furrier.

Joined the *Pobeda* Brigade *in the Lipiczany forests.* He was a quartermaster, but at his own wish he participated in combat missions. After the battle of Kozlovshchina (3Mar43) he was given responsibility for the liberation of the town, and the burning of three tallow factories that supplied their output to the Germans. He took five partisans with him and carried out the mission.

In the attack that a group of partisans staged on a police point in the Rudan forest, he was the first to break through the police barricades, and he fell from a bullet shot by a German tank soldier.

Lev, Israel - Reached the forests from Dereczin, and fought in the ranks of the *Pobeda* Brigade. He was wounded in one of the engagements, and died of his wounds.

Lifshovich, Eliyahu - Son of *Nahum-Yaakov & Batia.* Born in 1914 in Dereczin. He studied at the *Tarbut* School, and was a member of *Betar.* Assisted his father with work in the bakery. He was a soldier in the Polish army.

He was one of the first of the Jewish partisans in the Dobrovshchina forests. He ran the second battalion in the Brigade of *Dr. Atlas,* and was a unit commander in the *Pobeda* Brigade.

In the campaign against Dereczin (08Oct42), he stormed the gendarme headquarters building with other Jewish partisans and captured it. With five

other partisans (among them *Dr. Atlas*), they seized a German airplane that had made an accidental landing in the village of Lantzevitz (Oct42).

When the partisans attacked Ruda-Jaworska (in the Lipiczany forest), a place where the Germans attempted to establish a garrison to fight the partisans, *Eliyahu Lifshovich* penetrated into the village first with his detachment, and subjugated the Germans. There was nothing left for the other units to do except gather up the spoils.

He participated in derailing a 20-car train on the Volkovysk-Baranovich line.

During the great siege of the forest (Dec42), he was beside *Dr. Atlas,* and when he [*Dr. Atlas*] was mortally wounded, he appointed him leader of the division. With a cry of vengeance for the death of their outstanding leader, he stormed the German columns with his soldiers, and those columns fled.

Following an order from Moscow, he and his soldiers blew up a cement factory (beside Volkovysk), and cement production was interrupted for six months at the factory.

In their attempt to neutralize partisan activities, the Germans transported a large army to the Dereczin area. *Eliyahu Lifshovich* went out with his soldiers to lay an ambush at the village of Sliza Podgrovalna, with the mission of reinforcing the partisan forces that were hidden near a wrecked bridge at the entrance to the forests near Dereczin. The combatants found themselves in an exposed place, they concealed themselves, *Eliyahu Lifshovich* held a lanyard that was attached to a mine that had been hidden under the beams of a small bridge, that the Germans needed to cross. The German tank could not cross the rickety bridge, and officers and soldiers attempted to get it through the riverbed. *Elik* pulled on the lanyard, and the mine exploded at the point where the Germans had gathered, and 12 mortars began to rain down fire on them. Thirty Germans and Ukrainians were killed. The Germans at first retreated, and afterwards opened heavy fire from a distance of hundreds of meters. In the exchange of fire, several of the partisans were hit, including the sister of the commander.

Eighty Soviet paratroopers reached the partisans in the Lipiczany forests, including one person who was appointed to develop contact among all the units that were fighting in the Byelorussian and Pulasian forests. This person selected *Eliyahu Lifshovich* to the responsible position of connecting all the fighting units. Together with six of his hand-picked soldiers, he visited the leadership of the Brigades and divisions, while cutting train lines and dangerous roads. When he returned, he was given the 'Battle of the Homeland' Medal, Grade A.

To the end of the war, he participated in 22 train derailments.

After the liberation, he volunteered for the Red Army. Afterwards he joined a settlement in Legnitz (Lower Silesia), and was killed in an attack by Polish fascists while on guard duty at the settlement (Mar46).

Lifshovich, Chaim -Yehoshua - Son of *Nahum-Yaakov & Batia.* Born in 1910 in Dereczin. A junior officer in the Polish army.

A member of the fighting Jewish underground in the Dereczin ghetto. Fled with his brother and sister into the forests of Ruda-Dobrovshchina. Appointed as one of the organizers of the *Atlas* Brigade. Joined the *Pobeda* Brigade. In addition to operating a mortar, he had the special position of being in charge of supplies in the *Atlas* Brigade. He participated in every one of his unit's battles. When the partisans were compelled to retreat after the battle of Kozlovshchina, he covered them with machine gun fire together with *Dr. Atlas.* He received a citation for this.

Together with his brother *Eliyahu,* he stormed the military headquarters building in Dereczin. He participated in all the missions led by his brother in the unit.

He was heavily wounded during the sortie staged by

the *Vlasov* troops on the forest (2Apr44). When he could not find a way to escape, he shot himself to avoid falling into enemy hands.

Lifshovich, Taiba - ('Tanya'), Daughter of *Nahum-Yaakov & Batia.* Born in 1919 in Dereczin. She studied in a Polish school. She was an active member of *Betar.* During the Soviet occupation, she joined a sewing cooperative.

With the onset of the German occupation, she was sent into forced labor. She fled with her three brothers into the forests of Ruda-Dobrovshchina, and joined the *Dr. Atlas* Brigade. She participated along with her brothers in all the battles as both a combatant and a field nurse. Afterwards, she joined the *Pobeda* Brigade (*Bulak's* command).

She distinguished herself in the attack against the military garrison in Dereczin. In the battle of Kozlovshchina, she captured a German heavy machine gun, before which she was using a 'Maxim No. 2' that her brother *Chaim-Yehoshua* used to fire. She received a citation from the command of the unit of the day.

In the battle beside the village of Silza (15 kilometers from Dereczin), she served as a machine gunner. She was hit by shrapnel, and taken to the partisan hospital. Despite the dedicated care she received, she came down with blood poisoning and died.

In a letter she wrote in pain from her sickbed, she urged the combatants onward.

Lipmanovich, Chaim - Born in a village adjacent to Suwalk. He lived in Dereczin during the war years. He went into the forests with his sister, and joined the *Pobeda* Brigade in the Ruda forests. He was responsible for provisioning in the Brigade, and participated in the acquisition of foodstuffs, and in battles. He and his sister were killed at Kozlovshchina.

Lisovsky, Dvora - Born in Mosty', she was in Dereczin at the time of the Nazi conquest, and escaped to the forest from the ghetto. She fought in the *Burba* Brigade in the Lipiczany forests. She fell in a sortie.

Litmanovich, Yitzhak - Born in Sinai [sic: Kolonia Sinaiska], and wit the Nazi occupation, attempted to cross the Russian border with his family, and after a variety of tribulations, he reached Dereczin.

The morning after the massacre, he fled with his family into the forests. He joined *Bulak's* unit. He fell in the attack on Dereczin.

Lobzovsky, Abraham - (*'Levdrik'*), was born in 1924 in Dereczin. He was the sone of a wagon-driver and spoke Byelorussian. He did not look like a Jew.

He served in the *Pobeda* Brigade in the Lipiczany forests. He was an outstanding mortar operator, participating in all the group battles, and demonstrated unusual courage. He was eager to take revenge from the Germans and those who assisted them.

He was captured by the Germans in the house of a farmer, where he was recovering from an operation. He died after a short struggle. He received commendations several times, and received the 'Battle of the Homeland' medal.

Manikov, Nekhama - Daughter of *Meshl & Genendel Blizniansky.* Born in 1886 in Dereczin. A midwife. She fled the ghetto after the great massacre. She served as a nurse in the *Pobeda* Brigade. From there, she went over to the *Kozeyev* Brigade. She was given responsibility for the establishment of the partisan hospitals in the Lipiczany forests. She died of blood poisoning.

Miller, Nissan - Born in 1921 in Dereczin. Son of *Koppel Miller.* An electrician and locksmith. The Germans used his skills outside the ghetto. On the day of the slaughter, he fled to the forest, and reached the unit of *Dr. Atlas.* He was active in all the missions of sabotage against the German train transports, and excelled at mining with explosives. He participated in all of the missions of *Dr. Atlas's* unit.

In the battle against the German military garrison in Ruda, he was given the guard position at the edge of the forest. After the successful conclusion of this mission, *Moshe Ogulnick* came to relieve him, and found him dead. He was apparently killed by a stray bullet.

According to another version, he fell during the great sortie while mining the entrance to the forest.

Ogulnick, Moshe-Chaim - son of *Reuven & Beileh.* Born in Dereczin in 1924. His father was a glazier.

He reached the forest in November 1942, and joined the unit of *Dr. Atlas* in the *Bulak* Brigade, which operated in the forests of Lipiczany (the Novogrudok district). He began as a rifleman, and afterwards operated a mortar, and was assigned to the scouting patrol. Ramrod straight, he was an outstanding horseman, sang, rode, and played the mandolin, and instilled a good morale among the group; possessed of an unusually outgoing sense, which stood him in good stead in his contact with the farmers.

In 1943, the partisans laid an ambush for the Germans who transported foodstuffs on a daily basis on the Dereczin - Ruda Jaworska road. *Ogulnick* was exceptional in this action. He let the transport vehicle of the police get within 20 meters, and from the concealment of low grass, rained fire on them from his mortar. He killed about 30 of the police.

As a reward for his performance, the leadership awarded him a gold watch.

In April 1944, a short time before the liberation, large German forces encircled the area forests. In the battle that then took place in Kozlovshchina, *Ogulnick* was killed, along with his horse, that had accompanied him into battle and danger over a period of two years.

Ogulnick was decorated with the Red Star and the Red Flag.

Ogulnick, Shmeryl - a native and resident of Dereczin. Escaped from the ghetto during the day of the massacre to the forests of Ruda Dobrovshchina. He joined the unit of *Dr. Atlas.* He fell in the battle that took place between the *Bulak* Brigade and the Germans and Lithuanians who came to retake Dereczin after the partisan attack on the military garrison in the town.

Osherovich, Chaim [131] - 15 years old. Was in the *Pobeda* unit. After the liberation, he volunteered for the Red Army and did not want to return to his birthplace in Dereczin. He fell in the battle to liberate Bialystock.

Pintelevsky, Shlomo - Reached Byelorussia from Poland and fled into the forests, joining the 51st Brigade, and from there to *Bulak's* Brigade. There are two versions of how he died: A: He was shot in Dereczin after Lithuanian units were able to establish control there after the partisans captured it; B: He fell at the time his unit was guarding the entry way to the Dobrova forest. He excelled in the very battle in which he fell.

Pinus, Pinkhas - Born in Suwalk. A shoemaker. When the war broke out, he came to Dereczin, where the Soviets were in control. He fled the Dereczin ghetto to the forests, and joined the *Atlas* Brigade, and proved to be courageous in the very first battle – in the partisan attack on the military garrison in Dereczin. *Pinus* was wounded and was bedridden in the partisan hospital for a half year. When he was healed, he demanded to be included in missions. He participated in may battles, and excelled in the destruction of bridges that spanned the Shchara River. After derailing four German trains, he was awarded a high level medal.

After the liberation, he was drafted into the Red Army and was killed at the front.

Reich, Grunya (Salya) - Born in (c. 1920) Warsaw. A nurse. After the capture of Warsaw by the

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131 A cousin to *Alta Osherovich*, wife of *Foyka Gelman.*

Germans, she fled with her husband and infant child to Dereczin. She worked there in the municipal hospital.

On the day of the massacre, her infant child was killed. She and her husband fled into the forest, and joined the Brigade of *Boris Bulat,* who eventually came to lead the *Pobeda* Brigade.[132] She accompanied those that went into battle as a nurse.

During the siege, *Grunya Reich* stumbled upon a group of 7 Jews, led by *Joseph Wegmeister*, who had fled from Slonim, and he was wounded in the chest. She nursed him, and joined his group. Together, they reached the Lipiczany forests, and joined the *Kaplinski* unit, in the *Burba* Brigade. She served as a nurse in this unit as well, and accompanied the combatants on their missions.

During the siege of the Lipiczany forests, she clashed with a German guard post. In the process of falling back, she shot over the heads of the Germans who attacked her, was wounded, and died with her rifle in her hand.

Rosenthal, Yitzhak - Born in the Suwalk district, moved with his parents to Dereczin, where his father was a physician. He was recognized to have musical talent even from his early childhood years.

During the time of the [German] action in Dereczin, he hid in the eaves and saw how they were liquidating the ghetto from there. That same night, he fled into the forest and joined the *Atlas* Brigade. He was given responsibility as the liaison between the Brigade and the central command. He participated in all the missions of the Brigade.

He was killed in the battle of Kozlovshchina, while handing a shell to his comrade who operated the cannon.

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132 It is not clear that the writer(s) properly distinguish between the two commanders, *Boris Bulat & Pavel Bulak,* although joint leadership is ascribed to both men in the testimony to *David Dombrowsky.*

Rosenzweig, Dr. Israel - Born in 1911 in Kielce. Studied medicine in Czechoslovakia.

With the German occupation, he moved to the area under Soviet occupation, and worked in the hospital in Dereczin. From Soviet prisoners on whom he operated, he learned the location of the partisan base in the forests of Ruda-Dobrovshchina. He deliberately extended the stay of the prisoners in the hospital with the idea of the possibility that they would be able to flee into the forest (among those remaining, was *Bulak* himself).

When the ghetto was liquidated, his wife and children were killed. During the massacre, he was in the hospital, and until the Germans got to him, he hid himself, and then fled to the forest. After several days, he participated in the attack by the *Bulak* Brigade against the military garrison in Dereczin. During that same attack, the medical supplies of the hospital were confiscated, and this formed the basis of the supplies for the partisan hospital in the Lipiczany forests. *Dr. Rosenzweig* for a while was the only physician serving there, until additional doctors came, and helped relieve the great burden that had been placed on him.

He was sent to the *Voroshilov* Brigade that was composed primarily of inmates of the jail who escaped after the German occupation. He served as the Brigade doctor. Because he was liked so much by his commander, he succeeded in blunting the sharpness of the anti-Semitism of the partisans, which was not insignificant.

After the liberation, he was the head of the hospital at Zheludok. He [then] left Russia. He lived for a while in Poland, and from there went to Italy and made *aliyah* to the Holy Land (1948). He served as a military physician in the neighborhoods of the Haifa district. He died after a severe illness (7May54).

Sakar, Melekh - Born in Dereczin, the son of *Sholom & Tzivya.* With the invasion of the Germans, he went to *Zhetl.* When the head of the *Judenrat, Alter Dobritsky* made the effort to establish an 'underground partisan branch' he joined the branch.

An uprising by Soviet prisoners of war, and the arrest of *Sholom Piulin* during the acquisition of arms, precipitated a wholesale exodus of the entire branch to the Lipiczany forests.

After *Alter Dobritsky & Moshe Pozdansky* were murdered by the partisans, he and four of his comrades went over to the *Nalibocki* forests (5Dec42), and joined a Jewish unit in the *Stalin* Brigade.

The *Stalin* Brigade attacked the German garrison in Nalibock. The Jewish unit was designated to open the attack from one flank, and the Russians were supposed to join in from another flank. Because of the arrival of German reinforcements, it was decided to postpone the attack. A signaling error caused the Jews to open the attack with no support from the rest of the partisans. Of the 39 combatants in the unit, only a remnant survived alive. *Melekh Sakar* was killed in this battle.

Shaplan, Yitzhak - (Issak) Fell in the forest a short time before the liberation. His son, *Moshe*, became ill in the forest and died.

Shelkovich, Chaim - Born in 1923 in Dereczin. Studied to be a locksmith. Was employed by the Germans as a quartermaster for munitions outside the ghetto, fleeing on the day of the great massacre along with those who went to the Ruda forests, and joined the *Dr. Atlas* unit in the *Pobeda* Brigade.

He fell during the attack on the military garrison in Dereczin.

Shelkovich, Chaya - Daughter of *Eliyahu & Bluma*. Born in 1925 in Dereczin. Studied at a Russian high school. Fled to the Lipiczany forests with her family, joining the *Pobeda* Brigade.

She was captured together with her mother and two sisters during the great sortie, and they were taken to Kozlovshchina where they were tortured to death.

Shelkovich, Eliyahu - Born in 1900 in Dereczin. Owner of a shop for wheel repair. Fled with his wife and three daughters to the Lipiczany forests, and joined his friend *Bulak* who was just beginning to organize the *Pobeda* Brigade.

He headed the provisioning activities for military necessities. He fell after the Battle of Dereczin.

Shelovsky, Avigdor - (Vita), son of *Yitzhak & Rachel*. Born in Dereczin. An accountant. Fled with the members of his family to the Lipiczany forests, and joined the *Pobeda* Brigade (under the command of *Bulak*).

His brother *Shlomo* was killed in battle, and he sought opportunities to avenge his spilled blood. He took part in the derailment of three trains near Zelva, and participated in fighting campaigns until he fell ill with typhus, and his legs gave froze. After spending nearly a year in the partisan hospital, he became disabled, and was forced to content himself with duties around the base.

Despite his disabilities, he participated in the final battle against the Germans and he fell on the Drovna Road.

His parents, two sisters and his brother also fell in the ranks of the partisans.

Shelovsky, Feiga - (Fanya), Daughter of *Yitzhak & Rachel*. Born in Dereczin. Fled with her family into the Lipiczany forests, and joined the *Pobeda* Brigade.

During the sortie, she participated in all battles. When the pressured partisans were surrounded, many hid their weapons, lest they fall into German hands. When her unit returned to its base, she was asked for her weapon, and she explained where she had hidden it. The commander, *Bulak* sentenced her and her companion, *Bella Becker* to death, while other non-Jewish partisans, who had left their weapons behind, were held free from harm.

Shelovsky, Shlomo - Born in 1912 in Dereczin. Studied medicine. Was active in *Betar* in his town.

Fled to the Lipiczany forests along with the members of his family, and joined the *Pobeda* Brigade. Participated in the attack on Dereczin. He was appointed to replace the commander of his unit, *Kozeyev*. Participated in battles, sabotage, and train derailments along the Slonim-Zelva line.

Performed outstandingly in the attack of the police station in Mycht, where 12 police were killed.

He fell during the great sortie beside the cannon from which he was shelling the Germans.

Shelovsky, Sima - Daughter of *Yitzhak & Rachel.* Born in 1922 in Dereczin. A dental technician.

Fled to the Lipiczany forests with the members of her family. Joined the *Pobeda* Brigade. Served as a nurse, and joined all the battles of the unit. She earned citations of valor.

When the partisans attempted to break the final German encirclement (Jun44) *Sima Shelovsky* attached herself to a Soviet captain that had been wounded in battle. Even after the battle, it fell to her to care for him under cover in a camouflaged hiding place. A few days before the liberation, they were discovered by *Vlasov* troopers and both were shot on the spot (28Jun44).

Steinberg, Meir - Born in Mishinitz. Fled to the forests in the Dereczin surroundings, and joined the *Bulak* Brigade along with his friend, *Abraham-Mottel Krieger.* They were given the responsibility to obtain food provisions for the partisan hospital. Despite their youth, they both participated in the attack on Dereczin. Returning one day from the collection of foodstuffs, they walked into a German ambush. In the exchange of fire, they killed 3 Germans, and afterwards were shot and killed.

Walitsky, Israel - From Dereczin, a partisan in the *Vanka Levdyanka* Brigade. Fell in the forest during a sortie, after two years of active fighting service.

Wallmark, Migdal - Born in Ostrov-Mazowiecka. With the invasion of the Germans into Poland in September 1939, he fled to Dereczin. On the day of the massacre, he fled to the Lipiczany forests. He joined the Jewish unit of *Kaplinsky* and afterward he was a partisan in the *Burba* Brigade (*Lenin* Section).

After several days, along with his townsman, *Moshe Malkevitsky* and three other members of the *Burba* Brigade, they went to the outskirts of the town of Piesk, in order to obtain clothing for the Brigade, which was suffering from freezing and dampness. They never returned to the base camp of the Brigade. The circumstances surrounding their death are unknown.

Zarnitsky, Chaim Hersh - Fell together with his wife, *Rachel*, during a sortie against the forests.

Zarnitsky, David-Hirsch - Son of a poor Dereczin family, who was forced to work from early youth as an apprentice to a shoemaker.

On the day of the massacre, he fled to the Ruda forests, and was taken in by *Bulak's* unit, and even in the forest he worked as a shoemaker for the partisans. He participated in the attack on the military garrison in Dereczin.

He was killed on the day of the first German sortie in December 1942.

Zolotnitsky, Eliyahu - From Dereczin, the son of *Israel* the shoemaker. A partisan in *Bulak's Pobeda* Brigade, in the Ruda-Dobrovshchina forests. He was killed in the forests. His father, mother *Sarah*, sister *Beileh* and brothers also died the same way.

Zlotagura, Herschel - Born in 1908 in Dereczin. Ran an ironmonger's store. Head of *Tzahar* in Dereczin. On the day of the massacre, he fled with tens of other Jews, and reached the Ruda forests. He joined *Bulak's* Brigade, in the *Dr. Atlas* unit. He distinguished himself as a fighting partisan.

On the day of the attack on Dereczin, he was among the first to penetrate the German garrison building, and was severely wounded. After his wounds healed in the forest, he returned to combat duty.

He fell in 1945 in the ranks of the Red Army, a short time before the end of the war.

This list of the partisans who fell in battle has been prepared using two volumes of an anthology published by Yad VaShem, supplemented by the oral testimony of those whose origins were from Dereczin and who were in the forests and survived.

Let us memorialize the names of the fallen in this list, and in this way also all of those, to our great sorrow, whose names it was not possible for us to include in this list.

May God himself avenge their spilled blood!

Wandering

Uprooted with the Maelstrom

By Meir Bakalchuk
(Original Language: Yiddish)

I cannot get the morning of March23, 1939 out of my mind. At that time, I was living in Baranovich. The morning hours looked to me, as it did to others around me, as being carefree and bright. Jews returned home from their morning prayers, ate their mouthfuls quickly, and then took their keys n order to unlock either a store, a business or a shop.

It was a normal day, exactly as if someone wanted to portray us. March in the old country was still the end of winter, when the soul is till somewhat heavy, but every day was sunny and warm. On days like this, Jews loved to stand outside, snatch a bit of conversation, talk politics – Jews were experts at this.

A Clap of Thunder out of a Clear Sky

Nobody even contemplated war. The Polish regime constantly assures everyone that Poland is [militarily] strong, and that no one would want to engage the country. Jews believed this – because it was comforting for them to believe this. Despite the fact that the rise of Hitlerism in Germany instilled a fright in everyone and anti-Semitism in Poland had already filled up rather well, various corners of economic and social life – the Jews of Poland somehow managed to endure it, believing that things would work out, and that life would once again return to being stable as it had been up till now. We must not forget that the Jews were very well rooted in the Polish cities and towns, with extensive families, livelihoods of long-standing, shops and businesses. It was more convenient for them to have faith in the Polish constitution, and according to their Jewish way of thinking – in God. Jewish life was organized, and it was carried on with parties and organizations, cultural societies, synagogues, libraries, banks, aid societies, and foundations. Jews literally did not want to permit bad news to enter their consciousness and thoughts, which was likely to undermine their belief in better times.

That is why the news that Germany had seized the Lithuanian port of Memel, fell on the Jewish street that day of March 23, 1939 like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky.

Only a few hours afterwards, the Polish regime ordered an immediate mobilization of all eligible men for military service. I was also mobilized on that same day.

And so, the carefree morning hours were instantly transformed into a bitter nightmare. Businesses and shops were closed up, everyone running home. Men with packs in hand, took tearful leave of their wives and children, with heartbreaking blessings from parents, and went off to the assembly points.

After such a tumultuous and frightening day, came a mournful evening. Listlessness gripped everyone, houses were locked up, hearts trembled. Nobody knew or understood what all of this portended, and what would come of this – but fear of the unknown was even greater.

It is now clear to me that day was the first warning of the coming of the Second World War, of the saddest period in the history of our people, especially of the Jews in all of Europe.

Torn out of My Home

I had just arrived in Baranovich a couple of weeks prior, from my hometown of Dereczin. I took up residence in my new home and began to build a new life.

On the 23rd of March, I was torn out of my new home. I could not even visit my father's home before presenting myself for military duty. Riding through Zelva on the train, I sent a soulful greeting from the depths of my heart to the home of my parents, and asked them for their blessing.

From that day until September 1, were days of tension and uncertainty. Now I see, that in those months there was still a possibility to rescue the greater part of Polish Jewry – but who could then foresee the terrifying outcome that was in fact so near? And where was there a Jewish leadership that would be strong enough, and has enough prescience to undertake such a risky rescue operation?

In the last dying months of Polish rule, I was stationed, along with a goodly part of the Polish military, on the Polish-German border. During the last days of August, I obtained a 14-day furlough, in order to participate in a festive family occasion, marking the birth of my baby daughter. But I was able to visit with my family for only one day – I was immediately called back to the military, and fell into the outbreak of the war, which broke out on the 1st of September.

It is difficult to describe those 2-3 weeks of September 1939. This was not a battle, not resistance, but a continuous, daily retreat from the enemy. The entire strategy of the Polish military in those weeks was to find the easiest and nearest ways of reaching the Russian border. It was hoped that the Russian army would come to our assistance, but Russia had by then already allied itself with Hitler's Germany, through the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. The Red Army, in accordance with the agreement with Germany, occupied the western regions of the Ukraine and Byelorussia.

At *Sukkot* time that year, I found myself a captive of the Red Army.

Under Soviet Rule

My hometown of Dereczin, and my new home Baranovich, were already occupied by the Red Army (the Russians referred to this as: being liberated). The new regime put fear into the Jews. No one knows what sort of new order tomorrow will bring. Initially, private businesses, stores and shops were permitted, and even ordered to be opened. Afterwards, the larger stores, and all the important enterprises were nationalized. Anything that so much as smelled of private initiative, was slapped with heavy taxes.

Then the series of arrests and deportations began. First, the more prosperous families were sent to smaller towns, the further from the boundary the better. Then they turned to former manufacturers, entrepreneurs, intelligentsia, Zionists, Bundists, and even loyal communists were tried and sentenced to be sent somewhere deep into Russia. The smile vanished from Jewish homes.

In that time, I returned to Baranovich from Soviet imprisonment, and immediately thereafter traveled home to Dereczin. Oh, what Dereczin looked like at the time! The tradition of tens of generations suddenly had vanished. My father, the Rabbi of Dereczin looked on with sorrow and pain as things sacred to Jews were transformed into objects of derision. Young people no longer show themselves in the *Bet HaMidsrash*. One can do anything one desires, and it has become the vogue to speak in Russian, and to assimilate oneself into the new Russian environment. Everyone was dominated by the thought that the Russians will remain firmly planted in our area on a permanent basis. Jews began to accustom themselves to the idea of living under a Soviet regime. The new way of life began to pervade the Jewish streets.

But no sooner had we accustomed ourselves a little to the new circumstances and governance, when the older Jews went back to their old way of life, going to synagogue, studying a page of *Gemara*, praying. A portion of the Jewish children began once again to go to *Heder*. At that time, the Soviet rule didn't pay any attention to all of these things.
Dereczin then had an entirely different look to it, when compared to the pre-War years. Many refugees streamed in from the cities and towns of Poland, which were under German rule. The Jews of Dereczin took these refugees in with warmth, helping them in whatever way was possible.

Dereczin in Those Days

During those months, I visited my parents

frequently. From my father and friends, I came to learn what Dereczin went through in those last days of Polish rule, and in the transition period until the Soviets arrived. A group of young people, responsible to no one, but intoxicated with communist doctrine, attempted to 'seize control' in Dereczin before the arrival of the Soviet army. They detained several Polish officers who were retreating. Following these officers, who were a vanguard for a much larger retreating Polish force, the Polish soldiers arrived and it almost came to a pogrom. My father put his life on the line, and went out to the inflamed Polish soldiers, and promised them to locate their officers. By exerting great energy, he was able to persuade these young people to release these Polish officers. The retreating Poles were in a hurry to flee as fast as possible from the enemy, and it was for this reason a bloodbath was avoided in Dereczin.

During those frightful days without a regime in place in Dereczin, another incident occurred: a notification went out all over town that the left wing youth, both Jews and Christians alike, were planning to shoot the local Catholic priest, who was known to be a liberal-minded individual, and who also had friendly relations with the Jews. On the prior day, the local priest in Zelva had indeed been hung, whom the inflamed young people had accused of being sharply anti-communist.

When my father learned of the danger that awaited the priest of Dereczin, he resolved to do something to defuse the murder plot, for which the Jews would ultimately, God forbid, pay dearly. My father went to the priest in the middle of the night,
and surreptitiously brought him to our house, where he hid him in the bedroom. The following morning, large groups of young people surrounded our house, demanding that the priest be handed over to them. My father stood himself in the doorway and told them that only over his dead body would they be able to break into our house.

In the middle of this conversation between my father and this gathered crowd, the first vanguard of Soviet officials arrived in town. Seeing a large crowd in front of our house, they asked what was going on. When they found out about the issue with the priest, one of the Soviet officials asked my mother for a small table. He stood on the table and declared to the crowd that 'the Soviet regime does everything according to the rule of law, and nobody has a right to try and sentence anyone out of this process.' The young people were disarmed, and the Soviet military expressed their thanks to my father for his proper and sober position.

In this way, yet another tragedy was avoided, which could have brought frightful consequences to the Dereczin Jews.

I knew my father as a scholar, who always had learning on his mind. I never saw a hero in him. Every disturbance filled him with fear. It was therefore a wonderment to me, as to where he got so much courage in those difficult months of the Dereczin community.

Parting Forever

Two weeks before the outbreak of the war between Germany and Russia, I visited Dereczin for the last time. I found my father sitting in the same place, reviewing his insights concerning the Torah. It was as if everything going on around him wasn't really happening.

My father showed me a letter from my brother, *Ben-Zion* , which he had received that same day. A couple of months before, my brother had been taken into the Soviet army, and his letter had arrived from deep in Russia. My father read to me from the letter, and shook his head, full of pain and sorrow. My father, the scholar foresaw that he would, apparently, never see my brother again, and it was possible that he would never see me again as well.

A dark fear lay over the home of my parents. In a tortured agreement with their assessment, I took leave of my family. It was a parting forever.

A Way to Escape is Sought

In the spring months before the outbreak of the German-Russian war it again became uncomfortable. Some sort of an unrest hung in the atmosphere, a premonition of angry winds that are to come. My wife and little girl *Friedeleh*, were also full of fear and unease. Jews around us began to flee, leaving behind their possessions. They were fleeing to Vilna, the capitol of Lithuania, granted by the Soviet regime to the Lithuanian people. Lithuania was yet free at the time, not occupied, but under the influence of the [Soviet] command, and had its own Lithuanian government. That is why many Jews and also many Poles fled to Vilna, and from there, a portion of them went to Japan, China, and even the Holy Land. The way to Vilna was fraught with danger, especially for a family with small children.

Panic rose from day to day, especially as every morning we found out that one or another person of our acquaintance had left for Vilna.

The Soviet authority in Baranovich had become unnerved, and dropped all of its plans to fortify itself in place.

On June 22, 1941 German airplanes appeared over the city, the harbinger of death and liquidation. The city was heavily bombed and transformed into ruins. The authorities didn't know what to do. Initially, thousands of young people were mobilized into the military, but nobody had any idea of what they were going to do. We saw that in the Soviet offices documents and papers were being burned, and that the families of the higher ranking officials were leaving the city in the greatest state of panic. The mobilized forces had no orders as to where they should present themselves, and thousands of them could be seen blocking up all the roads around us.

People were running without any purpose all over the highways. The Soviet radio continuously declared that the Germans had broken through several front line positions, but very shortly they will be thrown back. We believed the radio because we wanted to believe that this was the truth. Nobody could then conceive that in a matter of days the Germans would reach Minsk and Slutsk. Everyone hoped that the former Russian boundary was well fortified and it would be there that the Germans would have their dark downfall.

I Am Caught Up with the Flow

But the brutal march of the Germans surged ahead without stopping. People fled to 'temporarily' get further away from the German soldiers, who most certainly wouldn't take women and children in to forced labor. And this is how I was caught up in the flow, being certain that in a short while, when the Germans will very shortly be thrown back, I will be able to be back with my dearest, with my wife and little daughter.

Who would have then thought that I was taking leave of them forever, and they will survive the purgatory of the ghetto, of suffering, hunger and death? Later I heard of their suffering in the ghetto from Baranovich survivors. They told me that my little daughter would say to her mother: 'Yes, father promised us that he would return, and he will come, but we will no longer be here.' And it is in this fashion that I carry the memory of my dearest in my heart, and [the memory of] their suffering, the memory of the martyrs which I will not forget until my last minute.

On the roads from cities and towns, waves of people streamed, numbering in the tens of thousands from the furthest locations. Single people, families, mostly the young. People ran for hundreds of kilometers, an unnatural strength drove us all forward. Children stood by the way sides. At every turn – German actions. Peasants awaited the German arrival, even going out with bread and salt with which to greet them, having no fear of the retreating Soviet military. To the peasants, the Germans represented a force that would liberate them from the Bolsheviks, and from the Jews. Once we stumbled upon a group of Russian soldiers, well armed, who didn't know what to do with their weapons. Until one of them started to shout: '

Brothers! For whom are we going to spill our blood? It isn't worth waging war! Let us surrender, find a way to go home!' – And indeed, they scattered, leaving their guns and ammunition in the field. Then I saw that for the time being, there was no force that will hold off the Germans in their march deep into Russia.

And so we dragged ourselves over fields and through forests, woods and swamps. Not once was I tempted to stop somewhere in a wooded area, and no longer drag my bloodied feet with their torn shoes. I had a good friend *Chaim Schwartz* with me, a teacher from Baranovich, who pulled me along, comforted me and perked me up, constantly saying: 'Better that we expire from lack of strength than to remain not alive.' I don't know where he is today, that *Chaim Schwatrz*. But if he is alive somewhere, perhaps he will read these lines. I would like him to know how grateful I am my whole life for his help during those days of wandering.

I cannot even remember how long we wandered like that on foot, until we found ourselves on a train, which took us into Russia.

Our transport was one of thousands, full of refugees, who arrived deep inside Russia, far from the war. The front was already far from us. A couple of weeks later, the sun in Central-Asian Bukhara was warming us.

I brought a child from Dereczin to Bukhara that I happened to find in Tashkent among thousands of refugees that had fled. A little boy was running around in that dangerous crowd, and at the top of his lungs was asking if there was anyone there from the Slonim area. I recognized him, it was *Herschel Dworetsky's* son.

Our mutual joy was indescribable. I took him with me and he remained with me until he went into the Soviet military. He remained in Russia after the war, one of the bewildered and lost children of Jewish parents, who through the storm of those years were uprooted from their place.

In Faraway Bukhara

It is hard to describe the life of the refugees, families and single people, old and young, in those far-flung places in faraway Russia. Our concern for our dearest, for the families who had remained behind in the 'old home' in the confinement of ghettoes, as slaves to the accursed German murderers, never left our minds. How many restless days and nightmare-filled nights all of use endured during those years!

The Soviet authorities related to us in the same way it did to its own citizenry, and often with even greater tact and concern. But times were hard for everyone. Not everyone could adapt to the Soviet way of life. No one had a stable place to live, and no one had enough to eat. Those who worked got between 400-600 grams of bread a day, and this also not regularly. Whoever didn't work needed to find sustenance and his own piece of bread by illegal means, and was always exposed to the danger of severe punishment.

Almost everyone went hungry, both local citizens and refugees. One rarely encountered someone who had eaten to satisfaction. And then a typhus epidemic broke out there, and an attack of dysentery also laid out many of the refugees. But the most severe illness that sapped everyone's strength in those years, was malnutrition, the insufficient intake of food. Many of the starving refugees were taken to the hospital, but the meager ration of bread there was too late to save them from death by starvation.

Yiddishkeit During Days of Hunger

It is practically unbelievable, how under such terrible conditions, a Jewish life pulsated through those areas, or better said: a mere shadow of a Jewish life.

I remember how a Jew from Brisk, a scholar, apparently one of the more important *balebatim* in his city, *Reb Zelik* was his name, invited me once to his home to see something that he was certain would please me. He brought me to an impoverished

Bukharan shack. On the ground, sat an old Jew with a long beard. Around him sat many young people and children. With his last ounce of strength, the Rabbi was giving a lesson in the *Gemara*. This was a Yeshivah, with all of the details, just like it was back in our old home in years gone by.

This was the *Kenner Gaon*, whom the war had cast into Bukhara. He had decided to preserve the Jewish spirit among the younger generation, so that he should not, God forbid, pass away among strangers during the war years.

Later, the *Gaon* did pass away in Bukhara, and all of his students escorted him to his final resting place.

It is thanks to the stubbornness and commitment of such precious and faithful Jews, that our people were able to survive their lengthy existence in the Diaspora. We all understood it this way, and therefore looked after the Yeshivah. Not one of us stood down from the need to help. We were people there from many walks of life, raised in many different kinds of youth organizations, and belonged to many [different] parties, – but out there we were all united, and did everything to uphold the Jewish spirit, regardless of the form in which it was expressed. Every little thing that had so any sort of Jewish content to it, received protection from all of us. It was the Zionist ideal that tied us all together.

In the largest common undertaking, we started to study a little *Yiddishkeit*, and especially Jewish history, the Russian Jewish youth itself. These young Jews, who for many years had been uprooted out of their people, were literally drawn to know something about the history of Jewry. We literally could see, how a spark of Jewish patriotism was ignited in their hearts.

On one such evening, when we sat with a larger group of young people, and talked about Jewish matters, an uninvited guest suddenly appeared at the door, that everyone feared. This was a party member, and understand, it was the communist party, an appointee with much responsibility. Angrily he asked what we were all doing here in such a large gathering, since we were neither singing nor were we dancing – only sitting and talking. Not having any option, I told him we were discussing the bitter condition of the refugees who are unable to work. He told us to leave the place immediately, and to never assemble again in such large groups.

A few days after this, at a late evening hour, someone came knocking at my door. I opened it, and saw that stern party member. He asked me to come outside with him. I was very scared, and was prepared to bid my freedom a farewell. I became very moved, when the man showed me a large package, and said to me: 'Here see, take this for the poor refugees.' The package contained things, clothing, which indeed the next morning were distributed among the needy. From that time on, that man was a reliable source of help for the refugees. When he would hear from us about the plight of the Jews, tears would come to his eyes. Later on, he would listen with interest to the debates between the members of *Betar* and *HaShomer Hatza'ir*. And he was sympathetic to the followers of *Jabotinsky*.[133]

Among the Russian Jews there were many who deeply longed for the Land of Israel.

When I was arrested by the N.K.V.D. in 1942, for wanting to enlist in General *Anders* Polish Army, I was questioned for a couple of hours by an interrogator. Suddenly he let me go, asking me why I did not want to remain in Russia, but rather was preparing myself to go to Israel. When I explained to him that I was not thinking at all about going to Israel, but rather to go and fight against Hitler in the ranks of the Polish army, in which I had served before, he answered me with a smile, that all this was for the formality, but he knew the truth well.

My release brought great relief to my acquaintances. I was liable for a severe punishment, because two passports were found on my person, in two different

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133 *Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky* was the founder of the *Betar* movement.

names. The matter became clear to me in 1945, when I met the N.K.V.D. interrogator in Vienna, in the well-known Rothschild Hospital, which served as a transit center for refugees. We embraced and kissed each other with joy. He said to me: 'Then you didn't want to tell me, so I found my own way to the Land of Israel...'

I don't know where he is now, but wherever he might be, may my blessings go with him.

Russia was a good school for communists, where they could educate themselves to the truth about the Bolshevik regime. I must recall *Shmuel* the youth from Dereczin, a hard-bitten communist. It was he who demanded of my father in Dereczin that he turn over the priest, who had hidden himself with us. He served the Soviet authorities faithfully in Dereczin, and when the Russians retreated, they took *Shmuel* with them.

In 1943, *Zacharevich* the photographer came to me and told me that he had met a young man from Dereczin in a terrifying condition. It was *Shmuel.* He had escaped from a labor camp from which he was supposed to be 'made over'...

We took him to us settled him down, dressed him and made him back into a human being. He became a good and faithful Jew, and helped everyone with whatever means were at his disposal. Until he was again arrested and accused of espionage... he was forcibly taken from us, and no one knows where he is now.

The local Bukharan Jews accepted us as brothers, even though we didn't share a common language with them. They were faithful Jews, observing the religious customs, longing for Zion and Jerusalem.

Back to Our Ruined Home

No one knew how long the war would last, and when an end would come to our being tossed around from place to place. Part of the Jewish refugees went into *Anders's* Polish military group, in order to reach the Holy Land through Iran. Others joined the Polish regiments of the Soviet military, organized by the left-wing author *Wanda Wasilewska.* The first, those who went with *Anders,* came to the Land of our Hope and often placed themselves at the service of the leadership of our country. The others joined the bloody march to Berlin, and along the way found cities and town in ruins, without any Jews, and without their nearest and dearest.

After Stalingrad, the front was broken and reversed, and the reverse march of the Germans began. By the summer of 1944, our areas had been liberated, but I didn't reach Baranovich and Dereczin until January 1945. A mild snow was falling, and lightly covered the emptied and destroyed city of Baranovich. There were no Jews, and in general it was empty all around. It is difficult to describe my sorrowful state of mind in those days, when I could find no trace of my little family and of my home.

I traveled to Dereczin with a tremor in my heart. Once, once I think, with eons ago, but it is 4-5 years in total that have passed since that time, I would come home for vacations and find a warm family. Now, after years of being tossed about in faraway, strange regions, I found no one in Dereczin and I wandered about like an orphan over the streets of my youth. Every gentile whom I met looked at me wondering: How is that a Jew survived?

I found a small bit of comfort in Dereczin: two small children of my sister *Malka, together with her husband, 'Nioma Weinstein*, were saved from the massacre and remained alive after so many years of torture, hunger and death. My sister *Malka* wanted to flee with them together, But literally at the last minute, she ran back into the house, to take something for her two small children – the murderers seized her, questioned her under torture until she died of the torture.

I did not recognize the home of my parents. Everything around it was burned, streets, alleys, and roads in general were sort of spilled together as if in one big area of ruin.

Together with a few other surviving Dereczin Jews, we would go every morning to the mass graves in *Blizniansky's* fields, recite the *Kaddish,* cry ourselves out, and again go stumbling back over the ruins in Dereczin.

I worked in Baranovich, but every few days I would travel 'home' to Dereczin, in order to be close to the spirit of my kinfolk, that hovered over the ruins, and to relive the memories of my youth in our town.

Before leaving Dereczin, I fulfilled a mission – I helped Jews smuggle themselves out of Russia into Poland. Until suspicion fell on me, and on May 9, 1945 I left our hometown and went away to Poland.

I found my brother *Ben-Zion* thanks to *Chaykeh Rudenstein.* She found him among those newly co-opted into Poland. She searched for me, and prepared me to meet my brother. She did this with motherly decency, and tenderness, as only she was capable of doing – she, *Chaykeh,* who had to watch how her husband and children were killed, left alone, and found after those terrifying years, a comfort in helping others. It was in this fashion, motherlike and without jealousy, that she protected and raised my sister's children.

But her heart could not long bear such a sorrow and loneliness in which she lived. She left us, here in Israel while still very young.

Since I again found my brother *Ben Zion,* we are together all these years, and we carry with us the sorrow of the annihilation of our family and of our town, Dereczin.

I continued to wander for a little time longer, in Poland, Austria, until I came to Israel in 1949, the only country which is the home of our exhausted people.

From The Foreign Land to the Homeland

By Rivkah Becker
(Original Language: Hebrew)
Translation by Martin Liebman as a kindness to Nancy Phillips
and the family of Ida Becker Phillips

Until the outbreak of the war between Germany and Russia, I was in Dereczin together with my parents and the rest of my family. I worked in the dental office of *Yudl Shelovsky.* The day after the outbreak of the war, the Russians retreated and they sent their families to Russia. All day long the German airplanes circled above our heads.

My mother turned to me and to my sister, and suggested that we gather a few items of clothing, and run into the fields. The next morning, a Russian officer, a Jew who had married *Dvorah Shelkovich,* turned to us and said: whoever wanted to save themselves should run away with us. We followed him, crossed the Shchara River on foot, got guns from the Russians, and arrived at the pre-war Polish-Russian border – Stolbsty. Part of those fleeing, among them my sister, returned to Dereczin, and we remained at the battlefront together with the Russian army. From there I was sent to a Russian hospital at the rear. For four years, I worked at this hospital in the city of Kaluga, near Moscow. When the

Germans got close, I moved with the hospital to Kazakhstan. We were in transit for about two months with the hospital, until we arrived at Penza. With the onset of the German retreat, the hospital was closed down there, and we moved to Vitebsk, and I along with the other personnel worked there until 1944.

In 1945 I was discharged from the army and they sent me back to Dereczin.

While still in Penza, I sent letters to liberated Dereczin, but did not receive a response for a long time. Only in 1945, did a letter arrive from the head of municipal administration of Dereczin, and in it he wrote that no Jews were left in town, since all of them had been wiped out by the Germans.

Upon my arrival in Slonim from Vitebsk in 1945, I found only *Yehuda Lantzevitzky* and *Yankelevich*, in addition to one other family.

I reached Dereczin by way of Zelva. In Dereczin, I found five pits in which our martyrs, who were murdered by the Nazis, had been buried, three pits in the fields behind *Blizniansky*, and two in the old cemetery.

In Dereczin, I found only three Jewish families: *Lozha (Eliezer)*, the hairdresser's (son?), *Zeydl Ferder*, and *Alter Becker*, now my husband.

I lived in Dereczin for about a year. The appearance of the town when I arrived was horrible: The market and the *Deutsche Gasse* were burned, the courtyard of the synagogue stood on its desolation – burned. Everything had gone up in flames. The only houses on the market street that survived were: the house of *Yehuda Wolfowitz*, and behind it the house of *Feitl Busak*, and of *Buma Grachuk*, whereas the *Zelva Gasse* had remained intact. The families that had survived lived together in the *Kwiat* house on the *Zelva Gasse*.

When the Russians permitted the Poles to leave Dereczin, we went with them to Lodz. Before leaving Dereczin, we all gathered, the survivors, at the grave sites, recited *Kaddish* and *El Moleh Rakhamim*, crying with torn hearts. That is how we took leave of our parents, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, holy and pure.

After the pogrom in Kielce, we decided to leave Lodz and move to Varotslav, and from there we smuggled ourselves across the border to Czechoslovakia. The Czech border guards caught us, and wanted to send us back to Poland. After crying and pleading, they agreed to send us to Prague. We moved to a refugee camp in Czechoslovakia, and from there to Germany. Here we met other natives of Dereczin. In Germany, my husband and I spent three years in the refugee camp. In the camp, my husband opened a bakery, and in it baked Challah for the Sabbath, and used it to keep food warm for the Sabbath.

In 1949 we arrived in Israel.

Torn Out of the Pulpit at Sinaiska

By Rabbi Israel ben Ch. M. Kaplinsky

(Original Language: Hebrew)

On *Lag B'Omer* of 5694 (1933), I came to occupy the pulpit in the settlement of (Kolonia) Sinaiska, one of the rare settlements of Jewish farmers, that had been founded more than a century before. I had been invited to serve as the Rabbi at the recommendation of *Rabbi Moshe* of Zelva, a reputable Jewish scholar. My memory of the things that were agreed to and signed by me and the heads of the Sinaiska community included these conditions: The heads of the community undertook to provide for me and my family from their agricultural produce, such as vegetables and fruits, milk and dairy products, and also to provide for a financial income through the sale of candles, and a portion of the tax on meat; and on my side, I undertook to deal with all questions and answers pertaining to religious law; to deliver a sermon on the Sabbath prior to all holidays; to direct a lesson for the *Shas* study group, and *Mishnah;* to oversee the education of the younger generation and to facilitate the admission of those deemed qualified, to the Yeshivah in Slonim. Apart from me there was a ritual slaughterer in the colony, an observant and scholarly Jew.

Over time, the bond between me and the settlers of Sinaiska grew strong, and became a bond of strong friendship. The Jews of Sinaiska, almost all of whom were tillers of the soil, both straight and diligent, extracted their sustenance from the earth and were observant Jews. They related to me with the respect due a Rabbi, and always showed concern that my family and I should not lack for anything. I, on my part also tried to satisfy their desires. At every happy occasion of a family event, my house was always open to each and every one. Occasionally they would come to ask me for personal or family advice; even the gentiles in the area were friendly in their relationship to me, and always received me with favor.

In 1934, approximately 13 families from the settlement made *aliyah* to the Holy Land, with the help of the farmers union in the Holy Land, whose special emissary was *Mr. Sitkov*, ל"ז. The departure of these families was felt very deeply in the settlement, because they represented about a third of all residents.

There was a *Heder* in the settlement, where boys and girls were taught together, and their combined number was about 13-15, taught by a *Rebbe* who was invited each 'season.'

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Jews that fled Poland passed through the settlement. The entire community welcomed them with open arms, and provided them with all assistance possible. With the Russian occupation of the eastern part of Poland, the Sinaiska colony passed under Soviet rule. Conditions changed for the worse, in particular my own circumstances. In my capacity as a Rabbi, I was like thorns in the eyes of the regime, those pursuers of 'justice and equality,' and the gentiles who before had treated me with respect, changed their tune, and began to spout the Soviet line known for its sarcasm. My position was entirely bad, and I concluded that I had no future in this place, and I even was at risk to being sent to the land to exile, Siberia, as they had done to other Rabbis already. It was then that I decided to endanger my life and that of my family, and flee in a short while from the talons of these beasts of prey. Fearful that they would deny me the permission to leave, I told the authorities that I had been invited to take a pulpit in another city, and secretly fled with my family. After wandering along the way, and many tribulations, I reached Vilna, which at that time was [still] in the hands of the Lithuanians. In one of our wanderings, as we sneaked across the Lithuanian border, I was apprehended by the Lithuanian border guards, I was taken a prisoner, and I was brought to a police station in a small town beside the border, my wife and children had not succeeded in crossing the border, and I didn't know their fate. The head of the police station, an anti-Semite, was delighted in

having a Jewish Rabbi fall into his hands, an illegal alien, and I didn't know what awaited me. And the Good Lord gave me an idea and advice, and I succeeded in getting away from the tyrant. There were two rooms in the police station, the chief sat in one, and I was sat down in the second, until such time that a policeman would come to put me into a jail cell. The door to the room was open, and trusting in God, I quietly slipped out and ran. On the bench I left a small package, and I said to myself that if God forbid they should seize me, I will justify my absence by saying that I had gone to buy cigarettes and food. In leaving the police station, I ran to a Jewish home and called out loudly: 'Merciful Jews, please rescue me!' And the members of the household indeed did rescue me, opening up their cellar that was beneath the floor, and putting me inside, while placing a piece of furniture on top of the cellar door. And that is how I spent a full day and night in the cellar, the police meanwhile turned the town upside down in its search for me, but with God's help, they didn't find me. The Jews decided to save me from this danger, and they cut off my beard, and I took on the appearance of a younger man without facial hair. They dressed me as a wagon driver, sat me on a wagon along with another wagon driver, and got me out of the town, and that's how I got to Vilna. After a little while, my wife and children also arrived in Vilna.

In time, many students of the *Mirrer* Yeshivah gathered and were concentrated there, and we succeeded, by means of a variety of subterfuges and with the help of intermediaries, in getting a transit visa to Japan. An entire group of students from the *Mirrer* Yeshivah reached the Japanese city of Kobe by airplane, and we remained there with the people from the Yeshivah and studied together, with support from the 'Joint' and the Aid Society of the Organization of American Rabbis in America, and the Jews of the Kobe community. Our circumstances were good, we were able to sit and study Torah.

At the end of 1941, two weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese authorities did not want to extend our stay, and they exiled us to Shanghai, which at that time was a free city captured by the Japanese. Our circumstances became very difficult. We lived in substantial deprivation from lack of any assistance. For 28 months we were concentrated in a special ghetto, until the end of the world war. In Elul of 1946, we succeeded in reaching the United States, with the help of my family that had sent me an invitation and funds for the journey.

Here, in the United States we began to feel the great freedom. Despite the great distance, I remain in touch with the people of Sinaisk who are found in the Holy Land, and I 'come together' with them in the exchange of letters, and with God's help, I was privileged to visit our Holy Land twice together with my family, and met with the people of Sinaisk who welcomed me with joy and sincerity. With all the pain and enervation over the destruction of the Sinaisk settlement, along with the entire sacred [Jewish] communities at the hands of the Nazis ימ"ש, I was gladdened to find a portion of the residents of Sinaisk that were privileged to make *aliyah*, and put down roots in our Land, and all of us, with God's help, were privileged to witness the establishment of Israel and the miracles and wonders done by the Holy One, Blessed Be He, who caused all our enemies to be brought low by our own soldiers, heroes of Israel. And my prayer to the God of Israel is that we be privileged to see the coming of the Messiah, our righteous one, quickly in our day, Amen.

On the Ruins

Back in Dereczin

By Sarah Wachler-Ogulnick
(Original Language: Yiddish)

On July 13, 1944, a two-year period of my service in the partisan movement came to an end. On that day, the female partisans received a document attesting to the fact that they took part in the war against the German occupation forces. The men were sent to the front with the Soviet army. Those few Jews who managed to remain alive after those hard years in the partisans, ended up in different campaigns, as members of the army that fought with the Germans until Berlin fell. They exacted revenge for all the things that the Germans did to us. Only very few remained alive after that terrifying Hell, that they had to survive, and whose story could not be told to date.

The few women from Dereczin began to go home to Dereczin from the forest – back to that home which no longer existed. I am drawing close to the mass graves, where our dear ones and kinfolk lay – the innocent, the tortured, the murdered, torn from life by the German murderers. For what reason?! For what purpose?! Tears choked me. But to what purpose will crying help at this point? To this day, I wish the entire German nation and its children the taste of the feeling experienced by all Jews, that suffered under the Nazi rule, waiting day by day for death – till the day of the massacre, and the cruelty, the indescribable scenes of that terrifying day of slaughter. They sentenced our brothers and sisters without cause for blame, except for the 'sin' of being a Jew. But they, the German nation, of Hitler's herd of wolves, the nation of systematized brutality – they deserve an end like the one we got! They wipe out the larger part of European Jewry – they, both the bad and the 'good' Germans. Whoever didn't observe them during their actions, cannot imagine what a nation of murderers looks like, with murder in their eyes, with destructive methods, with completely developed plans for the extermination of a people. But even vengeance, the greatest possible revenge, cannot still the pain and will not heal the wound that was inflicted on every one of us, and the general Jewish population, by the murder of our loved ones, and the hundreds of Jewish communities.

With these sorrowful thoughts and burning hatred, I listlessly dragged myself around Dereczin for a long time, aimlessly wandering about her burned out and destroyed streets. Everything had been burned, and was already overgrown with grass. Everything had been wrecked, flattened to the ground. It is desolate, and no living thing can be seen. There is a deathly silence on the streets and byways. Only on the other side of town, near *Beckenstein's* mill, several peasant wagons are standing. Like a needle to the heart and brain, a thought stabs me that in this very spot, three to four years ago, there was a life, with streets and houses, with stores and synagogues, with young people, with dreams, ideals, and with all the good and hard times of a pulsating Jewish existence. Why right here was the Schulhof, and here – the market square with the pretty little gardens in front of the houses, and there – the barracks. Only the church and its chapel are still standing, as if to add insult to injury, with their crosses high in the sky.

Now I am coming to the place where only a few years ago, *Shmuel Abelovich* and his wife *Basha* lived with their two daughters, *Tzippeh & Shayndeleh. Tzippeh* was my childhood friend. We used to do our homework together. What a warm Jewish household this was! I felt such dedication and love between the walls of their house. Now there is no one here, who can tell of the suffering and agony, the feelings and thoughts of the family in the last minutes of their lives...

Past their house is the burned and wrecked Schulhof. I used to be there so often, at the house of the Rabbi, where my two friends lived, *Malka & Zina Dubinchik* ל"ז. The murderers didn't let anyone go. The brutality of the German actions becomes even sharper when one walks the ruins of the streets of a life that once was.

Here, among the overgrown ruins was the house of my friend, *Elkeh Lifshovich, Noah's* daughter. Here she grew up in a well-to-do family with such fine children. *Dora Ogulnick* lived here as well. We were in the same class and studied together, dreamed together, strove – and now I stand here alone, with my memories and with an ache in my heart for those young lives that were prematurely cut off.

I am finally coming to *Slonim Gasse.* Our house once stood here. O, woe, woe is me, what is left of it! A desolation, one sees only a pit, where the cellar of our house was. There are fused pieces of glass lying about in that corner where in the attic the Passover paraphernalia was stored...

My family had been here, people lived, worked, suffered and hoped, they made themselves happy and always waited for something better to come along. Here, in the house that used to stand in this place, children laughed and sang, they played, jumped, now they, together with their parents, with friends and comrades, all, all in the graves about, – and I am still alive. To this day I do not know by what Providence I came to remain alive out of all my relatives and loved ones.

I stand in front of my burned out house, and before my teary eyes, the memories of our recent past go by. Friday nights at home, the candles flickering happily with their Sabbath light streaming through all the windows, the bright table with all the delicacies on the white tablecloth, my father making *Kiddush,* and our choral response of 'Amen...' It was so Sabbath-like and festive, a form of sanctity descended on our heads, a holiness that can no longer be found today.

I take leave of my former home with sorrowful steps. I am now on the *Sovicher Gasse.* There, all my girlfriends would gather at the house of *Rachel Nozhnitsky,* who was one of the best students in the class. In their house we felt the best of all the places we went. Around their house they had a beautiful orchard with fruits and beanstalks. One could breathe so freely there, the trees and fields always created a good mood in us. In the spring and summertime, being there was like being in a *Dacha.* We would go out for a walk in the field very early in the morning, picking flowers, singing, telling each other different things, serious and joking, and our song and laughter carried far over the green fields. In the *Nozhnitsky* house itself, was suffused with such a warmth and love between the parents, *Rachel's* two sisters, *Yehuditkeh & Miniyeh,* and the two little brothers ל"נ. We would gather at their home in the winter, during the intense cold as well. It was always warm and cozy there. *Rachel's* parents never made a remark to the effect that we might be disturbing anyone with our joyful conversation and singing. I remember the mother, *Tamar,* so well, and the grandmother, *Rivkah,* like two quiet doves in the warm house of this loving family. The father of the family would come home late from work, but even then he was loving, good and still, and this made such a strong impression on all of us, that we went home with great pleasure.

And now, I stand beside the grave of such a warm family life, that will never return. What dear people, so ideal, community oriented a Jewish life – everything, everything was cut down, together with all the dear people of Dereczin and from hundreds of cities and towns...

Apart from the pain in my heart, my visit to Dereczin only served to strengthen my enmity toward those who – for no purpose of their own, or for the world – murdered a Jewish civilization. I observed a small revenge taken on the Germans, but this is like a drop in the water.

What have I got left to do in desolate Dereczin? To look at the put up faces of the Christians, who speak as if with pity on us, and who in their hearts gloat over taking our booty, with the houses that did remain intact, in which they conceal stolen valuables from our families? To feel sorry for those Christian families that remained without a way to make a living, because without Jews there was no one to whom to sell and for whom to work, from whom to buy and have a garment altered?

I don't want any of their pity. I feel no pity for them.

My hometown was still and sad. I left her ruins quietly and sadly.

But I will remember our Dereczin to my last day, where I was raised, went to school, dreamed, and in whose soil the bones of our martyrs lie. Here, they were driven across the streets and byways, with little children in their arms, overcome to their hearts, on their last gray walk – the men, who might perhaps have been able to save themselves, but chose rather to die with their wives, the parents, who together with their little children, went to the death pits...

Our martyrs, fathers, and mothers, brothers and sisters! May your souls be bound up in the bond of life!

No Where to Return

By Chaya Beckenstein-Pilzer
(Original Language: Yiddish)

The tragedy became clear to me when the war ended, and I found out that there was no place to which to return. We met up with the Russian army that was advancing to the front, and they liberated all the partisans, to permit them to return home and be reunited with their families. I knew the bitter truth, that there was nobody waiting for me, and I had no one to go to. I requested that they take me to the front, but this didn't help. I had to go wherever they sent me. And I arrived in Horodishch, a small town between Baranovich and Novogrudok. I worked there for the procurator, and I was promised that as soon as the war was over, I would be sent to school (this is what I wanted). My life there was very gray. I made the acquaintance of the few Jews that remained alive in town – the four *Mirsky* sisters. I used to run into them on Yom Kippur to ask how much longer I needed to fast, and when Christians would bring me chickens, eggs and butter to pay for me for preparing a document for them to the authorities, I would show them by hand, that they should take it across the way (to where the sisters lived).

One time, I decided to travel to Dereczin to see what and who might have remained. The very thought frightened me, but I screwed up my courage, and went on my way. There were no regular means of communication, so I had to stand by the side of the road and hitch a ride with army transport vehicles going in that direction. I traveled to Baranovich, later to Slonim, Zelva, and in this way, to Dereczin. When I rode into town, and the soldiers asked me where I wanted to be let off, I didn't know what to say. Everything that I saw was in ruins, with the sky around us. Until I spotted the Catholic church, which was when I realized that I was on the outskirts of the town. So I alighted, thanked the soldiers, and went in the general direction of the houses near the church. With tears in my eyes and my heart beating wildly, I went into a house, and the woman recognized me, saying that I must be one of the *Beckensteins.* When I calmed down from crying, I discovered that there were a few Jews in town. She told me where I could find them, and I went away. In what had been a whiskey distillery, I found *'Nioma Weinstein* and his children, and *Chaykeh* from the mill. I became aware that a number of other families were to be found in Dereczin. I became extremely discouraged, seeing how they had to live

among the ruins. I could not comprehend how they were able to live among the gentiles, and the graves of their beloved and dear ones. They all told me that they would not remain in Dereczin for much longer. Angered and embittered, I forsook my dear little town of Dereczin, never to return to its ruins.

On the Ruins of the Dreams of My Youth

By Masha Kulakowski

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Mournful and bareheaded, we emerge from the forest and turn our faces – to Dereczin, our birthplace, the place of our childhood dreams.
We travel by wagon, with thousands of soldiers passing us by. We have already been liberated, but the missions are not yet over. They surge westward, to the front that has moved past Volkovysk. They are pursuing the Nazi Monster, in order to wipe it out entirely.

We reached Dereczin the day after we came out of the forest. A small group of Jews gathered in the town. We were greeted by the graves of the Jews, of brothers and sisters. Our hearts stopped. A few Poles come out in the streets, astonished to see those who were able to overcome the enemy and to return to their homes.

But there is no 'home.' The lion's share of the town had been transformed into a pile of rubble. Only a few of the houses of the Jews remained [standing], and we head for them.

What shall we do? How can we settle in these houses, when we can see the graves across the way, when we have to live next to the Christians – and we remember the depredations during the days of the Nazi occupation, their behavior on the day of the massacre. Lo, we don't even have a common language of discourse, and their attempt to ingratiate themselves arouses heartburn in us.

On the first day, it was already apparent to us that we could not stay here much longer. The aspiration of our youth, to make *aliyah* to the Holy Land, was rekindled within us with intensity.

We began to work, because according to the Soviet regulations, whoever doesn't work – doesn't eat. Surprisingly, units sprang up from the organizers that sent emissaries from Soviet Russia to do both farming or selling. They did not consider the fact that the Jews emerged from the forests weakened and exhausted. It was these in particular that they wanted to enlist in this sort of work in faraway lands.

It didn't take long before my husband, *Abraham* crossed the border to Poland. Several months later, I also reached Bialystock.

At first, I saw organized Jewish life in Bialystock, after the great destruction that overtook us. Yet, there were very few Jews there as well, and even these were a source of irritation in the eyes of the Christians. But there was a kitchen set up for those returning, and we would get one free meal there a day. But our living conditions, particularly the place where we lived was very hard to bear. But even more difficult were the relationships between the Christians and Jews. Several murders of Jews that had survived the Holocaust, occurred, and naturally, none of the murderers were ever found.

At the same time, when it was nearly impossible to find food, it was possible to buy soap, which on its wrapper were stamped the three German letters, *R.J.F.* – *Reine Jüdische Fett* – Pure Jewish Fat.

We celebrated the *Sukkot* festival in the city, and a number of *minyans* were organized, but services were conducted with bitter weeping.

Very quickly, my illusions from the forest, that relations between Jews and Christians would get better, were shattered on the hard rock of reality.

We decided to leave Bialystock, arranged for the necessary permits, and continued on to Lublin. There were more Jews there, but our contact with them left us depressed. There were many among them who had very recently come out of hiding, and were of a mind that they were saved from death by a miracle. There was one whom the Germans had attempted to slaughter – and he came out with his throat slit, and walked among us with a mechanically-aided breathing apparatus. And there were children there, offspring of Czech Jews, that the Germans drove to slaughter literally in the final days, but a Soviet tank blocked their way to the Nazi lines -- the Germans were killed and the children were given into the hands of Jews. They, along with others who were rescued walked among us silently, turned inward, because one could still see the terror in their eyes.

We visited the death camps at Majdanek, and we heard of the judgement meted out to the Germans who had been captured in this camp, about their execution – yet anti-Semitism continued to roil around us wherever we went. We decided to leave Poland. We wandered from city to city in the area of the Czech border. The Polish winter left its mark on us, we were dressed thinly and the cold was unbearable.

And in this fashion, we crossed the Czech border by way of an unmarked road. From there, we made our way to Germany – and we went through many more wandering before we reached the Land of our Forefathers.

From Forest Bunkers to Mass Graves

By Malka Bulkovstein
(Original Language: Yiddish)

The Germans retreat. We still remain concealed in bunkers – until the day came that we emerged from hiding.

The family compound received an order to assemble in the partisan camp. We had a long way to go, and far to travel. In the Dobrovshchina [forest] we met with high-ranking officers of the Soviet army. We asked them if we could go home, to which they answered: 'No, don't go yet, stay here for another week. You have survived so much, and waited so long to be liberated, wait a little longer before you go back home...'

Exactly a week later, on the anniversary of the great massacre in Dereczin, we arrived 'home' on a Friday night. We ran the last few kilometers, we didn't walk. We were shot at from the corn fields,

but we arrived in Dereczin. Among all the burned houses, our house stood intact. Two Christian families were living in it, from the worst sort in town, *Mikhash Kachuk* and *Aganowski*. The latter immediately vacated the premises the morning after our arrival, but *Kachuk* stayed with us for about another month.

Sunday we went to the mass graves. You can imagine how we felt, as we stood by the mounds of earth, adjacent to *Shelovsky's* mill, where the bones of our nearest and dearest lay. Later we found scattered bones of hands and feet, which we buried, and we put a fence around the grave. As long as we were in Dereczin that location was guarded. Now, I have no idea what remains of the mass grave.

Orphaned, Abandoned, and Hopeless

By Moshe & Israel Kwiat
(Original Language: Hebrew)

...Like a vessel filled with shame, so does a Jew feel in his own town. Few among many, abandoned, strangers. Like a thief, he steals across the plaza of the desolated city. Even the farmers are not anxious to come to town: there is no one to sell to, and nothing to buy. They come into town at the beginning of the week, or on holidays, near the church, and upon seeing a Jewish resident of the town, proclaim in loud wonderment: – How did you stay alive?

The Jews live crowded together out of necessity, in order to mitigate the feeling of pain, the sense of fright and desolation brought on by the echoes of their kin that were exterminated.

The conversations? Words of mourning for the dead.

Young men were required to enlist immediately after the liberation, and only few of the young people remained in town usually because of assuming a responsible position in a place of work. The value of a life was frightening, and pay was low. Various necessities could be procured, but only on the black market.

We had many troubles before we left Dereczin: could one continue to live a miserable life near the graves of our dead, without being able to look the Gentiles in the eye, who conveyed such astonishment that you remained alive? Or to leave the Valley of Death, and set out on a journey with the hope of reaching a more hospitable land? But how could we abandon the graves of the dead? It seemed to us that they were looking at us with reproving eyes: don't leave us!

Before Rosh Hashanah 5706 (1945), we left Dereczin. The few Gentiles who knew about our departure promised: we will tell our children who will come after us that [here] there once was a Jewish people that Hitler exterminated, and Jews lived even in our town...

Maybe they will fulfil their promise, but how will coming generations of these Gentiles understand these tales? For the town lies in ruins, and there is no one to rebuild it from its wreckage. The few Jews scattered to the four corners of the globe – and they are the only ones who mourn the destruction of their town and their community.

A Kosher Passover Among the Ruins

By Nekhama Petrukhovich

(Original Language: Yiddish)

When we were in the forest, partisans told us that our house had not been burned down, and stood intact – as if it were awaiting our return. So I thought to myself, if the ever-loving God would bring us out of this alive and well to home, I would make my house open to everyone.

And when we finally arrived in Dereczin, bread was indeed baked in my home, often two bakings a day, and this was not a burden to me. This was after our arrival from the forest.

In the meantime, winter passed, and as the Passover season drew near, my husband and I began to prepare us to make an effort to bake matzoh for the survivors. We found rolling pins and wheels in the attic, baking materials we obtained from the gentiles, and we koshered everything scrupulously. We also obtained boards. Everything was ready to begin baking – but we were missing our dearest ones, and there was no holiday joy among us.

Everyone got together, though, and began to bake the matzoh. We had enough matzoh for everyone – and how many of us were there anyway? We even baked for *Isser Mekhess* and sent him the matzoh to Zelva, and for *Noah Goldberg* and for the *Shelkoviches,* who also came to participate in our Seders. All the [remaining] Jews of Dereczin came to the Seders in our house. We also made mead from honey, put seasonal beets on the table – it was a Seder with all the details attended to...

It was a kosher Passover, but without our nearest and dearest, a kosher but sad Passover among the ruins of Dereczin.

Among Ruined Streets and Lanes

By Meir Bakalchuk

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Translated by Miriam Kreiter

No one knew or could anticipate when the war would end. When we were living far and deep in [the heart of] vast Russia, with an open wound in our hearts after being uprooted from our cities and families, no one could know when he would again be 'at home,' and whom he would find there. No one knew whether we would ever find anyone "in this life" or who it would be. In our worst nightmares, no one could imagine the terrifying destruction that had befallen everyone and everything we held dear.

After the defeat of the German army in Stalingrad a spark of hope ignited our hearts: soon we might be able to return to our homes. The first witnesses to the tragedy and destruction of the Jews during the German occupation were those who voluntarily joined the Polish regiments of the Red Army, organized by the Polish leftist writer, *Wanda Wasilewska.*

The number of Jews in the Polish regiments was not large, and many of them fell in the terrible battles against the German army. But they had the privilege of bringing the first assistance to those Jews who had managed to survive miraculously, through pain and hunger, the terrible ordeals of the German occupation. And they lived to exact vengeance from those Germans and their allies whom they encountered in the liberated areas. But they were also the first to witness the scene of the destruction of our cities and our families.

The news of the great tragedy reached us from

various sources, and still there remained in our hearts a remnant of hope that our nearest and dearest had succeeded in saving themselves.

Each one of us was yearning to go home hoping to find someone. On January 2, 1945, I arrived by train in Baranovich. A gentle, white snow fell on the city, but in my heart there was black darkness. All around me, there was darkness, as soon as I found out that there were no more Jews and there was no trace of my wife, children, relatives, and acquaintances. Together with a few other Jews, we wandered through the streets, ashamed and guilty: we saved ourselves, and our dear ones had perished. The brutal images of anguish that my dearest ones suffered in the last days of their existence would not let me rest.

From Baranovich I went to Dereczin. In place of that warmth with which I was usually received every time I came home, this time I was greeted by a destroyed house. I fell into a total void. No one welcomed me, no one extended his hand to me. A gentile would pass by and wonder why I, a Jew, was still among the living.

One spark of good fortune dominated my mood during those desolate days: my sister *Malka's* two little children, *Mosheleh* and *Feigeleh*, and her husband *'Nioma Weinstein*, managed to remain in hiding through the occupation, and they survived. My sister *Malka* perished. She was supposed to go into hiding together with her husband and children, but at the last moment she went back to her home to pick some things up for her children. The police caught her, tortured her, and wanted to extract the hiding place of her children and husband – and she died of the torture she received at their murderous hands. Today, the children with their father are living in America. Do they remember how their loyal mother paid with her life in order to save them?

I did not recognize the home of my parents in Dereczin. Everything around was in cinders. I walked around to all the places where once we played as children, but it all looked like a cemetery. The souls of my family, friends, and acquaintances floated around me in my imagination.

I think that these holy souls demand from me that I tell the world their story, so that the memory of the destruction of the homes and families remains alive. Each house had its own story; each family had their own life.

I wander around the ruins and suddenly my ears ring with the melody of the voice of Cantor *Beshkin* of Dereczin. I see his imposing presence in front of me, wrapped in his prayer shawl, as he stands in the Great Synagogue on Rosh Hashanah singing *Nesane Tokef*. With his strong voice, his sings out the words "..and as in a dream, he will fly off..." and "Is not Ephraim dear to me as a son...." He was lucky to have departed this earth before the war and did not have to live through the tragedy and the years of the Nazi Hell.

And here was the home of the pharmacist, which for us was always a symbol of culture, knowledge, and ideals.

And here was the home of *Berl Kirschner*, who was always an integral part of Dereczin. And here lived *Shalom Sakar*. And suddenly, I remember the constant smile of *Bomeh Grachuk*, whose children were the leaders of the Dereczin youth, proud and intelligent. *Leibeh Bialosotsky* who never had an argument with anyone and led a very quiet existence without complaints or demands. And the extensive family of the *Beckensteins*. The home of *Shelovsky*, with their decency, culture and calm. And there was the house of *Feiveh Blizniansky* with his stormy life, the permanent leader of prayer in the Rabbi's *Bet HaMidrash*. We will never again hear his chants on the eve of the Day of Atonement : *'Hineni....'*

All, all those Jews of Dereczin passed through my memory in those days of my wandering around the ruins. I hope they will forgive me if I find it perhaps hard to remember them all now, but they are all very dear to me today, just as they were then as I wandered among the ruins of Dereczin. They were dear to me as I remembered the large *Neuer Gasse*

of the hard-working Jewish tradesmen and the alley, where the shoemakers' synagogue and the tailors' synagogue always stood open, with their worshipers, all those Jews, who with the sweat of their brows tried to eke out a living.

Not I, but those who lived through the hell of Nazi occupation, and the heroically fought partisan war will tell of instances of Jewish self-worth and pride that emerged even during those years of suffering and denigration. But with all that, I must mention the name of *Mendel Feldman*, who by his death, ennobled the name of all worthy Jews.

The *Feldman* family did not belong to the traditional Dereczin generation, but it was a Jewish family, whose family head would come with everybody else into the synagogue during the High Holydays and on a Sabbath. *Mendel Feldman* was always well-dressed, friendly and correct in his relationships and conversation with each and every person. At the same time, he was helpful and approachable to all those who would come to him as the Chairman of the Jewish community and the head of the Zionist movement in Dereczin.

Everyone knows how proudly he acquitted himself in responding to the German murderers – they did not kill him, he took his life when he saw that everything was lost and that the fate of the Jews was doomed. The Germans did not succeed in breaking his Jewish pride. To the last moment, he retained his godly image.

★

For several months, when I would come to Dereczin after work in Baranovich, I would wander from time to time in the ruins of my hometown, and the entire Jewish community would pass before my eyes, from rich to poor, from great to small - all, all of them to this day, after their destruction, who are even dearer and more beloved than ever.

Derecziners in America

The Founding of the "Derecziner Society"

By Joe (Jonah) Silkovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photos: Joe (Jonah) Silkovich & his wife ז"ל (p. 412)
The Committee of the Dereczin Society of America (Individuals not identified) (p. 413)

Our society was founded by the first Derecziners who had arrived in America over sixty years ago. Immigration was substantial at that time, and the admission to America was – unrestricted. Whoever had the money to buy passage on a ship could come to America.

Who emigrated then? People who found it difficult to make a living in the old country, in the cities and towns of the Pale of Settlement in the large expanse of Czarist Russia. The emigration from Dereczin was of this kind also. Also, Jews who were blessed by God with five and six daughters, voyaged to America to make a little bit of money for dowries for their daughters. Many Jews in those years came actually only for a few years, and then went back to their homes and families.

Those who had decided to remain in America and later send for their families were lonely individuals, full of yearning for their old home, where they had left behind a peaceful small-town way of life, and to a traditional life style. Being so alone, without their kin or a common language, *landsleit* from various cities began to meet periodically, and it was in this fashion that the various "Societies" were founded, in which people found a solace for their loneliness.

Our Dereczin Society was founded this way as well. First of all, the founders learned how such a society had to be run. It is necessary to put together and write down a constitution of the society, elect a president, a vice-president, a secretary, finance secretary and hospitaler. The president runs the meetings, the secretary records the minutes in the folio, the finance secretary handles money matters, the hospitaler concerns himself with members who have fallen ill, visiting them and bringing them their sick benefits, a small sum of money which the sick person is able to use to support themselves for a significant period of time, while he is not working and has no income during the period of his illness.

Our society was very active from the time it was first founded. We had frequent meetings, and met with great feeling, as if we were all still in the old country, in Dereczin. We all kept close to one another. When new arrivals came from Dereczin, they immediately joined the society. In this manner we grew to between 150 -160 members.

When we younger people came to America and joined our society, it became somewhat more enlivened, – the leadership [became] more liberal and free. When one came to a meeting, one felt like one was among his own kind.

The society did many good things for its members, helped them in their time of need, took care of their families that were distant – and when it happened that one of the members managed to work his way up and begin to earn a little more, forgetting his wife and children in Dereczin, falling in love with another woman, without a kerchief and wig on her head – the society would send for the wife and children, bring them to their husband and father in America, and made him a "surprise."

In those years it was fashionable to arrange an annual ball with music. The young people would come to spend time and dance away the whole night. Many who didn't live in New York, would journey to attend these balls. We knew, that at these balls, banquets and meetings, we would be able to meet all the Derecziners.

Not all of our *landsleit* joined the society. There were instances where a Derecziner would fall in love with a girl from a different city or country, as for example, a *Galitzianer* girl, and he left to become a member in the society of the bride's father – even though he felt like a stranger there, and even

didn't understand their speech.

When the stream of emigration fell off, the activities of the society fell off as well. But during the years of the First World War and immediately thereafter, we formed an aid committee, that initially was established by natives who were Bundists, and to which other Derecziners were subsequently attracted. All the Derecziners would come to its meetings, we gathered funds, helped set up a credit union in Dereczin, and opened a modern school for the children.

The years went by again, and the Second World War came upon us like a storm, with its terrible tragedies. We became active once again, Bundists and Zionists together, even those who were not members in our society. We called meetings in private homes, raised money to send relief packages to the surviving refugees, who were at that time still in camps in Germany, Italy. We sent help to those who arrived in the Holy Land after long years of wandering, and to us in America. Our wives organized a special 'Ladies Auxiliary' – a women's aid society, and did significant and important work. More that 700 packages were sent to our brothers and sisters, the refugees that survived alive after the exterminations, in the camps.

This work was accomplished through the members of the committee and by the society, together with other volunteer Dereczin *landsleit,* and even non-Derecziners.

The following were active: *Berkowitz, Minkowitz, Nathan Bliss* ע"ה, *Mr. & Mrs. Silkovich, Rachel Feldman, Mr. & Mrs. Abramovich.* Our trustworthy *Kadish Feder* put in a lot of work along with his wife and two sisters. They would personally pack the packages, after the ladies would buy the various products and clothing, all of this being done like a sacred duty, in the evening hours after a full day's work. This was done in *Feder's* store, and he would then take care of expediting their delivery.

Many of those, who helped out with this important and difficult work, are to our sadness, no longer with us today. Let us remember them and honor their memory.

Now the society is small, but it is much like it was before. Everything that involves the memory of Dereczin is dear to us, precious and holy.

We are all impatiently waiting for the *Dereczin Yizkor Book*, for which we have done as much as we could. The Book will serve as a memorial to our brothers and sisters who were wiped out, and as a link that will tie us all together, the Derecziners who live in Israel, in America, and the world at large.

The Work of the Dereczin Relief Committee in New York

By Abraham Kadish Feder
Secretary, Relief Committee
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photos: Fanny Berman-Feder (p. 415)
Ida Sarnatsky-Feder (p. 416)
Facsimile of thank-you note to Fanny Berman for $100 donation (p. 419)

I wish to tell everything that I remember about the ***Dereczin Relief Committee,*** from when it was founded to its last days. If various dates, names and numbers don't jibe exactly, then I ask your forgiveness, because I am writing from memory.

It is true that the complete material for the entire period had been in my possession, concerning our relief work done in New York: all the correspondence from Derecziners who survived, sent from the various camps, all together a couple of hundred letters; all the minutes of our meetings;

letters from our *landsleit* in America, letters from Israel, correspondence with agencies; copies of all letters we sent out; newspaper ads; Lists of the funds we allocated and sent to Israel. I kept all of this material up to a couple of years ago, and I am terribly frustrated now that I no longer have it. We could have used a part of this relief material for the *Yizkor Book*.

I am therefore writing this from memory, but I do believe that I am telling the essentials.

During the war years, starting in 1941 or 1942, the Dereczin Society in New York called a meeting of all Derecziner *landsleit* that lived in New York. The purpose of the meeting was – to start doing something for our beloved town of Dereczin.

This was in the midst of the heat of war, at a time when dark clouds were hanging over the world, and Jews in Europe were engulfed by the flames of war. The Nazi armies marched from one country to the next and from city to city at lightning speed.
As soon as they occupied a city, their first awful objective was to torture or exterminate the Jewish populace using all manner of terrifying means. Thousands upon thousands of Jews, our brethren in Israel, had already been wiped out by then. We, in America did not yet fully comprehend the extent of the catastrophe, the monumental tragedy that befell our nearest and dearest in our ancestral home Dereczin, along with the entire Jewish population in the lands occupied by the Nazis. Reports concerning these matters in the newspapers were short and meager, but enough to alarm all of us.

At the time of our meeting to which the members of the Dereczin society were called, a sum of money was raised, and immediately a committee was formed that was called the 'Dereczin Relief Committee.' The following *landsleit* joined the committee: *Jonah Silkowitz, Seelah Silkowitz, Nathan Bliss, Shifra Bliss, Yitzhak Berkowitz, Fanny Berman, Hirschel Feder, Ida Sarnatsky, Rosa Siskind, Itzl Weissberg, Rachel Efras, Joe Abramowitz, Moshe Goldfarb, Moshe Bliss, Becky Mikatsky.* All who were nominated for the committee were elected: *Yitzhak Berkowitz* - President; *Abraham Kadish Feder* - Secretary; *Morris Minkowitz* - Treasurer.

At the outset of its work, the committee set out the objective to collect all the addresses of *landsleit* in New York and out of New York, across the entire country, and to establish contact with all Derecziners. To the extent possible, an effort was made to do so out of the country. At the time, this was not among the simplest of things to do, but after a time, we were able to get in contact with *landsleit* in the larger cities, such as Chicago, California, Washington, and especially in Boston, from which we got financial assistance.

Our meetings were held every Sunday in the home of our chairman, *Berkowitz*, and this helped us a lot, because his residence was centrally located in New York. His doors were always open to us, and despite his advanced age, he did for the work of the relief committee as much as his energies permitted.

Slowly, through letters, telephone calls and newspaper ads, we assembled a number of addresses of Dereczin *landsleit*, and also of some who were not born in Dereczin, but still had kin in Dereczin. We made contact with Canada very quickly, Argentina, and especially Israel.

The first letter we received from Israel reached us a short while after we initiated activity in New York. *Malka Alper* had written the letter. From her letter, we learned that the Derecziners in Israel were also organized, and were readying an aid activity. This boosted morale for our own work.

Through letters and the press, we reached out to our kinfolk across the land, to inform them of the existence of our committee, and of its objectives. A large portion of our *landsleit* were responsive, some with more and some with lesser contributions. Many of them also wrote us letters, in which they communicated more or less the same sentiment: It is a shame that we are so far from you, but we are with you in your important effort, and we will be here for you every time you need to turn to us. God should only give you the strength and the time to do this sacred duty. Such correspondence only served to revitalize us even further, and bolstered our energies to carry out the relief work.

When the war ended, we got the chance to get in contact with a group of surviving Derecziners, who were wandering through the camps in Germany and Austria, Italy and Shanghai. As quickly as the news would arrive of someone who was a Derecziner in a camp, we would immediately send out packages of food and clothing.

It took us a long time to send the packages. The hours and days stretched into weeks and months, which with dedication and energy, we donated to the first of the aid activities for the needy. We personally packed the food parcels, even though it would have been easier to send them through certain companies. We calculated that if we personally bought the food, and packed it ourselves, and then sent it by post, it would cost us much less, thanks to the fact that we had several stubborn women on our committee, who went so far as to neglect their own housework, and came to participate in organizing the packages, and through this saved a goodly sum of money, and gave the committee a characteristic of hearty friendship. The women, as we said, bought the food themselves, and we packed it in my store. So now I want to thank those women from the bottom of my heart who did this holy work in those days with commitment, and a special thanks to the ladies, *Fanny Berman, Ida Sarnatsky, Falla Jacobson;* And may the memory of *Becky Sikotsky* ע"ו, and of *Seelah Silkowitz* ע"ו shine brightly in our eyes, who were among the most active of the ladies, in regard to the parcels.

In those years, *Jonah Silkowitz* took a major part in the work concerning the packages, and in general regarding the relief committee. With a heavy heart, I recall our active committee member, *Nathan Bliss (Blizniansky)* ע"ו, who was always first to come to work, demanded of everyone that they do their part, gave direction, and then personally did more than he was able to. He also participated in the work on this *Yizkor Book*. To all of our great sadness, he is no longer with us, and did not live to see the *Dereczin Yizkor Book* published.

A difficult and stressful burden was also assumed no less by the writer of these lines. My work consisted not only of doing the packing itself, addressing the packages, and then posting them. I was involved with the entire work of the committee, being the central address for all the [incoming] correspondence from Dereczin survivors, who wrote to us with blood and tears about their wartime experiences. I took on the important task of responding to them, finding some words of comfort to offer each of them. I turned over all correspondence and accounting to the committee, for everything that was done during those years for the Dereczin survivors. It was my task to stay in touch with all the Dereczin *landsleit*, in New York and across the country, and with the *Landsmanschaft* organizations in other countries. I wrote the ads for the newspapers, and was in very close contact with our Dereczin kinfolk in Israel.

I did this work during all the years in which the committee existed. This took a very great deal of time. I did this with heart, love and soul.

During those years, we thought about publishing a *Yizkor Book*, and also about erecting a monument to those of our kin exterminated in Dereczin. We approached the 'Dereczin Society,' requesting space on their cemetery plot to put up the monument. At a meeting of the Society, it was agreed to allocate enough space for us to erect such a monument to our martyrs. To our great sorrow, nothing ever came of this plan because of financial difficulties.

Now the *Yizkor Book* is finally appearing. Let us hope that in time, we will yet put up a monument to those Derecziners who were exterminated.

A certain time after the establishment of the help committee for the refugees, a number of our survivors managed to reach the shores of America. We gave them a little financial help. On a number of occasions we also sent funds to Israel, to assist those Derecziners who made *aliyah* and needed help from a different quarter.

At the end of October 1946, a six-chapter account of the demise of the Dereczin Jewish community was published in *Der Tag* (Today *Der Tag-Morgen-Journal*) written by the *Kulakowskis*. It was titled: "How Jews Suffered and Fought in Dereczin." We received the manuscript from Israel. Independently,

at the same time, a digest of the experiences of the Dereczin Jewish community during the war years and the German occupation, was also published in the *Forverts* (i.e. The Jewish Daily Forward). A list of the surviving Derecziners was published in *Der Tag, Der Forverts, & Der Freiheit.*

To everyone's great sorrow, several active members of the relief committee are no longer with us today. We will always remember our dear friends, *Seela Silkowitz, Nathan Bliss, Yitzhak Berkowitz, Itzl Weissenberg, Joe Abramowitz, Moshe Goldfarb, Moshe Bliss, Becky Tikatsky* – ו"ל.

We were in contact with Israel through all the years of relief work. The work of the Israeli *Landsmanschaft* will be told by them in the *Yizkor Book*, I only wish to recall with a few words the active role of *Malka Alper* in all Dereczin issues. We, here in America, were constantly under the influence of her letters, reminders, requests and appeals – and she did all of this with a gentle wisdom and friendly patience.

May this *Yizkor Book* only serve to etch, even more deeply into our hearts, the last will and testament of that Jewish community so abruptly cut from us in our hometown of Dereczin, wiped off the face of the earth, and may its memory remain forever in our minds and in our hearts.

New York, 12 Kislev 5727, November 1966

In Memory of Our Friend, Nathan Bliss

By Jonah Silkovich

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Nahum-Nathan Bliss, ע"ה (p. 419)

On a beautiful summer day, a handsome young man appeared in Dereczin, dressed in the latest fashion, with a white collar, ironed shirt, carrying a cane in his hand. 'That is *Nahum Meshl's'* – people said. He came here to Dereczin from Warsaw. Everyone in Dereczin talked about him, especially – the girls. 'What a handsome young man!' – was bruited about in all corners.

His parents were well known in town. His father – a handsome Jewish man with a proud bearing, and additionally the owner of a house on the *Deutsche Gasse.* His mother – also a pretty lady, a 'woman of valor,' managing a substantial business and raising a large family. The father was among the honored members of the synagogue. I can remember even now: when the young lads would exit the synagogue during the reading of the Torah and engage in vociferous conversation and noisy play, – *Nahum's* father would go outside and give a shout: 'Quiet down you *shkatzim!*' – and you could hear his shout reverberate from one end of the Schulhof to the other.

Those were his parents.

It didn't take long, and it was told around town that *Nahum Meshl's* was encountered during the evenings in the garden associating with – working class people! You can imagine how his parents reacted to this when the news finally reached them. No small thing: a scion of the *Deutsche Gasse* consorting with the young people from the *Slonim* or *Zelva Gasse*, or even worse, from the *Neuer Gasse!* It appears that he brought back the new ideas of the labor movement from Warsaw. At that time there already existed circles among the intelligentsia who behind their backs would be called *tzitzialisten* (i.e. socialists). For a long time they were circles that kept to themselves, but now they began to mix with the working class young boys and girls. A sharp conflict was initiated between the traditionally-minded parents and their revolutionary-minded children.

It also had to be that *Nahum* fell in love with a working class girl, a seamstress, a uniquely beautiful

girl from a fine, but very poor family from the *Zelva Gasse*. It was here that *Nahum* displayed his strong character. His mother literally turned the world upside down to avoid making the match. Not only once, did she insult *Nahum's* beloved girlfriend in the middle of the street. Nothing helped – they got married, and their love lasted to the last day, until he lost her. They raised three fine children, two sons and a daughter.

Years passed, and I was already in America when I became aware that *Nahum* and his family were in Argentina, and was unable to get themselves settled. He then came to America and went to work. I met him at our Dereczin Society, which at that time numbers over 150 members. We became friends, and I was impressed by what a liberal individual *Nahum* was.

In those years in the Dereczin Society, just as was the case in all of the societies of this kind in America, the leadership came from the traditionally-minded Jews who had been here for a long time. *Nahum-Nathan Blizniansky-Bliss* was a free-thinking Jew, and he strove to transform the society into a modern, liberal organization. It didn't take long before the active *Nathan Bliss* was elected as President of our Society.

Then the First World War broke out. We immediately formed a committee and began to collect funds, in order to be able to send aid to Dereczin, for a credit union, for the school and the *Heders*. The Derecziners in New York responded warmly, but the accumulated funds were insufficient to support our brethren in the old country. There were also Dereczin kinfolk in Boston, but they were not organized. They wanted our committee to have a meeting with them.

We decided that two of our New York *landsleit* would travel to Boston, and conduct a fund-raising campaign. But the larger part of the Derecziners were workers, who could not leave their jobs for even one day.

Until one day, *Nathan* comes into me with an order: 'Joe, you're going to Boston, and no excuses!' At that moment, I was reminded of his father and his strong, commanding tone of voice. *Nathan* knew only too well that I was deeply enmeshed in a new business. He would often visit me concerning the work of our Society – but no excuses would help now. I took along *Ephraim (Foycha) Berkowitz's* wife, and we traveled to Boston. We traveled to *Moshe, Beileh-Rasheh's*, a shoemaker from the Shoemaker's Synagogue, a Jew well-versed in leading prayer and reading Torah, a dear man, who received us very warmly.

He and his wife went out to the Dereczin *landsleit* and we returned to New York with a pretty sum of a couple of hundred dollars.

Another couple of decades went by, and the Second World War completely destroyed our old home and the German murderers killed out nearly all of the Jews of our town. It was necessary to help those refugees who remained alive – and once again a committee was established, with *Nathan Bliss* as its head. As was his custom, he threw himself into the relief work with his life and being, coming to the meetings in rain and snow. To our sorrow, many of the members of our Society were no longer with us, but among the younger ones, the *Feder* family was very active. In the middle of his vigorous activity, the greatest of all his tragedies befell *Nathan* – after a long period of illness, his beloved wife passed away. He was broken, but he did everything he could to remain involved. He even made a visit to Israel, and it was from there that he came back with the idea of doing the *Yizkor Book*.

He did not live to see this memorial book for his beloved, old home – He had a terrible misfortune – being run over by an automobile. He suffered along for two ye4ars before he expired.

A good friend, a partner, a beloved Dereczin *landsman*, who always stood at the head of all activities, had taken leave of us. Let us revere his memory!

Derecziners in America

By David Rabinovich
(Original Language: Yiddish)

I remember to this day, how back in Dereczin we used to tell literally legends about that Golden Land across the sea – about America. It is no wonder then, that a large number of our young people emigrated to that faraway promising country. There were those who fled the military draft, and others who sought to escape arrest for their revolutionary activities. The largest portion, however, were men who on no account could find gainful employment from which they could derive a living with which to support themselves and their families. In those years, the Holy Land was not yet recognized as a place that could take in immigrants.

Fate had brought me to America two years prior on a visit of a couple of months. It was especially interesting for me to link up with our *landsleit*, observe their way-of-life and see, what they had achieved, and what they had attained after so many years in one of the greatest, richest, and most highly developed countries in the world – in the United States of North America.

The largest portion of our *landsleit* have been in America for about 50-60 years, and also longer. An added small percentage came there in the first years after the Second World War.

Our first meeting took place immediately on the first day of our arrival, with *Rachel Feldman-Efrat*, who is, in spite of my understatement, the one well-situated person of all of our *landsleit* in America. She lives in a large beautiful apartment in the very center of New York, in Central Park, in the section of diplomatic residences, artists or just simply wealthy people. Together with members of her family, we visited her summer home, furnished with all the latest and most beautiful appointments, and constructed in a highly desirable locale. *Rachel Feldman* immediately telephoned the committee of the Dereczin Society in order to alert them to our arrival. At about 10PM, a delegation of the Society's committee, among them the President of the Society, *[Abraham] Kadish Feder* and his wife, the Secretary *Khomeh Abelovich,*(who had already visited Israel a couple of times), the Treasurer, *Mrs. Zlotnik*.

I studied together with President *Kadish Feder* in the *Heder* of *Izaakovich (Der Mikhoisker). Feder* emigrated to America in 1918. At that time he went to his father, who had already been there for a couple of years. It is difficult to find such a warm person, a Jew and a friend, such a loving Derecziner, as was *Kadish Feder.* He works hard, from 7AM to 10PM in order to make a living. He has been a member of the *Poalei Zion* organization for his entire life, and to this day he has been unable to permit himself to make a trip to Israel, the land about which he dreams, and for which he has been active for his entire life. In 1945, immediately after the war, when the first news started to arrive from the Dereczin survivors from Lodz, from Austria, Germany and Italy, *Feder* organized and led an activity to send packages to all those who had survived. Seeing that his days were completely occupied at work, he would get up at 3AM and begin the work of packing packages, and get them ready to be mailed via post. When a part of the surviving Derecziners came to America, he concerned himself with supporting everyone, so that they would have some initial sustenance upon arrival. It was other *landsleit* who told me this, since he himself was reticent about his own endeavors.

Feder's wife was a Rabbi's daughter, and their home was strictly kosher. His wife participated in all organizational obligations which *Feder* took upon himself. This is an open, Jewish home, which receives everyone in a warmhearted, Jewish fashion.

When I visited them, *Feder's* thoughts were dominated by only one single objective – raising the money to publish the *Dereczin Yizkor Book.* The process of raising money is not easy in America. Our Dereczin kinfolk are spread out and scattered

throughout the land, and there are no really wealthy people among them. For a large portion of our *landsleit,* even dollars is a lot of money. Thanks to the loyal dedication of *Kadish Feder*, *Khoma Abelovich,* and *Mrs. Zlotnik*, the daughter of the Zelva Rabbi, it was possible to assemble a meaningful sum of money, and to send it to Israel in order to enable publication of the Book.

We became acquainted with *Mrs. Zlotnik* a couple of years earlier in Israel, when she had made a visit there. Her family lived through a gruesome tragedy: one of her sons was a well-known chemist and inventor; he had been a co-worker with the world famous atomic researcher Prof. [J. Robert] Oppenheim[er]. Her son's name was well known in scientific circles in America, after he had published a series of articles in the scientific research journals and the general American press covered him and his discoveries. On one day, he went out for ride with a friend in a small boat. An accident occurred – he was drowned. His friend survived. A short time afterwards, his friend published an important scientific article under his own name, which the family was informed that it was really the work of their son. A dark cloud of suspicion fell on his friend that he had murdered their son, in order to steal his scientific results. The *Zlotnik* family was literally broken. The wife of the family seeks solace in her work on the *Dereczin Yizkor Book*.

About 80 Dereczin *landsleit* took part in the banquet that was organized in our honor, the guests from Israel. A portion of them had been in the country for many years already, since before the First World War, such as *Feiga-Leah Abramovich,* a unique woman, *Yehuda Shmuel's* daughter, *Shelkovich* – a sympathetic Jew, full of humor and life, and yet others, whose names I cannot remember; a certain part of the participants had arrived in America after the Second World War already, such as *Moshe Ferder, Tsirel Friedman-Kamenetsy,* etc. Mostly they were working class people, worn out from long, hard years and long, hard days of work. They found no great good fortune in their labors. When I looked closely at them, I thought that the life of workers in Israel is both lighter, and more interesting. There were no young people at the banquet – similar to the case with us in Israel. The single younger couple were the brother of *Kalman Abramovich* and his wife – And he was already in his fifties.

The children of our *landsleit*, the American-born, are entirely different, and not at all like their parents. All are studying, and some already are engineers, lawyers, such as the sons of *Khoma Ziskind* of the *Feders.*

My visit to America came a short time after the Six-Day War, and the interest in hearing about and knowing what was going on in Israel and its brilliant victory over its enemies, who were prepared to annihilate her, was very high.

Every news item from Israel was literally swallowed down. This on the part of Jews, largely removed from Zionism, but our victory and Israel's strong will to survive, and to develop itself despite the Arab enemies and their strong allies and protectors, so inspired the Jews in America, that many of them would come here, if their economic circumstances would permit it. A large portion of the older Dereczin *landsleit* in America has passed away. They have left a legacy behind – The Dereczin Society, with a small membership, who concern themselves with the burial plots for the Derecziners. The younger people are leaving the Society, and concern themselves with matters that are more important than burial plots. There often arise conflicts over this in the Dereczin community in America.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our American *landsleit* from the bottom of our hearts for their affection towards our homey [town] of Dereczin, for their energy in being willing to help everyone, and for their commitment to erect a monument to our Dereczin community – in the publication of our *Yizkor Book.*

Sarah Slotnick-Yanofsky, ז"ל

By Malka Alper
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Sarah Slotnick & Her Husband, ע"ה (p.423). *This is the 'Mrs. Zlotnik' in the prior David Rabinovich memoir.*

Sarah was born in Dereczin, was a daughter of *Reb Meir Yanovsky* – a teacher, whom all of his pupils remember very positively for his heartfelt relationship to them (also, my brother, *David [Alper]* ז"ל, would often recall him).

The good teacher *Reb Meir*, apparently had a strong influence on his own little *Sarah:* she would listen in [on his lessons], and absorb the chapters of the Pentateuch along with the pupils, and this became deeply etched into her memory, and also into her feelings.

When she visited Israel a short time after our Jewish State was proclaimed, she thought that all the teachings of her father from the Pentateuch had come to life , and that everything that she had learned and remembered from his mouth, had taken on a substantial form in every corner of Our Land.

She was strongly interested in seeing the *Dereczin Yizkor Book* appear as quickly and as elegantly as possibly. She began to talk about it and work on it as soon as she returned from Israel, but it didn't proceed so quickly, and this cost her quite a bit of health.

When I visited New York in 1964, we met a couple of times, and it was at that time that the 'Book Committee' was selected, in which she took an active role. We exchanged correspondence frequently, until it was abruptly terminated by her untimely death.

Her memory will permeate the pages of our *Yizkor Book*!

Her Son, Meir, ע"ה

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Meir-Murray Slotnick, Her Son, ע"ה (p. 423)
The teacher, Meir Yanovsky, father of Sarah Slotnick (First on the left), with his family. (p.424).

On October 6, 1951, the 24 year-old assistant professor of physics, at the University of Michigan *Meir-Murray Slotnick* was drowned in the large Barton Pond in Ann Arbor Michigan, when his boat, in which he was with a student colleague, capsized, and both oars fell into the water.

A strong wind began to blow up waves in the water, and capsized the boat with the two young people in it. The student immediately swam for shore to get help, and assistant professor *Slotnick* who was not a good swimmer, clung to the hull of the capsized boat. When the help arrived, *Slotnick* was no longer to be found. It was only on the following morning that his body was pulled from the water.

Meir Slotnick at the age of 20, was one of the youngest students to earn a PhD at Columbia University, and before he went to Michigan as an assistant professor, he studied nuclear physics at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton, under the direction of Albert Einstein and J. Robert Oppenheimer.

Slotnick was born in Brooklyn, as the son of *Leo & Sarah Slotnick* and was graduated from Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan in 1944, when he was barely 15 years old. He was appointed an assistant professor three weeks before his tragic death.

Postscript in Translation

An obituary for Murray Slotnick appeared in The New York Times on Sunday, October 7, 1951. The text in the Dereczin Yizkor Book seems to have been taken largely from the obituary. He was buried on Tuesday, October 9, 1951, which was Yom Kippur Eve. The obituary identifies his student-companion during the accident as Donald A. Glaser.

The obituary goes on to identify his sister, Mrs. Roslin Kurtz, and a brother, Daniel Slotnick (then age 19) an assistant instructor of mathematics at Columbia.

Daniel L. Slotnick would go on to achieve prominence on his own in the field of computer science. The bulk of his career was spent at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, where he arrived in 1963from the von Neumann computer project at the institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. He was head of the ILLIAC IV project (1965), a machine which pioneered the new concept of parallel computation. ILLIAC IV was a SIMD computer built at Illinois, which was the first to use circuit card design automation outside IBM and the first to use ECL integrated circuits and multilayer circuit boards on a large scale. It had semiconductor memory and was the fastest computer in the world. Slotnick was a professor until his death in 1985.

The Daniel L. Slotnick Award was established for undergraduate students based on academic merit, exceptional leadership qualities, and good citizenship.

Dereczin Kinfolk in Israel

Relief-Work of the Dereczin Kinfolk in Israel

By Malka Alper
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: *From the original Aliyah of Halutzim from Dereczin*
LtoR (seated): Dov Gorinovsky, Esther Gorinovsky ל"ז, Rachel Polchik ל"ז, Yidl Bernicker;
Standing: David Rabinovich ל"ז, Malka Alper, Shimon Abramovich. (p.427)

Photo: A Dereczin Party in honor of Rabbi Chaim Zvi Sinai-Miller (Individuals not identified) (p.428).

Photo: Frontispiece of the Bulletin, 'Yediot' (February 1947 issue), published by the Organization of the Dereczin Olim in Israel. (P. 429)

Until after the war, we Derecziners were small in numbers in the Land of Israel. We were not particularly connected one to another; we took an interest one in another, and offered advice – only if asked. Our meetings were occasional, until – the first news started to reach us from our survivors, who had been tossed into displaced persons camps in Italy. Now, we organized ourselves, and began to seek ways and means to help them and bring them here. With the arrival of news from the survivors, we immediately sent a list to the *Forverts* and then our brethren in America joined with us in a united assistance activity.

In the [Holy] Land we operated through the extant dangers.

Thanks to the American relief, with *Nahum Bliss* ז"ל, at its head, and our colleague *Abraham Kadish Feder*, may he live to a ripe old age, we were able to provide assistance to those who were in the DP Camps in Italy, Germany and Austria, as well as offering the first financial assistance, a modest help but yet some help, to those coming to The Land.

It was as early as 1946 when we published the first bulletin about the organization, and in it were printed the correspondence, rules and regulations and an accounting of the activities of the committee (it is incumbent upon us to take note of two active members of the organization, who are no longer with us: *Elkeh Lichtenstein, & Yerachmiel Edelstein,* ל"ז), the bulletins being printed partly in Yiddish for those overseas, and partly in Hebrew for the locals.

It is important to take note of the fact that in the national library on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, where we would send every issue, there was a good reaction to our bulletin. Four bulletins were printed before the outbreak of hostilities in November 1947. The bulletin then ceased publication.

With the proclamation of the State of Israel, the organization became defunct, but we Derecziners remained strongly connected and united. It should be clear that we observe the Yahrzeit of our community, the Tenth of *Ab*, take part in the celebrations of our friends, receive all tourists of Dereczin origin who visit Israel, – we only wish they would come as permanent immigrants! – and with the publication of the *Dereczin Yizkor Book*, an obligation lies on us to raise the new generation of Dereczin children to assume the obligation to remember and not to forget!

From Sinaiska – To the Land of Israel

By Esther Dlugolansky (Petakh-Tikvah)

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: One of the Dereczin Meetings (Individuals not identified). (p. 430).

Simkha, son of *Yaakov & Chaya Dlugolansky* was born in Kolonia Sinaiska, married his wife, *Chaya-Basha* from the city of Zheludok. They established their family in this Jewish settlement. They had six sons: *Leibkeh, Moshe, Menasheh, Yoshkeh, Natan-Netah, & Sholom.* The sons matured. The place was crowded for them, and in the great flood of immigration prior to the First World War, they turned their eyes to faraway places. *Moshe* was the first to emigrate to America, was drafted into the army and afterwards was killed in battle. The second to leave the place was *Leibkeh* and his family, and after him, *Menasheh,* and *Sholom* also did not want to remain and live off farming. After not succeeding in reaching the United States, he went to Argentina, where he established his family. Only two sons were left in the settlement: *Yoshkeh,* his wife *Leah* from the *Nozhnitsky* family of Dereczin, with their children, *Shayna-Esther, Shlomo, Moshe & Rivkah,* – this entire family was wiped out by the Nazi marauders; *Natan* is my husband.

I married their son in 1933. We lived with his parents in Kolonia until 1935, when the poisonous winds of anti-Semitism began to blow up, and Hitler's name was being uttered with praise from the mouths of our gentile neighbors and the residents of the nearby villages. *Simcha,* and his wife *Chaya-Basha,* decided that this was no place for them, despite the fact that he was well known as a prosperous man.

He was a wise man, and understood the local farmers very well, and all respected him.

I will never forget the winter days, in which there are many empty days for farmers. Many would come to our house, some to ask for advice, others to simply unburden themselves.

Simcha, a tall broad-shouldered man, with a broad beard, would sit at the head of a table like a judge or magistrate, dispensing advice, because he was familiar with the issues that each and every person brought to him, and if someone was short of funds, they knew that at *Simcha's* they would be able to touch him for some. But when Hitler acceded to power in Germany, and the hatred of the Jews spread quickly through Poland, one couldn't recognize these selfsame farmers. They changed from top to bottom in their speech, in their attitude and in all their behavior, at which time *Simcha* arose with his wife, then in their seventies, and left the place, with their sights on Jerusalem, the Holy City. These were observant people for their entire lives, and that which they prayed for daily, regarding the Land of Israel and Jerusalem, they realized in their old age. In Jerusalem, in the Old Jewish Quarter, they established their residence. Days were dedicated to prayer, and the synagogue provided them with all they required for their spiritual lives.

Chaya-Basha passed away on 14 Heshvan 5704 (1943), and was interred on the Mount of Olives. The Arabs denied access to the holy places in Jerusalem for twenty years, and a part of the Mount of Olives [cemetery] was torn down. During the Six Day War, Jerusalem was liberated by the IDF, and we were privileged again to visit our mother's grave. Her fortune stood her in a good stead, and her grave had remained intact.

Simcha managed during the War of Independence to come from Jerusalem to us in Petakh-Tikvah. Even here, he passed his days with the recitation of Psalms, and deeds of charity. He passed away at an advanced age on 15 Adar I 5711 (1950) in Petakh-Tikvah.

Yaakov Izaakovich, A Chess Fanatic Among the Blind

By Moshe Guter

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Untitled, but presumably of Yaakov Izaakovich. (P. 432)

On May 1, 1966 at the city club in Haifa, the Israeli Youth Chess Champion *Yitzhak Bleiman* stood and played simultaneously against twenty young people – all of them blind. It was enough to watch only a bit on the play to become convinced of how well the sightless players demonstrated mastery of the secrets of the 'royal game,' and how confidently they moved kings, queens, knights and bishops on the board.

And as you can guess, this was the very same board used by people with sight, except that there were holes in each square, into which the player would insert the base of the pieces. The 'colors' of the pieces were distinguished by the fact that the white pieces had a molding on the top, while the black pieces were smooth.

The blind in Israel began to play chess because of the 'fault' of one person, and that was the 67-year-old Haifa retiree, *Yaakov Izaakovich,* the grandfather of three.

Izaakovich had been involved with his pet project for three years – the dissemination of chess-playing skills among the blind – and as usual in his case, he came upon this by happenstance. On one occasion he was invited to a lecture about the blind, and there he heard that there is virtually no activity that a sightless person cannot do, with the condition that a more fortunate individual who can see, assists him. And since *Izaakovich* had been dedicating all his spare time to chess for many years, he decided to become an aid to the blind in the development of the skill for this noble game.

He quickly came to realize what great utility his involvement in this hobby brought to the blind. From his very nature, a blind person develops a strong sense of focus, and playing chess sharpens that sense. He learns patience, consistency, and ordered thought, and mastery sharpens this, and mental powers are exercised by it.

When he undertook his initiative three years ago, which seemed too insane to even talk about, he had to contend on two fronts: first to convince the blind [themselves] that they are capable of playing chess like any other person, and that play will lead to satisfaction, and second, to convince various organizations that the initiative was worth the effort demanded. *Izaakovich* succeeded on both counts. Five years ago there were only six blind chess players – today they number about fifty. Today, *Izaakovich* has support from the Youth Sports of Haifa, the Organization for the Blind in Haifa, and the Israel Chess Federation; from them he receives the support he needs to procure playing sets, and material in Braille, and so forth.

Most, if not all of the work, was done by *Izaakovich* himself. In order to be able to work with the blind, he learned Braille, published chess lessons in *Lapid,* the periodical of the blind in Israel that is published in Netanya. He published ten lessons for beginners, added a periodical for advancing players, in which he included puzzles and their solutions, riddles, examples and games of 25 moves and more. In 1964, *Izaakovich* published three volumes of puzzles for beginners, and in 1965 (according to the testimony of the Israeli problem solving organization) – additional volumes with simpler puzzles for beginners and their solutions.

To *Izaakovich's* credit goes the staging of several competitions for the blind, including championship matches and matches involving simultaneous play. In the simultaneous play, the Portuguese Grandmaster *Y. Dorow* and three Israeli champions – *Moshe Charnik, Yitzhak Aloni, & Yosef Porat* participated.

Thanks to the efforts of *Izaakovich* there are today chess clubs for the blind in addition to Haifa, in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, Ashkelon, Beersheba, Qiryat Chaim, Petakh Tikvah, and Ramat-Gan.

Izaakovich's ambition is to double the number of blind chess players in a short time. There are 700 blind people in Israel, and it does not strike him as unrealistic to expect that one out of seven should be a chess player.

(*Davar*, 21Jun66)

What I Learned from the Mouth of My Mother

By Yitzhak Wachler
(Original Language: Hebrew)

From time to time, when friends of my parents come to my home, and the conversation rolls around from one subject to the next, it inevitably comes back to the subject of the Holocaust. My mother begins to reach into her memories for the unpleasant years of her youth, the sleepless nights, the unending wanderings in the thick of the forests, where it became necessary for her and her friends to hide themselves like hunted animals from the Nazis and their allies. Again and again, I hear the stories about helplessness, sickness and hunger, that was largely the lot of the Jews in the ghettoes and forests.

Mother tells: before dawn on a summer day in 1942, the murderers broke into every Jewish dwelling in town, forced everyone out of bed with blows, shouting and imprecations of: 'quickly, quickly!', put them onto transports that were waiting at the side of the houses, and when they were filled with men, children, and the old, the transport moved to the edge of the pits that had been dug before hand by the Jews. There, they took out all the Jews, and stood them at the edge of the pits, and then gunfire opened up on them from all sides, that cut through them mercilessly. The dead fell into the pits, and much blood was spilled that day.

My mother, along with three men, succeeded in jumping of the transport and reach the forests, and there, they joined the partisans.

In the wake of the stories that I heard, I began to take an interest in Holocaust literature, and the rebellion, and among others, I read the folio about the '*Dr. Atlas* Brigade,' the Jewish partisan commander, whom my mother knew personally. Likewise, I read a great deal about the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto.

I believe, that if I were there, I too would have joined the partisans or the ghetto fighters, in order to exact vengeance for the blood of our dear ones. I am suffused entirely with feelings of fury and revenge toward the Germans who butchered a third of our people. We must never forget what they did to our parents and to all the children of Israel in those times.

In Memory of Deceased Dereczin Landsleit

Remarks in Memory of David Rabinovich ז"ל

By Kalman Lichtenstein
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Untitled, presumably of David Rabinovich. (P. 433)

A thread of a smile to captivate the heart always was impressed on his face. A heart-warming countenance, and warm at the same time – that is the expression that best suits his external appearance, which appeared as an integral part of his entire being.

This good expression, optimistic and harmonious to the outside, also was compatible with his inner self, which radiated goodness of heart, and influenced his surroundings in this way. He wished only the best for all those who sought him. The light of his face was witness to his good heart. He saw, in accordance with his own inclination, that which was good in people, and would turn a blind eye to the 'evil inclination' that people inherit from their youth. He was liberal in the sense of the House of *Hillel,* and purposely distanced himself from the thinking of the House of *Shammai.*[134] He always sought to straighten out twisted paths, round sharp corners, to compromise and facilitate compromise. For every difficult issue, he always saw what was required to devise a solution that would be acceptable to everyone. It was for this reason that so many people, who were prone to dispute, would turn to him, with complicated affairs, and difficult issues, because he - he himself would assume the burden to clarify the matter, to clarify, and offer solutions to questions, to reach a compromise. And it was because of this that he continued the tradition that was well known to us from Dereczin and Slonim, the tradition of the 'conciliator,' who clarifies not only to achieve what is just, but also taking into account compassion and understanding for the welfare of all. In his eyes, 'everything bent could be put straight.'

He, who knew about and suffered from the slings and arrows of fortune, knew how to rely with familiarity on the common sense of life, and patience, two character attributes that are either intrinsic to the individual from birth, or acquired over a period of time as a person reaches the fulness of old age.

Despite his age – and he was far from being old – he learned that 'time can accomplish what common sense cannot.' We were to learn that these tendencies were integral to his being that exuded tolerance and patience, and 'doing the right thing.'

Added to this was his hearty popularity, his simple approach to everyone, the non-self-centered approach of a man of the people, free of those barriers that would otherwise come between him and the masses.

And if I used the term, 'masses,' I had the special intent to specially characterize those emigrants who were born in that same western part of Byelorussia bounded by Novogrudok – Slonim – Volkovysk. To those who came out of the cities and towns, many ancient communities – from Dereczin, in whose bosom he was born and raised, to Slonim, to which he tied the continuation of his life.

For many people, among them his friends, people who knew him and admired him, and similarly for

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134 *Hillel & Shammai* were two scholars of the Mishnaic era who embodied differing philosophies, wherein *Hillel* espoused the liberal, flexible interpretation of Law, while *Shammai* espoused literal and strict interpretation.

all those who came from those lands – his loss was a difficult one. Everyone will recall him only in the best light, from a sense of longing and respect, and everyone will miss this good man, who did so much good, possessed of a radiant face and radiant heart, straight in his dealings and true in his path, *David Rabinovich,* may his memory be a blessing.

My Father, of Blessed Memory

By Ilan Rabinovich

(Original Language: Hebrew)

I cannot find the words to convey my bitter pain and feelings at the time of my father's death. The wound is still fresh, and the memories are so clear and alive.

From my perspective, he was not only a loving and committed father without a peer, but also a friend and companion. Despite the age gap between us, we developed a common language, the language of friends who love one another, that made wondrous the formal family relationship by transforming it into a deep loving friendship of friends. Literally, I never took any important step in my life without prior consultation with my father. And his thoughts were always enlightening, realistic and sympathetic. We corresponded often when I was living in the USA, exchanging advice with one another on a variety of issues from different areas, literally as if we were two friends that were contemporaries.

He was always proud of me, and how great was his desire that I advance and succeed.

Many of my friends met my father, partly at my invitation, and partly on the occasion of bringing regards, or just plain visits. Most of them, like everyone else, were amazed by my father, and told me of their impressions of his personality. He was always full of life and spirit, with a smile imprinted on his face, the smile of a good-hearted person, with a humorous and good-hearted look. He was in the habit of joking with my friends, and frequently would give some of them a funny nickname.

Our home was always full of different kind of people, from different places and various walks of life, and what they had in common was their need to seek an anchor of security, help, support and good advice from my father. And he didn't disappoint them. Not once would he lead them from the house in the afternoon, only to return during the late night hours, tired and harassed. The reason for the effort was always the same – help for friends. Once it might be on behalf of people from Dereczin, another time on behalf of my mother's townsfolk, Slonim, and another time on behalf of relatives and yet another time for just plain friends.

About a week before he entered the hospital, he ran to find one of his townsfolk in some far corner of the land, who was in need of financial aid. My father traveled to him to convey a check that had come to us from the USA for him. The Angel of Death was already at his heels, and he was forced to return home because he simply could not find the place.

Everyone loved him and everyone respected him, and he never ever had any enemies. When I took him to his office, or to relieve him at work, everyone who came to see him, regardless of occupation, age or station in life, would praise my father's character to me directly, and add: 'You should be proud to be the son of such a father.' But I felt that way all the time, in any event.

After his death, I ran into any number of people whom I didn't know, those who worked with my father, and there was not one among them who

didn't speak at great length about his endearing personality, and the good-heartedness and vitality of my father, which no one could confront without being deeply moved.

I remember the meeting with my father's lawyer, *Max Kritzman*, who worked with him for years. Although I saw him at the funeral, standing to the side with his head bowed, I never understood both the affection and commitment he had to my father, and now to the entire family. When I sat in his office, he presented untold stories in order that I understand my father's deeds, that I was not aware of, that passed through his office. "Even you don't know what kind of a father you had, and what he did for others" – *Kritzman* said. And I didn't know that neighbors, who had lived with us in our former house, and in our current home, knew my father very well. When they met him in the street, on the stairs, on the bus or in committee meetings of the tenants were sufficient for them to greet him, to communicate their affection and even to praise him. Their enormous dedication during the time of his illness and afterwards proved yet again to me that my father was no ordinary man.

He was a man of especially emotional character. He was an ideal grandfather to his grandchildren, a father who was proud of his children, and a devoted husband to his wife. He could never take his leave of me for long periods of time with out weeping and tears. Occasionally, when I would telephone home from New York, I was unable to carry on a conversation with him, because he would burst out crying, because his feelings would interfere with his ability to speak. When I arrived from the USA and reached his bedside at the hospital, he burst into tears, and it was only with great difficulty that I persuaded him to rein in his emotions.

Even during the later stages of his illness, when his condition became worse, he continued to show concern about my future. Would repeat his demand of me not to 'waste valuable time' at his bedside, and to take advantage of my free time to attend to more practical objectives. He never thought about himself, and never showed any fear of death. The welfare of others always took precedence in his eyes. He was a grandfather totally dedicated to his grandchildren. He considered himself incredibly fortunate to walk with his grandchildren and find some common ground of communication with them, as if with people his own age. He would buy all manner of things for them, play with them like a child himself, and speak to them on their terms. His death was a calamity of enormous proportions that marks them even today.

His visit to the USA with my mother, was an immense experience. Even there, he tried to find the family and friends, met with and received members of the family that he had never seen before, and met with the Dereczin organization, which had arranged a very emotional reception in his honor. Again, I heard stories about my father, about his good-heartedness, his dedication and friendship to everyone. Once again, I saw the evidence of his skill in weaving deeply-seated relationships of friendship with all.

In Israel he was the living spirit of the Dereczin organization, but he was especially the pillar of concrete for the entire family. At all family gatherings, he was the Head, and the Chief Advisor, whether the occasion was happy or sad. Even on the occasion of the last family gathering, on Purim (when the extra Megillah is read), he arranged and looked after its arrangements. He always looked after his family connections with relatives and friends, both in and out of Israel, and it is incumbent upon me to say that I learned this from my father as well as many other things.

My father was a man of action, and focused on essentials. His considerable energy drove him ever ahead, to new ideas, varied enterprises, and other things. But he always kept an eye on his own interests. Through persuasion and good-heartedness, even those who might have set obstacles in his path, were won over, and became his friends and partners to this day.

Death took him while he was still at the zenith of his powers. Neither written nor spoken words will serve

to comfort his family or me. This is so, on our behalf, and I am certain on behalf of those many relatives and friends whom my father served as a symbol of pleasantness, good-heartedness, concern for the general good, righteousness, simplicity and the joy of life. The noble figure of my father will always stand before me, which I will try to emulate for my entire life.

May his memory be a blessing.

Elkeh Lichtenstein

By Malka Alper

(Original Language: Hebrew)

A dedicated mother and outstanding housekeeper, possessed of a radiant face, whose house was open to everyone near and far – to a townsman or a traveler, to a new arrival or someone with a bitter heart. She was a member of the Organization of Dereczin Townsfolk, committed to the affairs of the organization, and did not stint on her time and energy in order to work and facilitate.

She was born into a working-class family, and established her family in the Land of Israel on the efforts and the plans for the homeland.

At a young age in the twenties, she made *aliyah* to the Holy Land, and much happened to her: but her brightness and the optimism in her did not depart until she passed on: her children grew up, and families came from them, and she was the dedicated mother and grandmother. On top of this, she was gifted with wisdom, and it was useful to ask her advice. There are no words with which to comfort the bereaved family.

At the End of the First Year

By Miriam Musikant

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: *Elkeh Lichtenstein (untitled)* (p.436)

A year has gone by, and here already is the Yahrzeit. It is difficult to convey the feelings in my heart and the great sadness at the passing of that dear lady, my good-hearted neighbor, that woman of wonderful deeds, my unforgettable neighbor, *Elkeh Lichtenstein.* I always saw her with a bright face, with a hearty relationship to everyone. Her commitment to the general welfare was without bound.

She was happy to extend her help through work, with advice and direction. When I was a young mother, I was privileged over a period of years, during which we lived in the same building, to benefit from her advice and guidance. She did everything happily and with a smile, and with warm words which imbued me with a lively spirit and focused me on realizing myself through matters of life, solving little problems that seemed awesome from the perspective of a young mother, difficult beyond measure. She distinguished herself especially with her hospitality. In her demeanor and with her eager soul, I saw in her a commitment to all things good.

The years pass, and we have barely gotten used to the idea that she is no longer here and will not return. We miss her very much.

She was a dear soul among us, and in the middle of her best years, she was taken from us. To this day we feel the pain and anguish as if it was that bitter day when she was taken from us.

May her soul be bound up in the bond of life.

Elkeh Lichtenstein of the Dykhovsky Family ז"ל

By David Rabinovich
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Elkeh was taken from us prematurely. She was born to a working-class family in Dereczin, and reached the Holy Land at an early age in 1925. She met her husband, *Yitzhak*, to whom we wish a long life, and they established their domicile in one of the Caucasus neighborhoods. She found a fulfilment of her life in the commitment and concern for her townsfolk. When we, the first of the pioneers from Dereczin, learned of the existence of this warmhearted family, we became regular visitors to this neighborhood. We always found a warm house there, and not only once were we treated to a meal, which we desperately needed during those years when there was no work to be had in the Holy Land.

Elkeh was a straightforward and good-hearted lady, and every hand extended to her for assistance was not turned away empty. She never complained about her situation. With the end of the [Second World] War, she was among the committee workers of our townsfolk, and not only one of the new immigrants found in her small house in the Caucasus neighborhood a refuge filled with sympathy until he succeeded in establishing himself.

After many years of hard work, the *Lichtensteins* succeeded in saving enough money to move to a larger house in the north of Tel-Aviv.

Even in her new home, *Elkeh* continued to deal with dedication and motherly concern, with the needs of the Holocaust survivors. She never complained during the time of her serious illness, and she received all her visitors at the hospital with a pleasant countenance and a smile. Right up until death came

She left behind a husband, who always participated with her in providing help to the needy of her town, a daughter and two sons who are married, and grandchildren. Her good-hearted image will remain etched in the hearts of all who knew her and loved her, and her memory will be a blessing in our midst.

A Portrait of the Late Chava Sharar ז"ל of the Salutsky Family

By Menahem Rahat
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Chava Sharar (untitled) (p. 437)

I knew *Chava* for forty years. We were privileged during this extended period to know her close up, and to appreciate her many generous and selfless virtues, her big-heartedness, and the purity of her soul – her heart-warming relationship not only to her kin, but to the community at large, and to every

person, because he was a human being.

Her home – which she established in a Hasidic community, with her husband, *Eliezer*, may he be granted a long life – was always wide open. No one was turned away empty-handed. She did everything that she could, and then some, for the common good. She was a faithful partner to the community in good times and bad – happiness in its time, and mourning, when necessary, in its time.

For decades she faithfully and honestly served the socialist aid society in her settlement. In times when the society ran out of funds, and it became clear that an urgent need of one sort of another existed, she did not hesitate to extend those funds from her own money to the hard-pressed society, in order that they not be unresponsive to the needy person requesting aid.[She did this] to prevent disappointment, suffering and embarrassment for the needy.

These instincts for providing general assistance, she inherited from her parents ל"ז. Even while they were still outside the Holy Land – and their economic circumstances were not particularly good – she was drafted into supporting her family, since it became incumbent on her father to leave his home for a period of time, to find a way to make a living in distant America. The mother and children remained in Dereczin – and the burden of support for the family fell on her shoulders. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, the house remained open to the poor, as before, who find within it, an open heart and a willingness to help them.

When their father returned to his hometown and family, and it was decided to emigrate from Poland, the daughters decided to make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel. They clearly did not seek an easy life, preferring the life of the pioneer in the face of those turbulent times. The conditions facing the settler in those times were unusually difficult, and the work they had to do was hard and exhausting, and seemingly endless. Despite this, *Chava's* spirit did not flag, and she continued to bear her burden and took comfort in the hope that things would get better in the future, in which she saw the trials of absorption and settlement – in the testing of suffering, that there is hope for the sons of those returning to their land to rebuild its ruins and be received with love.

First, she and her husband, may he live long years, settled among the broken walls and falling beams of a ramshackle wooden house. The circumstances were very hard, but they were overcome with the joy of creation. And even in those distant times, everyone knew – and especially those families who opted to make *aliyah* – that first of all they had to form a community and provide for some common security. She received all of them graciously, and even when she began to lose her strength she didn't make any complaints.

She was always happy to hear about the development of our country, its advancement, its momentum, and initiatives. She followed all advancements in the country with a trembling heart and a loving spirit, and saw in each of these the coming of the Final Redemption.

And then – when finally, in her advancing years, when she could enjoy the *nachas* for the family that she raised, from the country that had matured, from the conditions that had gotten immeasurably better – she was taken from us at age 64.

And we can only hope that all her many well-earned rewards will come to the family that she left behind – her husband, her daughters and grandchildren, and on the entire people of Israel.

May her memory be for a blessing!

A Portrait of My Mother, Bluma, ל"ז

By Khemda Artzi, of the Sinai-Miller Family

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Of Subject (untitled) (p. 438)

My mother, of blessed memory, walked beside my father ל"ז, along all the hard roads of life that fate dealt them. The tribulations of building the Holy Land were dear to her, and she accepted them with love. She would rise at dawn and do her work until the stars came out. She detested the gossip of neighbors, and distanced herself from all argumentative discussions. The words of our Sages were easy on her tongue: 'Don't judge your neighbor until you have stood in his place.'

She was among the seekers and pursuers of peace. I remember these words of hers to us girls: 'Do not deride the needy public, because every person is made in God's image, and there is no doubt that every person who is poor, or down on his luck, would like to be successful and lucky.' Her quiet words stuck in our minds and had a great influence on us.

She knew how to fix things with words that defy alteration. I recall that in the final weeks before our *aliyah* to the Holy Land, our father ל"ז, would lecture us in the afternoons, that in the Holy Land we would eat of the 'Bread of Affliction.' She accepted these words as axiomatic and did not worry about them.

Father expressed her qualities after she passed away: 'I remember for you the devotion of your youth, your bridal love, following me into the desert, into a land unsown.[135]'

Even in her final years, she bore her suffering heroically (she suffered from a wasting disease), and the day before she died, she summoned my father and thanked him for the partnership they had in life, and the harmony that existed between them. We will never forget her strength of spirit and selfless qualities.

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[135] Quote taken from Jeremiah 2:2

In Memory of my Mother Shoshana Gutman ז"ל

By Israel Gil-Or (Gutman)
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Of Subject (untitled) (p. 439)

My mother was raised in a home that had deep religious and Zionist roots. Her father, *Rabbi Chaim Zvi Sinai (Miller)* ז"ל, championed the fulfilment of the life of a pioneer in the land of our forefathers. He was not deterred by the prospect of great difficulties, and in the mid-twenties, made *aliyah* with his entire family. Mother was then a young woman, and lived in Kfar Uriah, a small village in the Jerusalem hills, in which there were a number of farming families who made *aliyah* without the benefit of protection, and it was not easy on them at all. She quickly adapted to the hard life of a small Jewish settlement, cut off from the center of the land. It was there that she met her future husband. During the period of the incidents in 1929, the family was saved by a miracle from the depredations of rampaging arabs, and went down to the valley country. After a while, they joined the founders of the settlement of Ramat HaSharon. There, they set up an agricultural enterprise for themselves.

Mother was blessed with good sense. As a young woman in her hometown in the old country, she had studied the violin for many years. She seemed to have a great future in this area. But under the conditions of the pioneers in the early thirties, she had to forego any development of musical skills. She dedicated herself with her full commitment to the building of the land.

She was a member of the Haganah for her entire life. In her capacity, she filled the position of providing courses for instruction in the administration of first aid. She never stinted on giving her time in order to fulfill any order that she was asked to carry out.

Together with this, she was extremely devoted to her family. She always thought about the future. She therefore understood that very soon, the agricultural enterprise would not be able to provide adequate sustenance. On the hells of this, my father abandoned agriculture and went over to work for the local administration.

She always hoped that her sons would receive a broad education. I will forever remember how she would begin laboring early in the morning during harvest seasons on her small plot near the house. From the proceeds of that crop sale, they paid for my first year of study at the university.

However, her circumstances deteriorated. A few short years afterwards, she fell sick with a malignancy. When she got relief from her suffering, she would translate books into Braille for the Library for the Blind in Netanya.

She was a lover of life, a lover of humanity with a desire to help the downtrodden. She was taken from us much too young, leaving her family and friends bereaved.

May her memory be a blessing!

A Portrait of My Mother Dina Levitin of the Sinai Family

By Naomi Mizrahi

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Of Subject (untitled) (p. 439)

My mother, born in Shivli, came to the Holy Land with her family at a young age. Her first domicile in the Holy Land was in Kfar Uriah, but after the 1929 incidents, her family left that place after it was destroyed, and went to Ramat HaSharon. The family was one of the founders of that place.

Mother was active in the Haganah, and assisted in receiving new arrivals at the Apologia beach beside Herzliya, and was also active in the community life of the settlement. I recall my mother as modest in her ways and requiring little in the way of material things. She never showed any pride in what she did, and kept such good feelings to herself. I saw her as someone dedicated to her family, and in her care for a failing mother.

With what love she took care of her mother! In my whole life I never saw such a fulfilment of the commandment to honor a mother.

She always contributed to the public good. Her dedication to her family and the members of her household knew no bounds.

She was the librarian of the settlement. Her love of books was immense. I saw her always with a book in her hands, giving advice and providing instruction in the reading of books. Readers loved her enormously. Of her it was said: 'those who die before their time are truly beloved by the Gods.'

Her memory will be guarded by me wherever I shall turn. May her memory be for a blessing, and her soul bound up in the bond of life.

Israel Dror-Dereczinsky ל"ז, – The Man of Shfai'im

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Of subject, untitled (p. 440)

Israel was born on June 16, 1910 in Dereczin, to his parents, *Liba & Moshe*, traditional Jewish people. He received a Hebrew education, which was not a common thing in those days, and during his youth he was already taken with the 'Freiheit' movement, *Poalei Tzion* and *HeHalutz*, in which he was a member for five years, of which he spent one year in a training camp at kibbutz 'Shkharia' in Lida. While outside of the Land, he worked as a tailor.

He made *aliyah* on August 14, 1934 and turned to us immediately, to the kibbutz, which at the time was on the top of the hill in Section 3 of Herzliya. He arrived with a smile on his face, and it seemed as if that smile never left his face from that time on.

The work was hard for him. He went through the tribulations of absorption and settlement, and of getting used to the work, but bore all of it silently.

When we moved to Shfai'im, he worked in packing in the Litvinsky orchard, with all the battled facing the Jewish worker in the mastery of the labor of the times.

He was a marvelous family man, who loved family life.

He filled many positions at his work: in the organization of the work, as a secretary, a committee member, and on top of this he was the cultural leader of the kibbutz.

On February 1, 1950, he began his work as the secretary of the community advisory board of Khof Sharon. He began to organize cultural activities within the ambit of the community. And all of his inspired undertakings were abruptly brought to an end. We lost him.

He was age 57 when he passed away.

His Home – In His Hometown

Israel was the son of a town, a small town in the Pale of Settlement, far from the main roads, but vibrant, with an ear attuned to what was going on in the greater world and in the Jewish communities worldwide, participating in charitable activities, especially in the revival of the people in their homeland.

There were schools in that town, *Heders*, and also a Talmud Torah, in which *Israel's* father was a teacher of the young children, and disciplined his students in a pleasant way, because objectively speaking, you might have expected him to be a man of bitter soul because he was disabled, having a paralyzed arm, and a limp on one side.

How nobly this man carried the burdens of his hard life and its distress, even when his longed-for child was born, and the mother of the child remained bedridden.

Israel's nobility of spirit – he inherited from his father: no complaints, and no criticism against the healthy and normal members of the town. With what love he would carry *Israel* in his healthy arm when the little boy would grab for his father's throat with his tiny hands, or walk with him, hand in hand, with the little one dressed in his very long jacket, because that is the way they tailored in those days: the jacket would have to serve as his garment for many years, even when he would grow up to be a boy.

I recollect *Israel* during three periods of his life: the first is the one I have just described, and the second is in the *Tarbut* School in our town, in which I took my first steps as a teacher, and was an instructor in his class. I can still recall his place in the class. I taught in the school only for one year, but I would meet him during the extended vacation, when I would return to my town from those other places where I lived.

Those were stormy years in the Jewish streets of the towns, the budding of the movement of a working Land of Israel, the rebirth of the Hebrew language, the erection of a defense against the pressure of Polish culture and the Yiddishist movement.

Israel was both beloved and well received by his comrades, not only then, but for all the years in which he lived in his hometown, drinking in with thirst all the words of his teachers, even as a glint of mischief would flash in his eyes. He was introverted and shy because of his small stature, and it appeared to me that even in the Holy Land, despite that he was accorded the most respected place in his own home – in the kibbutz and its surroundings, it was possible to detect elements of introversion in his soul that were remnants of those days gone by.

The third period was when he was in the Holy Land. It was only in 1940 that I became aware of the fact that he was in the Land, and a member of Kibbutz Shfai'im. We met immediately after the Second World War.
Israel came by his common sense and openness from within himself, from a stubborn battle waged with life and his surroundings. In unplanned meetings, when members of the city would gather with survivors of the Holocaust, *Israel* would invite me to be his guest: come see how I have settled, come to know my family, my home – my kibbutz, come!

And so, a few years ago during summer vacation, I responded to his invitation and was a guest in his home for a number of days. I came to know his family, and became tied to them with bonds of friendship and love. He constructed with his wife

Tzila, she should have a long life, a family nest that radiated warmth and love, interesting himself in each and every detail of the lives of his children, even when they went out on their own. And what dedication he exhibited every time I visited them!

With the passing of *Israel*, a man was torn from the bosom of his family and from among his friends in his movement and workplace, whose heart was full of love for the common welfare, ready to work and do things in order to bring learning and knowledge to those who seek it.

I miss the modest and warmhearted countenance that, when you crossed his threshold, would shower you with warmth and an urging to tarry a while in his home.

His family will carry his blessed memory in their hearts, and so will I.

By Malka Alper

In Honor of His Person

I sit and think about *Israel*, and as if a vapor rising from a dark cloud, pictures begin to rise from the past: images, events and meetings. We spent a long part of our lives together in the kibbutz from the time we first met on the hill overlooking the sea in the Herzliya sector, until we accompanied him on the journey to his final resting place in a grove of eucalyptuses in Shfai'im.

Milestones, life's milestones pass by; from them, enveloped in worry and lack of sustenance, from them the satisfaction of accomplishment, and the spark of hope.

All of us went through this tribulation of absorption, and *Israel*, even though he was a laborer out of the Holy Land (a tailor), was subject to this trial like the rest of us. By stubbornly overcoming his physical weakness, even attained advanced positions (the lead packer in his line of work). Attacks and defense. A strike over the right to work opposite the gates of a hostile orchard owner. Going to work on foot, or riding on a donkey, while mines and snipers lie in ambush along the sides of the road. For all of these, he was among the first in line to go.

Despite all this, there were days of happiness and hope. Who will be able to portray our emotions of joy and the trepidation that we felt when we took to the land. The dream of settling the land hovered before us like a mirage. By turns, it would draw close and then recede, and then the appointed day came, and we went out into the open, but the way still lies before us; or the happiness of drawing our water from the first well. And as a result of this a log house, supplies. And suddenly the group begins to prosper, a school; a group of children, the first of our sons going off to the army. Through all of this we were together with *Israel*.

His hand was in all new undertakings and at the center of the communal life we shared. As a secretary for many years, as the organizer of the daily work schedule, and the leader of many other activities. Our neighbor *Israel* was one of those people who really cared. He was a man who didn't step to the side in matters pertaining to the kibbutz, and its common and personal issues. He adopted the life of the pioneer back in the days of his joining the youth movement, and his belief in this ideal he sought to fulfill through the work of his own hands, by living the life of a kibbutznik to a high degree, and through a communal way of life. He was no stranger to every personal and communal matter, seeing it as an issue for himself, and doing everything he could, and more, in order to advance a matter or resolve it.

★

No small number of difficulties sneaked up on him in this endeavor. When it became overwhelming – he intensified his effort. And he would not let go, and when it was allowed him, he would return and continue at it. Even in his final days he never said "I give up." He believed he would overcome his illness and return to work. But his weak heart could not withstand the pressure, and gave out.

Let us preserve his memory with honor.

By David Gutsfurkht

Hanan Abelovich ז"ל

By Malka Alper
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo: Of subject, untitled (p.442)

He was the youngest son of a large family, and early on tasted deprivation and the burdens of life. Despite this he was a cheerful person with a light face, warmhearted, and a lover of his fellow man, always ready to help someone even beyond his capacity – this is how he is etched in my memory.

In Dereczin, he was a member of the *Betar* organization, he went away for training, and entered the Holy Land illegally before the Second World War. He established a family, and together with his wife navigated the trials of absorption and the difficulties of putting down roots in a new country.

In the end, he obtained steady employment, had good fortune with his little son, and radiated satisfaction. He strived for a better way of life, to a bigger house, because he lived in cramped quarters on a noisy street.

He had already made a commitment to a building company for a small private home, but an accident took him, young and handsome at an age of vigor, from his family, comrades and friends.

May his memory be for a blessing!

To the Memory of Yerakhmiel Edelstein, ז"ל

By Dov Gorinovsky
(Original Language: Hebrew)

I left him [behind] in our town when he was still a boy of elementary school age. After he finished his elementary schooling in Dereczin, he continued his studies at the high school in Slonim.

At the beginning of 1936, on the eve of the outbreak of the bloody incidents in the Holy Land, he came as a student at the University of Jerusalem, and studied psychology. The conditions for study at that time were very difficult.

Like every other young man of that era, Yerakhmiel joined the Haganah, And he was very active. He became attached to the Jerusalem brigade, and was active in the vicinity of Atarot, and Gush Etzion where he was when he got started. Afterwards he was sent to Beit Zayid. Understandably, his service in the Haganah caused him to stop his studies at the university. After a period, he was sent by the Haganah leadership to serve in the [British] Mandate police force, and afterwards served in the areas of Beit She'an and Gesher.

His life was difficult during that period, because he had to spend quite some time in a hostile environment among Arabs and the English.

Yerakhmiel came to Tel-Aviv and started all over again. It was very difficult for him to get settled, and he went through all sorts of experiences, until he was accepted for a position with the Tel-Aviv municipal government, in the finance department. He succeeded in his work and earned a stable position. He established a family among his people, and a daughter was born to him. This period of good fortune did not last long. He took sick suddenly, and was sidelined. After recovering from the first episode of illness, he attempted to return to work, but his condition prevented him from doing so. He always hoped that he would return to good health and resume a normal life. He was always concerned about the welfare of his wife and tender daughter, and their fate.

For a little more than four years he struggled against his illness, until he succumbed after much difficult suffering. He turned forty very shortly before he passed away.

May his memory be for a blessing.

Yerakhmiel Edelstein, ז"ל

By Malka Alper
(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Of subject, untitled (p. 443)

He was born in 1914 to his parents, *Sarah'keh & Isaac Edelstein*, in Dereczin, *Yerakhmiel* was the oldest son in the family.

He completed the Tarbut School in Dereczin, and then he went to Slonim to study at the Polish-Jewish gymnasium, which he completed with distinction.

Apart from this, he was well raised, very shy, and introverted, but full of spirit and a very interesting conversation partner. It was in this manner that I renewed my acquaintance with him when in the middle of the thirties he came to the Holy Land on a visa to study at the University of Jerusalem.

When the bloody incidents broke out in 1936, *Yerakhmiel*, as a member of the Haganah went off as a watchman in the police force. Was compelled to give up his studies at the university, because Poland did not permit his visa to be renewed.

As a police aide, he was compelled to serve in a variety of places, often among Arabs and English. He saw, however, that his service comprised a mission placed upon him by the Haganah leadership. From his meager stipend, he was yet able to send back money to his parents quite frequently, more to give them satisfaction, because they really did not need his help.

Only at the end of the Second World War did he first get release from the British police force and obtained employment in the Tel-Aviv municipal government. He made a very nice family life for himself. He committed heart and soul to the work of the relief committee, which the people from Dereczin established to help surviving Jews from our hometown. He wrote letters to the wandering Derecziners in war-torn Europe, help with the publication of the Bulletin, sending packages to the refugees, and maintained the books of the credit union – and all without a fanfare, quietly, special and in a heartfelt way.

A serious illness tore him away from his family and from our ranks.

May his memory be for a blessing.

Isser Lev, ז"ל

By Meir Bakalchuk
(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo of Subject (untitled) (p. 444)

Among the few surviving Jews after the war in 1945, I also met *Isser Lev*, my friend and companion from my earliest youth onwards.

Isser was my father's ז"ל student for the study of *Gemara*, and he absorbed large portions of the Torah and commentaries at every opportunity. *Isser* was a diligent student and he was valued highly by everyone.

When *Isser* came to me somewhere in Austria to bid me farewell prior to his going to Argentina, he wept intensely, and began to recite Torah in his sweet voice, using my father's melodies that he used while studying the *Gemara*. – 'I will never forget the tunes of the Rabbi of Dereczin, your father, out teacher.' – he said to me then.

Isser was born in Dereczin in 1909 or 1910. We both studied with my father, and we both went to Grodno to [study at] the Teacher's Seminary. *Isser* always excelled in his studies with his stubborn diligence.

After the war, as I said, we met in Dereczin. *Isser* survived the German occupation in the ghetto, and then as a partisan in the forest. We met again in Lodz, and then in Austria. *Isser* was a teacher in the DP camps. In Argentina, he was also a Hebrew teacher. His students will remember him, along with us, his friends and companions.

Rachel Eichenbaum-Walansky ז"ל

By A.

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo of Subject (untitled) (p. 444)

Rachel Eichenbaum was the daughter of *Moshe & Shayndl Walansky (Gershon the Dyer's* granddaughter).

After the great massacre, *Rokheleh* fled to the forest, was an active partisan, and distinguished herself more than once with her heroic exploits.

She lived to come to the Land of Israel, and established a family, but rather soon she became seriously ill and was taken from us at an early age.

Offer respect for her memory!

Shimon Lusky ז"ל

By M. A.

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo of Subject (untitled) (p. 445)

[He] was born in Slonim, and lived with his family in Halinka. He was a general benefactor, anonymously helping those who were in need.

A good and special man. His wife and daughter were slain at the hands of the murdering Nazis in Halinka. He then fled into the forest.

In the partisan ranks, he was given the heavy responsibility of finding provisions. He constantly slipped extra food surreptitiously to the children and the women in the family compound.

Afterward, he came to Israel, and from the ground up, rebuilt his family life, but he became seriously ill, from which he did not recover.

Respect his shining memory.

In Memory of Reb Mordechai Zolotkovsky

By Abraham Baysman

(Original Language: Hebrew)

I met *Reb Mordechai ben Yosef Zolotkovsky* in 1936, and I wish to tell about this straight man, who lived out his final years in the home of his family, after managing to get them out in time and rescuing them from the terrifying Holocaust that overtook the Jews of Poland.

He was a man of pleasant disposition, supporting himself by the labor of his own hands, without, God forbid, finding it necessary to appeal for sustenance to his children. He worked hard his entire life. He was dedicated to his children, and helped them establish their homes and families. Because of this, they knew of his practice of providing charitable assistance anonymously. He was a believer and an observer of mitzvot, and was similarly inclined in his believe that the redemption of Israel would come in its own land.

Even in the time when he was in the town of Halinka, he served as the appointed liaison between the Jewish community and the ruling authorities. More than once he lent assistance to his fellow Jews in matters connected to the local governmental institutions. Except, with the passage of time, he saw that his efforts and all his work for his community were being done in a hostile diaspora, and as an ardent Zionist he decided that one of these days to make *aliyah.*

His *aliyah* did not come easily. The Polish regime took issue with him and began to search for him, and only thanks to friends that he had among Christian neighbors who hid him until the official concern passed, was he able to successfully flee, to reach Egypt and from there – to the Holy Land.

In the Holy Land, he started a new life. He rented a parcel of land from an arab in order to put up a house, and began to deal with the process of extracting his family to join him. After not too long as time, this desire of his also came to fruition – his wife, three daughters and son reached the Holy Land, joined him and became a help to him in his work. Only, he did not succeed in bringing out all the other members of his family, and these remained behind and were killed in the Holocaust.

Because of the strenuous work of putting down roots in the homeland, he lost his wife. But even as a widower, he knew how to arrange his life in a way that enabled him to successfully live close by his son and daughters.

He was a modest man, beloved by one and all, and he had the capacity to communicate to all who came in contact with him, his love of the land and the family of man.

As his son-in-law, the husband of his daughter, *Leah,* I wanted to put down these few lines in memory of *Reb Mordechai Zolotkovsky.*

Ze'ev Ogulnick ע"י

By M.B.

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo of Subject (untitled) (p. 446)

Born in Dereczin in 1915.

During the Second World War he was a partisan and distinguished himself as a scout. He was [then] drafted into the Red Army. After the liberation, he came to the Holy Land on the refugee ship, 'Latrun,' which was seized by the British authorities, and its passengers were taken to Cyprus, on January 11, 1946. He reached the Holy Land in May 1947.

A good friend, who had an open heart, always at the ready to help and offer encouragement. His house was always open to friends, and it was always a pleasure to find oneself in the company of his family, his wife *Henya,* and daughter *Esther,* may they have a long life.

He was taken from this life prematurely. His wife and daughter will take some comfort in his good name that he left behind him, as an honest man of pure heart.

We mourn our loss.

Moshe Izaakovich ע"י

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo of Subject (untitled) (p. 446)

Moshe was born in Dereczin in 1902. In his earliest years, he absorbed Jewish culture into his soul, and as he matured, he studied with both speed and dedication in the Yeshivas.
He reached the homeland in 1932 and after enduring the tribulations of getting settled, he went to work in a central supply organization. He worked at this organization for more than twenty years, until he came down with an incurable disease, and he was bedridden for more than five years.

He died – released from his agonies – on 15 Shevat 5728 (1966).

He was a modest man, self-effacing. He was always ready to help a friend. He was dedicated with heart and soul to whatever he undertook. He was a dear friend, content with his lot, modest and self-effacing. He was respected and loved by all who knew him.

Her was active in the liberation of Haifa during the War of Independence.

His memory will remain forever in the hearts of his family, those who knew him, his friends and all those who came in contact with him.

May his memory be for a blessing.

My Sister Shoshana ל"ז

By Y. Izaakovich

(Original Language: Hebrew)

She was an active member of her chapter of *HaShomer HaTza'ir.* She came to the homeland as a pioneer, originally in Kibbutz HaArtzi beside Petakh-Tikvah, and afterwards the nucleus moved to Kibbutz Ayn HaKhoresh, near Hadra.

In this kibbutz, she was active in cultural affairs and absorption of new immigrants.

After a serious illness, she died while still young, leaving behind a husband and two young sons.

She was interred at the Ayn HaKhoresh cemetery on March 1, 1953.

May her soul be bound up in the bond of life.

[E]lazar Rosenberg ל"ז

(Original Language: Yiddish)

'Lozer Rosenberg came to Israel in the year 1949 with his family from the camps in Germany. In 1950, he was bitten by a venomous snake, from which he died.

May his soul be bound up in the bond of life.

Beba, (Nekhama) Wife of Reb Yoshe Rabinovich ל"ז

(Original Language: Hebrew)

A 'Woman of Valor,' who ran her business with a firm hand and wisely. The matriarch of an intelligent family. In her eighties, she come to her daughter *Ethel* and her family, and make *aliyah.*

Her father, *Reb Eliyahu* ל"ז of Dereczin, made *aliyah* in the 19th century as an old man, and is buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

She enjoyed the pleasures of the land for eight years. And if these were difficult years for her – she did not complain, and during the time of the incidents, she would write back to her family in Poland: 'There is no problem, we will stand up to the Arab contingents.

She passed away on 6 Elul 5703 (1942).

May her soul be bound up in the bond of life.

Eliyahu, son of Reb Yoshe (Joseph) Rabinovich ל"ז

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Even back in 1935 he came to the homeland in order to settle down, but it was not to be. It was not for any reason to do with him, but he was compelled to return to Poland. In 1939 he was exiled to Siberia from his hometown of Slonim.

After the war, he spent some time in Germany, and learned the printing business there. He made *aliyah,* drained by his experience in the camps. He worked here exclusively for the [newspaper] *HaAretz,* printed by Mapai. He led a quiet life, but the years of suffering in Russian exile left their mark upon him. He died at an early age on 8 Shevat 5723 (1962).

May his soul be bound up in the bond of life.

Ethel (Esther) daughter of Joseph & Beba Herenson-Rabinovich ל"ז

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Photo: Ethel together with Y. M. Plotkin ל"ז and *F. Einstein.* (P. 447)

Upon the establishment of the *Tze'irei Zion* in Dereczin, she took an active role in the chapter activities, as well as in *KKL"L,* and was a member

of the culture committee of the library. She also would participate in the drama club presentations, which was in existence in those days, and would take leading roles in the plays of *Yaakov Gordon*.

She yearned to make *aliyah* even as a young girl, but she was the youngest in the family, and was denied the fulfilment of her wishes, because her lot was to live with her parents.

At the beginning of the thirties, she married *Eliyahu Herenson*, and as a mother of two sons she made *aliyah* with her entire family.

The process of absorption in that period, in the days of the wars and bloodletting in the Holy Land, were not easy, yet she bore all these difficulties in good spirit.

Wishing well to others, delicate in nature, dedicated not only to her immediate family, she – was also dedicated to her more extended family. She was taken from us before her time: she passed away on 2 Tevet 5721 (1960) in Tel-Aviv.

May her soul be bound up in the bond of life.

Our Sister Rachel Alper ל"ז

By Malka Alper

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Photo of Subject (untitled) (p. 448)

The youngest of a family of six children, *Rachel* was pretty, intelligent and full of graciousness – everyone loved her.

She learned to read and write Russian and Hebrew at an early age, listening to those who were older than her preparing their lessons at home.

Her prime childhood years coincided with the period of the First World War, when the issue of food to eat was no trivial matter. This had a very strong impact on her physical constitution. She even investigated the possibility of studying in a German school.

After the war, she graduated as the top student at the Real-Gymnasium in Slonim, while assisting many of her young city friends with their work. The teachers and the director took into account her involvement for the welfare of the students.

From there, she went to Warsaw, where she received her pedagogic training in the Tarbut institutions, and the public ones as well.

Her first position as a teacher was in Pinsk, in the 'Tarbut-Medrasha.' Her former students kept contact with her up until her last day.

On the eve of Passover in 1935, *Rachel*, along with our mother ל"ז, came to the homeland, and immediately after Passover obtained work as governesses in an institution for indigent children, established by the city administration of Tel-Aviv. The head of the child care institution, *Mrs. Shoshana Persitz* saw her at work, and at the end of the summer, at the beginning of the new school year, 1935-36, she transferred her to the Balfour School, which had just moved into a new building.

Rachel worked at the Balfour School until 1947, when she was sent by the Sokhnut to the DP camps in Austria. All those with whom she cam in contact during her work in the camps, always remembered her and reminded themselves of her, and came to see her on her final departure.

In 1952-53, at her own expense, she traveled to America, io order to broaden her knowledge in raising children and teaching, and in particular to observe schoolwork in the established parts of New York.

After she returned, in the years 1953-55, she directed the elementary school classes at the Herzliya Gymnasium, and afterwards until the 1960-61 school year at the Bar-Giora school in Yad Eliyahu, Tel-Aviv. From 1961 to her last Day, she was the head of the 'Muster Schul' named for Henrietta Szold in Tel-Aviv.

Rachel had Many Facets

By Amiram

(Original Language: Hebrew)

To make a 'list' about *Rachel* ?...

What to start with ?...

What is worth mentioning? – (And what is not? Is there even something that 'isn't worth mentioning'?....)

To portray characteristics? – (She was generous...).

How did I see her, me?

Then to my friends she was the 'very essence of what a school meant.' The ideal of the concept of 'a school' ...

She was a marvel of an educator for whom the twenty four hours of her day was totally given over to the 'children of Israel'...

She did her work with consummate dedication, like the High Priest in the Holy of Holies: from when she arose – and immediately threw herself into the issues of the school: and when [regular] hours were over – lessons:

'Go home! You're tired' ... 'they're waiting for you at home'... Me – I have a few more paragraphs to do'... It wasn't easy to convince her that the 'few paragraphs' could wait until tomorrow...

Despite this –

We carried on many discussions between us, and many times we 'closed' the school, and we walked together – as we went to our homes.

Those occasions were 'my university:' This was my privilege, 'to draw from the well [of wisdom] at her hand' – to be able to snatch up the strands of her thought process, and apprehend her line of reasoning: to learn and prove for who knows which time, that the directors and the ones who evaluate her work – they are the essence of the educational ideal and honesty.

If she had any fear – it was only for justice, and the protection of the dignity of the individual.

In her tiny worn body lived a great soul, strong-willed and of steadfast character, who demanded of herself the ultimate in austerity, to the point of bodily harm.

It was almost thought that she did this as a matter of putting up a front. Nevertheless, those who were close to her knew this was not a matter of appearances – and not all to everyone...

The relationship of her friends to work served as a source of pride to her: because through this she saw the blessings of doing in her work, and took satisfaction from the condition of the school with which she was bound to with all the strands of her soul. But her concerns were – never! – bounded by this institution only: all the children in Israel were dear to her, and her desire to see them all develop properly, grow up and prosper, was awesome...

Even on her sickbed, during her most critical days, her interest in all aspects of the school never let up, even if she was denied out of tact from involving herself with the work of her successor.

During the period of her incapacity, we came to learn what *Rachel* meant to the school, and what she had bequeathed to us through her character.

A long time will pass and we will continue to feel her presence between the walls of the institution...

These are only sketches of remembrance: floating, rising, and taking a place in the constellation of memories...

Rachel had many facets to her...

With the Memory of Rachel Alper ז"ל

By Meir Bakalchuk

(Original Language: Hebrew)

With the completion of the *Dereczin Yizkor Book*, the daughter of our town, *Rachel Alper* has departed from us, during the very days when we have completed the monument to the world that was and is no longer, by that small remnant of survivors from the slaughter that took place in so many different and surreal ways, while we are still in the midst of doing the best we can to assure the commemoration of our community, of our kin and members of our families who were annihilated by a murdering hand, while our hearts are still filled with bitterness and sorrow over everything that the cruel enemy of our people perpetrated on us, while we are in the midst of praying that not one of our minuscule ranks of survivors be taken from us – in those days, the persona full of glory and majesty was taken from us, *Rachel*, the daughter of the *Alper* family.

We were stunned to hear of this terrible loss, along with the many hundreds of her students, and her friends in the education arena. The pain is especially great for those who come from Dereczin, for the *Alper* family was like a bejewelled crown in the life of Dereczin, and *Rachel* was the glistening diamond in that crown.

I do not know if I will succeed in describing the greatness of spirit in this skilled educator, gifted administrator, whom thousands of her students bitterly mourn at her passing. *Rachel* was not just an ordinary teacher, who discharged her duties according to the rules. She saw the profession of teaching as the essence of her life, teaching not only the children, but also the teachers who instructed them. *Rachel* took note of her children not only within the four walls of the school – but even in their own homes, in the context of their families, in order that she would understand the right approach to the child and its education. She loved her children and knew everything about them. It is from this that the children and their parents came to admire *Rachel* and her dedicated work. Very few are blessed with this type of insight, and few are privileged to have such a faculty.

Rachel lent a firm and directing hand to those in challenged circumstances, to blind children. She did everything within her power to make these children feel like all the other children around them, and therefore the spent all their time in the company of the other pupils, mixing with them, participating in their games, and it was through the play that they felt the closeness of *Rachel* their teacher in their circle, and ran to her to give her a loving hug.

Rachel was a stern disciplinarian, and she demanded no less from others. The work in her area was burdened with unique requirements, because she gave more of herself than was asked to the education of children, and she demanded the same from her teaching and educating colleagues.

She earned a reputation as an outstanding educator, and in the higher educational institutions, her opinions were valued.

Rachel did not have personal demands, in view of the fact that she saw in the education of the children in Israel the sum total of everything, the purpose of her life, and she never stinted on her time, her work or her health, so long as the work got completely done.

In detailed conversations she was open-hearted, sometimes contentious, she didn't care for empty talk, or conversations that had no purpose. She would respond with sharp thinking, explaining her thinking on the subject at hand, to the point that often despite your own will, she would change your mind – because who could stand up to the reasoning and enlightenment in her words? We would listen to her utterances and her explanations would be accepted as if they were the teachings of the living God.

May her memory be for a blessing!

Rachel Daughter of Dereczin

By Y. Raban

(Original Language: Hebrew)

Rachel was a daughter of Dereczin form the beginning of her life to the day she died.

She was a daughter of her town – in the larger part of her recollections for the larger part of her life. She was quite a distance from her town, but when a gathering would take place in the home of a Dereczin landsman, and the recollections would begin to flow, recalling the jokes that circulated in its streets ans houses over the years – *Rachel* would stand as if aside, as if carrying on a conversation with herself: 'Look, look what they are busying themselves with, with the very town that we have come far from, even more than it has distanced itself from us…' – and suddenly she would open with a multi faceted theory, with ordered and clipped sentences, all in vivid and moving colors, and purposely in a Dereczin dialect, a vibrant flowing Yiddish, homey, ornate with expression, to the point that from story to story, her speech would soften and the cast of her face became smilingly dreamy, and all the longing that a person of our age can have for his childhood and youth, was revealed in her flowing discourse, in which every word was like a minted coin, to which nothing need be added, and nothing be removed.

She was an observer – and it seemed: a silent observer – to the work of creating the *Dereczin Yizkor Book*, which is the fruit of the writing of many, and the fruit of the labor of a few. It seemed that she was listening with half an ear to the dialogue between the ones who were organizing the contents of the Book. Yet almost at every one of the early meetings, she would provide some short insight – not even a proposal or critique – but there would be something in her insight about the fundamentals of the town of her youth, from her core, from the essence of her being.

She was a daughter of Dereczin, and everywhere that she worked and gave of herself, learning and teaching, she drawn to the legacy of her little vibrant hometown, to her first teacher, to the friends of her youth, to every person born in the town – because it was as if she sought something of the deep rich, homey feeling of Dereczin.

As a daughter of her town, she was not inclined to public disclosures and talk about her weaknesses, about the past, and the residue of memories that were deeply etched into her heart. She end her introductory remarks on this type of subject with a joke or something a little sarcastic, but in the gist of her discourse she would bedeck her listeners with a veritable treasury of nostalgia.

Countless times, we implored her to put her memories down on paper, but even these requests were disposed of with the wave of a hand and a firm and adamant refusal. And on one day we got the memory of her meeting with her teacher, in one of the cities of the USA, who first taught her to read and write.[136]

As she spoke – so did she write. Every word carefully shaped, every sentence clear from its beginning to its end, and the story as if cast as one piece. And it is only after reading it that you apprehend the very special affection that *Rachel* attributed to every corner of her town Dereczin, to every person whose memory was in her mind, to the few that remained alive, and the countless who died.

Each and every person became idealized in her memory, cleansed of their pettiness and the harshness of day-to-day life in the tiny town, but she also did not necessarily laud them with unconditional praise and glorious words – they appeared in her words as very real, earthy people, people who did have weaknesses, and these were her townsfolk, the Derecziners.

Rachel was a daughter of the *Alper* family, a daughter of the very house that stood at the heart of Dereczin, and shone a love of Zion on it and everything that surrounded it. It appears that this house and its family came into the world with a clear and distinguished mission.

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136 Found earlier in this book.

Along with the other members of her family, *Rachel* took part of this mission upon herself – the education of young Jewish children, regardless of where they were: in the cities of the diaspora, in the DP camps, and in their new land. And together with the members of her family, she carried out her mission as a sacred duty, full of faith, with a completely committed heart, giving all of her energy, all of her love, with everything she could give to education and her colleagues in the educational field, until she passed away.

Liova (Aryeh) Greenwald ז"ל

(Original Language: Yiddish)

In 1939, when the [Russian] army entered Dereczin, *Liova Greenwald* was exiled to Siberia.

After the war, following a period of wandering through Europe, he came to Israel, and worked as a pharmacist in a clinic.

He died of a heart attack at an early age.

May his soul be bound up in the bond of life.

Nachman (Nakheh) Goldenberg ז"ל

(Original Language: Yiddish)

Literally during the final minutes of the massacre in the Dereczin ghetto, *Goldenberg* found a way to get out of the hands of the hangmen, and fled to the forest.

His entire family, consisting of his wife and children, brothers and sisters, were annihilated along with the Dereczin community.

After the war, *Nakheh* joined up with the *Aliyah-Bet* to enter Israel. Along with thousands of other refugees, he was sent by the British authorities to Cyprus, and later did come to the homeland where he began to reconstruct his life anew. However, the years in the forest and the wanderings appear to have taken a toll of his health. A few years after he made *aliyah* he passed away from a heart attack.

May his soul be bound up in the bond of life.

Alter Lobzovsky ז"ל

(Original Language: Yiddish)

He was a partisan in the forest along with those from Dereczin.

He came to the homeland and worked hard driving a horse-drawn wagon to earn a living. Because of his tribulations in the forest, he required surgery on a leg. A short time after the operation, *Alter* passed away.

May his soul be bound up in the bond of life.

Memorial Pages

Reduced KK"L Facsimile Page

QUOTE PAGE
From Jeremiah

Page 455:

— נקמת דם ילד קטן עוד לא ברא השטן —

ח . נ . ביאליק

– The Devil himself has not yet devised the vengeance for the blood of a small child –

C. N. Bialik

In Memoriam
To All the Slain Jewish Children
of
Dereczin and Its Surroundings

Photo: Untitled group picture of schoolchildren, with teachers at the rear.

Page 456:

Their Memory Will Never Leave Our Hearts

Their Son & Brother, *Meir & Ben-Zion Bakalchuk*

Photos (Top to Bottom, L to R):

Rabbi Zvi-Hirsch Bakalchuk ז"ל — *The Rebbitzen Chaya Miriam* ז"ל

The Rabbi's Daughter, *Malka Weinstein* ז"ל

Second from Left The Rabbi's Son, *Moshe-Aharon* ז"ל

The Rabbi's Daughter, *Sima* ז"ל

Page 457:

Our Brother *David Alper,* His Wife *Shoshana,*
Their Son *Emanuel,* Their Daughter *Avia* – **Killed in Pinsk.**
Our Sister *Masha*, & Her Husband *Isser Lamprat,*
Together With Their Son *Nahum* – **Killed in Klutsk.**

May Their Memory Be for a Blessing

Their Sisters *Malka, Bella & Duba Alper*

Let Us Guard Their Memory Forever –

Shimon Abramovich & Family

Photo: Eliyahu Abramovich & His Family

Page 458:

The Ogulnick Families in Israel
And the Levs in South Africa
Perpetuate the Memory of Their
Parents, *Shmeryl & Masha Ogulnick*,
Their Brothers *Shmuel-Leizer & Leibl*,
And Their Sisters, *Goldkeh & Miriam*.

Photos: Five untitled photos are included, in which the photos of the parents are obvious. The identities of the three siblings is less clear.

I Perpetuate the Memory
Of My Husband, *Moshe* ע"ה

Kaylah Azov & Daughter

Photo: Moshe Azov, Son of Abraham & Pearl ז"ל

Page 459:

Their Memory Remains Perpetual and Sacred in Our Hearts –

The Family of *Rukhamah & Meir Siskind*

Photos:

Above: My father Yitzhak-Abraham Abelovich ע"ה *as a young man.*

Below: *The Abelovich Family:*
The mother, Zelda, Brothers Shmuel & Bashkeh, Issachar
Hannan – ז"ל

Page 460:

To the Perpetual Memory
Of Our Beloved Parents,
Brothers, Sisters and
Their Children –

The Families of:

Dvosha Beckenstein,
Chaya Pilzer-Beckenstein

Photos: 1) Shmuel & Nekhama Beckenstein
2) Reizl & Sini Beckenstein, Cherneh, Hannah Beckenstein & Their Children

The Lord Will Avenge Their Blood !

Page 461:

To the Beneficent Memory of:

Dobeh & Mordechai Ogulnick,
Moshe-Peretz Einstein,
Itkeh & Itcheh-David Ogulnick –

Commemorated By:

***Penina & Liebeh,* of the *Ogulnick* Household**
(In Israel)

Photo: An untitled family portrait.

Photo: (Seven people in photo, not specifically identified)

Esther Nussbaum-Bricker perpetuates the memory of her parents, Itcheh-Yaakov & Hannah-Rachel Bricker, brother Yosheh and Sister Badaneh

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Page 462:

To the Eternal Memory
Of the Souls of My Parents and
The Members of My Family Who Perished.

Aryeh Beckenstein

Photos:

Top: My Parents
Masha & Mordechai (Motkeh)Beckenstein

Below Left: My Brothers
Yehoshua, Eliyahu & Yerachmiel;
My Sister Bella

Below Right: Untitled Family Portrait

My Sister *Miriam*, Was Killed In the Prime of Her Life.

Page 463:

We Perpetuate the Memory of an Annihilated Family

Aryeh & Noah Beckenstein

Photos:

Top (Left to Right): Zina & Shayna at the grave of their father Noah Lunsky.
Zina Lunsky-Beckenstein

Below (Left to Right):

Shayna Lunsky and her Husband, Yaakov Sakar
The Mother of the Family, Nekhama

Page 464:

I, *Dr. Michal Ber (Birnbaum)* perpetuate the memory of my dear family that was annihilated by the Nazis:

Photos (Left to Right): My Father Leon Birnbaum from Warsaw
My Brother Moshe (Mytek)
My Mother Penina (Pearl) of the Blizniansky Family

May Their Memory Be for a Blessing!

Miriam, Liza & Katya of the *Bliznianskv* Family Perpetuate the Memory of:

Photo: Their sister Ruzha and her family, who were annihilated.

Page 465:

I, *Musha Novitsky-Grachuk Perpetuate the Memory of My Annihilated Family*

Photos: Top – a family picture with the legend: My Mother Sarah Grachuk ע"ה, and her crown of family members.

Bottom (Left to Right): Five people with the legend: With my family members in Russia, 1961
Musha Grachuk-Basak and child. Killed in the Dereczin ghetto.

Page 466:

To the Shining Memory of

Two photos:

My Grandmother *Paya-Sulya*
And of My Grandfather
***Itcheh-Berel Itzkowitz*,**
The Soltis, Who For His Entire Life
Stood Watch on Behalf of the
Jewish Community of Dereczin

Kalman Abramovich

In Memory of Our Parents
Rachel-Leah & Menahem-Mendel Dykhovsky
And Our Brothers *Joseph & Jacob*

Photo of four (untitled)

The Families of
***Rivkah Seglovitz & Esther Globus* Of the *Dykhovsky* Family**

Page 467:

Miriam Pechersky & Sarah Baswitz Perpetuate the Memory of Their Loved Ones in the *Slonimsky* Family

Photos (Left to Right): The Sisters Hannah-Esther & Zelda Slonimsky
On the right – the Mother, Chaya ז"ל
The Father Aaron (Zaydl) Slonimsky (Der Hasid) ז"ל

Dov, Saul & Sarah Gorinovsky Perpetuate the Memory of the Family:

Photos (Left to Right): *The Parents, Sisters and Brother*
Dov-Berel Epstein
David-Zelig Epstein

Page 468:

Shoshana Shapiro Perpetuates the Memory of the *Nozhnitsky* Family:

Photo: *A Family Portrait bearing the legend: Her Parents, Hanan-Yaakov & Hannah, The Grandmother Chaya-Beileh, Her Brothers & Sisters: Marisa, Liba, Natan, Abraham, Leah & Sarah*

I, *Natan Dlugolansky* Perpetuate the Memory of My Family, Residents of Kolonia-Sinaiska:

Photos (Left to Right): *Leah & Yoshka Dlugolansky and their children, Shlomo, Moshe & Rivkah*
Aaron, the son of Yehuda & Hannah Dlugolansky
My Parents, Simkha & Chaya-Basheh Dlugolansky

Page 469:

Moshe Kwiat & Son, *Israel* Perpetuate the Memory of Their Dearest:

Photos: Top – *Families: Leib & Gisha Walitsky, Shmuel-Aryeh Einstein, Esther, Chayeleh & Moshe-Peretz, Itkeh Kwiat & Son, Velvel*

Right – *Son & Brother, Velvel*
Cherneh Kwiat & Husband

To the Memory Of My Father

Photo: Eliyahu-Chaim Walitsky

Sarah Bergman-Walitsky
(South-Africa)

Page 470:

Their Memory Will Be Eternal –

Sarah Teichman-Levinger

Photos: (Top Right): *Grandmother Chaya-Beileh Zoger*
(Mid-Left): *Uncle Sholom Zhak*

In Memory of My Grandfather
R' Kalman-David Levinger

Bottom (Left to Right): *The Father, David Levinger*
Brother, Moshe Levinger (Killed in Volkovysk)
The Mother Mashka Levinger

Page 471:

Yehudit Yankelewick-Lantzevitzky

Perpetuates the Memory of Her Annihilated Family:

Photos: (Top Right): *Chaya-Hoddel & Chaim-Itcheh Gelman*

Bottom (Left to Right): *The Parents: Chaim & Guteh-Leah, Yehudit (in America), Chaya-Hoddel, Zlateh, Tuvia, Dobeh & Sarah*

Tuvia & Bella Lantzevitzky

Page 472:

Jacob Mishkin & Wife Perpetuate the Memory of Their Families In Dereczin and Slonim:

Photos: (Top Left): *Sister Chaya at the grave of the mother*

Bottom: *From the right: Moshkeh, Meir, Yenteh (in Chile), Sheryl, Masha (in Chile), Shmuel, Dina (In Peru); Sitting: Sonia with her son, Mottel, The Mother, Itteh-Rachel, The Father Yosef, Chayekeh*

Page 473:

The *Lovovsky Family*, In-Laws of *Jacob Mishkin*:

Photos: Top Right is Untitled, but seems to be the elder Lovovskys.

Top Left: *Hannah, wife of the Rabbi R' Mordechai Knorazavsky, and their children*

Children of R' Mordechai:
Yudel, Shmuel, Berel,
Leibeh, Abraham, Aaron,
Israel & David

Bottom (Left to Right): *The Rabbi, R' Yekhiel Brother of Sophia*

Wife of the Rabbi

The Child of the Rabbi & His Wife
Was Killed At The Age of 13 Months

Page 474:

A Perpetual Memorial to The *Lifshovich* Family

Photos: (Top Left) – *Dobka Lifshovich and Her Children*
(Top Right) – *Motteh & Dobeh Lifshovich*

Bottom: *The Lifshovich Family*
From the Right: Standing: David, Chava, Chaim-Yehoshua & Eliyahu
Sitting: Gershon (Living in America), The Parents Hena-Yankel & Bashkeh, The Daughter Taibl

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Page 475:

Mina Liebreider-Stupak Perpetuates the Memory of Her Family from Halinka:

Photos: (Top Right) – *Her Father, R' Shlomo Stupak*

(Bottom) – First Row: *Sonya, Jonathan & Leah Klimovitsky;*
Second Row: *The Parents and Children of Sonya. Esther, Daughter of Sonya survived.*

Page 476:

The *Streit* Family Perpetuates the Memory of the Families:

Photos: Top – *Sitting: Fruma-Risheh Rakhilevsky;*
Standing: Pinya & His Wife, Paya with her son

Bottom – *Abraham Chaim & Faygel Polonsky with their Children, Tevl & Taibl*

Page 477:

Rachel Efras-Feldman Perpetuates the Memory of the Families: *Feldman, Stukalsky, Weinstein*

Photos: Top Left – *Brother, Hirschel Feldman*
Mid- Left – *The Weinstein-Bardakh Family*
Mid-Right – *Riva Viniatsky-Feldman*

Bottom – *The Feldman & Stukalsky Families (Group Portrait, otherwise untitled)*

Page 478:

[Abraham] Kadish Feder, of New York, Perpetuates the Memory of His Relatives:

Photos (Top to Bottom, Left to Right):

Fruma Luria Killed in Bialystock
Rabbi Meir Luria Killed in Bialystock
Abraham & Musha Lifshovich with their children; killed in the Dereczin Ghetto
Chaim Ferder, killed in the Dereczin Ghetto

Page 479:

Photos:
Top Left: Yehoshua Shelkovich, Killed in the Dereczin Ghetto
Top Right: Hirschel Shelkovich, Killed in the Dereczin Ghetto
Bottom Right: Moshkeh Ferder and his wife

Sarah Pintchevsky Perpetuates the Memory of:
Photo: Hannah-Itkeh Ferder

Page 480:

To Their Eternal Memory – The *Kulakowski* Family

Photos: Left – Rivkah Weissenberg, Itzl, Ethel, Mosheleh; Tamara Nozhnitsky, Chaim, Yehudit, Rachel, Mina, Zeydl & Henoch

Right– Resha Lev-Kulakowski ז"ל

To the Eternal Memory of My Family –

Dora Birnbaum-Rothstein

Photo: My Father, Director Samson Rothstein, My Mother Eydeleh, Brother Yosheh, and Little Sister Masheleh

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Page 481:

Photos: (Top, Right): R' Chaim-Yehoshua Petrukhovich
(Top Center): His Wife
(Top Left): Hannah (left), their daughter

Bottom: Left – Hannah Bernicker-Petrukhovich with her Husband & Children
Right – Faygel Lev-Petrukhovich, with her Husband & Children

Their Memory is Perpetuated by *Nekhama & Michal Petrukhovich*, the Daughters, and their Families

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Page 482:

To the Shining Memory of *Yekhiel Khonyak & Chaya*, and the Sisters, *Bella & Feiga*

(Refugees from Ostrolenka)

Perpetuated
Esther Michelson

Photo: Faygel Quint, ע"ה
Killed in the Dereczin Ghetto

Sarah Slotnick, of New York, Perpetuates the Memory of Her Relatives

Photo: The Dykhovsky Family of Slonim

Page 483:

Dvora Smith – Shelkovich (New York) Perpetuates the Memory of Her Dearest

Photos: Top Left: *Brother Eliyahu and his wife, Bluma*
Top Right: *Sister Esther*

Gutka Boyarsky-Salutsky Perpetuates the Memory of Her Murdered Family

Photos: Left – *Her Parents, Bothers and Sisters*
The Salutsky Family

Right – *Golda, Moshe-David's*

Page 484:

Photos: Top (Left): *Rachel-Leah Dworetsky, Mother of Regina Rabinovich*
(Center & Right): *The Parents of Chaim Rabinovich: R' Aryeh-Leib & Breineh*

Their Memory is Perpetuated By *Chaim & Regina Rabinovich*

Bottom: *The families of R' Yossef, Chaim & Eliyahu Rabinovich, Herenson & Stein*

Page 485:

Yaakov Rabinovich, His wife *Fanya Rabinovich,* and Members of His Family, Perpetuate the Memory of their Relatives

Photos: Top – *The Parents, Ze'ev & Hannah-Sarah Rabinovich*
Brother Joseph, his Wife and son Shlomo, and sister Ethel

Bottom (Left to Right): *Brother, Moshe Rabinovich*
The Mother, Hannah-Sarah & her grandchild, Shlomo son of Joseph

Page 486:

***Chaya Blauss* Perpetuates the Memory of Her Sister**	***Tzivya Dykhovsky-Rakhilevsky* & Her Family, Perpetuate the Memory of:**
Photo: Liba, and Her Husband Moshe Walansky	*Photo: Mother, Brothers & Sisters*

To the Memory of
Zelig Lobzovsky,
His Daughter, Paya & Her Family

Perpetuated
Daniel Kedess

Photo (untitled)

Page 487:

Young Lives Cut Off
At the Hands of the
Nazi Oppressors

Photo: Mirel Ogulnick, Liba Miller, Sima Shelovsky

Photo: Chaim-Shia Lifshovich, Batya Glinkovasky
Hannan Abelovich, Chaya Glinkovsky
Shmuel Korn

God Will Avenge Their Blood!

Page 488:

Photos: Top – (Left): Basha Glinkovsky ז"ל
(Right): Beileh Lev ז"ל

Photo: Mendel Narchuk ז"ל

To the Memory of the Partisans,

Chaim Elyovitz* and His Brother, *Leibeh
(accompanied by photo), **who fell in the forests.**

Perpetuated by their Sister, *Leah*

Necrology

Martyrs of the Community of Dereczin

Note: The order in which these names appear has been made to conform to English alphabetization, and therefore does not follow the same order as they appear in the original Hebrew text.

A

Abelovich, Abraham-Elya, his wife Chaya, Daughter & Son

Abelovich, Issachar, & Wife

Abelovich, Shmuel, wife Bashkeh and their daughters Tzippeh & Shayndl

Abramovich, Eliyahu (Elyeh Ahareh's), his wife Itkeh, & their children: Menahem Mendel, Genya, Esther, Leah and her Husband, Moshe & Basheh

Abramovich, – Husband, wife & daughter Sonia. Aharon Leib & Family

Abramovich, Kunya and her Sister

Alper, David, his wife Shoshana,& children: Emanuel & Avia (Killed in Pinsk).

Alper, Moshe, the Watchmaker, His Wife & Their Children.

Asak, Chaim, his wife Bashkeh, their son Moshe and daughter Leah.

Astrakhan-Poupko, Sarah and her daughters: Yehudit & Tzippeh

Azef, Elkeh

Azef, Hannah-Itkeh & Her Child.

Azef, Moshe ben Abraham & Pearl, fell in the forest.

Azef, Nekhama, her Husband Aryeh and their children: Gittel, Pearl, Avreml, Chaim & Tzivya.

Azef, Nella (Gella?), and son, Mordechai

Azef, Rachel, Her Husband & Child

Azef, Yankel & Mottel.

B

Bakalchuk, Zvi-Hirsch, The Rabbi of Dereczin. His wife, the Rebbetzin, Chaya Miriam, and their children: Sima & Moshe-Aharon.

Bardakh, Joseph, his wife, Menukha and their sons: Moshe'l, Meir, Chaim.

Bardakh, Reuven, his wife, Mashkeh, and their daughters, Cherneh & Ethel.

Baranovsky, Itcheh-Yudkeh, his wife Sonia (Walansky's daughter), His Brothers & Sisters.

Baruch the Homeless One and his family.

Basak, Abraham-Moshe, His Wife & Children

Basak, Feitl, his wife, Golda-Leah & their children, Rachel, Sarah & Motya.

Basak, Feitl's brother and his Family.

Beckenstein, Dvora with 2 Daughters.

Beckenstein, Hirschel & Wife

Beckenstein, Leibl his wife Friedeh and their Children.

Beckenstein, Mendicheh, his wife & daughter Tzippeh.

Beckenstein, Motkeh, his wife, Mashkeh, their children: Eliyahu (killed as a partisan), Yehoshua, Bela & Yerachmiel.

Beckenstein, Shmuel, his wife Nekhama, their daughter Hannah, Her Husband and Children.

Beckenstein, Shmuel-Yossel, and Children.

Beckenstein, Sini, his wife Reizl, and their son Mottel.

Beckenstein Yaakov-Chaim, his wife Shayncheh and children (Killed in Zelva).

Becker, Chaya and her sons: Yankel & Khatzkel (Kolonia).

Becker, Moshe, His wife Sula, and children Shmuel, Chaycheh, and Myteh (from Kolonia).

Becker, Shmuel, His Wife, and children, Aryeh & Beileh.

Becker, Tuvia, His Wife & Two Daughters (Lived in the Hayatim Bet HaMidrash).

Belkovich, Aryeh a refugee (overseer of the women's labor in the ghetto).

Berel the wagon leather worker his Wife & Children.

Berkovich, Michal (from Warsaw), his Sons & Daughters.

Berkovich, Izia (Yitzhak) A teacher in the Pavshekhner School.

Berkovich, Yitzhak his wife Cherneh and 4 Children, a Sister of Yitzhak and her family.

Bernicker, Esther-Elkeh, her husband Motya and 7 children.

Bernicker, Marek

Bernicker, Shmuel his wife Sarah, with their 2 Children.

Bernicker, Velvel his Wife, his daughter Mereh and Son.

Beshkin, Avromkeh, his wife Malka and son Israel.

Beshkin, Leibkeh, his wife Bobitcheh and their daughters: Masheh & Friedeh.

Beshkin, Mattityahu, his wife Merah and their son.

Bialosotsky, Leib, his wife Fruma, their daughter Ruzha, her Husband & Child.

Bitensky, Hirschel, and his wife, Nekhama.

Bitensky, Shlomo, his wife Yocheh, and their son, Velvel.

Bitensky, Shmuel, Wife & Children.

Bliziansky, Eliyahu & his wife, Zina.

Bliziansky, Feivel, his wife Minieh, & their children: Meshel, Sioma & Nahum.

Bogdanovsky, Aryeh – (fell in the forest)

Bogdanovsky, Yehoshua & Family.

Bricker, Barankeh

Bricker, Yosheh, his wife Chava, and their Son.

C

Chernitsky, Beileh-Hannah

Chernitsky, Beileh-Hannah's sister in-law & her children Shimon, Hirschel, Shlomo.

Chernitsky, Shimon his wife Esther (Shelkovich) and their children Hasia and Paya.

Cohen, Chaim-Velvel (Kolonia) His Wife, & children Sholom-Yankel & Moshe.

Cohen, Nissan (Kolonia), his wife Masha, his sons Isaac & Aharon, and 2 Daughters.

D

The ***Deaf*** coach leather worker & his wife

Davidovich, Gittel.

Dereczinsky the Teacher, Wife & Children.

Dombrowsky, Shlomo-Mordechai, his wife Badaneh and their sons David (fell in the attack on Dereczin), Yehudah & Shimon.

Dlugolansky, Aharon, (Kolonia) his wife Itkeh, & 2 Children.

Dlugolansky, Feivel from Kolonia (Sirota's son-in-law) and his wife.

Dlugolansky, Joel his wife Sarah-Beileh & Daughter

Dlugolansky, Joseph (Kolonia) his wife Leah-cheh, & their children Shayneh, Esther, Shlomo, Moshe, & Rivkah.

Dubinchik, the Mother, and her daughters Malka & Zina.

Dubovsky, Abraham, his wife Hannah & their children Sarah & Sheyma.

Dworetsky, Hirschel his wife Chaya (from the Feldman family) and their Child.

Dworetsky, Yankel, Wife & Children.

Dykhovsky, Abraham his wife Shayneh & Children. Shayneh's mother, Temeh Sarah.

Dykhovsky, Joseph ben Dov, his wife Rachel & Children.

Dykhovsky, Joseph and his daughters Mikhleh, Beileh & Chaya.

Dykhovsky, Menahem-Mendel, his wife Rachel-Leah.

Dykhovsky, Yankel, Wife & Daughter

E

Einstein, Chaim-Leib, His Wife & Children.

Einstein, Itcheh, his wife Berakha, and their 6 Children.

Einstein, Moshe-Peretz, fell as a partisan.

Einstein, Sarah

Einstein, Shmuel-Aryeh, His Wife & 3

Children.

Einstein, Sholom, his Wife & Children.

Ellerstein, Gedaliah his wife Cherneh (Kwiat's Sister).

Ellerstein, Isaac his children Shayndl, Rivkah, Chaim.

Elovich, Shprinza, her children Chaim, Elkeh, Leib-Aryeh and grandchildren Sholom & Rachel.

Epstein, Sholom, his wife Sarah & 6 Children.

F

Feder, Hindeh.

Feder, Yaakov-Meir.

Feldman, Hirschel & Children.

Feldman, Menahem-Mendel (committed suicide), his wife Pessia.

Ferder, Avreml (fell in the forest).

Ferder, Hannah-Itkeh (Azaf)

Ferder, Mosh'keh his wife Faygel, & children Genesheh (Genendel), Abraham, David, Zelig.

Fink, Chaya & Nathan.

Friedman, Zelig his wife Rachel, & daughter Hannah-Chaya.

Fuchs, his wife Manya & Children.

G

Gorinovsky, Esther, her husband Meir-Abba and Children.

Gorinovsky, Mani his wife Chaya and children Meir, Munia & Liezeh

Gorinovsky, Moshe, Wife & Children.

Gorinovsky, Shifra and her husband Blumel's (son?)

Gorinovsky, Yankel, Wife & Children.

Gorinovsky, Yankel-David his wife Sulkeh and son Leibl.

Gelman, Hasia (Sonia's)

Gelman, Katriel his wife and their children Feivel, Dvorah & Shmuel.

Gelman, Moshe His Son & Daughter

Gershon the Butcher, His Wife & children Berel, Velvel, Aharon, and Yocheh.

Glick(s)feld (son-in-law of Rudenstein) & Children.

Glick(s)feld, Mina (fell as a partisan) & her Sister.

Glinkovsky, Barukh-Notteh his wife Dvoshka and their children, Velvel & Itzl.

Goldenberg, Eliyahu, Yudel & Dinkeh.

Goldenberg, Fradl

Goldenberg, Motya , his wife Faygel.

Goldenberg, Pessia and 3 Children.

Goldenberg, Shlomo, his wife Betty and daughter Alia.

Grachuk, Berel.

Grachuk, Mendel and his wife Gizeh

Grachuk, Moshe his wife Sarah and children: Meir & Hirschel. Musha Grachuk's husband Shmuel and their children: Esther, Mereh & Moshe.

Grachuk, Rykheh and her children, Sonia, Shimon and Yankel (fell as a partisan).

Grachuk, Shayneh & Her Sons.

Grachuk, Tolya and his wife (killed in Kletsk).

Grazhevsky, Velvel, Zlateh, Shmuel (fell in the forest) & Hannah.

Grinkovsky, Berel & His Family.

Grinkovsky, Felteh and her Children.

H

Hananiah the Tailor his wife Malka & Daughter

Harkavy, Getzel the Farmer & His Family.

Hurvich, Alter and his wife Hasia

Hurvich, Simkha his wife Hindeh & Children

K

Karalitsky, Ephraim, wife Bluma children Melekh & 2 others.

Karakatsky, Rivsheh.

Khanyak, Yekhiel, Chaya, Bella & Feiga (from Ostrolenka).

Khatzek – The entire Family (refugees)

Kobrinsky, R' Leib, his wife Rivkah, Daughter & son, Israel.

Kostellansky, Borukh & Family

Kostellansky, Hannah-Pessia & Her Husband.
Kostellansky, Henokh & His Family.
Korin, Basha (Glinkovsky) & Child.
Korin, Yankel his wife Hannah, daughter Cherneh, & son Isaac.
Kornblum the Feldscher, His Wife, his daughter Bobitcheh & her husband Abraham.
Kotlarsky, Riva & Her Children (Halinka).
Kreslansky, Chaya & Tzemakh.
Kreslansky, Gershon & Liba
Kreslansky, Yudl & Bluma
Krimolovsky's Family.
Kolakowsky, Naftali his wife Hannah-Golda, daughters Raiyeh & Resheh, & son Yitzhak.
Kulakowski, Shlomo, wife Peninah & Child.
Kustin, Abraham-Chaim his wife Leah & daughter Esther.
Kustin, Moshe'l & Wife.
Kvintovsky, Sheyma, Wife & Son.
Kwiat, Itkeh & Velvel.
Kwiat, Reuven & Rivkah.

Jews from Kolonia

Kaninovich, Joseph, his wife Masheh & children Nissan, Zalman, Sima & Pearl.
Karakatsky, Yaakov, His Wife & Children.
Kazhvitsky, Lippeh, wife Sonia, children Genya & Others.
Klimovitsky, Janusz his wife Leah, & children Yosseleh & Michal.
Kresnovsky, Aryeh his wife Shayneh, & children Aharon & Leah.
Kresnovsky, Beileh, Sarah, Riva.
Kresnovsky, Bunya, Sula, Khatzkel, Itcheh & Itkeh
Kresnovsky, David, Sarah, Cherneh.
Kresnovsky, Hanan, wife Pearl & 2 Sons.
Kresnovsky, Simkha (fell as a partisan).
Kresnovsky, Simkha, wife Taibl & Young Daughter.

L

Lampert, Isser his wife Masheh (Alper), their son Nahum.
Lampert, Yehoshua & Leizer.
Landau, his wife form the Weinstein family, & Daughter Masha.
Lantzevitzky, Chaim & Family.
Lantzevitzky, Hillel, Son & Daughter.
Lantzevitzky, Hindeh.
Lantzevitzky, Itcheh, Wife & 8 Children.
Lantzevitzky, Koppel 2 Daughters & A Son.
Lantzevitzky, Leizer & Family.
Lantzevitzky, Moshe, Mirel, Gershon, Tuvia
Lantzevitzky, Shmeryl & Family.
Lantzevitzky, Velvel & Family.
R' ***Leib*** a refugee.
Leizer the coach leather worker & Family.
Lev, Abraham-Shmuel, his wife Sarah-Hindeh
Lev, Aharon his wife Matleh & 3 Children. Their daughter Frieda & her husband Michal.
Lev, Chaim & Family
Lev, Jonah, his wife Feiga-Chaya, the children, Son & daughters: Shayndl, Yehudit, Breineh.
Lev, Karpel his wife Khishkeh, & children Israel (fell as a partisan), Bobbel, Basheh.
Lev, Leizer, Wife & Daughter.
Lev, Mereh
Lev, Mindl & daughter Beileh.
Lev, Zalman, Wife & Child.
Lev, Yaakov-Leib, his wife Faygel & 5 Children.
Lev, Yankel & Family.
Levin, Leibeh, his wife Tamara, & children Zalman & Hannah.
Levitt (Wananchik)
Lifshovich, Avreml.
Lifshovich, Bashkeh & her daughters, Chava, Taibl (fell in the forest), Chaim-Yehoshua (also fell in the forest), Eliyahu-Elik – murdered by the Poles after the War.
Lifshovich, David & his wife, Hannah (Khankeh)
Lifshovich, Dobkeh & her 5 Children.
Lifshovich, Motya & Family.
Lifshovich, Musheh, Husband & Children.
Lifshovich, Noah His Wife & Children.
Lirkovsky, Kalman, his wife Breineh & Little Girl.
Lobzovsky, Chaya, her daughters, Hasia & Sonia.
Lobzovsky, Gershon & 2 Daughters.
Lobzovsky, Hindeh.
Lobzovsky, Leizer, his wife Rachel-Beileh, his sister, Sima.
Lobzovsky, Mirel and her Parents.

Lobzovsky, Shmuel (Lobedrig?? – executed??)
Lobzovsky, Zelig The Butcher, His Son & Daughter-in-law
Lvovich, Karpel his wife Mashkeh, their children Esther, Itteh-Leah, Liebeh, David, Kalman, Sholom, Resheh, and Basheh-Minkeh.
Lunsky, Nekhama.
Lusky Sarah, Her Child (Halinka).

M

Malcharsky, Sholom his wife Esther, & children Mindl (Mincheh), Shmuel & Tzemakh.
Manikov, Nekhama (fell in the forest).
Manikov, Sasha his wife Frieda & Children.
Mervetsky, Dobeh & Her Children.
Miller, Isaac (Kolonia) his wife Hannah, their children Jekuthiel, Shmuel, Tzirel, Chaya-Sarah, Gutkeh, & Sulkeh.
Miller, Koppel, His Wife & Children.
Miller, Nissl fell as a partisan.
Miller, Mosh'keh Wife & Children.
Mishkin, Joseph & his daughter Chaya.
Mishkin, Moshe his wife Sonia & their Children.
Mishkin, Shmuel, his wife Esther & 3 Children.
Monkevicher with her 3 Sons & 2 Daughters.
Moshe Issachar's & Family.

N

Nozhnitsky, Baraneh.
Nozhnitsky, Hanan-Yankel his wife Hannah, & daughters Masheh & Leah
Nozhnitsky, Herschel-Chaim, his wife Tamara and children Yehudit, Rachel, Minia, Moshe (Zeydl), Henokh.
Nozhnitsky, Sarah & Her Husband.
Nozhnitsky, Shepeh his wife Chaya-Sarah, the daughters: Yehudit, Ethel & Her Husband, Beileh, & their son Yudl.
Nyegnievetsky, Shmuel & wife Elkeh.
Nyegnievetsky, Yehoshua.

O

Ogulnick, Alter, Wife & Children.
Ogulnick, Chaim-Hirschel, wife & Children.
Ogulnick, David & His wife, Bobitcheh.
Ogulnick, Hasia, her husband and children
Ogulnick, Itcheh-David, wife and 2 children
Ogulnick, Itcheh-Yankel & his Wife
Ogulnick, Moshe-Chaim, fell as a partisan
Ogulnick, Motkeh & His Wife
Ogulnick, Reuven & Wife
Ogulnick, Sarah-Minkeh her son Peretz and 3 other Children.
Ogulnick, Shimon, Wife & Children
Ogulnick, Shmeryl, his daughters, Goldkeh and her Husband Broydah, Mirel and her Husband Kopitkeh, and their son, Leibl.
Ogulnick, Shushka, Meir's wife, and children.
Orlansky, Michal, his wife Shayneh and her sister and family.
Osherovich, Moshe, His wife, Felteh, and their Children.
Osherovich, Motya His wife Golda, and their Children.
Osherovich, Nahum, his wife Hannah and their children: Genendel, Chaim & Zelda

P

Pintelevich, Itcheh his wife Cherneh and children Esther & Mirel.
Petrukhovich, Abraham, his wife Paya & 3 Children.
Petrukhovich, Joseph Ephraim & Gisheh (children of Nekha & Michal, long life to them).
Petrukhovich, Leibeh his wife Sarah, & children Cherneh & Abraham. Cherneh's children: Karpel, Basheh, Shayneh.
Petrukhovich, Moshe-David.
Petrukhovich, Pessia-Tzirel, Husband & Children.
Platt, Chaim his wife Tamara & son Feivel.
Plitnick, Avreml & His Family.
Polachuk, Dov-Ber & Wife.
Polonsky & Family (Halinka).
Poretsky, Shmuel (From Lobzov).
Poupko, Masheh, Husband & Children.

Q

Quint, Gisha her children Faygel, Rishkeh & Hirschel.

R

Rabinovich, Esther her husband Gelman & daughter Hannah-Sarah.
Rabinovich, Joseph his wife Miriam & children: Shlomo, Hannah-Sarah.
Rabinovich, Moshe.
Rabinovich, Yocheh (Chaim's wife) & children Ethel, Moshe & Eliyahu.
Rabinovich, Ze'ev, Felya
Radenstein,[137] Shlomo his sons, Eli-Chaim & Shmuel.
Radenstein, Yehudit.
Radenstein, (Rivcheh's son-in-law), Wife & Children.
Rakhilevsky, Khatzkel & wife.
Ratner, Avigdor & Wife.
Ratner, Zalman, his wife Cherneh, their children Rivkah & Leibl.
Ravilievsky, Pinieh (Pinkhas?) & Family.
Reznick, Israel.
Rizikov, Chaim wife Esther & Children.
Rizikov, Leibeh, Wife & 3 Children.
Rosenberg, Mirel (Lazar's Mother).
Rosenberg, Pinieh (The Metalworker) & Wife.
Rothstein, Samson (Shimon), wife Eydeleh, children Yosheh & Masheh.
Rudovsky, Malka, Her Husband & Children.

S

Sakar, wife of Berel & 2 Children.
Sakar, Leah.
Sakar, Melekh, Wife & Child.
Sakar, Yankel, his wife Shayneh (from the house of Lunsky).
Salutsky, Israel, Wife & Children.
Sarah the Grain Worker.
Savitsky, Elkeh, her daughters Leah & Resheh.
Savitsky, Sarah a single woman ("Aunt" Sarah).

Schneider, Michal, Wife & daughter Rishkeh.
Sedletsky, Leizer, his wife Leah, son Avreml, and other Children.
Sedletsky, Yehoshua & his wife Raiyeh.
Shapiro, Joseph, wife Rachel, children Israel, Sonia, Liba.
Shapiro, Shlomo & The Family.
Shcheransky, Chava, daughter Genya & Family, daughter Cherneh & Family, son Shimon.
Shcheransky, Yaakov, wife Chava & the children Naftali, Pessia, Zelig, Sonia, Esther, Liba.
Shelkovich, Alter, wife Malka & 3 Children.
Shelkovich, Berel, Velvel, Yocheh & Aharon.
Shelkovich, Eliyahu, wife Bluma & daughters: Chaya, Paya, & Ethel.
Shelkovich, Israel, his wife Sarah, & 2 Children.
Shelkovich, Leibkeh, wife Golda-Beileh & children Ethel, Malka, Velvel, Chaim (fell in the attack on Dereczin).
Shelkovich, Musheh & Yocheh.
Shelkovich, Rachel-Liebeh.
Shelkovich, Shmuel, his wife Hannah, & children Leibl, Zlateh, Ben-Zion.
Shelkovich, Shmuel The Barber, wife Rokheh(Rachel)-Beileh, & Children.
Shelkovich, Yehoshua & Family.
Shelovsky, Itcheh, wife Rachel, children Shlomo (Siuma), Avigdor (Vitta), Sima & Faygel.
Shelovsky, Yudl, wife Matilda.
Sheplan, Yitzhak, wife Riva & children Masheh, Emma & Gola.
Shepshelevich, Shmuel, wife Paya & Children.
Shepshelevich, Yehoshua & Family.
Shmilevich, Beilkeh & daughter Paya.
Alteh ***Shomers,*** a single woman.
Sirota, Aharon his wife Tzippeh.
Sirota, Israel his wife Yenta
Sirota, Nahum, his wife Leah.

Skrabun, Alter his wife Esther & son Asher. (From Kolonia)
Slonimsky, Aharon, Zeydl der Hassid, his wife Chaya & daughters Hannah-Esther & Zelda.
Sobol, Yehoshua, his wife Tsirel & 3 Children.
Spector, Chaya (Miller's wife).
Spector, Zalman & Wife.

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137 Also spelled *Rudenstein*

Stein-Rabinovich, Rivkah, & children Aryeh, Kayla, Etya (killed in Slonim).
Stukalsky, Cherneh (Nadel).
Stukalsky, Leizer, his wife Chaya.
Stupak, Shlomo, his wife Liba, a daughter Freydl (Halinka).
Sukenik from Semyatich the whole family – parents, children: Chaya (Kolonia), Minia, Genesheh (Genendel), Feigeleh.

T

Tobolsky, Moshe The Cantor, his wife Rivkah (Beshkin) & their Children.

V

Viniatsky, Leib his wife Riva and son Chaim.

W

Walansky, Moshe his wife Liebeh & daughter Faygel.
Walitsky, David.
Walitsky, Dov and his wife Rakheh (Rachel?)
Walitsky, Eli-Chaim his wife Tamara & Children.
Walitsky, Hillel.
Walitsky, Leibeh & his wife Gisheh
Wantawer, His Wife & Children
Weinstein, Chaim, his wife Elkeh, & their Children.
Weinstein, Malka (Rabbi Bakalchuk's daughter).
Weinstein, Shmuel.
Weinstein, Yankel his wife Genesheh (Genendel), & children Moshe'l, Itkeh & Leibl.
Weinstein, Zelig his wife Cherneh, & their Children
Weissenberg, Ethel, Itzl's wife, and child, Masheleh
Weissenberg, Rivkah.
Wilenczyk, Avreml.
Wilenczyk, Moshe Ben Benjamin-Chaim
Wilenczyk, Motya and his wife Bobcheh

Winikov, Dina, Her Husband & Children.
Winikov, Hasia & Her Children.
Winikov, Hindeh & Mereh
Wolfowitz, Borukh, Beilkeh, Hirschel.
Wollman & his wife Hasia (Khashkeh)

Y

Yalovsky, Liova, his wife Henikeh & their Children.
Yellin, David, Wife & Children.

Z

Zakharevich, Golda-Faygel.
Zakharevich, Leibeh and His Daughter
Zelikovich, Musha, her Husband & 2 Children.
Zelkin, the Father, Riva & 2 Children.
Zelkin, Hindeh & Husband.
Zhernitsky, David-Hirsch, his wife Rachel.
Zhernitsky, Yaakov his wife Itkeh.
Zhernitsky, Yossel his wife Shayneh, & His Children.
Zhimelevich, Meir, Alta & the daughters, Dobeh, Esther, Liebeh.
Zilberman, Isaac, & wife Hoddel.
Zlotagura, Abraham His Wife & Children
Zlotagura, Herschel, His Wife & Children
Zolotnitsky, Alter & 2 Sons.
Zolotnitsky, Henokh, Mirkeh (in Israel).
Zolotnitsky, Itzl, his wife, Yenta, & children Velvel & Chaya-Sarah.
Zolotnitsky, Reuven

This list is missing hundreds of names of those killed who were from Dereczin, Halinka and Kolonia [Sinaiska] as well as those who attempted to flee but were murdered in a bestial manner by the Nazi beasts and their [willing] helpers, their names having already been forgotten through the passage of time, but their images stand before our eyes.

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